THE IMPACT OF MENTORING ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ ABILITY TO OVERCOME "PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF" STEREOTYPE THREAT

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This multiple case study design utilized undergraduate African American male students to examine the perceived impact of mentoring on the effects of stereotype threat. According to Steele and Aronson (1995) stereotype threat refers to a concept that one’s behavior pattern confirms a stereotype linked to a particular group identity. Historically, African American males have been subjected to negative societal stereotypes, which are represented, perpetuated, and portrayed through every sector of society. Research shows that this phenomenon impacts the academic achievement of African American males (Steele and Aronson, 1995).

This examination queried African American males enrolled in Lehman College’s Urban Male Leadership Program (UMLP), a mentoring program to assist in their successful matriculation. The research was guided by the following questions: (a) How do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being? (b) How do African American males describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating the challenges of overcoming the effects of stereotype threat? and (c) How do African American males describe the role mentoring plays in their academic achievement?

The findings revealed four thematic domains: (a) the benefits of having a person in your corner, (b) there is nothing that I cannot do, (c) education is integral to success, and (d) stereotyping is to be expected. These emergent themes allowed the researcher to develop a tool kit of strategies to assist leaders in the development of more effective mentoring programs for students in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat.
I dedicate this work to the young men who look like me and are willing to embark on the uphill challenge to achieve academic success.

To my wife I dedicate this work to you because you have been an invaluable support system throughout this process.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In 1619 the first slave ship, the *White Lion*, arrived in America transporting 20 captured Africans who were spoils of battle with a Spanish ship. Those 20 captured Africans were traded by the Dutch crew to Virginian colonials as indentured servants in exchange for food and supplies (Davis, 2008; Pilgrim, 2014). Indentured servants are laborers who are under a contract with their master to serve for a period of time; and in exchange receive shelter, food, passage across seas, and other accommodations (Davis, 2008). Indentured servants were not only Africans, but also included Irish, Scottish, English, and Germans.

More than 30 years later, following the arrival of the first African indentured servants, the court established the first legal slave in America. The Northampton Court ruled in favor of Anthony Johnson, former master of indentured servant John Casor, making Casor the life-long property of Johnson (Davis, 2008). The Northampton court cited that because Africans were not English, they were not subject to English Common Law, which served as the justification for Casor’s property status. The Northampton ruling made it both acceptable and legal to force African bodies into a life-long existence of involuntary bondage and servitude (Davis 2008).

The forcing of African bodies into submissive bondage and servitude required the newly empowered colonial slave masters to strategically indoctrinate a free willed, self-sufficient, intelligent people into a faceless collective who were accepting of dominance (DeGruy, 2005). This indoctrination of slaves perpetuated the belief that Africans were non-human and were simply thinking property and rightless persons. DeGruy (2005) and Lester (1968) report that in addition to the indoctrination of slaves, this type of submissive domination has also been evidenced in acts of psychological and physical torture, heinous violence, aggression, kidnapping, and lynching.
The nature of molding individuals to comply with involuntary servitude requires the systematic control of what is emotionally and physically valuable to the prisoner. For the Africans, this began with the intentional severing of ties and erasing of centuries of rich and proud history, which included family and kinship bonds, shared languages, cultural customs, and societal achievements (DeGruy, 2005; Lester, 1968; Monroe, 2011). In doing so, slave masters and profiteers could implement the most crucial part of the forced indoctrination process, the formation and solidifying of mental enslavement (The Black Scholar, 2012). Removal of all known familial ties was crucial in creating and perpetuating a false cultural context that devalued and dehumanized African American bodies (Lester, 1968; Monroe, 2011).

Professor Patrick Davis (2008) reported that Africans and African culture were re-founded, re-formed, and re-shaped through a systematic deletion of native tongues, beliefs, and customs upon arrival in America. This began and continued as the indoctrination and perpetuation of Africans then and African Americans now, as intellectually inferior. The indoctrination of African slaves by European Americans included dehumanizing efforts, which embrace devaluing historically held belief systems and consistent use of marginalized rhetoric related to creating a new reality of inferiority.

Julius Lester’s (1968) work, *To be a Slave*, explained that the ultimate purpose of slavery was to amass wealth; which required the erasing of a slave’s pride, humanity, and a re-shaping of their thinking patterns. Lester explained that erasing pride and re-shaping thinking patterns involved treating slaves as animals by housing them in quarters that were more suitable for animals rather than humans. An example of slavery’s attempt to reshape thinking patterns through dehumanization is exhibited in the story of Kunta Kinte, which gained notoriety in Alex Haley’s (1976) publication of *Roots*. Kinte was a Gambian warrior who vehemently resisted
slavery and his master’s attempt to rename him Toby. Kinte’s master sought to erase Kinte’s pride and history by imposing a submissive identity onto Kinte via his new identity as, Toby. It is imperative to note that a severe whipping was rendered each time Kinte refused to acknowledge the name imposed by his master. Moreover, after many attempts to escape his involuntary slave status, Kinte’s master gave him a choice to be castrated or have his foot cut off (Eastaugh, 2015; Haley, 1976). Kinte chose the latter of the two options and had his foot removed to ensure that he would never again attempt to escape and remain a captive of slavery. This story, among other lessons, demonstrates the strength of cultural pride and identity and how deeply it is entrenched in one’s self-identity.

Historically, Africans and their African American descendants have been negatively portrayed by the dominant society through a variety of practices and entrenched perceptions that have proven stubbornly difficult to dispel. These negative perceptions, or stereotypes, imposed on African Americans have discredited and negatively impacted their self-image (Allen, 2001; Kambon, 2003; Majors & Billson, 1992). Stereotype is defined as a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing but is often not true in reality (Bernstein, 2013). The impact of being inextricably linked to stereotypes is stark and includes having to navigate, survive, and succeed in American society while carrying an oppressive albatross (Allen, 2001; Kambon, 2003; Majors & Billson, 1992). While all sectors of African American society have experienced vilification, dehumanization, demoralization and negative portrayals for close to 600 years, the focus of this study is more specific in its examination of African American males currently in post-secondary institutions, who have been excessively impacted during their K-16 education pursuits. This study investigates how African American collegians describe the impact of historical and pervasive racism in the academic environment.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gain insight into the perspectives of African American male collegians concerning mentoring’s ability to improve self-efficacy allowing them to overcome the effects of stereotype threat and achieve academically.

Research Questions

1. How do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being?

2. How do African American males describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating challenges relative to the effects of stereotype threat?

3. How do African American males describe the role mentoring plays in their academic achievement?

Stereotype Threat Introduced

Stereotype threat refers to a concept that one’s behavior pattern confirms a stereotype linked to a particular group identity (Steele & Aronson, 1995). African American males have been subject to negative societal stereotypes, which are negative representations perpetuated and portrayed through various media outlets. This phenomenon led to the creation of a concept termed “stereotype threat” by researchers Steele and Aronson (1995). For this investigation, this concept specifically relates to African American males and their academic performance, first in secondary school and later in higher education. More specifically, how African American males perceive, respond, and manage the effects of stereotype threat. According to Osborne (1999), when entrenched stereotypes are present, anxiousness, fear, dread, and distress can negatively affect the performance and the behavior of the target group. These physiological effects may
occur even though the targeted group does not believe the stereotypes being assigned to them (Osbourne, 1999).

Osbourne (1997) explains that although all students experience anxiety in school situations (such as concern over appearing foolish for offering a wrong answer), students who are members of minority groups for which negative group stereotypes concerning academic ability abound, suffer from additional anxiety. For these individuals, a wrong answer is not only personally damaging, but also confirms the negative group stereotype (Osbourne, 1999). For example, in the seminal stereotype threat study conducted by Steele and Aronson (1995), African American and White participants were administered an exam consisting of 27 items from the verbal section of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and were placed in one of two groups. Participants in the first group were told that their performance would assess their intelligence and for the second group, the exam was described as a nonevaluative exercise in problem solving. After controlling for prior SAT scores, the results revealed a strong influence of stereotype threat; African Americans in the intelligence evaluation group answered fewer items correctly than their counterparts in the problem-solving group. Furthermore, African Americans who believed that the test was a problem-solving activity answered more questions and performed more comparable with their White counterparts.

**Development of Stereotypes within Dominant Society**

Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups that result in the creation of theories about how and why certain attributes go together (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). The nature and purpose of these theories are likely to play an important role in determining when and how stereotypes are utilized. Stereotypes are not necessarily negative; however, when they are formed about out-group members, they are more
likely to have negative connotations than those about in-group members, even when the attributes may seem objectively positive (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Societal out-groups are members of the societal minority, and as it pertains to this study, African American males. Conversely, in-group members consist of persons classified as members of the societal majority. In sociology and social psychology, in-groups and out-groups are social groups to which an individual feels he or she belongs as a member, or social groups in which he or she feels contempt, opposition, or a desire to compete (Scheepers, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

American journalist Walter Lippmann asserted that stereotypes are the subtlest and most pervasive of all influences (Bernstein, 2013; Lippmann, 1956). Stereotyping is an occurrence possessing a dual existence, rooted in its ability to positively or negatively impact every race, gender, creed, and sexual orientation. The dual existence of stereotypes is dependent on whether the stereotyped individual’s perceived attribute is derogatory or complimentary or good or bad. For example, a widely-held stereotype of African American males is they are very athletic. African American males were positively impacted by this stereotype during the 1950s and 1960s by gaining access to predominantly white institutions (PWI) and subsequently increasing the likelihood to play professional sports as a result of national exposure. These institutions of higher education had been previously opposed to their attendance. Conversely, African American males are negatively impacted by the athletic stereotype when individuals at a PWI immediately associate an African American male’s admittance or attendance with their sports team association instead of their ability to gain admission based on their intellect.

**Stereotypes and the Impact on the Portrayal of African American males**

Stereotypes are sweeping, reductive, culturally contingent, and not necessarily linked to factual support. However, they are used by the dominating society to fit unfamiliar experiences
into grooves that confirm and reassure (Bernstein, 2013; Lippman, 1956). The confirmation of negative stereotypes are inextricably linked to the need to perpetuate these stereotypes by weaving them into the fabric of America (Alexander, 2011; Bernstein, 2013; Rome, 2006; The Black Scholar, 2012; Woodson, 2009). The perpetuation of stereotypes serves to reassure members of the dominant society that their behavior towards particular groups is indeed warranted and appropriate, and therefore blame and shame-free (Alexander, 2011; Bernstein, 2013; Rome, 2006; The Black Scholar, 2012; Woodson, 2009).

**Media Perpetuation of Stereotypes**

Dennis Rome (2006) asserts that many of the stereotypes that plague African Americans are perpetuated by the images created and displayed by media outlets. Rome’s study identifies and discusses media outlets as encompassing all forms of media, including but not limited to print, electronic, auditory, and visual. Holt (2013) posits that the media possess the ability to make certain aspects of an issue more prominent and thus more influential in guiding a person’s judgment. The media’s ability to influence an individual’s perceptions is linked to its ability to provide easily accessible and readily made characterizations requiring minimal thinking by the recipient (Holt, 2013).

Characterizations that are perpetuated by media outlets are often linked and used to support and validate the pejorative ideals created by in-group members concerning out-group members that pervade society and are widely disseminated to maintain the existence of these ideals (Aronson & Steele, 2005; Bernstein, 2013; Holt, 2013; Rome, 2006). The Heinz Endowments’ African American Men and Boys Taskforce conducted a review of the media’s portrayal of African American males in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This taskforce found that 36 percent of the articles featuring African American men and boys focused on crime, and 86
percent of the televised stories featuring African American men and boys focused on crime (The Heinz Endowments’ African American Men and Boys Taskforce, 2011). In other words, mass media, including but not limited to small and large screens, electronic, and print, serve as a “defender of truth” in the perpetuation of powerful and negative conceptualizations. Such conceptualizations are evidenced consistently throughout history with media such as “Birth of a Nation,” and the perpetual portrayal of African American males as inherently criminal, aggressive, and violent. Another example can be found in the 2001 film Training Day. Denzel Washington’s role as Alonzo Harris provides one of the most enduring and threatening depictions of Black men as violent criminals. The criminal mindedness of Washington’s character is underscored by the contrast to his white partner, Ethan Hawke, who plays the role of good cop and a morally righteous man (Smith, 2013).

**Constraining Effect of Stereotypes**

According to Anita Bernstein (2013), stereotypes pervade life in the American context and may be viewed by all societal sectors as factual realities. Negative stereotypes have the power to be demeaning, and can result in the damaging of the out groups’ perception of his/her own group, reducing perceptions of their own abilities. Stereotyping is damaging as it deprives individuals of their freedom without good cause and constrains some groups of people more than others. Pervasive stereotypes can be reductive in the sense that they can minimize feelings of personhood and inhibit opportunities to engage in activities that in group members consider common societal freedoms. Stereotyping cannot be reduced to singular events with singular consequences. Like environmental pollution, redlining by mortgage lenders, disregarding of occupational safety, misbranding of consumer products, non-disclosure of information pertinent
to the sale of securities, and other ills, stereotyping is a behavior that has adverse consequences for the public (Bernstein, 2013).

African Americans are disproportionately constrained by stereotypes when compared to their majority and some minority counterparts (Bernstein, 2013; Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003). As history reflects, since the first days of slavery, African American males have been particularly targeted for the harshest of societal mistreatment through persistent negative portrayal. Negative stereotypes concerning African American males within American society have become so persistent and entrenched in the fabric of American society that individuals typically considered by societal standards as intellectual and conscientious may believe that stereotypes bear some truth (Hall & Rowan, 2001). The nation’s first African American Congresswoman, Shirley Chisolm, attested that in-group members are more susceptible to accept negative stereotypes as true because “racism is so universal in this country, so widespread and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it is so normal” (Chisholm, 1970, p. 49).

**Media, Institutionalized Racism, and Stereotype Threat**

The infusion of stereotypical portrayals results in strongly validating stereotypical beliefs, especially if they mesh with a person’s preexisting beliefs (Holt, 2013). Thus, media outlets have been used to perpetuate negative stereotypes, which in turn result in stereotypes being used to justify individual racist acts and institutionalized racism (Aronson & Steele, 2005; Holt, 2013; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Rome, 2006). One such example is the media’s use of negative language in their portrayal of Black victims and positive language in presenting White perpetrators. For example, consider the following story presented by a news leader in Los Angeles whose title read, *an unarmed marine and father of two was murdered by police while entering his vehicle*
with his children. The Los Angeles Times (2012) reported that “the deputy killed the marine out of fear for the children’s safety.”

Conversely, a story given to the Associated Press portrayed Ohio teen, T. J. Lane, accused of a school shooting where three students were killed, and two were wounded, as a “fine person” (Wing, 2014). In sum, the father and decorated war veteran lost his life and family because he was inaccurately perceived to be a threat to his own family, while the accused killer maintained his life, and was described as a fine person. The preceding examples highlight the inequities in the presentation and portrayal of African Americans and their White counterparts in the media, which are indicative of the presence of both racism and institutional racism.

Racism, also referred to as individual racism, is defined as a belief in the superiority of one’s race over another race and the behavioral enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions (Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2004). Additionally, institutional racism serves as an extension of individual racist beliefs through the manipulation of institutions to maintain racist objectives (Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2004). Although institutional racism is often associated with malice or racist intent, neither serve as a requirement for its operation (Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2004).

The operation of institutional racism rests in its standard practice of systematic advantages offered to whites and the systemic disadvantages that plague ethnic and racial minorities (Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2004). It is imperative to note that the systemic nature of institutionalized racism does not allow for the identification of an individual or individuals’ racist act, but is secluded in the institutional fabric by those who possess control over the system (Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2004). As such, institutionalized racism consists of the policies(social,
economic, educational, and political), practices, and procedures embedded in a bureaucratic structure that systematically lead to unequal outcomes for groups of people (Silva et al., 2007).

An example of institutionalized racism is evidenced in the sentencing practices of the judicial system. In a fair and just system African American and white defendants who score the same number of points (points are based on seriousness of crime, circumstances of their arrest, and their previous convictions) under this formula would spend the same time beyond bars. The Herald-Tribune found that judges disregard the guidelines, sentencing Black defendants to longer prison terms in 60 percent of felony cases, 68 percent of serious, first-degree crimes and 45 percent of burglaries. In third-degree felony cases, which are the least serious and broadest class of felonies, White Florida judges sentenced African American defendants to 20 percent more prison time than White defendants (Board, 2016).

The acceptance of institutionalized racism as a fact of life is reinforced in the inequitable sentencing of an African American and White offender who committed armed robbery in the same county. The New York Times reported that with the approval of one judge, the prosecutor and the defense lawyer, ignored the sentencing guidelines for the white teenager and struck a plea agreement for probation with no jail time. Conversely, the Black teenager was sentenced to four years, as recommended under the guidelines, and was told by his lawyer that it was the “best deal he could get” (Board, 2016). The institutionalized nature of racism assists in the social acceptance of the mischaracterization of African American males by media outlets. For this reason, this study contextualizes the impact of pervasive racism on African American males and examines possible strategies for addressing its steadfast effects.

Media outlets perpetuate in-group stereotypes of African American males through their portrayal of these out-group members as un-intelligent, thug-like, lazy, aggressive, hyper-sexual
individuals prone to violence and criminality (Alexander, 2011; Cuyjet, 1997; Hopkins, 1997; McGee, 2013; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Spradlin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). Moreover, the stereotype of Blacks as criminals is embedded in the collective consciousness of the dominant culture irrespective of the perceiver’s level of prejudice or personal beliefs (Pager, 2011). Increased exposure to images of African Americans in custody or behind bars results in a strengthening of perceptions regarding the criminal tendencies of African American males (Pager, 2011). Foster (1995) reports in his study concerning race and stereotyping, that 56.7% of White participants rated African Americans as prone to violence. Additionally, civil rights lawyer and activist, Michelle Alexander (2011), reports that a study conducted concerning media perceptions of African Americans found that 60% of viewers who saw a story with no image falsely recalled seeing one, and 70 % of those viewers believed the perpetrator to be African American.

**Miseducation, Dehumanization, and African American Males as Endangered Species**

African American males have been dehumanized by being placed outside of the human family and often described as monkeys or beasts (Gibbs, 1988; Rome, 2004). This portrayal of African American males has led many researchers to characterize African Americans as endangered species (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Lowery, 2015; Peten, 2010). Social scientists report that the mischaracterization by educators and members of dominant society concerning African American males is linked to inferiority anxiety and the psychological processing African American students experience when faced with negative stereotypes (Pillay, 2005; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). For example, scholar and scientist Carter G. Woodson (2009), in his book *The Mis-education of the Negro*, observed that young African American males are
constantly reminded of their inferiority in classes and reading literature, which can lead to feelings of anxiety and inferiority concerning their intellectual abilities (Harper, 2015).

America has perpetuated the miseducation of African Americans as a race. Miseducation is defined as deficient or improper education techniques that are imposed on an individual or group (Woodson, 2009). Dr. Carter G. Woodson describes the education systems’ failure to present authentic Negro History in schools and the scarcity of literature available to do so as a primary example of the education system’s miseducation of African Americans. Most textbooks, according to Carter, provide little to no mention of African Americans’ presence in America. Woodson also notes that many of the writings and images of African Americans include derogatory statements or images relating to the primitive heathenish quality of African Americans, with little to no highlight of their skills, abilities, contributions or potential. Thus, the miseducation of African American males serves as an undergirding and powerful ideology linking mischaracterization to the notion of African American males as endangered species. The miseducation of African American males allows for a characterization that permeates institutional structures leading to males being disproportionately removed from the functional social population, thus the term “endangered species.”

**Impact of miseducation on institutional systems.** Kerby (2012) explains that people of color continue to experience incarceration, policing, and death sentencing at a significantly disproportionately higher rate than their white counterparts, for which the term “endangered species” is drawn. Historically, African American males have been miseducated by the educational system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare system (Alexander, 2011; Gibbs, 1988; Hopkins, 1997; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). Pointedly, Alexander (2011) expounds that African
American males are characterized as endangered because they are more likely to go to jail than to college and face a lifetime of closed doors, discrimination and ostracism.

Kerby (2012), reporting on data from the Center for American Progress, indicates that people of color make up about 30 percent of the United States’ population, yet account for 60 percent of those imprisoned. Additionally, per the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three African American males can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. The Center for American Progress cites data from the U.S. Department of Education, which reports that African American students are arrested far more often than their white classmates. The data show that 96,000 students were arrested and 242,000 referrals to law enforcement by secondary schools were made during the 2009-10 school year. Of those students, Black and Hispanic students made up more than 70 percent of students arrested or referred to the justice system (Kerby, 2012).

In urban cities, 30% of African American males graduate from high school; of these, only 3% obtain a bachelor’s degree by the age of 25 (McGee, 2013). The United States Census Bureau (2008) estimated that by 2015, 17.7% of African American males would attain a bachelor’s degree or higher as compared to 34.4% of their white male counterparts. Cuyjet (2006) reports that African Americans have the lowest male to female ratio in higher education. According to Polite and Davis (1999), African American males continue to lag behind their white and other minority male counterparts with respect to college participation, retention, and degree completion rates.

In 2003, approximately 620,000 African American males were enrolled in college, which is disproportionately lower than African American females whose enrollment topped 1.2 million (Roberson & Mason, 2008). African American male students are considered one of the most at-
risk student populations, having the lowest graduation rates of students of White, Pacific Islander, and Asian descent (Beamon, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

The portrayal of African American males in animalistic terms appears to validate dehumanization and denial of the fact that they possess creative, spiritual, and intellectual qualities (Johnson, 2006). Thus, they are also perceived as not worthy or deserving of basic rights, such as schooling (Johnson, 2006; Woodson, 2009). As discussed earlier, the negative manner in which segments of society characterize African American males pervades all social systems, most notably, the educational system.

**Academic Achievement and Academic Success**

Academic achievement, as measured by standardized assessments, is typically the most commonly shared method of benchmarking academic success. York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) report that academic achievement and academic success are often used interchangeably within educational research to investigate educational outcomes because academic achievement measures are by far the most readily available tools for institutions.

To ensure meaning clarity, the current study defines academic achievement as an academic measurement that is a direct result of attaining learning objectives and acquiring desired skills and competencies measured with grades (by course or assignment) and grade point average (GPA) (Choi, 2005; DeFreitas, 2012; York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). As such, this study’s reference to academic achievement or achieving academically refers to the student success on academic measures using grades and GPA's. Conversely, the study defines academic success as a complex and broad term encompassing six components: academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success (York et al., 2015). This study’s reference to academic success
encompasses all six previously mentioned components and is used to address the study participants’ desire to attain career success.

**Academic achievement of African American males K-16.** African American males are reported to be at least three grades behind whites in reading and math proficiency (McGee, 2013). Steele (1992; 1997) asserts that students of color underperform on academic tasks resulting in disproportionately lower academic achievement rates that may be, among other variables, attributed to the effects of negative stereotypes and the subsequent onset of stereotype threat. The negative stereotypes and subsequent occurrences of stereotype threat in the educational experiences of African American students may impinge upon their ability to demonstrate and maximize their academic ability. Palmer and Maramba (2011) note this lack of achievement may be demonstrated in students dropping out of high school and higher rates of illiteracy and unemployment. The onset of stereotype threat coupled with the students’ inability to successfully negotiate the threat negatively impacts the African American male’s belief that he can perform at the highest academic level and ultimately attain academic success (Beamon, 2014).

In a study by Professor Ronnie Hopkins (1997) teacher attitudes toward African American males demonstrated low expectations, fear, and apathy. Hopkins explains that his findings support the results of a 1991 study examining the status of the Black male in New Orleans public schools, which found that 16% of teacher participants believed that the African American male students would drop out before completing high school. Additionally, Hopkins found that six out of ten teacher participants did not believe that African American males deemed their education valuable or significant.
Stereotypes that describe African American males as intellectually deficient have served as the basis for denying equitable access and opportunities within the education system (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lowery, 2015; Valencia, 1997). An example of African American male’s denial of equitable access is evident in a report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, examining the suspension rates of African American males. The study describes African American male suspension rates in the public education system as America’s Pushout Crisis (Schott Foundation, 2011). The Schott Foundation report on public education and African American males explains that school suspensions result in reduced instructional time for students, which negatively impacts their academic achievement, alienates them from the schooling process, reinforces negative student behavior, and increases the likelihood of school disengagement, leading to more students dropping out.

For thirty years, African American male suspension rates have remained disproportionately higher than their white counterparts for less serious and more subjective infractions, while lacking evidence that these suspensions were due to higher rates of misbehavior (Schott Foundation, 2011). Nationally, approximately 20% of African American males receive outside school suspension as compared to 9% of Latino males and 6% of White males, which indicates the prejudicial and inequitable injustices experienced by African American male students within the education system (US Department of Education, 2014).

Suspending African American males is problematic because it greatly diminishes their chances to realize their full personal or economic potential, and robs society of their leadership and contributions (Schott Foundation, 2011). Social scientist Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) reports that African Americans are stereotyped as intellectually incapable and undeserving of university admission. Johnson-Ahorlu attests that this belief concerning African Americans is not a result of
test scores or campus generated data concerning academic performance, but is directly linked to
the faculty’s belief in negative stereotypes associated with the intellectual abilities of African
Americans.

**Stereotype Threat and African American Males**

A lifetime of exposure to society’s negative stereotypes regarding the abilities of African
American students can result in the development of inferiority anxiety. Researchers define
inferiority anxiety as a state that can be aroused by a variety of race related cues in the
environment (McGee, 2013; Pillay, 2005; Steele, 1997; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).
Stereotypically negative environmental cues leading to feelings of inferiority anxiety, can result
in internalizing a belief in one's own inferiority creating heightened challenges that are race and
gender based, which can promote psychological dissonance and discomfort (McGee, 2013;
Pillay, 2005; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). The internalization of negative beliefs concerning
one's intellectual ability is often linked to educators framing achievement by focusing on ways
that emphasize underachievement, which frequently leads to the misconception that all African
American males are failing in school and life without exception (McGee, 2013).

When faced with a stereotype, African American students often engage in a
psychological process that involves deciding whether to confirm or disconfirm a specific
characteristic in themselves that has been assigned to their entire group. This is what is known as
stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat then may be described as an out
group member determining if their behavior will validate or dispel a stereotype widely held by
the in group about all the members of the out group (Aronson & Steele, 2005; Davis, Aronson, &
Salinas, 2006; McGee, 2013; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson,
2002). For example, African Americans may score significantly lower than Whites on tests
purporting to measure intellectual ability partly because, in such evaluative situations, awareness of the widely-held stereotype that Blacks lack intelligence induces stereotype threat and its disruptive processes (Davis, et al., 2006). In this example, an African American student with superior intelligence may deliver an inferior performance under the internally debilitating stress and psychological fear of knowing in group members expecting them to "live up to the stereotype" of lacking intelligence and ability. The threat that accompanies the overpowering apprehension that in group members are expecting failure, may actually compromise the ability to overcome the stereotype.

Kellow and Jones (2008) report that heightened perceptions of the existence of a stereotype related to one’s group membership may make one more vulnerable to the fear of confirming the expectations of others regarding a group stereotype (Steele, et al., 2002). However, it is necessary to note that the onset of stereotype threat can only be triggered if a task is perceived by the stereotyped individual as challenging (Kellow & Jones, 2008). The preceding assertion is supported in Steele and Aronson’s (1995) initial stereotype threat study, which examined the academic performance of African Americans on standardized tests compared to their White counterparts.

Sellers, Chavous and Cooke (1998) echo the findings of Steele and Aronson with the results that the racial identity is required for an individual to associate themselves with a group stereotype that can impact their academic performance. Thus, if an African American student possesses knowledge of the negative stereotypes associated with his group, this would make him more susceptible for his performance to be impacted when faced with an academic task. Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, and Ruble (2010) report that stereotype threat’s power exists in the individual’s belief that the threat (stereotype) is an accurate and applicable description of the
group’s ability, which impairs performance by depleting valuable cognitive resources needed to accomplish the task. This depletion of cognitive resources possesses the ability to negatively impact the academic achievement of African American students; most notably males.

Cognitive resource depletion and its negative impact on African American male students’ achievement is related to their inability to fully focus on and accomplish the task because of their preoccupation with addressing negative emotions and thoughts concerning abilities that dominate their focus when presented with the task (Alter et al., 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Davis, Aronson, and Salinas (2006) underscore this finding concerning the power of stereotype threat with their explanation that simply being a member of a stereotyped group (e.g., African American, Hispanics, White females) can lead to decreased performance in certain situations (e.g., taking a test of intellectual ability), presumably by increasing the psychological stakes of failure on a task of importance to the individual. Research suggests that the existence of formal and informal mentoring within predominantly Black institutions positively impacts African American male’s belief in their academic abilities and academic success (Caldwell & Obasi, 2010; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013).

**Stereotype Threat and Higher Educational Institutions**

Bonner (2010) reports that the institutional environment and the racial composition of the academic environment can have a significant effect on African American students’ learning outcomes (Allen, 1992; Caldwell & Obasi, 2010; Cokley, Komarraj, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003; Fleming, 1984). Hopkins (1997) notes that African American male students enter the white university environment with a clear understanding that society expects negative outcomes from them. These findings foreshadow more recent research on African American male’s awareness of negative societal expectations in educational settings. Studies show that
African American males who attend predominantly white institutions possess an awareness of negative societal expectations, and will interact with educators who maintain these expectations, which can negatively impact the students’ educational trajectory (Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis, 2004; Fleming, 1984; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013).

Conversely, studies examining the environmental differences of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and PWIs report that HBCUs provide a more positive social and psychological environment for African American students. A conducive education environment is defined as an environment that provides students with trust, opportunities for growth and collaboration, autonomy, support, and belongingness (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2012).

A conducive environment at HBCUs allows African American students to achieve better grades, have higher occupational aspirations, experience more support, connection, and feelings of acceptance, and become more engaged at HBCUs than their peers at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Chen et al., 2014; Fleming, 1984). An example of the positive impact of a conducive HBCU environment is found in the study conducted by Arroyo and Gasman (2014) examining the relevant empirical research on the contributions HBCUs have made on African American students’ success. The researchers report that 70% of Black dentists and physicians, 50% of Black engineers and public-school teachers, and 35% of Black attorneys graduated from an HBCU.

Education environments characterized as conducive are essential to building the self-efficacy of African American males because in these environments they can identify with professors and administrators and receive support and encouragement toward goal achievement. Additionally, conducive environments can empower these students to formulate educational
goals and believe in their academic ability to achieve their goals, resulting in an increase in personal abilities and an improvement in the likelihood of goal attainment (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2012).

African American males within the confines of higher education have been described as not fitting in (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). The descriptor of not fitting in is linked to negative stereotypes concerning their intellect (Brown & Dobbin, 2004). The dynamic reflected in not fitting in often results in African American students being watched by both faculty and peers to see if they are capable of handling their course load (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). The “need” to watch African American students to determine their ability to manage their course load indicates the perpetuation of the belief that African Americans are intellectually inferior (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

**Mentoring and African American Males**

Mentoring literature suggests that African American males have unique cultural needs that can be addressed through mentoring (Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013; Johnson & Hoffman, 2000). African American communities have historically used mentoring as a welcome and viable tool to address cultural needs and to work within the community and educational settings (Butler et al., 2013; Harvey & Hill, 2004). The existence of formal and informal mentoring components assists African American males in staving off potentially destructive forces that can interfere with social and cognitive functioning and address behavioral and academic areas (Butler et al., 2013; Johnson & Hoffman, 2000). Bonner (2010) explains that intellectual functioning may be impacted when African American students desire a sense of belonging, but instead experience environments that are indifferent or hostile. This and other supportive research serves as the rationale for selecting mentoring as a focus of this study.
Mentoring serves as a possible strategy because of its ability to assist in the minimization of stress while improving students’ attitude concerning their abilities, school and academic achievement irrespective of race (Wyatt, 2009). Relatedly, Brown (2009) echoes Wyatt’s assertion with the belief that the identification of a mentor assists students in acquiring a knowledgeable and experienced individual to guide them at critical points in their educational and personal development, which is essential in retaining students in higher education and ultimately informing their academic success.

As it pertains to African American males, mentoring programs have shown promise in terms of increasing retention and promoting overall inclusion in academic tasks and academic achievement (Brown, 2011). According to LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1987) mentoring is vital to the survival and empowering of African American men and enhances their ability to make educational gains. A majority of the African American male participants in the study above attributed their academic success to a variety of people in their lives who provided a support system.

The supportive nature of mentoring can assist in removing barriers of non-responsiveness by school and community members in meeting the academic needs of African American students, which can improve their academic performance (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Brown (2009) explains that a cause of non-responsiveness or lack of action to assist in serving the academic needs of African American students by school and community members is a result of the misconception that African American students can only be served by other African Americans. Brown’s study reports that while it is not necessary for mentors to be of the same race as the mentee, it is helpful for the mentor to have an understanding of some of the issues the mentee is facing. Researchers assert that if an institution is committed to the
academic success of African American males, then it is necessary to implement programs, such as mentoring, to provide the necessary supports to improve self-efficacy and academic achievement (Alter et al., 2010; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2012; Roberson & Mason, 2008; Watson, 2012). Further, studies continue to demonstrate that African American students are more likely to underperform in environments where they perceive they are threatened by stereotypes and devalued by adults, such as teachers, principals, counselors, and staff (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Steel, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). It is through mentoring that African American male students feel valued and more certain in their academic abilities. Mentoring programs provide the necessary supports to address stereotypes associated with the negative perceptions concerning their intellectual abilities (Bonner, 2010; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). In sum, indicators point to the positive influence of mentoring on the potentially negative impact of stereotype threat on the academic performance of African American males.

**Education as the Great Equalizer**

Within the context of American society, education is perceived as the vehicle for achieving success and amassing wealth (Schoon, 2008; Schwartz, 2008; Wang, Kick, Fraser & Burns, 1999; Wickrama, Simmons & Baltimore, 2012). Holmes and Zajacova (2014) describe education as “the great equalizer,” serving as a potential solution for social inequalities. Bernasek (2005) points out that many American parents associate the acquisition of education with an economic benefit based on their gut feeling that education is the way to ensure prosperity for their children.

Thus, education is more than ensuring the maintenance of a functioning democracy, it is also a source of wealth creation and an investment in the self-interest of all Americans (Bernasek, 2005). Inextricably linked to this notion is the reality that academic achievement,
irrespective of one’s race, impacts an individual’s opportunity for professional upward mobility (Black, Devereux, & Salvanes, 2005; Schwartz, 2008; Thompson, 2007). The acquisition of employment and subsequent organizational promotions associated with employment assists in gauging one’s professional mobility.

Whitaker (2010) reports that an individual’s professional growth and mobility can be hindered by dropping out because they earn less than workers with diplomas and they are more likely to depend on public assistance programs. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau’s (2008) “Income, earnings, and poverty data from the 2007 American Community Survey” reinforced Whitaker’s assertion and highlighted that African American males who drop out of school earn an annual income that is 30% less than those with a high school credential. Education attainment’s association with professional growth and mobility is also linked to potential as well as a student’s belief in their academic abilities.

**Strategies to Overcome Stereotype Threat**

Although stereotypes and stereotype threat can negatively impact African American male students, there are strategies to overcome the negative impact. Alter, et al. (2010) recommend the implementation of training for teachers to describe stressful academic tests using more challenge-oriented terms. Trainings that assists educators in reframing descriptions could increase the possibility that individuals believe that they are capable of overcoming a disappointing performance, and the consequences of failure are less profound than they may seem. These trainings will result in test-takers fixating less heavily on avoiding the threatening consequences of failure, and instead learning to focus on the benefits of success as a method to overcome stereotype threat. Fein (1999) suggests that self-affirmation can buffer against the threatening implications of failure in high-pressure situations, and there is a moderate link
between threatening environments and performance deficits.

Literature indicates there are other methods to minimize the impact of stereotype threat in addition to promoting a student’s sense of belonging. Another method is to convey high standards and assure students of their ability to meet these standards. This may occur through educators and members of both in and out groups intentionally framing critical feedback as reflective confidence in students’ ability to meet those standards (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Cohen, Steele, & Ross; 1999; Inzlicht & Schmader, 2012). Implementing the strategy above teaches students to view feedback as reflective of high standards and confidence in their ability to meet the standards (Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

African American males are uniquely impacted by stereotype threat. The disproportionately negative societal stereotypes, which are perpetuated and portrayed through adverse representations in society, have created pervasive challenges for African American males. Steele and Aronson (1995) explain that the psychological and emotional effects of knowing their behavior may serve to validate or dispel negative stereotypes that are linked to their group identity has a devastating effect on their academic performance. National data continue to report patterns demonstrating pervasive educational challenges experience by African American males. Only 47% of African American males graduate from high school, and as a group they comprise less than five percent of all undergraduate programs in American colleges. Additionally, more than two-thirds of all African American males depart college before completion of a degree, which is a greater college drop-out rate than any other ethnic group (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2011; U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).
Many scholars have studied a variety of programs and strategies to help students manage the impact the stereotype threat. Some of these strategies include programs to increase parental involvement, programs to promote students’ feelings of support and belongingness, and programs to increase the visibility and representation of African American role models in the field of education and other disciplines (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Johns, Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2008; Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Walton & Cohen, 2011, 2007). The purpose of this study is to add to the scholarly literature base by investigating mentoring as a strategy to address the effects of stereotype threat. The current researcher seeks to explore mentoring as a tool to overcome stereotype threat with the ultimate goal of improving the academic achievement of African American males.

Researchers report that mentoring programs have proven valuable to African American males at various educational levels (Anderson, 2007; Burrell, Wood, Pikes, & Holliday, 2001, 1998; Lee, 1999). Additionally, mentors have been effective in improving the behavior and self-esteem of African American male students, while also increasing the number of African American males pursuing advanced higher educational degrees (Anderson, 2007; Morgan, 1996; Struchen, & Porta, 1997; Townsel, 1997). The literature discusses mentoring as an effective strategy to improve academic achievement and the current study seeks to apply these research-based concepts to overcoming the effects of stereotype threat for African American males.

A minority male mentoring program created by a Vice-President of Student Affairs reports that 73% of the African American male participants remained in school for the 2010-2011 academic year in comparison with 63% for those not enrolled in the program (Giordano, 2012). Therefore, the concept of mentoring deserved investigation to contribute to the body of
knowledge needed to address the impact of mentoring on an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat.

**Significance of the Study**

Research studying stereotype threat and its effects provide evidence of its existence and impact on the societal perceptions of African American male students (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Stereotype threat possesses the ability to influence a variety of areas of an individual’s life, one of which is the educational atmosphere. Thus, the significance of this study rests in contributing to the literature evidence supporting stereotype threat’s effect on academic achievement and providing strategies for educational leaders in addressing this societal phenomenon.

Increasing awareness of stereotype threat and its effect on African American males is essential in assisting educators with gaining more knowledge and understanding of its impact. Further, awareness affords educators a deeper understanding of the behaviors that may be exhibited by African American male students attempting to navigate a social system that persistently disparages them. Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) reports that stereotype threat can cause students to disengage in class and refrain from seeking out academic support. Increasing stereotype threat awareness can also lead to refocusing energy on instructional practices, that may serve to decrease the misdiagnosis of African American male students’ intellectual abilities. Moreover, engaging the impact of mentoring could lead to the creation of more opportunities for African American male students to receive mentoring to overcome stereotype threat.
Limitations of the Study

The researcher has identified the following as limitations of this dissertation study. First, the geographical boundary selected for this study serves as a limitation because the researcher confined investigation to a specific physical area. Individual’s lived experiences are influenced by the area which they reside, and it is possible that inclusion of more geographical boundaries could provide additional perspectives and subsequent thematic emergence.

Second, the site for this study was limited to only one urban university. This study’s investigation of the participants’ perspectives concerning societal influence and culturally sensitive topics highlights the multifaceted nature of the research topic; including additional urban universities might have provided additional information not included in the data collected.

Third, an additional limitation of this study stemmed from the sample group, which is small and comprised solely of African American male students. Focusing on African American males intentionally isolates a particular race and gender and limited the researcher’s exploration of stereotype threats’ impact on other populations.

Fourth, it was imperative to preserve the boundaries between the experiences of the male collegians and those of the researcher. The researcher is male and identifies as African American. Consequentially, the researcher was diligent in maintaining separation between his collegiate experiences and those used in the study. Although the researcher made every effort to maintain the distance between experiences, the possibility of transference exists.

Definition of Key Terms

*Academic Achievement* is defined as an academic measurement that is a direct result of attaining learning objectives and acquiring desired skills and competencies measured with grades (by course or assignment) and GPA (Choi, 2005; DeFreitas, 2012; York, Gibson, & Rankin,
Academic Success is defined as a complex and broad term encompassing six components: academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success (York et al., 2015).

Central term decentering is defined as a literary deconstructive approach that allows for the effects of the marginalized term to temporarily overthrow the hierarchy of the central term (Crowley, 1989; Neel, 1988; Vandenberg, 1995). An example of central term decentering can be found in the events of the Arab Spring following the popular revolution in Egypt in 2011. The multiplicity of voices and viewpoints that were shared via social media outlets created a wide field of data for understanding not just the facts of the events, but their underlying meaning and its impact on a cross-section of Middle Eastern people.

Constraining effect is defined as the ability to repress, restrain or impel an individual or group (Bernstein, 2013; Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003).

Dehumanization is defined as the removal or deprival of a person or group of human qualities (Lester, 1968).

Dominant society (dominant culture) is defined as a societal group possessing the ability to impose its values, languages, ways of behaving, and perceptions on other groups within a given society based on their economic or political power (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lester, 1968; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Woodson, 2009).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 section 322, is “any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the
Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.” (p. 139).

*In group members* encompass persons who are classified in the societal majority (Scheepers, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

*Institutionalized racism* is defined as the policies (social, economic, educational, and political), practices, or procedures embedded in bureaucratic structure that systematically lead to unequal outcomes for groups of people (Silva et al., 2007).

*Mass media* encompasses all forms of media including but not limited to print, electronic, auditory, and visual (Rome, 2006).

*Mentor* is defined as teachers of relationships, rights, and responsibilities (Brown, 2009).

*Mentoring* is defined as a proactive strategy that exposes students to positive role models who can help with specific life skills, goal setting, and opportunities (Brown, 2009).

*Mischaracterization* is defined as an incorrect or misleading descriptor/description of an individual or group (Pillay, 2005; Steele, 1997).

*Miseducation* is defined as deficient or improper education techniques that are imposed on an individual or group (Woodson, 2009).

*Out group members* encompass individuals who are classified as members of the societal minority (Scheepers, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

*Predominately White Institutions (PWI)* are higher education institutions with an enrolled student population of more than 50% (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

*Racism* is defined as a belief in the superiority of one’s race over another race and the behavioral enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions (Lewis-Trotter &
Jones, 2004).

**Reductive effect** is defined as the ability to minimize an individual’s personhood and ability (Bernstein, 2013; Lippman, 1956.)

**Self-efficacy** is defined as the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action that produce desired performances (Bandura, 1997).

**Stereotype** is defined as a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality (Bernstein, 2013)

**Stereotype threat** is a concept coined by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) and is defined as the risk of an individual to confirm as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group.

**Summary**

The existence of racism within the social fabric of American society gives rise to the perpetuation of societal stereotypes. African American males experience the pervasiveness of negative stereotypes in both social and academic settings. Social scientists describe the concept of stereotype threat to better conceptualize the potentially negative impact of stereotypes on the academic performance and subsequent academic success of African American males (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Mentoring can serve as a possible strategy to assist in the minimization of stress of navigating stereotypes and stereotype threat while improving student’s attitude regarding their abilities, school, and academic achievement (Wyatt, 2009).

Chapter II presents a review of the literature and discusses stereotype and stereotype threat’s impact on African American male’s academic success and mentoring’s ability to serve as a strategy for overcoming the effects of stereotype threat and achieving academically. Chapter III presents the methodology used to investigate the perceived impact of mentoring’s on an African
American males’ ability to overcome stereotype threat and achieve academically. Chapter IV discusses the findings that emerged from the data collection process. Chapter V explores the emergent themes, and Chapter VI discusses the emergent themes more deeply and includes the conclusions, implications for policy, practice and future research.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The last twenty years have witnessed a growing literature base relative to the impact of racial stereotypes, and institutional racism, on the academic performance, psychological well-being, self-concept, self-efficacy, of vulnerable populations, most notably African American male collegians. Education is often considered the most accessible means of achieving social, political, economic, and cultural liberation in the United States (Hopkins, 1997). However, African American male collegians are subjected to stereotypes that negatively impact perceptions of their intellect (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Brown & Dobbin, 2004).

Research shows that negative perceptions of inferior intellect may carry burdens to demonstrate the ability to achieve academically (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). This pursuit is further challenged when facing institutionally embedded factors such as biased course content and racially insensitive instructors (Ervin, 2001; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotypes and stereotype threat are cited by African Americans and more specifically African American males as the biggest barrier to their academic success. (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Engaging the concepts of stereotypes and stereotype threat assists in creating a foundational understanding of the barriers to academic success that may persistently inhibit collegians and academic success.

Stereotype Defined

Stereotyping is an occurrence that impacts every race, gender, creed, and sexual orientation irrespective of geographical, cultural, or racial boundaries (Bernstein, 2013; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; Vázquez, Panadero, & Zúñiga, 2017). An exploration of the meaning of stereotype will offer insight into the power of racial stereotypes and serve as fodder for identifying the associating ethical implications.
A stereotype is defined as a set of inaccurate generalizations about a group that allows others to categorize members of a particular group and treat them accordingly (The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, online). The American Heritage Dictionary (n.d.) defines stereotype as a generalization, usually exaggerated or overly simplified, and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group. Social-scientist Robin Johnson-Ahorlu (2013) defines stereotype as gross generalizations applied to a group of people with some level of shared characteristics. The Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.) defines stereotypes as a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality. Lastly, Hilton and von Hippel (1996) define stereotypes as beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups that result in the creation of theories about how and why certain attributes go together.

This multiple case study utilizes Hilton and von Hippel’s (1996) description of stereotype as the foundational understanding of stereotypes. It is necessary to note that each definition of stereotype highlights the fabrication of characteristics that describe a group; however, they do not address its impact when used to describe a stereotyped individual negatively. For this reason, we must explore the effect of negative stereotypes on stereotyped individuals to understand its influence better.

Barbara Reskin’s 2011 study on the impact of stereotypes, found that negative stereotypes concerning a group resulted in a discriminatory effect. Social scientist Richard Allen (2001) explains that the discriminatory effect that characterizes stereotypes and its associating images, are a result of socially constructed images that are selective, limited, superficial, and distorted in their portrayals. Diminishing the occurrence of stereotyping and its impact on other groups is not the intent of this study. However, this present study seeks to engage the influence
of stereotypes on African American males. As such, it is necessary to examine stereotype’s discriminatory effect on African Americans.

African American Males and Stereotyping

Focusing on African American males intentionally isolates a particular race and gender. The intentional isolation of African American males for examination in this study is inextricably linked to the historic cruel and vicious attack on the humanity of African American males (Johnson, 2006; Voskamp, 2016). Furthermore, the growing conversation amongst researchers of African American males and members of the African American community regarding the future of these men catalyzed my desire to investigate their experiences.

Media. Allen (2001) asserts that stereotypical images of African American males perpetuated by the media are not harmless products of idealized popular culture. In fact, through media, African American males have served as the principal victims of the legacy of racial discrimination and prejudice in American society (Allen, 2001; Davis, 2004; Gibbs, 1994). The negative media portrayal impacts the perceptions of African American male students within the education system (Davis, 2004; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Smith, 2013).

The media depicts African American males as un-intelligent, thugs, lazy, aggressive, hyper-sexual and prone to violence (Davis, 2004; Gibbs, 1994; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Marble, 1994; Smith, 2013; Spradlin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000). In examining the contemporary stereotypes and prejudices of African Americans, Devine and Elliot (1995) found that a majority of the study’s participants believed that African Americans were lazy, athletic, rhythmic, lacking in intelligence, poor, and criminal. Sociologist Devah Pager (2011) reports survey results where respondents identified African Americans as more prone to violence than any other American racial or ethnic groups.
**Criminalization.** The stereotype of Blacks as criminals is embedded in the collective consciousness of the dominant culture irrespective of the perceiver’s level of prejudice or personal beliefs (Pager, 2011). The negative media portrayals have led to young African American males viewing themselves as victims disadvantaged by: race, poverty, and social isolation, non-achievers in schools, non-producers in the labor market, and non-participants in society (Gibbs, 1994). The media’s ability to dehumanize and perpetuate negative stereotypes of African American males is linked to increased exposure to images of African Americans in custody or behind bars. These negative images strengthen the expectations of African Americans becoming the race of assailants, the criminal tendencies of African American males, and their description as less than human (Pager, 2011).

Gibbs (1988) and Rome (2004) assert that African American males have been placed outside of the human family and often described as monkeys or beasts. Marble (1994) declares that historically African American males were only one step above animals—possessing awesome physical power but lacking in intellectual ability. Johnson (2006) asserts, when African American males are portrayed in animalistic terms it becomes easier for society to deny their intentional, creative, spiritual, and intellectual qualities, which are qualities associated with being human.

**Academic perceptions.** The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity found that teachers far too often perceive and portray African American males to be academically inferior, overly aggressive, and lacking leadership and social skills (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Smith, 2013; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2008). For example, a teacher questionnaire administered to teachers found that they believed that race and a student’s ability are related, which are linked to lower expectations of teachers, differing discipline practices, and deficit-
oriented mind-sets concerning students of color (Thompson, 2007).

As a result, these racist predispositions that are associated with low-teacher expectations have resulted in deficit-oriented approaches concerning African American male’s intelligence; resulting in teacher’s inability to recognize gifted characteristics in African American males (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). Moreover, Thompson (2007) asserts that a relationship exists between the teachers’ perceptions and the racial prejudice experienced by students. African American students recognize at an early age the prejudice that exists and its impact on teacher perception (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). For example, in a study conducted by Harmon (2002) examining the experiences of elementary gifted students, a fifth-grade participant reported, “[they] . . . expected you to never get anything right or to be the best . . . It was like they purposely did not want us to succeed” (p.71). The feelings expressed by the fifth-grade participant did not end with the completion of primary and secondary education but impacts African American students in higher education.

**Collegians, Institutionalized Racism and Psychological Effects.** African American male collegians continue to face a unique set of social circumstances, leading to negative experiences with professors, which they attribute to societal stereotypes resulting in racial prejudice (Davis, 1999; Sinanan, 2012). A national survey examining race and racial issues indicated that racial discrimination against African Americans remains so intense that African Americans believe that no other racial or ethnic group is discriminated against more than them. More importantly, the report reveals that most of the nation agrees with that sentiment (Sinanan, 2012). The racial discrimination experienced by African Americans is linked to stereotypes that have been used to justify individual racist acts and institutionalized racism (Alexander, 2011; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).
Racist acts and institutionalized racism experienced by African American males have been linked to negative stereotype’s ability to impact African Americans psychologically (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). When one is subjected to consistent negative rhetoric that is accepted as fact this can, in turn, create self-doubt and feelings of low self-worth. Majors and Billson (1992) describe African American male’s feelings of psychological castration where they are rendered impotent social, politically, and economically. This assertion is reinforced by Corbin and Pruitt’s study of the development of the African American male identity, which found that prejudicial stereotypes could affect the identity development of African American males if believed. Therefore, an examination of the concept of stereotype threat will assist in understanding how African American males’ legitimate stereotypes. It is necessary to note that stereotype threat cannot exist without stereotypes.

**Stereotype Threat Defined**

Steele and Aronson (1995) contend that stigmatized groups experience stereotype threat as a result of discrimination and racism whose births are outgrowths of stereotypes within society, which are used as a generalized belief to characterize members of stigmatized groups’ experience. Stereotype threat is defined as the risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s own group as self-characteristic (Kellow & Jones, 2008; Lewis-Trotter & Jones, 2005; Paul, 2012; Steele & Aronson, 1995). More specifically, stereotype threat involves identifying one’s self as a member of a subgroup such as Black or white, male or female, and being aware of the existence of the negative stereotypes associated with that subgroup (Palumbo & Steele-Johnson, 2014).

Farr (2003) describes stereotype threat as “the pressure individuals feel when they are at risk of confirming, or being seen by others as confirming” (p. 179) the negative stereotypes
associated with one’s group. Similarly, Alter and colleagues (2010) summarize the perspectives concerning stereotype threat with the assertion that stereotype threat occurs because of people performing more poorly across a broad range of evaluative domains when reminded that they belong to a group associated with weakness in that domain.

The Impact of Stereotype Threat on African American Males

Relationship of Stereotype and Stereotype Threat on Self-Efficacy

Steele argues that after a lifetime of exposure to society's negative images of their ability, these students are likely to internalize an “inferiority anxiety;” a state that can be aroused by a variety of race related cues in the environment (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat possesses the ability to influence the actions of any individual (Alter et al., 2010; Steele, 1997). For example, female engineers who work alongside male engineers are susceptible to stereotype threat in their work environment, because their reputations and mathematical prowess are regularly challenged by the negative stereotype that women are mathematically less capable than men, an effect that has been shown in both laboratory and field experiments (Alter, et al., 2010).

The power of stereotype threat rests in the individual’s knowledge that a negative stereotype exists (Kellow & Jones, 2008; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). It is imperative to note that the existence of the threat (knowledge of negative perceptions) catalyzes the onset of stereotype threat irrespective of the individual’s disbelief concerning the stereotype (Steele, 1997).

Kellow and Jones (2008) point out that the extent to which a person believes he or she is stereotyped by others in a given domain does not imply that the person believes the stereotype to be true; rather, it simply indicates the individual’s awareness of the stereotype. The only requirement for the onset of stereotype threat and its subsequent power to influence is for the
individual to know that it (stereotype threat) stands as a hypothesis about him in situations where the stereotype is relevant (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The relevancy of the threat can be characterized as a group-specific stereotype possessing potential applicability based on individual task performance.

Steele (1992) explains that stereotype threat’s ability to impact the self and the subsequent academic performance of African American males is linked to their self-esteem, which impacts their academic resilience. This study defines resilience as the process and results that are part of the life story (encompassing both risk and positive adaptations) of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles (Morales & Trotman, 2011). Self-esteem is defined as an individual’s feelings of worth (Blash & Unger, 1995). Self-efficacy, which is a member of the self-esteem family, is defined as the belief or expectation about one’s ability to perform a task successfully (Bandura, 1997).

Identity theorists Reitzes and Jaret (2012) investigated the interconnections among the different dimensions of racial/ethnic identity and their relationship to self-esteem and self-efficacy. Their study was conducted at a racially diverse large public research university near the center of a southern major metropolitan area. A 16-item questionnaire was administered to undergraduates in a university general education required lower-level sociology course to acquire a diverse sample from the student population. There was a total of 655 students: 264 White, 263 Black, 47 Asian, 22 Hispanic, 56 mixed or other, and three unknown racial identities who agreed to participate in the study. The researchers found that self-esteem and self-efficacy are positively correlated, but are not identical based on self-efficacy’s desire to examine control.

Since this current study explores explore African American males’ belief in and ultimately control over their abilities, which could positively impact their ability to overcome
A self-fulfilling process occurs in a three-step process: where the perceiver (stereotype individual) must first hold a false belief about a target, as when a teacher underestimates a student’s true potential. Second, the perceiver must treat the target in a manner that is consistent with the false belief, such as if a teacher presents easier material to low-expectancy students. Finally, the target must confirm the originally false belief, as when a low-expectancy student underperforms (Guyl, Madon, Prieto, & Scherr, 2010).

Thus, when an individual is faced with the onset of a self-fulfilling prophecy, they can experience heightened perceptions of the existence of a stereotype related to one’s group membership that may exacerbate the potential for evaluation apprehension (Steele, 1997) and make one more vulnerable to the fear of confirming the expectations of others regarding a group stereotype (Kellow & Jones, 2008). Bandura (1997) called this self-fulfilling human agency self-efficacy, which is the belief about one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action that produce desired performances.

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) contend that students will be motivated to act and persevere through challenges and to employ effective learning strategies when they believe their actions will produce positive outcomes. Allen (2001) connects the
motivating factors for a person desiring to complete a task with their innately insatiable human
desire to protect and refine their feelings of self-worth. According to Allen, human beings are
motivated to protect and enhance their feelings of self-worth, which are influenced by the
perceptions by out-group members and the desire to protect and control one’s self-worth serves
as the linkage between self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-efficacy beliefs have been positively
linked to academic achievement, performance expectancies, self-perceptions of competence and
possession of positive attitudes toward subject matter (DeFreitas, 2012; Reid, 2013). The
positive linkage of self-efficacy to academic achievement is a result of the African American
males’ desire to preserve the self and their personal belief in their abilities (Paster, 1994).
Aronson and Inzlicht (2004) contend that African Americans who are susceptible to feeling
racially stereotyped, may experience instability concerning their self-efficacy.

According to DeFreitas (2012), the susceptibility to feeling stereotyped decreases the
likelihood that an individual will believe that he or she is in control of the outcomes in situations
in which they feel stereotyped. As a culminating effect, an African American male’s lack of
belief concerning his ability to control outcomes creates an internal antagonist that embraces the
world’s negative view relative to his group and entrenches itself as a lifelong voice of doubt
(Cuyjet, 1997). The preceding effect is reinforced with a finding from Reitzes and Jaret’s (2012)
self-efficacy study of college students, which reports that the strongest effect on self-efficacy is
feelings of tenseness and self-doubt. Reitzes and Jaret based their findings on participants’
negative relationship (feeling of tenseness) versus positive relationship (level of confidence) in
their description concerning their confidence in their college student role. Student participants
possessing a negative association in their confidence in their role as a college student were found
to have a lower-level of self-efficacy because of the lack of belief in their ability to
control outcomes concerning their abilities. Conversely, Reitzes and Jaret found that participants expressing a high-level of confidence were deemed to have higher self-efficacy based on their belief that they were able to control outcomes measuring their abilities.

This externally generated voice of self-doubt through embracing the world’s negative views is significant considering the research on the pivotal role of self-efficacy and self-concept among African American males. Social scientist Karl Reid (2013) conducted a statistical study examining African American male undergraduate students enrolled in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and their scores on scales of self-efficacy, racial identity attitudes, levels of institutional integration and measures of achievement. Reid’s study sought to correlate the scale scores with cumulative GPAs of Black males enrolled full-time as sophomores and above attending research universities. An important finding identified by Reid was that high-achieving African American males reported a heightened sense of self-efficacy, with this motivational belief having the strongest direct effect on achievement among the considered factors of persistence, self-efficacy, and identity. Furthermore, African American male students who excelled in a collegiate setting attributed their success to their positive self-conception (Whiting, 2014). High-achieving African American male students possessing a positive self-concept are more confident in their overall abilities, more confident in their academic abilities, and possess high positive reactions to achievement (Arbuthnot, 2009, 2012; Paster, 1994; Whiting, 2014).

Social scientist Keena Arbuthnot (2012) surmises that self-efficacy can explain differences in test performance based on the individual’s belief that they are capable of being successful on the task at hand. Aronson (2002) points out that stereotypes can spoil a person’s experience, in school or many social situations, just by suggesting to the target of a stereotype that a negative label might apply to one’s self or one’s group. Thoman, Smith, Brown, Chase,
and Lee’s (2013) model of stereotype threat show that it is a specific type of social identity threat, as explained in the Social Identity Theory.

The social identity theory informs us that people strive to maintain a positive perception of their groups and collectives (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When these positive perceptions are challenged, the individual will experience feelings of being threatened. Moreover, social identity threats can prompt people to treat others, and even themselves, in a manner consistent with the groups’ stereotypes. When social identity threat is triggered by a competency-based stereotype in an achievement setting, a person experiences concern about being judged by or confirming the stereotyped ability; this experience is also characterized as “stereotype threat” (Thoman et al., 2013).

**African American Males, Stereotype Threat, and Academic Achievement**

Varying theories report that sociocultural factors can negatively influence the ability of students of color to become and remain strongly identified with academics, which adversely impact these students’ academic outcomes (Osborne, 1997). Aronson (2002) reinforces the preceding statement with his assertion that stereotype threat involves the salience of race because of the stereotyped individual’s identification with the negative group stereotype related to a task measuring ability. Steele (1997) identifies negative stereotypes and the subsequent onset of stereotype threat as a culprit in the academic underperformance of students of color.

The Diverse Learning Environment project is a higher education study with seven two-year and four four-year institution participants housed at UCLA, which examined factors (campus climate, campus policies, curricular and co-curricular environments, interplay and impact student outcomes) that impact the trajectories of African Americans and other diverse student populations (Johnson-Ahocorlu, 2013). This study reported that African American
participants cited stereotypes and stereotype threat as the “biggest barrier to their academic success” (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013, p. 382).

Osborne (1997) explains that although all students experience anxiety in school situations (such as concern over appearing foolish for giving a wrong answer), students who are members of minority groups, for which negative group stereotypes concerning academic ability abound, suffer from additional anxiety. For these individuals, a wrong answer is not only personally damaging but also confirms the negative group stereotype (Arbuthnot, 2012; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Osborne, 1999). Moreover, stereotype threat at each level of schooling affects the self and as time progresses the individual is more likely to underperform when faced with an academic challenge (Steele, 1997).

The exacerbation of stereotype threat increases with student matriculation, which in turn intensifies the possibility of student underperformance on academic tasks based on negative group stereotypes when faced with stereotype threat and is linked to the individual’s low self-efficacy regarding their performance (Arbuthnot, 2009). The increased anxiety is aversive, and as a self-protective measure, students will sometimes devalue or reduce their identification with academics (Osborne, 1999). Therefore, students might employ the coping mechanism of making themselves believe that the stereotype associated with the task does not matter to them and as a result cannot determine their ability. This aversion serves to reduce stereotype-induced anxiety as it allows students to be no longer concerned with evaluation in that domain (Epps, 1970; Katz & Greenbaum, 1963).

The statistics on the academic achievement of African American males in secondary and post-secondary school are staggering. It is even more disheartening that African American men continue to lag behind their peers with respect to retention and degree completion rates (Harper,
2006; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009; Watson, Washington, & Stepteau-Watson, 2015) with only two-thirds of the African American men who matriculate through four-year institutions going on to graduate (Harper, 2008; Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010).

As illustrated in a sobering trend, in 1994, 40% of adult African American males were functionally illiterate and approximately 50% of African American males dropped-out of school (Brooks, 1994).

A decade later, Stoops’ (2004) report found that African American men attend and graduate college at a disproportionately lower rate than their White and Asian counterparts. According to The Council of the Great City Schools (2010), African American males over 18 accounted for only 5% of college enrollment nationally. What the reports have failed to capture are the effects that accompany being a member of a group consistently targeted for negative societal stereotypes. The risk of confirming stereotypes according to Holzman (2006), results in only 58% of African American men graduating from high school on time.

Kellow and Jones (2008) report that White students scored statistically higher than African American students when told that their test performance would be predictive of their performance on a statewide, high-stakes standardized test. Conversely, African Americans who felt their intellectual ability would be examined scored statistically lower than their White counterparts and other African American participants placed in the non-evaluative group.

The concept of at-risk African American males is reinforced in Aronson’s (2002) finding that when African American participants felt that their intellectual abilities were being examined, their sensitivity to group stereotypes became heightened. As a result, student participants made excessive attempts to ensure that they did not portray themselves in a stereotype-consistent manner. Conversely, when African American male students felt that their academic abilities were
non-evaluative of intellectual capacity, they solved twice as many problems when compared to an evaluative assignment (Aronson, 2002).

For example, a study examining African American students’ performance on the verbal section of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) randomly assigned student participants to three groups: low, medium, and high threat (stereotype threat) group (Aronson, 2002). Participants in the low threat group were told that the experimenter was interested in “understanding how students respond when confronted with a challenging problem-solving exercise,” whereas in the medium and high threat cells, participants were told that the task (a selection of GRE items) was a measure of their “verbal ability or verbal intelligence.” Also, in the high threat cell, participants had to complete a racial identity questionnaire (which served as a race primer) immediately before taking the GRE test. Aronson (2002) reported that the best performance occurred when race was not primed, and the test was described as non-diagnostic (low threat condition). The rationale for their assertion is a result of students in the high stereotype threat conditions solving fewer GRE verbal items ($x = 14.64$) than those students in the low threat condition ($x = 16.7$).

Aronson further explains that the heightened sensitivity of African Americans is catalyzed by their hyperawareness of people’s negative expectations about their group. The onset of hypersensitivity and awareness are a result of the creation of a climate that creates a burden of suspicion for African Americans to feel at risk of confirming stereotypes through behavior.

Stereotype, stereotype threat, self-efficacy, institutional racism and other environmental factors possess the ability to impact African American male students’ academic achievement and graduation rates. As a result, the impact of the disproportionately low graduation rates and
achievement of African American males is significant, long-term, and ubiquitous because of the nearly limitless benefits and gains that are associated with obtaining a college degree (Owens et al., 2010). A primary benefit of a college education is that it allows graduates access to both social and economic opportunities that typically are not afforded to non-college graduates (Owens et al., 2010).

**Impact of the Institutional Environment Factors**

The institutional environment creates an internal struggle concerning students’ ability to compete academically with their counterparts of differing racial backgrounds (Aronson, 2002). The role of institutional environment plays a significant role in the academic achievement of African American males. African American males are adversely affected by interracial environments based on their self-reporting of lower levels of self-confidence that is attributed to alienation and interpersonal hostilities when compared to other student participants at PWI’s and African American students at HBCUs (Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1997). The aforementioned barriers to academic success experienced by African American males are linked to Steele’s (1992) finding that these men must matriculate in an atmosphere that feels hostile, which arouses their defensive reactions that interfere with their intellectual performance (Aronson & Steele, 2005; Gordon et al., 2009).

Majors and Billson (1992) report that the lower achievement scores of African American males are symptomatic of centuries of educational discrimination against African Americans. Subsequent studies examining African-American male students found that their participants did not believe that they were respected by their teachers, administrators or professors (Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, & Haskins, 2010; Usher & Pajares, 2006; West-Olatunji, Baker, & Brooks, 2006) and these young men found it difficult to trust that the school system in which they
attended took an interest in their well-being. The student participants in these studies explained that the nonchalant attitudes of teachers, the lack of culturally diverse curriculum and the comparison of resources provided to predominately Caucasian schools was the rationale for their mistrust. Majors and Billson (1992) identify educationally discriminatory environments as those environments that are disproportionately composed of white instructors that may lack cultural insight, training, and sensitivity to recognize the culturally specific behaviors as a source of pride and not indicative of negative or disruptive behavior.

An instructor’s cultural ignorance is related to the reality that African American males are more likely than whites to receive a recommendation for special education classes for the emotionally disturbed in K-12 settings and recommended for remedial classes in both the collegiate and K-12 settings (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Majors & Billson, 1992). Kunjufu (1986) correlates a disproportionately white education environment with the failure syndrome. Kunjufu explains that the failure syndrome occurs as early as the fourth grade, and causes African American males to become vigilant that schools do not invest in their cognition process. According to Cuyjet (1997) the internalization of these attitudes leads to the development of an inferiority perception concerning their abilities and aspirations compared to African American females and members of other racial groups.

Gordon et al. (2009) explains that the internalization of an inferiority perception is problematic because it causes African American males to detach themselves from academic tasks, which increases the likelihood that they will perform poorly on academic tasks. As a result, African American men are said to be the most at-risk college students in this country (Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013; Griffin, Jayakumar, Jones, & Allen, 2010).

The academic identification of African American males indicates the ability to impact
their academic motivation, performance, and success (Gordon et al., 2009; Griffin & Allen, 2001; Osborne, 1997). Turner and González (2015) report that mentoring can counteract an inferiority perception based on its ability to provide psychosocial support, which strengthens the mentee by challenging them to shore up a perceived weakness.

**By-Products of Stereotype Threat**

As presented, stereotype threat is a relatively new term applied to a long existing concept. Research on stereotype threat appears to be more clearly shared in the description of the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effect that it manifests on the recipients (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Taylor & Walton, 2011). Based on the research, the impact of stereotype threat is evidenced in the emotions and feelings projected on out-group members (DeFreitas, 2012; Gordon et al., 2009; Guyll et al., 2010). The impact of stereotype threat on African American males is devastating (Rome, 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995). A review of literature indicate that the emotional by-products evoked through stereotype threat include: fear, detachment, dread, anxiety, anxiousness, reduced perceptions of competency; lack of self-confidence; belief in one’s abilities, increased isolation, lack of encouragement, lack of support, lack of a shared common ground; lack of trust in relationships; lack of academic support, (Arbuthnot, 2009; Aronson, 2002; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Reid, 2013; Schmader, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele et al., 2002).

These feelings and emotions lead to the depletion of cognitive resources, which inhibits their ability to focus on the task (Alter et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Thus, resulting in African American males underperforming and underachieving when faced with stereotypic tasks (Alter et al., 2010; Aronson, 2002; Davis et al., 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Walton & Cohen, 2011). This leads to the perception of education devaluing, their lack of ability
or competence to achieve academic success, the perpetuation of the belief that they will drop out of school before completing high-school, or that their athletic abilities gained them college admission (Hopkins, 1997; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lowery, 2015; Scott & Rodriguez, 2015). The underperformance on academic tasks is correlated with the inability to complete schooling, which results in a decrease in both the likelihood of acquiring higher education and subsequent employment. This, in-turn, results in an increase in poverty rates, likelihood of exposure to the justice system, and generational mirroring by off-spring (Brand & Xie, 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Steele 1997; 1992).

**Deconstruction of Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat, as a concept, denotes the risk of an individual to confirm, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat literature indicates that out-group members who perceive they are at at-risk of confirming in-group stereotypes, can suffer adverse effects on their self-efficacy concerning their academic and non-academic abilities (Aronson, 2002; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Kunjufu, 1986; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The denotative meaning of stereotype threat is necessary because it provides a foundational understanding of stereotype threat’s potentially negative impact on out-group members. However, solely relying on a denotative engagement of stereotype threat is a limiting approach because it does not allow for the engagement of the effects of stereotype threat on out-group members.

Schmader (2010) explained that although we understand and recognize stereotype threats ability to raise uncertainty concerning one's abilities, there are even deeper considerations for the psychological emotionality and energy that encompass an individuals’ vigilance to confirm to the stereotype. For example, the surfacing of this evidence can be found in found in one's internal
behavioral inquest (Am I making mistakes? Am I too anxious? Should I stay? Should I go? Should I look up? Should I look down?), or one’s’ external inquest of others' reactions (Do they think I’m stupid? Are they laughing at me? Are they snickering at me? Am I being humiliated?) when faced with in-group stereotypes (Schmader, 2010). The research suggests that addressing stereotype threat may rely essentially on one’s ability to identify, manage, and somehow overcome the manifestation of feelings and emotions projected from in-group members.

Failure to discuss stereotype threat in-terms of its effect limits one’s ability to identify the perspectives, feelings, and emotions of impacted out-group members. As a result, non-engagement of the effects of stereotype threat influences the understanding of the magnitude by which stereotype threat impacts out-group members. To accomplish a shift in this study’s discussion of stereotype threat from a denotative examination of stereotype threat to the effects of stereotype threat requires a deconstruction of stereotype threat.

Deconstruction is a concept coined by French theorist Jacques Derrida who believed that deconstruction referred to a philosophical position, a theory of reading, and a political strategy (Vandenberg, 1995). The deconstructive approach focuses on decentering a term, theme, concept, approach, or belief. Derrida’s desire for the term “decentering” is rooted in the exclusionary nature of centered approaches, which leads to the ignoring of varying aspects that assist in the composition of the term, which represses and marginalizes others (Olson, 1990; Vandenberg, 1995). This is important as it pertains to this study because stereotype threat is a concept that may impact all groups (Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, this study seeks to gain insight into the interaction of stereotype threat and the marginalization effects on African American male students. This focused approach on African American males purposely seeks to isolate this group leading to the uncovering of perspectives that can certainly differ when
compared to the experiences of in-group members.

To clarify as it pertains to this study, prior to the interaction between African American male students and the imposed stereotypes all individuals are theoretically apart of the same group, which are persons seeking education. However, because stereotypes and stereotype threat impact all groups when stereotypes are introduced, and divisiveness occurs group members who are recipients of the negative stereotypes are deemed out-group members and are placed in the minority of the group. Conversely, group members who perpetuate the stereotypes are in-group members. This notion does not differ from the construction of societal stereotypes in that all individuals are grouped as human beings. However, the introduction of stereotypes and stereotype threat have been created and perpetuated by members of the majority (in-group) and in acted upon members of the minority (out-group) creating a division and distinction within the macro group of human beings.

Focusing on stereotype threat through the lens of the experiences of out-group members allows for a re-centering of the investigation concepts and provides a means to better understand the specific effects, feelings, and emotions of stereotype threat on this marginalized group. Derrida asserts that decentering the central term, in this case, stereotype threat, with the marginalizing effects of term, allows for the effects of the marginalized term to temporarily overthrow the hierarchy of the central term (Crowley, 1989; Neel, 1988; Vandenberg, 1995).

This study identifies the effects of stereotype threat as the marginalized normative term, which the researcher seeks to use as a central term in this research. As a result, this study defines deconstruction as a tactic of decentering and a way of reading and interpreting, which as explained, first makes us aware of the centrality of the central term and then attempts to subvert the central term so that the marginalized term can become central (Olson, 1990; Vandenberg,
Deconstructing stereotype threat allows for engagement of the impact of stereotype threat because it identifies the characteristic effects through the feelings and emotions experienced by out-group members. A proponent of stereotype threat deconstruction is social scientist Toni Schmader. Schmader (2010) contends that after more than a decade of research establishing that stereotype threat impairs performance, there is a need for understanding how these effects occur.

Schmader, Johns, and Forbes (2008) asserted that stereotype threat is triggered by situations that pose a significant threat to self-integrity. This, in-turn, impacts the perceived sense of oneself as a coherent and valued entity that is adaptable to the environment. It is necessary to note that the threat to self-integrity stems from a state of cognitive imbalance where one’s concept of self and expectation for success conflict with primed social stereotypes suggesting poor performance. It is in this moment where there is a transition of sorts where the major influence is no longer the threat, but it is now the effects of the threat (emotions and feelings) that assume precedence and serve as the primary influencer on the out-group member (Schmader, 2010; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Schuster, Martiny, & Schmader, 2015).

Schmader, Johns, and Forbes (2008) further explained that a result of this transition is a state of imbalance, which acts as an acute stressor that sets in motion physiological manifestations of stress, psychological stress, cognitive monitoring, interpretative processes, affective responses, and efforts to cope with these aversive experiences. Out-group members, in their desire to excel and dispel, address their physiological and psychological manifestations through an increase in their motivation to ensure that any sign that may confirm the stereotype is identified and suppressed (Ho & Sidanius, 2009; Schmader, 2010).

For example, Scott and Rodriguez (2015) conducted a study examining the effects of
stereotype threat on African American male collegians. The participants possessed an awareness of in-group stereotypes that are perpetuated by the media that characterize African American male college students as largely limited to athletic scholarship recipients within the college environment. This is a negative stereotype because scholastic abilities are seldom recognized as talents and skills associated with African American males. As a result, the participants expressed the importance of being “super-observant” of how in-group members interact with them when addressing their status on campus; i.e., you are enrolled because of athletics and not academics. Moreover, the participants expressed feelings of frustration, lack of motivation, resentment, challenges to self-efficacy, and non-belonging.

To overcome feelings associated with the initial threat and a desire to disprove the threat and maintain their high self-efficacy, the participants were intentional in dismissing the inaccurate stereotype and highlighting their academic prowess. The actions of the participants are indicative of the implementation of a workable approach to overcome stereotype threat. In sum, possessing an understanding of stereotype threat in its deconstruction is essential in addressing strategies to overcome these effects.

**Strategies to Overcome the Effects of Stereotype Threat**

There is a growing literature base that discusses strategies and approaches to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. Schmader (2010) contends that changing one’s frame of reference serves as a strategy to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. Changing one’s frame of reference requires a situational reappraisal of the threat. In other words, when faced with a task that catalyzes the onset of the threat, the out-group member must engage in emotion disassociation. This is accomplished by mentally removing the negative emotions that are a direct effect of stereotype threat and replacing those emotions with positive beliefs concerning
the self and one’s abilities when attempting to complete the task (Schmader, 2010).

A second strategy requires out-group members to disengage their feelings of self-worth from the task which they are faced, which in-turn minimizes the psychological effect of the task because they do not locate their feelings of worth with the task (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). An example of this is found in Stone et al.’s (1999) study of African American and Caucasian athletes’ performance on an athletic task addressing group-specific stereotypes.

Stone and colleagues’ study identified African Americans as naturally athletic but lacking sports intelligence. Conversely, Caucasians were stereotyped as non-athletic but possessing sports intelligence. When asked to complete tasks that perpetuated the group stereotypes, the participants who disengaged their self-worth from the outcome of the athletic performance significantly moderated the relationship between stereotype threat and performance in the athletic performance test.

A third strategy also found in Stone et al.’s (1999) study calls for stereotyped individuals to maintain a belief in their abilities and preparedness when faced with negative stereotypes. The effectiveness of this strategy is located in the researchers reporting that Caucasian participants who participated in organized sports and considered themselves to be athletic but did not rely on their performance in sports as a basis for evaluating their overall self-worth did not result in impaired performance because confirming the negative characterization was not perceived as a threat to their global self-esteem (Stone et al., 1999). In other words, the participants did not experience a negative effect because they believed in their abilities and did not feel a need to prove one’s self because they did not subscribe to the imposed stereotype concerning their abilities.

A fourth strategy is creating spaces and opportunities for out-group members to construct
affirming images of themselves (Smith, 2011). Smith (2011) contends that the images imposed on African Americans were not constructed by African Americans but were created in relation to the definition imposed on them by the dominant society. As a result, African American males are constantly battling the effects of the negative stereotypes imposed on them, which impacts their self-efficacy and self-esteem. Smith asserts that pairing younger African American males with older positive African American male role models provides the younger males with a positive outlook that will challenge their self-perceptions. Moreover, Smith reports that positive role models best assist in challenging the negative effects of stereotypes and stereotype threat because the young men begin to internalize the characteristics of their role model as their own in an attempt to challenge in-group-imposed stereotypes. In overcoming stereotype threat, mentoring may be a positive activity to overcome the perceived effects of stereotype threat.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring is defined as the positive relationship with, and contribution by a non-parental adult to the life of a young person (Gordon, et al., 2009). Mentors are also perceived as teachers of relationships, rights, and responsibilities (Brown, 2009) and mentoring relationships can occur formally or informally (Dolan & Brady, 2012). Formal mentoring relationships typically occur through a mentoring program and are generally assumed to refer to a one-to-one relationship between an adult and a younger individual (Dolan & Brady, 2012).

Formal mentoring programs serve as a necessary branch of the mentoring family because they aim to foster the development of supportive relationships for individuals who may lack access to naturally occurring mentor relationships (Dolan & Brady, 2012). Howard (2014) underscores the importance of formal mentoring as a result of the possibility that a mentor’s presence in the life of his/her mentee could serve as the only positive role model in the mentee’s
life. Contrarily, informal mentoring occurs naturally and is described as a relationship between a younger individual and an adult that develops spontaneously where the young person receives guidance, encouragement, and support (Dolan & Brady, 2012).

Irrespective of the type of mentoring relationship, La Vant, Anderson, and Triggs (1987) contend that the primary aim of mentorship relationships is to develop and refine a young person’s skills, abilities, and understanding of the joys and challenges of life. The developing and refining of a young person through mentoring is linked to its capacity to provide support, challenge, and a vision for a protégée (Davis, 2009; DuBois & Neville, 1997). Burrell, Wood, Pikes, and Holliday (2001) recapitulate Davis’s assertion with their belief that an effective mentor is supportive, knowledgeable, and understanding of the mentee’s needs.

In the following paragraph, Davis (2009) provides extensive thoughts on mentoring and indicates that support refers to active heedfully listening and understanding of the mentee’s concerns, providing structure, and expressing positive expectations regarding the student’s capabilities. A mentor’s ability to challenge is beneficial because it sanctions the mentee to mature in a given field and find their unique voice. Determinately, mentors provide vision to students or the ability to interpret authenticity, consummately and holistically (Davis, 2009; Watson et al., 2015). Moreover, Davis (2009) describes vision as the context that hosts both support and challenge in the accommodation of transformation.

Watson (2012) contends that a productive and meaningful mentor relationship contributes to a person’s self-efficacy. A meta-analysis of 59 separate research reports was conducted by DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) examining one-to-one adult to youth mentor relationships and the effects of mentoring participation on youth with a median age of 19 years old. They found that there is a significantly positive effect in the areas of psychological, social
and academic outcomes. Wyatt (2009) reinforces Watson’s contention, reporting that mentoring assists in the improvement of interpersonal skills and relationships along with self-confidence, attitudes toward school, and academic achievement. Davis (2010) echoes Wyatt in that mentoring increases student engagement, and self-efficacy.

Mentoring’s ability to positively impact its mentees is linked to its ability to serve as a proactive strategy that exposes students to positive role models who can help with specific life skills, goal setting, and navigating the complexities of life (Brown, 2009; Brown, 2011; Dolan & Brady, 2012). Moreover, youth in mentoring relationships present more positive attitudes and appropriate behaviors at school and are more likely to go on to college than their counterparts (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002; Watson et al., 2015).

**Collegiate Mentoring**

Mentoring’s ability to positively impact students at the primary and secondary levels by increasing the likelihood that they will transition to higher education requires an examination of mentoring’s impact within the higher education environment. Studies conducted by Crisp and Cruz (2009) and Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1999) find that mentoring by college faculty has a positive impact on students’ persistence and academic achievement and helps prepare them to be successful in professional careers (Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill 2003). Thus, mentoring’s capacity to improve these skills results in the creation of a *steeling mechanism*, which equips the mentee with the power to overcome adversity (Dolan & Brady, 2012) based on their increase in self-confidence (Philip & Spratt, 2007). The primary mechanism underlying these core concepts is the validation of students as valued members of the university community.

Davis (2009) cites mentoring as a potential remedy to the education crisis of the African
American male student. The academic benefits of a mentor rest in the creation of a relationship with a mentee that is strong enough to encourage the mentee to put forth their best efforts in the classroom (Howard, 2014). Davis (2010) concurs, explaining that the academic influence of mentoring pertains to the cultivation of intellectual skills and achievement. Kelly and Dixon (2014) suggest that even with the presence of academic assistance, mentoring serves as the differentiating factor that helps students improve their academic performance and avoid academic dismissal. Moreover, after one year of mentoring by faculty, students with mentors have higher GPAs and are more likely to stay in college compared to academically similar students who do not have mentors (Campbell, T.A., & Campbell, E.D., 1997).

Campbell and Campbell’s (1997) study sought to gain insight into whether an assigned mentoring program can contribute to student academic success. There was a total of 678 undergraduate student participants- 37% male, and 63% were female; 69% Latino, 22% African American, 3% Native American, and the remaining 6% were from a variety of other ethnic groups. Additionally, there were 126 mentor participants comprised of faculty, administrators, and staff. Participant breakdown based on gender was 72 females and 54 males. A breakdown of mentor participants based on race found that there were 91 Caucasian, 15 Latino, 14 Asian, five African American, and one Native American.

Salinitiri (2005) examined mentoring on low-achieving first-year students at a Canadian university with 128 student participants (56 in the mentor group and 72 in the non-mentored group) who were accepted into the Faculties (School or College) of Arts and Social Sciences and Sciences. The study’s mentor participants were Faculty of Education teacher candidates in the intermediate/senior division with qualifications to teach in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and Sciences. Salinitiri posits that mentoring at the undergraduate level has been found
to have a significant impact on students’ career selection, socialization to academic and professional roles, course grades, retention during the first year of college (Salinitiri, 2005; Schlosser, et al., 2003), and satisfaction with college (Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2012).

Tierney, Grossman, and Resch (1995) report that students who engage in a mentoring relationship improve school performance and attitude toward completing school work when compared to the control group. Watson (2012) explains the academic benefit of mentors underscoring the necessity of students possessing role models in which they can relate for advice and encouragement. Researchers Philip and Spratt (2007) synthesized a plethora of mentoring research and highlighted that the benefit of mentoring is related to a mentee’s positive relationship with their mentor, making mentees more likely to return to education and do better than those who lacked a mentoring relationship.

**Mentoring’s Impact on Self-Efficacy**

A majority of White and high-achieving minority students believe they are intellectually capable of achieving academically and are encouraged by and challenged by their instructors to perform at the highest academic levels (Thompson, 2007). Research has linked a student’s belief in his/her (academic) abilities with their self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action that produce desired performances.

Studies examining academic achievement and self-efficacy found that students with a heightened sense of self-efficacy tend to take more challenging courses, are better at solving conceptual problems, persist in searching for solutions, and demonstrate better time management (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1994; Reid, 2013). As a result of the academic support and coaching of
their instructors, these students do not question their ability to perform at the highest academic levels on course assignments, exams and standardized tests (Thompson, 2007). Conversely, there are studies that report lower self-efficacy among racial minority undergraduates, including African American males (Brower & Ketterhageng, 2004; 2001; Cuyjet, 1997; Laar, 2000; Mayo & Christenfeld, 1999).

There is much research literature reflecting the significant role of self-efficacy in individuals’ belief in their abilities. Bandura (1997), a preeminent self-efficacy researcher, defines self-efficacy as the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action that produce desired performances. The self-efficacy literature has linked a student’s belief in his/her (academic) abilities with their self-efficacy. This is critical to students because of self-efficacy’s positive relationship to academic achievement, performance expectancies, self-perceptions of competence (Hackett, Betz, Casas, & Rocha-Singh, 1992; Reid, 2013; Stipek, 1984) and possessing positive attitudes toward subject matter (Bandura, 1997). The findings of Steele and Aronson’s (1995) initial study coupled with the potentially positive impact of self-efficacy on African American male students’ achievement informs the purpose of this study, which seeks to contextualize the impact of pervasive racism on African American males and examine possible strategies for addressing its steadfast effects.

**Mentoring and African American Males**

Brown (2011) explained that mentoring can have a significant influence on African American male students. According to Howard (2014), Black males are often analyzed, scrutinized, and dissected and are not viewed in similar humane contexts as others in need of encouragement, support, and mentorship. Effective mentoring allows African Americans to advance socially, politically, and economically (Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Moreover, research
suggests that mentoring collegiate African American males improve retention and persistence at predominantly White institutions (Harper, 2006; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). For these reasons, it is plausible that mentorship can assist African American male students in overcoming stereotypes and stereotype threat. Additionally, mentoring programs have shown promise in improving psychological development, increasing retention, graduation rates, and promoting overall inclusion of African American males (Brown, 2011; Mitchell & Stewart, 2012; Rhodes, 2002; Stokes, Brittian & Sy, 2009).

A study conducted by Ishiyama (2007) concludes that African American males (especially first-generation college attendees) who have participated in mentoring are far more likely to cite “psychological benefits” such as “feeling more comfortable with faculty” or “feeling more confident about myself and my abilities” than White first-generation students. Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) suggest that underrepresented students of color across institutional types note that “faculty and other institutional agents (advisors, counselors, and student affairs staff) who share common ground with students humanized the educational experience, provide holistic support, and are proactive in serving minority students had a positive influence on participants’ success” (p. 72). According to Fries-Britt and Snider (2015), these relationships have the potential of removing feelings of isolation that many undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty of color, experience at PWIs.

In a study conducted by Strayhorn (2010), participants describe faculty as mentors and “cultural navigators” throughout the educational and professional process. Koch and Johnson (2000) explain that undergraduate students involved in mentoring relationships cite mentoring as possessing a psychological benefit for mentees. Moreover, Koch and Johnson offer that the undergraduate students expressed more satisfaction with their undergraduate experience than
students who did not have a mentor. Ishiyama (2007) correlates the perceived psychological benefits of mentoring by African American male students with the students relaying descriptors about their mentor being “personally concerned with the student's welfare.”

Students need role models to which they can relate to for advice and encouragement (Watson, 2012). Mentoring, according to Howard (2014), proves beneficial to African American males because it affords them the opportunity to interact with persons that may have been reared in situations similar to theirs, and thus have a level of cultural synchronization that is often uncommon. Bandura (1997) identifies the actions described by Howard (2014) as modeling. Thus, modeling possesses the capacity to serve as a significant influence of how individuals judge their capabilities (Bandura, 1997).

**Mentoring and Stereotype Threat**

Mentoring’s ability to provide mentees with motivation and positive reinforcement through social persuasion can influence their self-efficacy and belief in their academic abilities. When individuals are motivated and empowered to rely on their capabilities to overcome a challenge they work harder to achieve it (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Patton & Harper, 2003). Inge (2012) synthesizes the work of Howard (2014), Watson (2012), and Bandura (1997) with the declaration that African American male mentees locate the achievability of their aspirations by interacting with someone who has attained similar goals.

Participation in mentoring results in the mentee’s ability to develop a clear picture of their professional identity (Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2014). More succinctly, the availability of a mentor or role model that has dealt with similar struggles appears to be important to minority student achievement (Ishiyama, 2007; Tinto, 1993). Moreover, Cohen and Galbraith (1995) indicate that mentoring could be used to counter the
attitude students experience that “no one cares.”

Additionally, mentoring is an effective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome the barriers that prevent many African-American men from completing college (Brooks, Jones, & Burt; 2013; Brooks & Steen, 2010). Social scientists Mitchell and Stewart (2012) conclude that mentoring improves the matriculation and academic performance of freshmen and sophomore African American males. Mitchell and Stewart further assert that mentoring has a positive effect on matriculation despite the societal realities and effects of structural racism, stereotype threats, and environmental stressors (anxiety) on their psycho-social (positive racial identity) composition, emotional stability, and schooling engagement. According to Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013), African American students who participate in mentoring efforts are more likely to feel included in the culture of the university, and as a result create a correlation between increased diversity and larger graduating classes.

An empirical study of students involved in mentoring relationships, uncovers that grade point averages (GPA) were higher for students with mentors than for students who did not have mentors (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). The findings of Kelly and Dixon (2014) locates its foundation in the study’s goal to synthesize multiple research studies and the findings associated with mentoring programs and their impact on African American male athletes. Crisp and Cruz’s (2009) study found that minority college students who participate in mentoring are twice as likely to persist in the college setting as non-mentored minority students. Additionally, they had higher GPAs and a 77% persistence rate compared with 67% persistence rate for non-participants.

Furthermore, a study on mentoring at a public university reveals that at-risk (African-American) student participation in a mentoring program resulted in a higher GPA than when they
began the program and through the support of their mentor, they could reach all of their academic goals for the semester (Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Sorrentino, 2006). A study examining the presence of mentoring in the lives of African American males reports an increase in GPAs from the pretest range of 1.880-3.250 to the posttest range of 2.250-3.250, which is an 84% hike (Wyatt, 2009). Additionally, Torrance’s (1984) study found that African American males who are mentored complete an average of two more years of education than their counterparts who were not mentored.

**Summary**

As noted, the path to success is perceived to include the successful matriculation through the K-16 educational experience, which can be a daunting task for anyone. However, within society, African American male students are challenged with additional potential deterrents that have impacted graduation rates and dropout rates for these young men. Moreover, these potential deterrents to academic achievement possess the ability to continue to and in the future impact African American males.

This chapter delineates concepts relative to stereotype, which is defined as beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups that result in the creation of theories about how and why certain attributes go together and its impact on the negative perceptions of African American males. The concept of stereotype threat is birthed from the negative stereotypes associated with African American male students and its ability to influence their performance on tasks associated with group stereotypes.

Research reviewed and reported in this chapter found that if an African American male possesses a high-level of self-efficacy (belief in individual ability to control abilities) they could in-turn disprove the stereotype and successfully overcome the effects of stereotype threat and
achieve academically. Additionally, mentoring possesses the ability to improve the self-efficacy of African American males, foster belief in academic abilities, improve graduation rates, and create a support system that will assist African male students in overcoming stereotype threat and navigating challenges they may face during their matriculation into higher education.

The following chapter presents the methodological procedures used to examine the impact of mentoring on an African American male students’ ability to overcome stereotype threat’s effects and achieve academically.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gain insight into the perspectives of African American male collegians concerning mentoring’s ability to improve their self-efficacy in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat and achieve academic success. This chapter presents a discussion of the study design, participant profiles, data sources, data collection, and data analysis.

Stereotype threat is a concept coined by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) and is defined as the risk of an individual to confirm as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group. Mentoring serves as our next key term and is defined as a proactive strategy that exposes students to positive role models who can help with specific life skills, goal setting, and opportunities (Brown, 2009). Formal and informal mentoring are two forms of mentoring. Formal mentoring is a form of mentoring that occurs through a mentoring program and is assumed to refer to a one-to-one relationship between an adult and a younger individual (Dolan & Brady, 2012). Formal mentoring will serve as the primary focus in this examination of mentoring.

This study’s participants were full-time undergraduate students enrolled in Lehman College and student participants in the Urban Male Leadership Program (UMLP). This study gathered information related to the student’s academic history, formal mentoring history, perspectives concerning the importance of education, and their feelings concerning stereotype threat and its influence on their life.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being?
2. How do African American males describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating challenges related to the effects of stereotype threat?

3. How do African American males describe the role mentoring plays in their academic achievement?

**Multiple Case Study Research Design**

This qualitative investigation was conducted using a multiple case study design. The examination studied the perceptions of undergraduate African American male students enrolled and participating in Lehman College’s UMLP and used the findings from their perceptions to make suggestions regarding mentoring’s ability to assist in overcoming stereotype threat and achieve success. The purpose of a case study is to gain an understanding of a particular case (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) explains that the real business of case study is to come to know a particular case well by understanding what it is and what it does. Specifically, a case study seeks to refine understanding (Stake, 1995).

Merriam (1998) describes case study research as a *heuristic* process possessing the ability to allow the researcher to discover new meanings, extend their experience, or confirm what is known. The researcher used one-on-one interviews that served as individual cases to gain insights, make new meanings, and attempt to confirm what is known, based on the perspectives of the study’s participants. This approach allowed the researcher to sincerely enter the scene of the case by putting aside pre-assumptions and learn how the participant functioned in his ordinary pursuits and milieus (Stake, 1995).

The data collected in qualitative studies are a result of either active or passive participation by the researcher. In consideration of the unique nature of the information needed to be gathered, the instruments, observation methods, and modes of analysis are not
standardized. This process was selected for this study because of the research study’s focus, which is to understand better how African American male students perceive the role of mentoring in their ability to overcome stereotype threat and achieve academic success. This method involved fieldwork to collect and document a variety of information to provide a holistic description and explanation of the participants’ perceptions of mentoring.

Specifically, the researcher gained participant data pertaining to their academic history, mentoring history, perspectives concerning the importance of education, and their feelings and experiences concerning stereotyping, and stereotype threat through participant questionnaires and one-on-one interviews. Upon student participant agreement to participate in this research study, the designated gatekeeper provided student’s cumulative grade point average.

I chose multiple case study because an examination of multiple cases allows the researcher to strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings (Merriam, 1998). This study employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the intent of increasing participants’ willingness to share experiences and discuss feelings.

**Researcher Subjectivity or Researcher Positionality**

Characteristic of many qualitative research studies, the researcher is considered a human instrument in that the data are mediated through an individual (researcher) who possesses experiences with the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Because of this, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) offer that it is essential that the researcher describe their personal experiences, assumptions, biases, perspectives, and expectations.

Possessing a bachelor’s degree, places this researcher in the minority population of African American males. During the early stages of my collegiate experience research indicated that 67% of African American males who begin college do not complete their undergraduate
studies and obtain a bachelor’s degree (Anyaso, 2007). More than half a decade has passed since Anyaso’s publication while African American male’s degree completion has increased their graduation rates are disproportionately lower than their white male counterparts. The most recent data from the U.S. Census Department reports that 12.9% of African American males have earned a bachelor’s degree compared to 22.3% of their white male counterparts (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol & Brown; 2015).

It is disheartening that not only are too few African American males completing college, but the achievement gap between African American males and their White counterparts is continuing to grow. This researcher’s personal experience with the potentially negative impact of stereotype threat predates his undergraduate studies and were prominent during his adolescent years. During these years, negative perceptions concerning my academic abilities and those who looked like me were manifested in a variety of ways.

As an example, I can recall a conversation during my junior year of high school at Stanton College Preparatory School (SCP) with my AP Biology teacher. Our conversation stemmed from my mother’s decision as chairwoman of the school board to call for William M. Raines High School (Raines), which was both my neighborhood school and my mother’s alma mater, along with also Jean Ribault High School (Ribault) to offer Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. The populations for each of these schools were predominantly African American and in recent years have been known for sports and an “at-risk” population of students.

My AP teacher explained to me that she and many of her colleagues were in disbelief that the school district would consider implementing AP and IB courses at Raines and Ribault. She went on to say that the students at those schools were not AP and IB students. I asked my teacher
what made the students from my mother’s alma mater different from myself and the AP students she currently taught at our high school. She explained that her students were bright and not from around there. My AP teacher did not know if I had not gained admittance into SCP, a school ranked nationally as the top high school in the country and viewed by many in Jacksonville, Florida as an academic power house, I would have been enrolled at either Raines or Ribault. Infuriated and offended, but ever cognizant of my teacher’s ability to influence my grade I replied, “I guess we will see.” My feelings of anger and disgust were not products of our conversation but were inextricably linked to the reality that persons entrusted with educating the masses believed that a school’s demographic composition and geographic boundary were hindrances to their learning potential. The hindrances are believed by some to be indicative of a student’s inability to grasp the educational content, ability to think critically, and perform well on academic tasks because of their environment.

Although my teacher did not explicitly challenge my academic abilities, her belief concerning persons in an area where Raines and Ribault served as neighborhood schools, an area where I resided, indirectly signaled her belief concerning the academic abilities of a particular group in which I was a member. This conversation fueled my desire to prove to my teacher that individuals from that area were, in fact, AP and IB students capable of achieving above proficient grades. I am happy to report that I was successful in her class.

I believe it is necessary to note that previous lessons from my parents, family members, and others who served as informal mentors strongly influenced my response to my instructor and fueled my desire to work hard to disprove my teacher’s beliefs. Past conversations with those individuals who served as informal mentors taught me that anger clouds one’s ability to think rationally and acting irrationally could impinge upon your ability to succeed. In this particular
situation, an irrational response could have resulted in an argument that would have resulted in suspension or possibly impact my teacher’s grading of assignments. Because of this situation and others, I am aware of the unique circumstances involved in the internal negotiation that African American males may engage in, and how it may be used to promote their academic success.

As an African American male student, I have learned that academic success is attainable for all students especially for those willing to put forth the necessary effort. More importantly, I believe there are two interrelated factors that require effort that have attributed to my academic achievement. The first is identifying and addressing the existence of stereotype threat within the academic arena. I have come to realize that overcoming stereotype threat served as a catalyst for my academic success and can serve as a catalyst for African American males who desire to use this phenomenon to disprove group stereotypes and achieve academically.

The second factor is the necessity for mentoring to assist in equipping students with support, guidance, and strategies to overcome the presence of the threat. I believe that it would have been extremely difficult to overcome stereotype threat without a mentor. The presence and relationship with my mentor helped me to identify the threat and recognize that I did indeed possess the intellectual capacity and academic prowess to overcome the threat and achieve academically. My personal experiences have become intertwined with my research goals concerning stereotype threat. Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain insight into the qualities possessed by students who have achieved academic success in the face of stereotype threat.

A potential advantage of my experiences and “influences” when conducting this study is linked to my investment in the subject area. I believe a high-level of subject investment could lead to an in-depth engagement of the literature, increasing knowledge of the subject area, and assist in expanding the current body of literature concerning beneficial strategies for students
who are faced with stereotype threat. A major disadvantage of my “influences” is the presence of experimenter bias. My intimate connection with the subject matter could cause me to overlook results, or various nuances that may arise from the study that do not align with my personal beliefs or expectations concerning the outcomes of the study.

Additionally, my connection to the study could lead to the misinterpretation of results, which could be misconstrued based on my personal beliefs and experiences surrounding the subject area. Personal bias is inescapable but capable of being managed (Zygmunt & Clark, 2014). For this research, to minimize the effect/impact/influence/confluence of personal bias, I governed my actions by intentionally and deliberately refraining from coloring the statements of the respondents and including in the results portions that were not congruent with my personal beliefs and experiences.

Finally, I engaged in the process of member checking to minimize personal bias and increase authenticity pertaining to the interpretation of participant responses. Member checking allows the researcher to ensure that the participants’ meanings and perspectives are represented and not minimized by the researchers’ agenda and knowledge (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). Furthermore, Birt et al. (2016) point out that participants should be consulted to ascertain if they wish to take part in any validation exercise, whether that is checking interview transcripts or commenting on analyzed data.

The researcher engaged in the process of member checking by providing study participants a copy of their final transcripts to review once transcribed to ensure that it was an accurate representation of their responses to interview questions. Study participants reviewed the transcripts and verbally informed the researcher that the transcripts were an accurate representation of their perceptions and responses and approved the transcripts.
Study Setting: Urban Male Leadership Program at Lehman College, City University of New York

The population of interest that also served as this study’s investigated cases were African American males enrolled in the Lehman College Urban Male Leadership Program (UMLP). Lehman College is a senior liberal arts college in The City University of New York (CUNY), and one of 24 CUNY institutions with an UMLP. Former Chancellor Matthew Goldstein created the UMLP in 2004 to increase, encourage, and support the inclusion and educational success of underrepresented groups in higher education. The Division of Student Affairs at Lehman College recognizes its responsibility and opportunity to (a) take an active role in establishing and introducing this initiative as a platform to provide strong leadership on challenges facing underrepresented youth and men, (b) strengthen the school-to-college pipeline enabling many more minority male students to move into higher education, and (c) increase admission and graduation rates at CUNY colleges.

The UMLP is designed to facilitate the successful transition of first-year and transfer students to Lehman College. The UMLP is not exclusive to only first-year college students and transfer students, but also provides support to continuing students by strengthening academic skills, personal development, and character enrichment. Lehman College’s UMLP offers a variety of initiatives to achieve the program’s primary focus on recruitment, retention, academic success and graduation of students, especially historically underrepresented Black and Latino males in higher education. These initiatives include academic intervention and success, freshmen seminars, and the retention program. The UMLP employs differentiated strategies to assist in meeting the academic needs of its student participants. The academic needs of the Urban Male
Leaders are determined by their performance on the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI).

The LASSI is a 10-scale, 60-item assessment of students' awareness about and use of learning and study strategies related to skill, will and self-regulation components of strategic learning. The LASSI is both diagnostic and prescriptive. It provides students with a diagnosis of their strengths and weaknesses, compared to other college students, and it is prescriptive in that it provides feedback about areas where students may need additional support to improve their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and skills. Students received their scores from the LASSI and with the help of the UMLP leadership begin creating an Individual Plan of Action (IPA). It is necessary to note the programs and activities of the UMLP are open to all students, faculty and staff, without regard to race, gender, national origin and other characteristics.

Academic Intervention and Success (AIS) is an initiative offered to first-year, transfer students, and those deemed by the college as at risk of dropping out. The AIS initiative is conducted in four stages (1) AIS cohorts are contacted through a welcome and appointment letter, (2) the AIS Coordinator meets with each student to conduct an academic assessment, resulting in the development of an IPA, (3) the AIS Coordinator follows up with students monthly through individual e-mails and Blackboard regarding their IPA and UMLP program activities including academic workshops, and (4) the AIS Coordinator will conduct an evaluation of AIS services by administering surveys with students and collaborating department administrators.

Student participants are encouraged to attend and participate in the academic and skills workshops to help make their classroom and personal lives more manageable by strengthening the students’ ability to increase their GPA, prepare for examinations, register for the upcoming
semester, and start the graduate school application process. The AIS monthly workshops benefit student participants academically and socially by providing them with strategies that address (a) the 5 Steps for achieving straight A’s, (b) preparing to take professional exams, (c) setting and achieving goals through effective time management, (d) toolkit for Academic Mastery and Student Support Services, (e) how to establish and maintain effective study groups for life (f) how to overcome performance anxiety and stereotype threats, (g) achieving academic wellness (optimizing brain function through nutrition, exercise, meditation, and scholarship), and (h) improving the quality of a student’s life (optimizing your time for academics, life, and leisure).

A second initiative of the UMLP is the three-credit hour Freshman Seminar course that specifically addresses the identified needs of African-American and Latino male students. This seminar also assists students in their transition into college life at Lehman as well as develop students’ research abilities by providing training, information, and media sources in academic studies. Freshmen seminar students are required to read and discuss The Black Male Handbook, which is a blueprint for those aspiring to thrive against the odds in America today. The Black Male handbook solicits the perspectives of Black males to address issues and create solutions related to political, practical, cultural, and spiritual matters, and ending violence against women and girls. Additionally, student participants are required to create a complete Long Range Academic Plan (LRAP) mapping out strategies and goals that will be implemented for three future semesters.

A third initiative of the UMLP is the Retention Program which offers leadership retreats for UMLP students that focus on academic enrichment, self-identity, community responsibility, and personal development. The UMLP sponsored leadership retreat specifically concentrates on
leadership strategies and academic solutions for empowering all students, but specifically Black and Latino males. The leadership retreat is held off-campus during the spring semester and conducted by UMLP staff members and Lehman faculty members that consist of a progression of intensive workshops that are focused on academic success, personal growth/development, team-building, and leadership skills. Urban Male Leaders participate in the UMLP Leadership Retreat and subsequently implement workshop practices to assist other students on the Lehman College Campus.

The retention program also offers the Distinguished Speaker Series, which invites experts from academia, the law, medicine, public service, and other professional fields to discuss issues affecting underrepresented communities. A final aspect of the retention program is the Educational Summit, which is a full-day conference sponsored annually by “CUNiTY,” an alliance formed by the Black Male Initiative programs at Lehman College, Hostos Community College, and Bronx Community College. The conference, while open to all, focuses on educational and social issues related to the retention of Black and Latino male college students. Participants listen to a panel discussion and then meet in workshops led by CUNY faculty and staff on topics derived from the panel discussion.

The final initiative is the Circle of Support program, which is the UMLP’s mentoring initiative that pairs students with a member of the faculty, staff, or administration based on their shared interests, the field of study, and specialization. Potential mentors and mentees are required to complete a registration form and provide demographic information, and discuss areas of specialization, special interests and hobbies, rationale for needing a mentor (potential mentee), professional goals (potential mentee), rationale for wanting to become a mentor (potential mentor) and course of study (potential mentee) or courses taught (potential mentor). Following
application completion, the program director reviews the application and within 48-hours contacts the applicant and informs them of their application’s acceptance or denial. If an application is denied the applicant is instructed to reapply during the following semester. Conversely, when an application is accepted mentors and mentees are required to participate in trainings conducted by the UMLP leadership. The UMLP offers two signature training sessions.

The first training session is Mentorship USA, which seeks to strengthen mentorship bonds. Successful completion of the Mentorship USA training results in mentor to mentee pairing based on shared interests, specializations, fields of study and availability. Following mentor to mentee pairing both mentors and mentees are permitted to begin interaction and are required to attend the second training session.

The second training session also serves as an on-going training session which is the Mentorship Speaker Series, which discusses the importance of mentorship and pipelining. In addition to the previously mentioned signature training sessions the UMLP also offers additional training and support sessions to all participants in the following areas: positive identity, empowerment, commitment to learning, positive values, establishing boundaries, expectations, social competencies, and constructive use of time. Moreover, in addition to attending trainings mentees and mentors are asked to meet face-to-face at least one hour per month, and communicate via telephone, email, or skype at least once a week.

Participants

This study consists of six student participants who are enrolled in Lehman College and are members of the institution’s UMLP. The UMLP is composed of African American and Latino males to assist in the successful transition for first-year students and transfer students. The criteria for participation in this study required students to be classified as African American
males, be at least 18 years of age, have a minimum GPA of 2.7, and be enrolled as an undergraduate student at Lehman College and a participant in the UMLP. Potential study participants were identified using the assistance of a gate keeper. The gatekeeper was an undergraduate faculty member who serves as the UMLP’s director who received written correspondence requesting his assistance in identifying organizational members who fit the study’s criteria for participation. Further details concerning the acquisition of participants and subsequent data collection are presented in the data collection process section. The data were collected through participant interviews, document analysis including student report card and mentee registration forms, and observations.

Data Sources

This study’s data sources included a participant questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, field notes, and information from the Lehman College UMLP validated by the Lehman College Institutional Research Program. Demographic data from the six participants were collected with a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The researcher created the study’s questionnaire (Appendix H), and the demographic information collected included participants’ age, school classification, cumulative GPA, number of formal mentors (past and present), favorite subject, and least favorite subject. The researcher collected data on mentoring and stereotype threat through one on one semi-structured interviews conducted in a private and comfortable environment for the student participant.

A semi-structured interview style differs from other interview styles. In semi-structured interviewing, a guide is used with questions and topics that must be covered while allowing the interviewer the discretion to determine the order in which questions are asked or omitted, while permitting the researcher to probe to ensure the researcher covers the correct material. The
researcher selected this interview style because it allowed the researcher to collect detailed information in a conversational style, which made the student participants feel less tense and more willing to share their perspectives and experiences. Moreover, because this study would only conduct one interview per student participant the researcher chose this interview method because it is reported to be the best interview method when a researcher cannot conduct more than one interview with each participant (Bernard, 1988; Creswell, 1998).

Six African American male students were interviewed for the study. Each interview was conducted one on one for approximately 45 minutes on the Lehman College Campus in the Urban Male Leadership Program’s office. This site was chosen by the Urban Male Leadership program director, Mr. Deas, to promote participants’ comfort and ensure privacy. Each interview session was audio-recorded, and the researcher used a lapel microphone coupled with an accompanying recorder that assisted in the quality of the recording. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed after all interviews were conducted, and the researcher took field notes. The interview sessions for all participants was one week (there were approximately two people interviewed each day). The interview sessions aimed to elicit participants’ thoughts and lived experiences concerning the impact of mentorship on overcoming the effects of stereotype threat and academic achievement. Below are a few questions that were addressed in the participant questionnaire and participant interview:

1. What experiences, if any, have you had with formal mentoring?
2. Please describe your experiences with formal mentoring prior to your enrollment at Lehman College?
3. Please describe a mentoring relationship that you believe has positively impacted your life?
4. What aspects of your mentoring relationship do you believe were essential in helping you to enroll in college?

5. What impact, if any, do you feel that mentorship had on your belief in your academic abilities?

6. What are your thoughts concerning the importance of education?

7. What are your thoughts concerning your abilities when you are tasked with completing an academic task?

8. Please discuss your experience with stereotypes?

9. If you have experienced stereotypes, please discuss your previous experience with stereotypes before joining the UMLP and also your current experience with stereotypes as a member of the UMLP?

10. Please discuss any stereotypes that you have encountered concerning your academic abilities.

11. What were your feelings when faced with these stereotypes?

   In what way have stereotypes impacted your academic performance?

**Data Collection Procedure**

After receiving approval from the Bowling Green University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study, I followed up with the UMLP director to receive permission to visit the institution. Once verbal permission was received, a follow-up letter was forwarded. Before my arrival to Lehman College’s campus, arrangements for a formal meeting with the Program Director were made to explain the nature and purpose of the study and the goal of this research study.
There were 20 students identified by the Program Director. The Program Director made the first contact with the identified students via email and provided them with an introduction to the researcher, his research interests, a brief explanation of the study, the researcher’s contact information and to look forward to a formal email from the researcher. Each of the 20 students was emailed a student outreach letter (Appendix C). Next, the 20 students responded to the researcher via email expressing an initial interest in learning more about the study. These students were contacted via Skype and Facetime with the help of the gatekeeper to inform them of the purpose and goal of this research study and their potential participation in the study.

With the help of the gate keeper, six potential students were identified from this accessible population to participate in this study. One of the major reasons for the drastic decrease in the accessible population was that several students identified by the gate keeper were of Hispanic descent and did not feel that they would prove beneficial to the study because the study focused on African American males. Following the withdrawal of potential participants, we were left with an accessible population of approximately nine students. With the help of the gatekeeper, we removed three students who did not fit the GPA requirement. These students were recently admitted into the program and did not possess a Lehman College GPA.

The six remaining students were contacted via Skype and Facetime on a one-on-one basis for a meet and greet where we discussed the research interests and addressed any questions regarding this study’s purpose, goals, and implementation. It is necessary to note that the researcher did not set a time limit for the meet and greet sessions to create a space that fostered a level of trust and comfort. Many of the meet and greet sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. At the end of the meet and greet the potential participant provided the researcher with a verbal commitment to participate in this study.
Following the verbal commitment, the researcher verified the participants’ contact information which included telephone numbers, email address, skype and facetime username/numbers; and informed the participants that they would receive an email within 24-48 hours regarding next steps concerning their participation in this study. Within 24-48 hours, each participant received a generic email thanking them for their participation in addition to a reminder of the purpose of this research, a list of available interview times, and a request to complete the attached participant questionnaire prior to their interview (Appendix D and E). Once the participants chose their desired interview time they received an email confirming their desired time (Appendix F). Additionally, non-scheduled participants received an email update of the removal of a recently selected interview slot (Appendix G).

Upon arrival for their scheduled interview, each participant verbally completed a demographic questionnaire with the researcher (Appendix H) and was reminded of interview confidentiality and that their interview would last approximately 45 minutes. The questionnaire (Appendix H) addressed: age, familial education history, school classification, cumulative GPA, number of formal mentors (past and present), favorite subject area, and least favorite subject area. It is necessary to note that participants were encouraged, but not required to answer every question of the questionnaire to participate in this study. Following the completion of the questionnaire, participants were verbally informed of this study’s confidentiality, the format of the interview, and an explanation concerning the audio-recording of the interview. Subsequently, following this discussion, the interview commenced for approximately 45 minutes.

Lastly, the interviews were transcribed to produce verbatim transcripts. To ensure transcript accuracy, the researcher engaged in an interview and transcript review process. This process required the researcher to replay each student participant interview session and compare
the responses of the student participants to the transcripts. This review process was conducted a
total of three times for each student participant transcript. Following this process, the transcripts
were reviewed by the researcher to obtain an overall feeling for their responses. This process
allowed the researcher to compare individual student narratives and begin to note thematic
similarities.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed all verbatim interviews and handwritten field notes before
attempting to analyze data. For this multiple case study, a thematic analysis was used to analyze
the data (Stake, 2006). Thematic analysis is the principal data analysis process used by
qualitative researchers to identify, analyze and report themes within data (Braun & Clark, 2006;
Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Stake, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it provided the
researcher the flexibility to acknowledge the ways the student participants made meaning of their
experience, and, share their perspectives regarding the ways the broader social context impinges
on those meanings while retaining focus on the daily reality of being an African American male
in America (Braun & Clark, 2006). Themes and their emergence in the data analysis process
were influenced by quantifiable measures (constant resurfacing of ideals within each case) but
were dependent on whether they pertained to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The researcher followed the six proposed steps to thematic analysis outlined by Braun
and Clark (2006), which called for (a) familiarizing yourself with the data (engaging in
transcription), (b) generate initial codes (coding and collating interesting features across the data
set), (c) search for themes (collating codes into potential themes), (d) review of themes
(determining if codes fit within both coded extracts and entire data set resulting in the generation
of a thematic map), (e) defining and naming themes (analyzing and refining aspects of themes,
creating name and/or definition of themes), and (g) producing the report (selecting vivid and compelling examples, final review of extracts, and discussing the relation of the themes back to the research questions and purpose of the research).

Interviews were analyzed for each case study and each theme and then coded. The researcher coded the data using open coding. The researcher engaged in open coding by going through each transcript line by line and identifying emerging themes and categories from the participants’ statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following the open coding process, the researcher employed axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), by grouping the themes and concepts that emerged from open coding. Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1994) contend that to increase the reliability of qualitative research, outside raters should review the data and calculate the inter-rater agreement. This study used three outside raters who were non-affiliates of Bowling Green State University and Lehman College and possessed qualitative research experience. According to Myles and Huberman, inter-rater agreement is calculated when three outside raters are given themes created by the primary researcher with quotes that are representative of each theme.

Both themes and quotes were randomized and then presented to the raters, and the raters were asked to match each theme with the representative quote. It is necessary to note that the researcher did not instruct nor inform the raters to use all quotes or themes nor placed parameters on the number of quotes and themes that were to be matched. Themes were marked with number and letter code combinations, and the raters marked the back of each quote with the theme they felt corresponded. Raters marked themes and quotes they felt were a non-match as “N/A.”

Following the rater matching session, the researcher tallied the agreements, and disagreements were counted and calculated the inter-rater reliability. Miles and Huberman
(1994) explain that inter-rater reliability is the number of agreements between raters divided by the sum of the total number of agreements and disagreements. They suggest that inter-rater reliability of 80 to 90% is acceptable. This research study obtained an inter-rater reliability score of 86%.

**Steps to Protect Study Validity**

Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability and validity as a fit between what they record as data and what occurs in the setting under examination, rather than the literal consistency across different observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1982) contend that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in research. One of the strategies to establish trustworthiness identified by Guba and Lincoln is “tactics to help ensure honesty in informants.” The researcher implemented this strategy by providing each participant and potential participant with the opportunity to refuse to participate in the project. In doing so, this ensures that the data collection sessions involve only those who are genuinely willing to participate and offer data freely. Moreover, the researcher encouraged the participants to be frank from the outset of the session, with the researcher aiming to establish a rapport in the opening (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

The process of member checking is considered to be the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study’s credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In this process, participants may be asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated. It is believed that the emphasis should be on whether the informants consider that their words match their intent (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Stake, 2006). The researcher emailed each participant a verbatim copy of their interview transcript to review to ensure statement accuracy. All student participants reviewed their transcripts and contacted the researcher via telephone to provide
feedback. The researcher and student participant feedback sessions resulted in the student participants informing the researcher that their transcripts conveyed their intended message. Member checking assisted in decreasing potential bias and increased authenticity regarding the interpretation of participant responses (Stake, 1995).

Additionally, the researcher engaged in a strategy identified by Guba and Lincoln (1982) as “researcher’s reflective commentary.” Reflective commentary may be used to record the researcher’s initial impressions of each data collection session, patterns appearing to emerge in the data collected, and theories generated. The researcher’s reflective commentary can play a vital role in what Guba and Lincoln term “progressive subjectivity,” or the monitoring of the researcher’s own developing constructions, which the writers consider critical in establishing credibility. This strategy was implanted through the process of journaling. Implementation of journaling decreased the potential for the researcher to taint the study by inserting the researcher’s voice and minimizing the voice of the participants. As such, engaging in journaling during the study assisted in minimizing the onset of potential bias because it provided an outlet to express feelings and emotions associated with the study and to refrain from inferring one’s thoughts and feelings on participants.

Frequent peer-debriefing and examination also served as a strategy to protect validity. This strategy required the researcher to work together with several colleagues who held impartial views concerning the study. To ensure interview questions accomplished the goal of gaining insight into the experiences and perspectives of participants, the researcher sought feedback from multiple sources before deciding upon the initial set of questions. Questions were reviewed by African American male professors and mentors from accredited four-year institutions across the United States to gain feedback on whether the questions were clear, non-leading, and appropriate.
for the participants to answer. Moreover, the impartial peers examined the researcher’s transcripts in totality, emergent themes, final report and general methodology.

Next, the researcher requested insight from a group of African American male college graduates from across the United States who participated in formal mentoring programs while in college. These male graduates were asked to review the interview questions and to offer feedback on whether they believed the questions were easy to understand. It was determined by the graduates that the questions were clear and straightforward.

Peer examination can uncover overemphasized points, underemphasized points, vague descriptions, general errors in the data, biases or assumptions made by the researcher. As a result, this form of debriefing assisted the researcher in bringing awareness concerning potential biases regarding the data. After examining the appropriate document, the examiners offered the researcher feedback to enhance credibility and ensure validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; 2006).

This chapter detailed the design and methods of the study, and the next chapter describes the study participants and the emergent themes and subthemes generated from the analysis of the one to one participant interviews.
CHAPTER IV. INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gain insight into the perspectives of African American male collegians concerning mentoring’s ability to improve self-efficacy allowing them to overcome the effects of stereotype threat and achieve academically. The researcher interviewed six African American male full-time college students enrolled at Lehman College in the Bronx, New York, who are participants in the Urban Male Leadership Program (UMLP). During the interview process, the researcher posed questions to gain insight into the perspectives of the study’s participants through a discussion of their collegiate experiences concerning mentoring, stereotype threat and their belief in their academic abilities. The questions utilized in the study are provided in Appendix I.

This chapter provides a description of each of the study participants, organized under the following categories: Personal and Academic Characteristics, Familiar Education History, and Mentorship History. To maintain anonymity, all identifying information for student participants and mentors of this study were replaced by pseudonyms with the exception of the program director’s name, Mr. Deas. The following section presents each study participants’ history and chapter five describes emergent themes and subthemes generated from the interview analysis.

Case Study One: Mr. Carmichael

Personal and Academic Characteristics

Mr. Carmichael is the product of a self-described present two-parent middle-class family household in a New York borough. Before enrollment in Lehman College and the UMLP, Mr. Carmichael was a well-respected high school honor student who enjoyed school and desired to graduate from college and pursue higher degrees. Mr. Carmichael’s favorite subject area are the sciences and least favorite subject area is math.
Mr. Carmichael is classified as first-semester senior in the Biology department at Lehman College with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.5. Mr. Carmichael is cognizant of his high GPA and places a high importance on his academic achievement because he believes it possesses the ability to dictate his future by impacting opportunities through “opening and closing doors.”

**Familial Education History**

Mr. Carmichael desires to enroll in Medical School following the successful completion of his undergraduate program. Mr. Carmichael attributes his terminal degree pursuits to the values instilled him at an early age by his parents and grandmother whom all have master’s degrees. He explains,

*They always told me that education was important and that I could be anything that I wanted to be...*

**Mentorship History**

Before entering Lehman College, Mr. Carmichael did not participate in any formal mentoring programs. However, Mr. Carmichael self-identified (informal) mentors that included his pastor, sports coaches, and family members who were influential during his primary and secondary educational pursuits. It is necessary to note that Mr. Carmichael did not identify any of his primary and secondary teachers as mentors. Mr. Carmichael’s decision to pursue and ultimately participate in the UMLP is a result of their presence and service on campus, which he was immediately drawn to as a freshman. Currently, Mr. Carmichael is in his fourth year of membership in the UMLP and has three formal mentors.
Case Study Two: Mr. King

Personal and Academic Characteristics

Mr. King is the product of a matriarchal one-parent household with three younger siblings, one brother and two sisters, in a New York borough. Mr. King will be a first-generation four-year college graduate. Mr. King was beloved by teachers and peers in his high-school. Additionally, Mr. King excelled in both academics and athletics. Mr. King loved high school and desired to graduate from college and pursue higher degrees. Mr. King’s favorite subject area are the sciences and least favorite subject area is English.

Mr. King is a first-semester senior in the Nursing department at Lehman College with a cumulative 3.5 GPA. Mr. King is cognizant of his academic abilities and achievements; however, he refuses to allow his GPA to define his abilities. Mr. King, believes that his academic success and subsequent professional success will be attained because he is a well-rounded student who champions preparation and hard-work but also participates in extracurricular activities.

Familial Education History

Mr. King’s mother holds a high school diploma. Mr. King’s maternal grandparents did not attend college. Although Mr. King’s mother and grandparents did not attend college, they instilled in him at an early that attaining a college degree was an expectation. He recounts,

*It was never a question about whether I would attend college... it was an expectation that I would attend and graduate...On time!*

Mentorship History

Mr. King possessed formal mentoring experiencing before entering Lehman College and the UMLP. Mr. King is a self-identified participant in the Boys and Girls Club of America. Mr. King’s membership dates to his primary education years. Throughout his primary and secondary education matriculation, Mr. King had six formal mentors. Currently, Mr. King is in his fourth
year of membership in the UMLP and has two formal mentors.

**Case Study Three: Mr. Little**

**Personal and Academic Characteristics**

Mr. Little is from a New York borough and is the product of a matriarchal household where he is the only child. Mr. Little was a well-respected high school honor student who enjoyed school and desired to graduate from college in pursuit of higher degree attainment. Mr. Little’s favorite subject area is math, and least favorite subject area is English.

Mr. Little is 20 years old and is classified as a first-semester junior majoring in Physics and Math with a cumulative 3.5 GPA. Mr. Little cites the possession of a high GPA as a contributing factor in the creation of opportunities that could lead to professional success. Mr. Little is cognizant of his high GPA and desires to continue to strive for a higher GPA with the goal of gaining exposure to more opportunities that will lead to professional success.

**Familial Education History**

Mr. Little’s mother’s highest educational attainment is a high-school diploma. Mr. Little is a first-generation college student and will be the first in his family to attain a college degree. It is necessary to note that Mr. Little’s mother has also enrolled in college courses and intends on acquiring her bachelor’s degree. Mr. Little details his family’s perspective concerning education with the statement,

*My mother doesn’t have a college degree, but she always wanted me to have one and she did everything that she could to make sure I got the chance to get one... Now that I am almost done, she is about to get one for herself.*

**Mentorship History**

Before Mr. Little’s entrance into the UMLP, he did not have any formal mentoring
experience. Mr. Little desired to have a mentor and obtain guidance and support when entering college. Mr. Little met Mr. Deas on campus and was inspired by the way he carried himself and the respect that he and the UMLP had on the Lehman College campus. As a result, Mr. Little decided to join the UMLP and is currently a third-year member with three program mentors.

Case Study Four: Mr. Newton

**Personal and Academic Characteristics**

Mr. Newton is the oldest of two children in a matriarchal household from a borough in New York. Mr. Newton is 21 years old and a self-described lover of learning and an initial introvert before admission into the UMLP. Mr. Newton possessed the respect of his high school teachers but was not widely known or recognized by his peers. Additionally, Mr. Newton was an honor student who enjoyed school and desired to graduate from college in pursuit of higher degree attainment. Mr. Newton’s favorite subject is history and least favorite subject is math.

Mr. Newton is pursuing a degree in Health Services Administration and has a cumulative GPA of 3.5. Mr. Newton recognizes the importance of his GPA in the attaining of academic success and potential creation of opportunities for professional success and for this reason he will continue to strive to perform to his highest academic abilities.

**Familial Education History**

Mr. Newton’s mother’s highest educational attainment is a bachelor’s degree. Mr. Newton’s mother was the first of her siblings to graduate with a college degree; however, all of her siblings possess a college degree. Education and degree attainment was impressed upon Mr. Newton and his siblings during their growth and development. Mr. Newton recalls,

> For as long as I can remember everyone always told us (he and his sibling) that when you graduate from high school the next step is college and nothing else.
Mentorship History

Before enrolling in Lehman College, Mr. Newton did not participate in formal mentoring. During his first year at Lehman College, Mr. Newton kept seeing young men dressed in blazers, carrying briefcases and heavily involved in campus-life and he made conscious decision at that moment to find a way to become a member of the same organization as those young men. Mr. Newton later learned that those young men were members of the UMLP and as a result, he sought out Mr. Deas on campus and inquired about how to become a member. Mr. Newton is a third-year member of the UMLP and currently has three program mentors.

Case Study Five: Mr. Mays

Personal and Academic Characteristics

Mr. Mays is the oldest of his parents’ two children. He grew up in a two-parent household in a New York borough, and has one sister. Mr. Mays self-identifies as a life-long learner and a lover of addressing the health disparities in all communities but primarily African American communities. Mr. Mays was beloved by his peers and high school teachers. However, he explained that there were several instances that he did not perform to his highest academic abilities because he did not want to be viewed in a negative light by his peers. Mr. Mays enjoyed high school and graduated with honors and a desire to pursue higher degree attainment. Mr. Mays’ favorite subject area are the sciences and least favorite subject area is English.

Mr. Mays is classified as a sophomore with a cumulative 3.7 GPA and is enrolled in the nursing family practitioner program, which is housed in the School of Health Sciences, Human Services, and Nursing. Mr. Mays does not believe his GPA serves as the single identifying factor that validates his personhood. However, Mr. Mays recognizes the importance of his GPA in attaining academic success and creating future opportunities for professional success. As a result,
Mr. Dubois seeks to correct the failures of his past where he did not perform to his highest academic abilities by taking advantage of each opportunity to perform to his highest academic abilities.

**Familial Education History**

Mr. Mays’ father’s highest education completed was the earning of a master’s degree. Conversely, Mr. Mays’ mother’s highest education completed was a bachelor’s degree. Mr. Mays’ sister is not currently enrolled in college. Mr. Mays’ family championed the importance of education throughout his growth and development as a conduit for social mobility. For example, Mr. Mays shared,

*My parents always challenged us to do better than them in all aspects of life. And the way to achieve this was to get as much education as we could.*

**Mentorship History**

Mr. Mays did not participate in a formal mentoring program before enrolling in Lehman College and his induction into the UMLP. Mr. Mays attributes his desire to become a part of the UMLP to the similarity that existed between his father and Mr. Deas. Mr. Mays described his father as a strong, hardworking, caring, intelligent and inspiring individual. Mr. Mays saw those same qualities in Mr. Deas and wanted to be connected to someone similar to his father while he was away from home. Mr. Mays is currently in his second year of the UMLP and has two formal mentors.

**Case Study Six: Mr. Dubois**

**Personal and Academic Characteristics**

Mr. Dubois is a first-generation college student and the middle son of three boys that were born to his parents. Mr. Dubois attributes his rearing to his maternal grandparents in a New
York borough. His parents were not consistently present during his developmental years; however, their presence became consistent during the latter years of his secondary education. Mr. Dubois attributes the values of hard work, dedication, perseverance, loyalty, honesty, and respect that were instilled in him to his maternal grandparents. Mr. Dubois is a self-described lover of technology and community uplifting.

During his high school years, Mr. Dubois was beloved by his peers while his high school teachers did not believe that he consistently performed at his highest academic potential. Nonetheless, Mr. Dubois graduated from high school as an honor student who enjoyed school and desired to graduate from college and pursue higher degrees. Mr. Dubois’ favorite subjects are math and science, and his least favorite subject is Spanish.

Mr. Dubois is a sophomore majoring in Computer Information Systems, which is housed in the Department of Computer Science with a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Moreover, Mr. Dubois expects his scholastic performance to continue to reflect high academic achievement. Although Mr. Dubois’ GPA is reflective of a high academic achiever his expectations remain high because he desires to continue his academic achievement through the continued practice of hard work, persistence, sacrifice, and preparation.

**Familial Education History**

Neither Mr. Dubois’ siblings, parents nor maternal grandparents possess a college degree. Mr. Dubois’ parents, grandparents, and oldest sibling possess a high school diploma. Although Mr. Dubois’ family education history does not boast a higher education degree, the members of his family have always pushed him to pursue a college degree.

**Mentorship History**

Mr. Dubois did not participate in a formal mentoring program before his enrollment and
subsequent induction into Lehman College’s UMLP. Mr. Dubois desired to pursue the UMLP because he viewed the program participants as successful based on their on-campus achievements and success. Since he also desired to be successful, he felt that he should connect himself with persons who were in a position that he desired to be. Mr. Dubois is in his second year of the UMLP and currently has three formal mentors. and because he desired success he felt that he should himself with persons who were in a position that he desired to be. Mr. Dubois is in second year of the UMLP and currently has three formal mentors.

**Summary**

The previous pages provided written descriptions of the study participants and the Table 1 below captures the personal data presented.
Table 1

*Personal Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>First Generation College Attendee</th>
<th>Informal / Formal Mentors</th>
<th>Parental Education</th>
<th>Nuclear or Extended Family Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following chapter presents the emergent themes and subthemes generated from the analysis of the one to one participant interviews.
CHAPTER V. EMERGENT THEMES

The data collected and analyzed for this study provided valuable information regarding academic ability, mentorship, and overcoming stereotype threat. As presented in the literature review, the discussion of overcoming stereotype threat rests in addressing the feelings and emotions experienced by out-group members. Literature experts surmised that the effects of stereotype threat present significant harm to perceptions of self-integrity, self-efficacy, and overall self-concept and value, leading to cognitive imbalance along with equally and impactful non-cognitive effects. Research also supported a myriad of negative emotions and characteristic psychological effects such as feelings of frustration, lack of motivation, resentment, challenges to self-efficacy, psychological stress, cognitive inadequacy, non-belonging and countless physiological manifestations (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Scott and Rodriguez, 2015).

This inquiry provides an opportunity to add to the growing literature base addressing strategies to overcome the effects of stereotype threat through the voices and experiences of African American male college students. As echoed in the voices of the participants, the mentoring experience provides “emotional equipment” to overcome what the researcher identifies as the deconstructed effects of the marginalization of stereotype threat on out-group members. Emergent themes from the participant responses identify tools that were generated from the mentoring experience that addresses the effects of stereotype threat. The researcher identifies the participant descriptions of the mentoring experience as a workable approach to overcome stereotype threat. In sum, possessing an understanding of stereotype threat in its deconstruction is essential in addressing strategies to overcome the effects of stereotype threat.

This chapter explores the responses of the participants and reports substantial interview portions verbatim. The data analysis generated four thematic domains: (a) the benefits of having
a person in your corner, (b) there is nothing that I cannot do, (c) education is integral to success, and (d) stereotyping is to be expected. These four overarching themes lead to the emergence of six subthemes including having someone to confide, accountability, high personal and scholastic expectations, education prevents stagnation, mentoring instills confidence, mentoring shapes perspective, and stereotypes fuel me to succeed. This chapter explores the emergence of these themes. Table 1 (Appendix J) provides a list of the domains, subthemes, and frequencies.

**Theme One: The Benefits of Having Someone in Your Corner**

Each of the participants highlighted that one of the most beneficial aspects of mentoring is its ability to provide someone who has your best interest at heart and who is undoubtedly in your corner. Mr. Carmichael explained,

*My mentor and I have been through a lot and no matter whether I failed or succeeded my mentor always encouraged me to believe in myself and he has always been there for me when I needed him. Not only that, my mentor gave me many resources to use around campus, which helped me in classes, helped teach me organization, and made me a better all-around student.*

Additionally, Mr. Mays divulged that,

*The mentors in the UMLP take the time to get to know what their mentees enjoy and do not enjoy and why they do not enjoy it...with the mentors’ goal of, over time, trying to change why I felt that way... Which is why I felt was a big difference maker because taking the time to understand “why” assisted in establishing and maintaining connection.*

This shared belief amongst participants concerning the beneficial aspect of mentoring as having someone in your corner led to the emergence of three subthemes. The first emergent subtheme perhaps reflected the significance of having someone in your corner in that it appeared to reflect
having someone in which to confide. Mr. Little provided the following response,

*Well if I had to say being in the UMLP, I have come to appreciate Mr. Deas because he never makes me feel as if he’s too busy to listen to me and speak to me about anything that is going in my personal life or at school. I can’t lie, I never had that before and now that I do have it I feel like situations that used to seem hard aren’t really that hard anymore because I have someone to talk things out with…*

Four of the respondents offered supportive examples under “the benefits of having someone in your corner.”

According to Mr. King,

*The UMLP never makes you feel like you don’t matter, they make you feel like you are the greatest thing [person] walking.*

I pressed Mr. King further on his statement and asked him to elaborate. He responded,

*whenever I felt like I wanted to give up or that I was not cutout for college, I would talk to my mentor and he would constantly remind me that anything worth having is worth fighting for and that no matter how bad I might feel I could always come to him and talk about anything I needed…I know it might sound crazy but just knowing that I had somebody who I could talk to and I knew that they would get me back on the right track has kept me going semester after semester after semester.*

A second emergent subtheme, someone to be accountable, emerged and is evidenced in the testimony of Mr. Mays. Mr. Mays shared his perception that as a mentee you must be accountable to someone, in that,

*…My mentor constantly questioned me about my performance in my courses and on a number of occasions we sat down and discussed areas where I felt like I struggled and*
after a while I didn’t want to disappoint him and that kind of helped with my abilities because I felt that this person in my life really cares and forced me to work hard to get on track and stay on track...

In addition, Mr. Carmichael disclosed,

There have been many times when Mr. Deas questioned me about my productivity or lack thereof and expressed concerned if he did not feel I produced grades that were consistent of a member of the UMLP... I never had teachers care before and the fact that he cared made me accountable to him because I did not want to disappoint him.

And lastly, a third emergent subtheme concerning mentoring and its high personal and scholastic expectations emerged. Mr. Newton reported,

...The UMLP provides a standard for all of its leaders to adhere to; they expect to you perform in the classroom, they expect you to be a leader on campus and in my mind most importantly they expect you to serve in the community!

As a result, participation in the UMLP provided the students with mentors who supported them, provided someone to confide, demanded accountability, and maintained high personal and scholastic expectations. The high-value the participants placed on their experiences with their mentors is indicative of a perceived benefit of the act of mentoring within the designed program of the UMLP.

**Theme Two: Education is Integral to Success**

All six of the participants reported that education is integral to success because it serves as a key component in the determination of employment and social mobility. Mr. Carmichael reported,

*Without a proper education, it is very hard to get a job, which can slow you down in life.*
Mr. Little shared,

The better your education, the more opportunities you are given, which can also lead to more career path opportunities.

Mr. King explained,

I feel like if you are not going to school you are decreasing your opportunities and that is like the biggest area I feel like people don’t get the same opportunities as other people do [who go to school]....I feel like without education I would be doing things that I probably shouldn’t be doing and I definitely wouldn’t have access to the opportunities that I have access to now and really to be able to keep on improving.

Mr. King’s explanation foreshadowed the emergence of a fourth subtheme that emerged within this notion of education is integral to success. The emergent subtheme was that education prevents stagnation.

Mr. Du Bois divulged,

If I was not in the process of pursuing an education, I would probably be at a stagnant and very steady pace. I would probably be doing the same thing for years and years to come. I don’t want to live paycheck to paycheck or work a job. I want a career and that’s what the UMLP is instilling in all of us!

Similarly, Mr. Mays shared,

I believe that in every job, in every career or occupation, you are going to have to learn something new and if you do not have that ability to learn I feel like that’s something that can derail you from becoming what you want to become or what you possibly can become.

Likewise, Mr. Newton stated,
Mr. Deas always tells us that education creates the capacity to learn, fosters the open mind to learn, and strengthens the ability to learn, and as a result of that I believe that without education it keeps you stagnant and at a standstill [in life].

In sum, the responses made by the student participants indicated a perceived linkage between learning and academic performance, the attainment of educational success, and the social-professional success that is believed to follow. It is necessary to note that the participants reinforced the widely held belief of in-group members, which attribute social-professional opportunities and success with a college degree and these same opportunities and successes are limited when lacking a college degree. The significance of the aforesaid notion is located in the consistency of the belief concerning the value of acquiring an education amongst both groups (in-group and out-group members). This notion reiterates the researcher’s identification of an initial group of individuals (human beings) who share desire for acquiring education and who diverge with the introduction of societal stereotypes. Similarly, within this study the desires and belief pertaining to educational acquisition and the resulting opportunities are consistent for both out-group and in-group members. However, the divergence occurs when stereotypes are introduced that negatively impact one group (out-group) and are perpetuated by another (in-group).

Theme Three: There is Nothing I Cannot Do

The student participants expressed with great confidence that because of their participation in the UMLP that there was not a task that they were incapable of completing. For example, Mr. Newton shared,

*I have to say that after becoming a part of the program you really begin to internalize the reality of yourself as an Urban Male Leader and with the help of the program not only do*
you begin to view yourself as elite, but others begin to view you as a leader and as a result of how you view yourself, how others view you, and the teachings and seminars that you participate in you realize that there is nothing that you cannot do.

Another example can be seen in Mr. King’s statement,

_The UMLP has powerful events and seminars that they host, and we as student leaders serve at the event and have a chance to listen to powerful speakers. I am not sure if you are familiar with Ruben Diaz, but he is the Borough President of the Bronx. I had an opportunity to shake his hand and hand him an award. But in his speech, he said something that has stuck with me, which was “you can’t control what happens to you, but you can control how you react to it.” Most people would apply that to dealing with race issues but for me that taught me that I can control everything that personally deals with me and for that reason no one can make me do anything; and, anything that I am faced with or tasked with I can do it or overcome it because I have the power to [overcome it] which makes me my own master._

A fifth emergent subtheme was the belief that the UMLP and its mentors instill confidence.

In his description, Mr. Little expressed,

_The UMLP helped me understand how to handle business; and that I had to do what I had to do in order to succeed. Everything is on you! And as an Urban Leader, there is nothing that you cannot do! Truthfully, they make us feel like success is synonymous with becoming an Urban Male Leader._

Mr. Mays revealed,

...They [other institutions and programs] don’t have classes and programs about how one should think and the importance of feeling good about yourself, your self-confidence, but the
UMLP did provide that class and that has made all the difference in how I feel about treating people or anything that I am asked to do as long as I have prepared. That seminar was one of the most impactful seminars that I have had.

Correspondingly Mr. Carmichael stated,

Being in the UMLP, I also have learned to have confidence [in my abilities]. My mentor always believed in me and encouraged me to believe in myself, which helped me have more confidence in class and life.

Additionally, Mr. DuBois shared,

…The UMLP and my mentors constantly remind me that I am an Urban Male Leader and that has given me confidence. I can show everyone that I have the fortitude and discipline to achieve and ultimately succeed. It is my time to shine!

A sixth subtheme emerged, which was the UMLP’s ability to shape perspective.

Mr. DuBois explained,

This program reinforced the belief that success was not a fairytale, but it was real and can be achieved and we [the UMLP] are here to help you achieve success.

Mr. Little stated,

When you become a part of the UMLP you receive a gold tie, a blue blazer and a briefcase; now, it’s not one of those ten thousand-dollar briefcases (laughing) but it’s a nice briefcase. But nah. You don’t really understand the importance of the briefcase; they are already on top of it all for you; they know everything that you will need to become a leader and be successful. I carry that briefcase every day. Wearing that blazer and having that briefcase reminds you that you are somebody and that you have some place to go!
Mr. Mays shared his perspective,

> My participation in the UMLP afforded me the opportunity to see things from a different point of view and [to] see how they handled certain situations and what they thought about certain things definitely had its benefits in shaping how I handled situations and my outlook on life.

The responses of the student participants concerning the emergent theme “there is nothing I cannot do” indicates the participants perception that the UMLP and its mentors have instilled in some and strengthened in others their self-efficacy concerning both social and academic challenges.

**Theme Four: Stereotyping is to be Expected**

A consensus existed among participants, which was the belief that stereotypes regarding to their abilities both academic and non-academic have and will always be present in society. Mr. Mays revealed,

> That might be the easiest question (laughing). Being an African American or any minority, we have to face a number of stereotypes and definitely stereotypes when it comes to education ability….You become numb to stereotypes because you already know they are going to always be there. You don’t even pay attention to the stereotype after a while.

Mr. King shared,

> I used to be surprised when I ran into stereotypes. Now it’s to the point where I expect someone to say a negative stereotype about me…

A seventh subtheme emerged within the participants’ discussion of the pervasiveness of stereotypes, which is the belief that stereotypes fueled participants to succeed.
Mr. Carmichael shared his perspective,

...The belief about a lot of [Black] students in years past and today are that they are in school because they were athletes. For years, it was a slap in the face, but I take it as a compliment and say well actually I didn’t play any sport, you know; actually, I get to tell my story when I am asked that question. When they hear that statement, they are like ‘wow, you are intelligent, you are capable, what made you decide your major or stay in college’... So you can look at it as a compliment or a time to give your testimony, which gives you the ability to break the stereotype.

Additionally, Mr. Newton divulged,

...I would be excited to show you [individual(s) holding stereotype] that I am not the stereotype and in essence prove them wrong and throw it in your face [individual(s) holding stereotype] that you were wrong about me and my abilities... I can finally show the world, hey, I am not the stereotype and I am not going to be confined to the box that you place me in.

Finally, the emergent theme “stereotyping is to be expected” indicates societal cynicism concerning in-group members while illumining the participants’ perceived optimism regarding its ineffectual impact on their abilities when viewed negatively by “out-group” members.

**Summary of Participant Perspectives**

The six student participants in this qualitative case study identified as African American and male. Participants ranged in age from 18-22 years old. Inclusion in this study required a cumulative GPA of 2.7, however, through self-reporting and gate-keeper verification, participant GPA’s ranged from 3.5-3.7. The participants in this study were four upper-classmen and two underclassmen. As a point of clarification, this study identifies underclassmen as students
enrolled in a four-year accredited institution recognized by the institution for possessing one to two years of collegiate experience. The academic majors for the study participants included biology, health services administration, nursing, physics, math, and computer information systems.

All six of the students were from urban communities in New York. The participants were asked to complete a four-question pre-participant questionnaire, which sought to acquire participant perspectives’ concerning academics and academic abilities, mentoring, and interaction with stereotypes and stereotype threat before entering the UMLP. Additionally, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, which sought to gather information about their age, familial education history, school classification, cumulative GPA, number of formal mentors (past and present), favorite subject area, and least favorite subject area. All participants completed both questionnaires.

This study provided insight into the student participants’ perspective regarding mentoring’s ability to improve self-efficacy allowing them to overcome the effects of stereotype threat and achieve academically. The perspectives of the collegians were substantial, and the results varied within this dissertation study. The findings in this study strongly supported mentoring in assisting African American collegians in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat and achieving academically.
CHAPTER VI. DISCUSSION OF EMERGENT THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gain insight into the perspectives of African American male collegians concerning mentoring’s ability to improve self-efficacy allowing them to overcome the effects of stereotype threat and achieve academically. The researcher sought to engage and support research-based implications that identify mentoring as a workable strategy to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. The researcher’s identification of mentoring as a strategy to overcome the effects of stereotype threat are a result of mentoring’s ability to provide motivation, positive reinforcement, positive images of group members, attitudes that counter the “no one cares” philosophy, improved perception of self-efficacy, and a belief in a mentees academic abilities (Blanton, Crocker, & Miller, 2000; Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005; Patton & Harper, 2003). Additionally, the research-based strategies to overcome the psychological effects of stereotype threat call for out-group members, or those who are marginalized, to maintain a belief in their abilities and preparedness, and to disengage their feelings of self-worth with the task, when faced with negative stereotypes (Reid, 2013; Stone et al., 1999; Whiting, 2014).

The guiding research questions for this study sought to gain a more thorough understanding of (a) how do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being, (b) how African American male students describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating challenges relative to the effects of stereotype threat, and (c) how African American male students describe the role that mentoring plays in their academic achievement.

This study examined the perceived impact of mentoring on the academic achievement of African American male collegians at an urban accredited four-year college. The researcher
reports and engages information acquired from the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews conducted with six African American male collegians during the fall semester of 2017. All six participants were matriculated undergraduate students and participants in the Urban Male Leadership Program at Lehman College in Bronx, New York. Participant interviews were conducted on the Lehman College campus.

Discussion of the Research Questions

How do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being?

Significant research has been dedicated to the identification of factors having the ability to impact African American male’s academic achievement, including stereotypes, stereotype threat, self-efficacy, institutional racism and other environmental factors (Aronson, 2002; Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Davis, 2004; DeFreitas, 2012; Griffin & Allen, 2001; Harper, 2015; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; McGee, 2013; Osborne, 1997; Owens et al., 2010; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The contentions of these researchers coupled with statistics often touted by in-group members describing African American males as a group who are lagging behind their peers in retention, and degree completion (Harper, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2010; Watson et al., 2015) led to the formulation of this study’s first research question, “how do African American males describe the effects of stereotype threat and its impact on their academic and social being?”

It is not difficult to understand how African American male students could question their intellectual abilities and underperform on academic tasks when they are inundated with pervasive, unrelenting, and overwhelmingly negative stereotypes concerning their group. Four of the participants in this study described stereotyping and stereotype threat as pervasive and
inescapable in both social and academic settings. This was compounded with the reality that these young men are required to make a split-second decision (about whether they will succumb to or overcome the threat) that might have a lasting effect on how they are perceived and how other group members will be perceived in the future. To add insult to injury, it is a fallacy to believe that stereotyping, stereotype threat, and its effects will happen once a week, bi-weekly, or annually. These individuals and their group members must consistently make hundreds of split-second decisions daily.

Additionally, these participants acknowledged the history and negative impact of stereotypes and stereotype threat on out-group members and accepted that stereotypes and stereotype threat will continue to exist. The participant acceptance that stereotypes and stereotype threat will continue to exist was significant. This acceptance was significant because they were essentially committing themselves to undertake a psychologically exhausting task. This conscious effort to make hundreds of daily split-second decisions when faced with stereotypes and the effects of stereotype threat all in the name of transforming the perceptions of African American males was admirable. Moreover, these split second decisions that impact the participants individually and collectively occur while attempting to attain personal goals and maintain relationships and interactions with in-group members who consciously and unconsciously perpetuate out-group stereotypes.

Moreover, the psychological weight associated with attaining personal goals while attempting to carry the burden of dispelling negative perceptions and beliefs concerning their group could and should serve as an insurmountable challenge. However, as presented in the discussion of emergent themes, these young men actively redirect the negative energies and implications to create fuel for overcoming the effects of stereotype threat by disproving in-group
perceptions regarding out-group members. It is, however, intriguing that despite the bombarding of negative stereotypes and the intensity associated with the psychological effects of stereotype threat that the young men in this study were successful in overcoming the effects. The experiences of the participants in this study conflicted with other research studies that asserted that when African American males believed their intellectual abilities were being questioned they often underperformed on academic tasks (Aronson, 2002; Holzman, 2006; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Owens et al., 2010).

The author of the current research study argues that an increase in the participants’ self-efficacy is a result of their participation in the UMLP, which increased their ability to perform on a high academic level despite the presence of the threat. This is evidenced by the participants welcoming tasks that gauged their intellectual abilities and believing they would continue to perform well on tasks as long as they were prepared. This notion is rooted in the belief that there is a linkage between student’s belief in their abilities with their self-efficacy and that high-achieving students, irrespective of race, do not doubt their abilities, are capable of achieving academically, and are encouraged and challenged by their academic and social guides to perform at the highest levels (Bandura, 1997; Reid, 2013; Thompson, 2007).

The researcher also contends that the effects of stereotype threat were consistently present and intentional in its pursuit to (a) decrease self-efficacy, (b) academic achievement, (c) the ability to focus on tasks, (d) maintain social relationships, (e) achieve goals, and (f) dispel negative perceptions. More importantly, the success of the student participants in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat was inextricably linked to their self-efficacy, which was attributed to their participation in the UMLP.
How do African American males describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating challenges relative to the effects of stereotype threat?

A significant body of literature exists discussing mentoring’s positive impact on African American male’s academic achievement, self-efficacy, professional mobility, adjustment to varying social environments, stereotyping, retention, and the creation and maintenance of support systems (Anderson, 2007; Bandura, et al., 2001; Brown, 2011; Burrell et al., 2001; Cohen & Galbraith, 1995; Cohen & Steele, 2002; Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The researcher believed that stereotype threat served as a potential barrier to the academic success of the African American males. In lieu of the research-based findings the researcher also believes that mentoring could positively impact factors such as academic achievement that are negatively impacted by stereotype threat and assist the student participants in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat.

As a result, the researcher believes mentoring to be a viable option because mentoring is an effective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome the barriers that prevent many African American men from completing college (Brooks, Jones, & Burt; 2013; Brooks & Steen, 2010). These beliefs led to the formulation of the second research question “how do African American males describe the role mentoring has played in negotiating challenges relative to overcoming the effects of stereotype threat?”

The participants cited mentoring generally and the UMLP more specifically as the conduit that equipped them with the tools to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. The UMLP’s practice of providing its inductees with a blue blazer jacket, a gold tie, and a briefcase as a part of their induction ceremony serves as the initial step in the program’s attempt to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. As a point of clarification, in the immediacy of the
induction ceremony the mentee may be unaware of the purpose and effect of the group solidarity represented in the presentation of these items, however such adornments illustrate positive group membership. In addition, the symbolic stripping of non-UMLP garments illustrate a removal of stereotypically negative membership, which assists in overcoming stereotype threat and its effects. The UMLP mentees may or may not recognize the program’s attempt to overcome the effects of stereotype threat with a blazer, a tie, and a briefcase. However, the program’s decision to identify three items that are synonymous with professionalism, leadership, achievement, and success signal the program’s intentional focus on transforming how these young men are perceived.

It is disheartening, that irrespective of an African American males clothing denoting positive group membership these young men are not excused from negative stereotypes and are victims of the perpetuation of negative media portrayals. The media portrays African American males as thugs, unintelligent, lazy, prone to violence, aggressive, and hyper-sexual. Additionally, in-group members use the negative media portrayals of African males to assess their intent, trustworthiness, potential threat, academic abilities, employment opportunities, freedom, and the maintaining of their life by the clothing they wear, the manner in which they speak, and the style of their hair. The aforesaid perceptions and portrayals typically do not include the positive identification of African American males as professionals, as leaders, or as successful individuals.

This notion of an African American male’s negative media portrayal is critical because the student participants are not excluded from the pervasiveness of the negative stereotypes based on their environment, which is a product of their academic pursuits. The program’s decision to provide them a blue blazer jacket, a gold tie, and a briefcase, signals an
understanding that although the young men are extremely smart, courteous, and caring they may be more likely to be perceived not as their authentic selves, but as their stereotypical selves. As a result, the program understood that it was necessary for the surrounding community to see images of young African American men that counter the images perpetuated by the media. In doing so, individuals will be forced to challenge the portrayals that they may have internalized and then begin the process of associating positive attributes with these participants and African American males that look like them.

Additionally, as a result of the bestowing of the UMLP’s paraphernalia, the participants become synonymous with leadership, achievement, success, and professionalism, which in turn, positively impacts their confidence and self-efficacy. As previously mentioned, an increase in self-efficacy coupled with the presence of a mentor increases the mentee’s ability to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. Moreover, the visual representation of a blue blazer jacket, a gold-tie, and a briefcase serves as an effective strategy in improving participants’ belief in their academic and overall abilities based on the consistently positive feedback by members in the Lehman College community and more broadly in the Bronx community.

The UMLP’s ability to provide its mentees with mentors who believe in them, who create an environment of accountability, champion the consistency and persistence of making decisions that would positively affect group members, and who empower them to become their best selves the participants believed increased their self-efficacy, the participants believed increased their acceptance of the existence of out-group stereotypes, and the participants believed increased their ability to transform negative influences into positive outcomes. In addition to the positive impact of the environment and the relationship with their mentors, the upperclassmen divulged a
The mentors intentionally reinforced to their mentees that the concept of an African American male as an Urban Male Leader is a stereotypic contradiction.

The effectiveness of this ideal is that it highlights the existence of negative stereotypes, social perceptions and the negative influences that out-group member must challenge. Moreover, they assist the mentee in understanding that the UMLP took the initial step to challenge the stereotype by bestowing upon them the title of an Urban Male Leader. However, the bestowing of the title is not sufficient enough to maintain the stereotypic contradiction. Through discussions, interactions, and seminars the UMLP and its mentors equip its mentees with the tools to become a stereotypic contradiction. The UMLP’s ability to highlight the negative influences and assist the mentees in understanding their presence in the midst of the threat leads to the mentee’s association of the experiences and challenges of participants who also share in the out-group experience. The mentee’s association, in addition to the qualities that have been sharpened and refined, provides them with the ability to challenge stereotypes and the effects of stereotype threat and serve as a stereotypic contradiction. The communities’ positive response to the images of African American males and the belief that they are urban male leaders intensified the participants’ ability to overcome the effects of stereotype threat.

The assertion of the researcher coupled with the perspectives of the participants is affirmed in Harper’s (2006) study of the nation’s 50 flagship institutions, which recommended that institutions should create more mentorship opportunities for African American males. The creation of equitable mentorship opportunities would result in an increase in academic success and subsequently improved graduation rates. Harper (2006) found that collegiate students who were more integrated and actively engaged into the leadership and extracurricular activities of the school had better academic outcomes.
How do African American males describe the role mentoring plays in their academic achievement?

Mentoring is often discussed within the body of literature as a factor that positively impacts the academic achievement of African American males (Anderson, 2007; Brooks, Jones & Burt, 2013; Brown, 2009, 2011; Butler, et al., 2013; Cuyjet, 1997). The research-based findings led to the creation of the third research question “how do African American males describe the role mentoring plays in their academic achievement?”

Many of the student participants reported that they achieved academic success before enrolling in Lehman College and their induction into the UMLP. However, the students associated their participation in the UMLP as a motivator to continue to persevere and succeed academically especially in moments where they questioned their own abilities. Furthermore, they indicated that the presence and support of mentors as a viable tool for inspiration, a tool to maintain academic excellence, and a tool to receive an unfiltered perspective concerning the realities of out-group membership and the necessity for achieving academic success.

The UMLP’s ability to provide its mentees with mentors who understand and can identify with the struggles associated with balancing out-group membership, societal perceptions, and personal goals illuminates the shared vulnerability of both the mentor and mentee. It is necessary to note that the vulnerability of the mentors and the mentees are located in the reality of having to engage in painful discussions about lived experiences regarding the effects of stereotype threat and the association with the subsequent psychological challenges, frustrations, and potentially negative impact on academic achievement.

It is in the vulnerability of the mentee and the mentor that a foundational level of trust and mutual understanding ensues because they can bond over shared experiences. Additionally,
the mentee can use the experiences and the wisdom of his mentor to change his approach to stereotype threat’s effects, add experiences to his contextual intelligence, and understand that he too can and will overcome the effects of stereotype threat and achieve his academic goals. This is possible because out-group members have achieved success while simultaneously challenging threats to their academic success. Moreover, the mentee has a tangible example and supporters who have succeeded, understand the struggles to succeed, and the importance of succeeding and continue to challenge threats to their academic success.

Moreover, many of the students before their entrance into the UMLP believed that education was integral to academic and professional success. As UMLP participants, they received guided instruction from their mentors in addition to organizational programming that informed them of the reality and attainability of success, while challenging them to continue to pursue academic success and ultimately professional success that could lead to the transforming of their community through service and allocation of resources. The notions and practices of the UMLP are reiterated by researchers who contend that academic achievement or the underachievement influences the perspectives of out-group members concerning future economic and family stability; because earning a good education especially a college education is viewed as the portal to lifelong economic security and family stability among members of the Black community (Brown & Jones, 2004; Caldwell & Obasi, 2010; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Hunn, 2014).

The participants’ ability to achieve academic success before enrolling in college indicates their capacity to successfully address challenges to their academic achievement in the primary education setting. More importantly, their perseverance in addressing academic challenges through the support of the UMLP reveal their commitment to achieving academic success.
Having mentors and a program who encourage success through the development of and IPA, pairing with study buddies, identifying and addressing academic needs through the Lassi, participating in courses and seminars that are geared to improving academic achievement and subsequent academic success provides mentees with positive representations of the future benefits of academic success. Moreover, it reminds the mentees during moments of difficulty that “I can achieve because I know that my mentor achieved.” This concept of success and mentee mirroring and foreshadowing is not limited to the completion of schooling but also encompasses professional mobility. The study participants’ commitment to achieving academic success is linked to their belief that education will result in professional success. They hope that the professional success that they desire will improve their current social class standing.

Moreover, the participants’ pursuits of high academic achievement are inextricably linked to the idea that they will experience a high-yield in financial opportunities as a result of professional employment. To put it more succinctly, higher achievement equals higher salary, higher salary equals opportunities to assist family members and transform one’s quality of life. Their ability to persevere and overcome challenges and experience academic success in the collegiate setting serves as an indication of their potential to persevere and overcome challenges and achieve financial success in the professional setting. This is important because the participants’ willingness to endure challenges and to succeed academically is not solely related or fueled by their desire to achieve academic success. For this reason, the researcher contends that the desire for professional success and financial security also serves as a motivator in addition to the UMLP’s efforts to challenge its mentees to persevere and overcome challenges.
Discussion of Emergent Themes

Four major themes emerged surrounding the experiences of these African American male students in the UMLP as a result of this research including (1) having a person in your corner, which the researcher discusses through the lens of the literature review relative of collegiate mentoring; (2) education is integral to success, which the researcher discusses through the lens of the literature review relative to education as the great equalizer; (3) there is nothing I cannot do, which the researcher discusses through the lens of the literature review relative to addressing mentoring, African American males and self-efficacy; and (4) stereotyping is to be expected which the researchers discusses through the lens of the literature review relative to addressing strategies to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. The following sections first discuss the connection between the emergent themes and review of literature followed by a discussion of the implications for policy and practice.

Having Someone in your Corner

*Collegiate mentoring.* This study’s participants identified their participation in their collegiate mentoring program as a factor that positively impacted them academically, socially, psychologically, and professionally. The participants espoused beliefs about mentoring that reinforced common opinions in the mentoring community. It is reported that collegiate mentoring assists mentees in overcoming adversity, in addition to positively impacting their: confidence, persistence, academic achievement, and the equipping of the skills required for a successful professional career (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Dolan & Brady, 2012; Schlosser et al., 2003; Terenzini et al., 1999).

These young men reported that a beneficial aspect of mentoring, particularly the UMLP, is the ability to have someone in your corner. The participants’ perceived benefit of mentoring
and subsequent theme emergence reinforced the research findings concerning the academic benefits of mentoring on African American males. It was reported that mentoring benefits African American males academically because it encourages them to put forth their best academic efforts, provides positive images, increases GPA, and subsequently increases retention and graduation rates (Campbell, T.A., & Campbell, E.D., 1997; Davis, 2009, 2010; Howard, 2014). The beliefs of the participants concerning mentoring coupled with the research-supported findings pertaining to mentoring served as the researcher’s rationale for linking this study’s emergent theme with this study’s literature review on the positive benefits of mentoring.

**Education is Integral to Success**

*Educations as the Great Equalizer.* The participants in this research study held the belief that the acquisition of education is integral to success. The accounts of the participants highlight the often-perpetuated notion by out-group familial and communal matriarchs and patriarchs that youth who acquire an education will achieve social and professional success. Economist and writer Anna Bernasek (2005) highlights this widely held belief, which this study found to be perpetuated by its participants and the matriarchal and patriarchal ideals that are instilled in, and reinforced among, out-group members. Bernasek points out that parents within American society associate the acquisition of education with an economic benefit based on their gut feeling that education acquisition is the way to ensure prosperity for their children.

Moreover, the perspectives perpetuated by the matriarchs and patriarchs and subsequent internalization by the participants is echoed in the findings of social scientists who investigate educational and professional success. It is reported that education is believed to be the vehicle for achieving success, amassing wealth, and serving as a potential solution for social inequalities (Holmes & Zajacova, 2014; Schoon, 2008; Schwartz, 2008; Wang et al., 1999; Wickrama et al.,
The researcher found this emergent theme strongly supports findings from the review of literature and is consistent among participants, economists, and social scientists who identify education as an integral component of social and professional success.

**There is Nothing I Cannot Do**

*American male, academic achievement, stereotype threat, and self-efficacy.* Thompson (2007) reports that high achieving minority students believe they are intellectually capable of achieving academically. The present study’s participants’ beliefs concerning their academic abilities was no different from those minority students described by Thompson. When questioned about their academic abilities, all participants believed they were capable of achieving academically irrespective of the task. The beliefs of the participants concerning their academic abilities led to the emergence of the theme “there is nothing I cannot do.”

The belief of the participants concerning their academic abilities is indicative of their self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of the participants is important for three reasons. A student’s belief in their academic abilities is linked to their self-efficacy. Secondly, students with a heightened sense of self-efficacy tend to welcome tasks that challenge them academically, are problem solvers, and are solution oriented (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1994; Reid, 2013; Thompson, 2007). However, studies examining self-efficacy and academic achievement report African American male collegians as possessing low self-efficacy. The emergent theme and belief that “there is nothing I cannot do” challenges such studies and is indicative of the presence of high self-efficacy. Moreover, the self-efficacy of the participants is correlated with high academic achievement and challenges the notion that African American male collegians possess low self-efficacy.
Stereotyping is to be Expected and Strategies to Overcome the Effects of Stereotype Threat

Stereotyping as an expected norm. This study defines stereotype as a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality (Bernstein, 2013). For close to 600 years, the African American society has experienced vilification, dehumanization, demoralization and negative portrayals. More specifically, African American males have been miseducated by the educational system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system and mistreated by the social welfare system (Alexander, 2004; Gibbs, 1988; Hopkins, 1997; Scott et al., 2013). Moreover, stereotypes describing African American males as intellectually deficient have served as the basis for denying them equitable access and opportunities within the education system (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lowery, 2015; Valencia, 1997).

This study’s participants were cognizant of stereotyping’s historical impact on African American males in addition to the existence and prevalence of stereotypes concerning their group. These participants were candid in expressing that stereotyping was not a secret but is a practice that is to be expected. Hopkins’ (1997) study of African American male students at PWIs echoes the perspective of this dissertation study’s participants. Hopkins explained that African American males enter higher education institutions possessing a clear understanding that society expects negative outcomes from them.

The belief and subsequent emergent theme held by this study’s participants that stereotyping is to be expected links the perceived prevalence of stereotypes with the emergence of stereotype threat. Steele and Aronson (1995) explained that stereotypes cause African American students to engage in psychological processing in determining whether to confirm or disconfirm stereotype threat as self-characteristic a group-specific characteristic.
The literature is replete with the potentially negative effects of stereotype threat, which among other indications possesses the ability to decrease task performance, self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, learning outcomes, graduation rates, and retention (Alter et al., 2010; Bonner, 2010; Davis et al., 2006; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Walton & Cohen, 2011). This threat, coupled with the prevalence of stereotyping, are believed to result in individuals confirming the stereotypes (Aronson, 2002; Osborne, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Smith et al., 2007). However, this perspective was not supported in the findings of this study as confirming of negative stereotypes was not an occurrence for this study’s participants. The participants reported that because of their awareness of in-group stereotypes and the onset of stereotype threat that they were intentional about not confirming to stereotypes. The practice of the student participants is consistent with the research-based findings concerning African American males overcoming the effects of stereotyping by increasing their motivation to make sure that any sign that they might be stereotype confirming is identified and suppressed (Ho & Sidanius, 2009; Schmader, 2010).

The student participants’ belief and subsequent emergent theme of “stereotyping is to be expected” echoed the prevalence of historical and present-day stereotypes. Moreover, the prevalence of stereotypes coupled with the existence of stereotype threat, its negative effects, and the participants’ use of strategies to overcome its the effects is strongly noted in the literature.

**Collegiate Mentoring**

*Countering the notion that no one cares.* Psychologist Carol Gilligan is credited with developing the ethic of care, which is an ethical approach that guides individuals in acting carefully in the human world and highlights the costs of carelessness (Held, 2014). The ethic of care approach is grounded less in moral precepts than in psychological wisdom, underscoring the costs of not
paying attention, not listening, being absent rather than present, and not responding with integrity and respect (Held, 2014). The costs of refusing to engage in the ethic of care can result in emotional and psychological suppression (Gilligan, 2014; Held, 2014; Starratt, 1991). Conversely, engaging in the ethic of care leads to the cultivation and development of trust and mutual consideration amongst the care-recipient and the care-giver (Held, 2014). It is the contention of the researcher that the level of trust indicated by the participants is indicative of the presence and implementation of the ethic of care within the UMLP.

The student participants in the UMLP highlighted their dependence on their mentors as a beneficial aspect of their mentoring program. Their dependence led to the first theme that emerged from the data analysis interviews, which was “the importance of having someone in your corner.” Participants’ dependence is a result of the relationships that were fostered through experiences with their mentors that lead to their trust. The trust of the participants is indicative of the UMLP and its mentors’ implementation of the practices of care that call for sensitivity, empathy, trust, and especially responsiveness to need (Held, 2014).

A recurring need voiced by the student participants was the lack of institutional support systems outside of the UMLP, both during and before their induction into the Program. The participants’ disclosure identifying the importance of having a support system in an environment where they have not consistently felt supported is a critical concept because it indicates the UMLP’s practice of care through their need responsiveness. This notion is important because the meaningful interaction between mentors and mentees has proven to be invaluable in African American males’ academic and social development (Brooms & Davis, 2017; LaVant et al., 1987; Wyatt, 2009).
Brown (2011) cited the academic benefit of this meaningful interaction between mentor and mentee in its ability to increase retention and academic achievement and promote inclusion in academic tasks. Moreover, the UMLP mentees believe the program’s supportive approach to mentoring positively impacts them academically. The UMLP’s approach echoes the belief of Gordon et al. (2009) who believes this approach to mentoring best assists in removing barriers of non-responsiveness that are perpetuated by in-group members and experienced by out-group members both inside and outside of the classroom.

The UMLP’s ability to remove non-responsive barriers reinforces Howard’s (2014) belief concerning the academic benefits of mentoring. Howard postulated that the academic benefits of mentoring rest in the creation of a relationship with a mentee that is strong enough to encourage the mentee to put forth their best efforts in the classroom. Study participants and upper-classmen Carmichael, Newton, and King, affirm Howard’s belief concerning the academic benefit of mentoring. These young men believed that participation in mentoring through the UMLP positively impacted their academic abilities because they, like many of the other participants, had a person in their corner helping and encouraging them throughout their journey.

The participants attributed having a person in their corner as the motivator to continue to work and push themselves during the most difficult moments of their educational journey when they did not believe in their abilities. The description of the upper-classmen’s decision to accept the support of their mentor and continue to work and push themselves during difficult moments highlighted their desire to successfully matriculate the collegiate environment and ultimately graduate. The perspectives of the participants correspond with the finding of Campbell and Campbell (1997) who investigated the academic benefit of mentoring. They asserted that students with mentors have higher GPAs and are more likely to stay in college compared to
academically similar students who do not have mentors. Thus, having a person in your corner reinforces the idea that someone cares.

This theme is especially significant because it underscores the belief held by Cohen and Galbraith (1995) who indicated that mentoring could be used to counter the attitude students experience that "no one cares." For example, the participants explained that the UMLP made them feel like they mattered and were the best and the brightest even when they wanted to withdraw from college. Additionally, the participants informed the researcher that no matter the struggles or disappoints they experienced their mentors never gave up on them. The participants perspectives concur with the findings of Cohen and Galbraith because they were able to identify through their testimony, both as individuals and through their experiences as participants in the UMLP, the existence of relationships with people who cared. The accounts of the participants are aligned with Starratt’s requirements of the ethic of care. Starratt (1991) reported that an ethic of care requires fidelity to individuals with a willingness to acknowledge their right to be who they are, an openness to encountering them in their authentic individuality, and a loyalty to the relationship.

In concert with the research of Gilligan (2014), the accounts of the participants coupled with Starratt’s (1991) requirements of the ethic of care correspond with the necessary components for an effective mentoring program. Researchers (Cohen & Galbraith, 1995; Gordon et al., 2009; Jordan, 2015; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008) have suggested that in order for a mentorship program to be effective several components must be present, namely: emphasis on relationship, emphasis on information exchange, focus on facilitation, focus on confrontation, mentor’s attention to one’s role as a model, and attention to the vision the mentee brings to the relationship. The effectiveness of the UMLP to counter the attitude that “no one cares” exists in
its ability to incorporate Starratt’s requirement for the ethic of care in addition to possessing the necessary components of an effective mentoring program.

The contention of the researcher is rooted in the accounts of the study participants. Each student participant articulated in their own words that an integral facet of mentoring as a concept, and more specifically as a participant in the UMLP, was that they had someone in their corner who showed them how to become a leader, encouraged them, supported them, provided resources, challenged them and assisted in the making of better men.

In sum, the emergent theme that cites a benefit of participating in mentoring through the UMLP as having someone in your corner signals the existence of a supportive relationship that is rooted in the ethic of care. Moreover, it reinforces the belief that mentoring has the ability to improve African American male students’ academic and social development and counter the belief that “no-one cares.”

**Education as the Great Equalizer**

Within the context of American society, education is believed to be the great equalizer and is perceived as the vehicle for achieving success and amassing wealth (Bryant, 2000; Holmes & Zajacova, 2014; Schoon, 2008; Schwartz, 2008; Wang et al., 1999; Wickrama et al., 2012). Each participant divulged this American belief in their identification with attending school and attaining a designation as a college graduate as integral to achieving professional success. It is necessary to note that the participants in this research study possessed differing backgrounds pertaining to familial education history. Three of the participants were first-generation college students, two of the participants were second-generation college students and one of the participants was a third-generation college student.
Irrespective of the familial education history, all participants reported a familial focus on the importance of attaining an education and the exposure to social and professional opportunities. The familial focus affirmed Bernasek’s (2005) belief that many American parents believe the way to ensure prosperity for their children is through educational acquisition. The consistency in the belief concerning the importance of education and its ability to create opportunities led to the creation of the second emergent theme “education is integral to success.” The participants identified education’s ability to impact success through the subsequent acquisition of employment resulting in a monetary benefit that stems from relationships formed through opportunities and interactions within the education setting. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the perceived positive impact of education on an individual’s social and economic opportunities along with the literature.

**Social**

The possession of an education leads to a reduction in crime, improved social cohesion, technological innovations, and the generational and traditional gains associated with educational attainment (Vernez, Krop, & Rydell, 1999). Additionally, the acquisition of an education impacts degreeed and non-degreeed individuals as it pertains to education access. I would like to preface my impending point with the reminder that irrespective of the familial education history, all of the participants’ family members desired that the study participants pursue higher education as a means of attaining success. Although there was consistency in the families’ desire for the participants, the access to education was different. As previously mentioned, there were three participants who were classified as first-generation college students and the remaining participants were second-and third-generation college students.
The participants’ familial education history diverged from desire when discussing the process of paying for college. First-generation participants described a lack of knowledge concerning the loan process and little to no assistance in covering tuition. The experiences of the second-and third-generation students differed from the first generation as they detailed the existence of college funds, socially connected scholarship opportunities, and the importance of refraining from incurring high student debt. The social implications of the economic influences concerning knowledge and access within the enrollment process is linked to exposure to the collegiate environment. In other words, increased collegiate exposure resulted in increased knowledge in navigating the higher educational terrain and an increase in the likelihood of degree completion and exposure to professional opportunities.

**Economic**

In 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that college graduates earned on average approximately $55,000 annually, compared with less than $30,000 for individuals who had only a high school diploma (Brand & Xie, 2010). The disparities in income serve as a potential rationale for the inability of a first-generation attendee to receive familiar monetary assistance when compared to another family. Additionally, the discrepancy in generational college attendance assistance results in differing rationale for attendance. It is an unfortunate reality, that college is less exclusively and intentionally linked to economic gain than it is for people lacking generation attendance, for whom a college education is a novelty that may well demand economic justification (Beattie 2002; Boudon, 1974; Brand & Xie, 2010; Smith & Powell, 1990).

Brand and Xie (2010) asserted that individuals choose to attend college according to expected economic returns, and attain college degrees only if the economic returns outweigh the
costs. Moreover, Vernez, Krop, and Rydell (1999) identified a positive effect of education on individual wages and earning potential. The participants’ belief that their attendance and subsequent graduation would prove more fiscally beneficial than if they were not pursuing a degree coincide with the above research findings. Moreover, it is further reinforced in the research-based findings that education attainment positively impacts earning potential and professional mobility irrespective of race (Black et al., 2005; Schwartz, 2008; Thompson, 2007; Vernez et al., 1999). It is imperative to note that the researcher is not asserting the existence of equitable wages when comparing in-group and out-group members. However, the researcher contends that the acquisition of education increases one’s earning potential and social mobility irrespective of group affiliation. Owens et al. (2010) asserted that a primary benefit of a college education is that it allows graduates access to both social and economic opportunities that typically are not afforded to non-college graduates.

Moreover, higher educational attainment leads to savings in governmental assistance programs throughout a person’s lifetime (Vernez et al., 1999). The aforestated finding serves as a foreshadowing of the results of Whitaker’s (2010) study. Whitaker (2010) reported that an individual’s professional mobility can be hindered by dropping out of school because they earn less than workers with diplomas and are more likely to depend on public assistance programs. Individuals lacking an education require more financial resources than individuals with higher levels of educational attainment. According to Vernez et al. (1999), high school dropouts and high-school graduates require more financial resources than persons with a college degree or previous college enrollment. These research-based assertions are reinforced through the perspectives of the student participants who explained that without a proper education it is very difficult to secure employment and can make you dependent on the provisions of others.
Notably, the student participants cite the UMLP as a consistent motivator to continue their educational pursuits while fostering their leadership skills with the intent of achieving professional success. Likewise, during the interview discussion of education and success, each participant highlighted that professional success is not something that is given, but rather it is the result of taking advantage of the opportunities that are a byproduct of pursuing higher education.

**African American Males, Academic Achievement, Stereotype Threat, and Self-Efficacy**

A third emergent theme was the mindset that “there is nothing I cannot do.” This emergent theme was significant because it highlights the belief that mentors are important to African American males because they help them fulfill their potential (Whiting, 2006). Whiting’s assertion manifested itself during the interview process with all participants championing their belief that there was nothing that they were unable to do. Moreover, the emergent theme reinforces the belief in mentoring’s ability to positively impact students’ persistence and academic achievement, as well as assisting in their preparation for successful careers (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Schlosser et al., 2003; Terenzini et al., 1999). The student participants reinforce the findings above with the identification of their participation in the UMLP as a catalyst for enhancing their self-confidence and belief in their leadership abilities. Ishiyama (2007) maintained that the perceived psychological benefits by the African American male mentees are a result of their descriptors about their mentor being “personally in their corner.”

Additionally, research continues to link a student’s belief in his/her (academic) abilities with their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1994; Reid, 2013). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action that produce desired performances. The participants’ conviction that there is nothing that they could not do is indicative of the presence of a heightened sense of self-efficacy. Thompson (2007) contends that
a student’s high self-efficacy is a direct result of the academic support and coaching of their instructors.

Moreover, Kelly and Dixon (2014) suggest that mentoring serves as the differentiating factor that helps students to improve their academic performance and avoid academic dismissal. It is necessary to note that six of the participants identified the UMLP’s mentors and three participants identified its seminars as the factors that increased their self-efficacy. As a result, these students do not question their ability to perform at the highest academic levels on course assignments, exams and standardized tests (Thompson, 2007). The research study’s participants embrace Thompson’s (2007) findings in their attestation that as long as they were prepared, they were confident in their ability to perform any task. Additionally, the assertion of the participants echoes the findings of Ishiyama (2007) that African American male collegians, especially first-generation attendees, who participate in mentoring express feeling more confident about themselves and their academic abilities.

Finally, Bandura, et al. (2001) surmized that students will be motivated to act and persevere through challenges and to employ effective learning strategies when they believe their actions will produce positive outcomes. For example, the student participants internalized the belief that success may be difficult, but it is synonymous with an Urban Male Leader. This study’s student participants were considered high-achieving American males as a result of their high GPA. The notion that the participants in the UMLP were high-achieving African American males who are motivated to achieve success in the face of difficulty, reinforce the research findings that link the motivation to succeed with high-achieving African American males (Arbuthnot, 2009, 2012; Paster, 1994; Reid, 2013). As represented in the literature, these young
men possessed a positive self-concept, resulting in a confidence increase which, according to their responses, positively impacted their academic and overall abilities leading to achievement.

**Strategies to Overcome the Effects of Stereotype Threat**

A fourth and final emergent theme is the belief that “stereotyping is to be expected.” This emergent theme is significant because the literature highlights that stereotype, stereotype threat, self-efficacy, institutional racism, and other environmental factors possess the ability to impact African American male’s academic achievement and the graduation rate of African Americans (Owens et al., 2010). More importantly, it is reported that African American males and other minority groups possess a heightened sensitivity to in-group members negative expectations about their group, which negatively impacts task performance (Aronson, 2002; Owens et al., 2010).

Researchers report that minority students are the target of racist acts, which results in questioning the legitimacy of one’s presence on campus, the expectation of portraying group stereotypes, and to explain the African American experience (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Person & Christensen, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). It is imperative to note that the participants in this study possessed an awareness of the presence of negative stereotypes and the effects of stereotype threat. However, they did not report negative feelings or experiences, but instead described a rather positive impact of the negative stereotypes imposed by in-group members and the subsequent onset of the effects of stereotype threat. The explanation of the participants reflected Schmader’s strategy of changing one’s frame of reference. Schmader’s (2010) strategy supposes overcoming the effects of stereotype threat by mentally removing the negative emotions that are a direct effect of stereotype threat and replacing those emotions with positive beliefs concerning the self and one’s' abilities.
Stereotypes are an unfortunate occurrence that plague societal groups within society, and with respect to this study, impacts African American males disproportionately. Each participant indicated that they had experienced a multitude of stereotypes before and during their enrollment in college. Steele (1997) contends that repeated exposure to stereotyping and stereotype threat at each level of schooling affects the self and as time progresses the individual is more likely to underperform when faced with an academic challenge. A most disturbing finding of the study related to participants indicating that negative stereotyping was expected. The researcher surmised that this heighten level of acceptance of impending negativity is perhaps their “new normal” in some environments, resulting in a form of imposed “psychological battery.”

Moreover, Arbuthnot (2009) reported the exacerbation of stereotype threat and its effects increase with student matriculation, which in turn intensifies the possibility of student underperformance on academic tasks based on negative group stereotypes by in-group members. However, the perceptions and experiences of this study’s participants challenge Steele’s and Arbuthnot’s findings in that as time progressed and their continued participation in the UMLP progressed their self-efficacy increased rather than decreased.

The students continued participation in mentoring and the increase in their self-efficacy, despite the intense effects of stereotyping, in the experiences of the participants, is indicative of participant task disengagement. Task disengagement serves as a strategy to overcome the effects of stereotype threat that require out-group members to disengage their feelings of self-worth from the task they are facing, which in-turn minimizes the psychological effect of the task because they do not conflate their feelings of worth with the task (Stone et al., 1999).

Additionally, these young men cite the unfortunate reality that although they have experienced being stereotyped, both the act of stereotyping, and the onset of stereotype threat
have become so pervasive for African American males that they expect to encounter them daily resulting in the belief that experiences with stereotyping are the new norm. What is intriguing about this notion of stereotyping as the new norm, as reflected in the study findings, is that it contradicts Smedley et al.’s (1993) assertion. Smedley and colleagues report that discriminatory stressors are debilitating to students because they undermine their confidence, heighten their concerns over their academic preparedness for college, and limit their ability to bond to the university (Smedley, et.al., 1993).

The participants in this study shared that they do not allow the stereotypes to inflict psychological damage, but rather use the stereotypes as a motivator to ensure optimal performance both inside and outside of the classroom. These perspectives are consistent with Stone et al.’s (1999) strategy to overcome the effect of stereotype threat. Stone and colleagues call for stereotyped individuals to maintain a belief in their abilities and preparedness when faced with negative stereotypes (Stone et al., 1999). In this current study five of the six student participants expressed that when faced with negative stereotypes instead of giving in to the stereotypes, they assumed control of the stereotype and used it as an opportunity to challenge the beliefs of in-group members. Stone et al. (1999) would contend they did not experience a negative effect because they believed in their abilities and did not feel a need to prove themselves because they did not subscribe to the imposed stereotype regarding their abilities.

Each of the participants references the UMLP and their mentors as the conduit that has helped catalyze the thought process and approach of not "succumbing" to in-group perceptions in addressing and overcoming the effect of stereotypes. The referencing of the UMLP and its mentors signals the use of creating spaces and opportunities for out-group members to construct affirming images of themselves to overcome the effects of stereotype threat (Smith, 2011). Smith
(2011) reports that this approach is beneficial because the mentee’s possession of positive role models best assists in challenging the negative effects of stereotypes and stereotype threat because the young men begin to internalize the characteristics of their role model as their own in an attempt to challenge in-group-imposed stereotypes.

It is imperative to note that while stereotyping and the effects of stereotype threat can negatively impact one’s self-efficacy, task performance, academic achievement, and social mobility, the students in the UMLP, through mentoring, have become empowered to overcome the onset of stereotyping and the effects of stereotype threat.

**Summary**

As presented in the literature review, the discussion of overcoming stereotype threat rests in addressing the feelings and emotions experienced by out-group members. Literature experts surmized that the effects of stereotype threat present significant harm to self-integrity, self-efficacy, and overall self-concept and value, leading to cognitive imbalance along with equally and impactful non-cognitive effects. Research also supported a myriad of negative emotions and characteristic psychological effects such as feelings of frustration, lack of motivation, resentment, challenges to self-efficacy, psychological stress, cognitive inadequacy, non-belonging and countless physiological manifestations (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Scott and Rodriguez, 2015). The themes that emerged from the participant responses in this chapter reflected the “tools” generated through the mentoring experience to address the effects of stereotype threat.

This study presented, discussed, and described the emergent themes (a) having a person in your corner, (b) education is integral to success, (c) there is nothing I cannot do, and (d) stereotyping is to be expected that were generated from the analysis of the one to one participant
interviews. Moreover, this study provides African American collegians with an opportunity to share their experiences and assist in adding to the growing literature base addressing strategies to overcome the effects of stereotype threat. The participants, identify mentoring and its ability to provide tools to overcome the deconstructed effects of the marginalization of stereotype threat on out-group members. Readers will recognize the nexus between the analysis of the participant responses, and achieving academically by providing the student participants with a space to voice their experiences and perceptions concerning mentoring, stereotypes, and the effects of stereotype threat, and academic achievement.

The findings of social scientist Schmader (2010) contends that after more than a decade of research establishing that stereotype threat impairs performance, there is a need for understanding how these effects occur. To overcome feelings associated with the initial threat and a desire to disprove the threat and maintain their high self-efficacy, the participants were intentional in dismissing the inaccurate stereotype and highlighting their academic prowess. The actions of the participants are indicative of the implementation of a workable approach to overcome stereotype threat. In sum, possessing an understanding of stereotype threat in its deconstruction is essential in addressing strategies to overcome the effects of stereotype threat.

**Significance of the Study and Implications for Future Research**

The pervasiveness and prevalence of in-group stereotypes concerning out-group members results in the onset of stereotype threat and the need for out-group members to overcome the effects of stereotype threat to achieving academic success. Moreover, the effects of stereotype threat impacts a student academically (Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis et al., 2006; DeFreitas, 2012; Scott et al., 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Watson et al., 2015), which in turn impacts them economically (Brand & Xie, 2010; Brown & Jones, 2004; Caldwell & Obasi, 2010;
Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Hunn, 2014). The implementation of supportive mentoring possesses the ability to overcome the negative effects of stereotype threat (Bandura et al., 2001; Brown, 2010; Burrell et al., 2001; Davis, 2009; Dolan & Brady, 2012; La Vant et al., 1987; Turner & Gonzalez, 2015; through its ability to increase self-efficacy (Davis, 2010; Ishiyama, 2007; Jekielek, 2002; Watson et al., 2015) that results in academic achievement (Reitzes & Jaret, 2012; Terenzini et al., 1999).

Moreover, research indicates that the college environment, feelings of support and belongingness, faculty and staff perspectives on academic ability, and the presence of stereotypes, stereotype threat, and its effects, can impact the academic success, retention, and graduation rates of African American males (Allen, 1992; Inzlicht & Schmader, 2012; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Monk, 2016; Owens, et al., 2010; Sinanan, 2012; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

A major finding in this study was that the strategies and structure of the UMLP addressed factors that have historically served as deterrents to African American male collegians while simultaneously empowering those collegians to strive to achieve academic and social and professional success. The UMLP and its approach to mentoring are beneficial to primary and secondary environments because they have identified the needs of African American male students to achieve academically, socially and professionally and have packaged solutions in a manner that improves self-efficacy and self-confidence, fosters feelings of acceptance and belongingness, and provides support. The solutions of the UMLP are beneficial to both the institution as well as the students because it promotes academic success, which often results in both retention and graduation. These findings led the researcher to the creation of effective strategies in the form of a comprehensive tool kit titled “Keys to Developing and Empowering
the African American Male” (KDEAA). This model utilized the valuable data from the study findings to develop pivotal keys to better assist leaders in the mentoring of students in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat.

The information discussed coupled with the findings of this research study can provide multiple tools that assist African American male collegians in overcoming the effects of stereotype threat. More importantly, these tools should be implemented in the lives of African American males as early as possible and most assuredly in primary school, years prior to their matriculation to the collegiate environment. Given the prevalence and pervasiveness of stereotype threat and the need to more effectively address the academic achievement of African American males, schools, and communities should engage in awareness programs, financial support, and policy development to begin overcoming the effects of stereotype threat.

The rationale for tool implementation before enrollment in secondary schooling are linked to the research findings that students of color in the primary education setting underperform on academic tasks, some of which is attributed to the negative effects of stereotype threat, which in-turn increases the likelihood of dropping out prior to high-school completion (Hopkins, 1997; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Schott Foundation, 2011 Steele, 1997; 1992), their perceived devaluing of education by in-group members (Hopkins, 1997; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Lowery, 2015; Valencia, 1997), denial of access and opportunities, and a decrease in professional mobility (Black et al., 2005; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Schwartz, 2008; Thompson, 2007; Vernez et al., 1999).

One of the most detrimental effects of stereotype threat is its potentially negative influence on an African American male’s self-efficacy concerning his abilities (Cuyjet, 1997). Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action
that produce desired performance (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacy beliefs have been positively linked to academic achievement, performance expectancies, self-perceptions of competence and possession of positive attitudes toward subject matter (DeFreitas, 2012; Reid, 2013). The positive linkage of high self-efficacy to academic achievement is a result of the African American males’ desire to preserve the self and their personal belief in their abilities (Paster, 1994; Reitzes & Jaret, 2012). The participants in this dissertation study possessed a high level of self-efficacy. Their heightened level of self-efficacy provided them with the ability to achieve academic success, despite having to overcome environmental threats (instructors, ingroup classmates, negative out-group stereotypes both in the collegiate and social environment) that possessed the ability to negatively impact their performance.

The KDEAA identifies having a supportive mentoring program or the mentoring environment as a tool in overcoming the effects of threats to self-efficacy because it provides accountability, high personal and scholastic expectations, and pushes the student to achieve academically during difficult moments in the education journey when they doubt their abilities. Additionally, a second tool identified by the KDEAA is consistent reinforcement of the belief that there is nothing they cannot accomplish. Reinforcing this ideal can instill in some and strengthen in others both their confidence and their self-efficacy concerning both social and academic challenges. Moreover, it emphasizes the reality that success is real and achievable irrespective of the negative effects of stereotype threat.

Academic underachievement is believed to be negatively impacted by stereotype threat and its effects, resulting in the identification of African American male collegians as the most at-risk college students (Butler et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2010). The underachievement of African American males, when faced with addressing the effects of stereotype threat, is attributed to the
difficulty of focusing on the task while attempting to determine whether they will prove or
disprove the in-group beliefs regarding their abilities (Gordon et al., 2009; Steele & Aronson,
1995). The participants in this dissertation study achieved academic success in their collegiate
environment despite addressing the effects of stereotype threat on their academic ability.

The KDEAA identifies the first step to overcoming the effects of stereotype threat on the
academic achievement of African American males is implementation of supportive mentoring
programs and the mentoring environment. Tool implementation provides someone in which to
confide concerning academic struggles, identification of strategies and resources to counteract
the potential onset of underachievement, accountability structures to monitor student progress,
high personal and scholastic expectations, and program membership that supports students to
achieve academically during difficult moments in the education journey when they doubt their
abilities.

A second step used to address the effects of academic underachievement is a consistent
reinforcement of the belief that there is nothing they cannot accomplish. Reinforcing this ideal
can instill in some and strengthen in others both confidence and self-efficacy concerning both
social and academic challenges that increase their ability to achieve academic success.

A third and final step to overcome the effects of stereotype threat on academic
achievement is to consistently reinforce the notion that stereotyping is to be expected.
Reinforcing this ideal allows students to understand that they will be stereotyped but, they can
rely on their beliefs in their abilities and successfully overcome the threat. Tool implementation
improves the likelihood that these young men will achieve academically by increasing their
motivation to make sure that any sign that they might be confirming the stereotype is identified
and suppressed and disengage. These tools also address assisting African American males with
maintaining feelings of self-worth through tasks which they are faced, promoting an unwillingness to allow the stereotypes to inflict psychological damage, and using the stereotypes as a motivator to ensure optimal performance both inside and outside of the classroom. In short, implementing the UMLP or supportive environments similar to the UMLP will result in an increase in academic success, retention, and graduation rates based on the strategies identified in the KDEAA.

**Implications for Future Research.** The time frame for this study was limited. A longitudinal study that follows African American male collegians from matriculation to graduation might offer interesting findings in the evolution of African American males’ experiences and perceptions of mentoring on their self-efficacy, and its influence on overcoming stereotypes, the effects of stereotype threat, and achieving academically. A longitudinal study would be able to track the evolution of each African American male collegian in the study over time. The study would then be able to consider other variables that may be a product of the UMLP that impacts self-efficacy, academic achievement in conjunction with overcoming stereotype threat’s effects.

This study engaged the perspectives of six African American male collegians. Although the perspectives of the collegians provided insight into their experiences, creating a future study that seeks the perspectives of more participants would create a more robust study. It is possible that with the additional perspectives more themes could emerge, which would offer more insights into more best practices and strategies to better assist African American males. This study solicited the perspectives of African American male collegians in an urban collegiate environment. It would prove beneficial for studies to compare and contrast the perspectives of African American male collegians in different geographical areas, i.e. rural, urban and suburban.
Engaging these perspectives offers researchers an opportunity to acquire knowledge regarding the similarities and differences in environmental experiences and the students’ perceptions of mentoring’s impact on their overall academic, social, and professional success.

Finally, further investigation into the emergent theme that “stereotypes are to be expected” should be considered for future research. This notion could prove invaluable to parents, faculty, students, and mentoring programs because it could shed light on the current social landscape experienced by students, in addition to better understanding the mindset of or the ideal mindset required to overcome stereotype threats and achieve academically.
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http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotype

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotype


Dear Student,

My name is Calvin Burney and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, exploring the impact of mentoring on African American males’ ability to overcome stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is defined as an individual’s decision to confirm or disconfirm as self-characteristic a group specific stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between mentoring and an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat and achieve academic success.

Your selection is based on your participation interest in this research study. I am inviting you to participate in one individual face-to-face interview that will be held at Lehman College and will last approximately 45 minutes. In these interviews, you will be asked to share your experiences and perceptions concerning the impact of mentoring on academic achievement and explore how you believe mentoring has influenced your ability to address stereotype threat. The interviews will be scheduled over a one-month period in the Fall semester of 2017. You will be asked open-ended questions about your personal thoughts and experiences as an African male student and are allowed to skip any questions during the interview sessions. The discussion will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim following the session. Pseudonyms for you and the institution will be used.
and your responses will be assessed for information that might compromise confidentiality. In such instances, your responses and direct quotes will be paraphrased or used in segments so that no personal compromising information is reflected. The recordings will be stored on compact disks (CDs) that will be kept under lock and key at the researcher’s residence. I will transcribe your interview responses and send them to you via your personal email account for you to review and revise. This process may take up to a few weeks or months. These tapes will be destroyed following the study.

The risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life. You are also free to withdraw from the study without explanation at any time. If you leave the study, your relationship relative to grades, academic standing, athletic involvement or your status as a student with Lehman College will not be negatively affected. Your participation will be kept strictly confidential and no personal or study information will be shared without your prior written permission. However, by participating in this study, you are asked to maintain what you hear in confidence. Your participation in this study is vital to help us better understand how mentoring impacts an African American male’s ability to overcome societal barriers and experience more academic success.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, please feel free to contact me at 904-993-8997 or via email at cburney@bgsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Judy Jackson May at judyjac@bgsu.edu or 419-372-7373. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at Bowling Green State University (419-372-7716 or orc@bgsu.edu) if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign below. Participants must be 18 years old or older to be eligible. Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years old. You also
acknowledge that the researcher has fully explained to you the nature of the interview and all your queries have been answered.

I, ________________________________, have chosen to participate in this study voluntarily.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Dear Program Director [insert name],

My name is Calvin Burney and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. I am conducting a study exploring the impact of mentoring on an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is defined as an individual’s decision to confirm or disconfirm as self-characteristic a group specific stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between mentoring and an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat and achieve academic success.

As a part of my dissertation research, I am inviting the Urban Male Leadership Program to participate in my research study. With your approval, I will request student participants to engage in one forty-five-minute interview sessions with me in to discuss more about their lives as an African American male college student. All interviews will be held in New York on the Lehman College campus during the month of September at a time convenient for participants.

Your student’s participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. There are no anticipated risks to participate in this study. If you are interested, kindly click on reply and indicate “Yes, I am interested in participating in your study” as the SUBJECT heading of your email. I will contact you as soon as possible to discuss more about my dissertation and schedule the first personal interview.
Please do not hesitate to email me at cburney@bgsu.edu if you have any questions. Please feel free contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Judy Jackson May at judyjac@bgsu.edu or 419-372-7373. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at Bowling Green State University (419-372-7716 or orc@bgsu.edu) if you have any questions or concerns. I appreciate your willingness to consider assisting me as I complete my doctoral journey.

Sincerely,

Calvin Burney

Doctoral Student, Leadership Studies

Bowling Green State University
Dear [insert name],

My name is Calvin Burney and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. I am conducting a study exploring the impact of mentoring on an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between mentoring and an African American male’s ability to overcome stereotype threat and achieve academic success.

I am inviting you to participate in my research study that is conducted as part of my dissertation. If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in one forty-five-minute long interview session with me where we will talk more about your life as an African American male college student. All interviews will be scheduled based on your availability. Most interviews will be scheduled during the months of October and November. You will be provided a range of times and dates that best work for your schedule.

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. There are no anticipated risks to participate in this study. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your grades, academic standing, athletic involvement or your status as a student of Lehman College.

If you are interested, kindly click on reply and indicate “Yes, I am interested in participating in your study” as the SUBJECT heading of your email.

I will contact you as soon as possible so that we can discuss more about my dissertation and set up the first personal interview.
Please do not hesitate to email me at cburney@bgsu.edu if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Calvin Burney
Doctoral Student, Leadership Studies
Bowling Green State University
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe how you performed academically before participation in the Urban Male Leadership Program (UMLP).

2. Before participating in the UMLP program what were your feelings about school?

3. Before attending the leadership, program did you have a desire to graduate from college and further your academic pursuits?

4. Before attending the leadership program how did you feel you were viewed by your fellow students and teachers concerning your academic abilities?
APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT EMAIL

Thank you Mr. [Name] for your willingness to participate in this research study of the UMLP. Your participation will assist in expanding the body of knowledge pertaining to the academic achievement of African American males. Again, I would like to thank you for your participation. I am attaching a pre-participation questionnaire and available time slots to schedule a 45-minute interview session. Below I have listed available time slots:

Nov 2nd 1:15 – 1:45
Nov 2nd 2:00- 2:45
Nov 2nd 3:00- 3:45
Nov 2nd 4:00– 4:45
Nov 3rd 9:00- 9:45
Nov 3rd 10:00-10:45
Nov 3rd 11:00 -11:45
Nov 3rd 1:00- 1:45
Nov 3rd 2:00 – 2:45
Nov 6th 9:00- 9:45
Nov 6th 10:00-10:45
Nov 6th 11:00 -11:45
Nov 6th 1:00- 1:45
Nov 6th 2:00 – 2:45
Nov 6th 3:00 – 3:45
Nov 7th 9:00-9:45
Nov 7th 10:00- 10:45
Nov 7th 11:00 – 11:45
Nov 7th 12:00- 12:45
Nov 7th 1:00 – 1:45

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,
Calvin
APPENDIX F: STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONFIRMATION EMAIL

Thank you again Mr._____ for your willingness to participate in this research study. I will make note of your Day Month Date, Year interview session which will take place from_______until ______. I look forward to our impending conversation. Additionally, I am attaching a pre-interview questionnaire to this email if possible could you complete and return this brief questionnaire prior to our interview session? Again, I appreciate your willingness to assist in this research study.

Best,
Calvin
Dear Mr.______________ thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research study. I am sending you this email to notify you that ___(Day)_____ Month Date and Year between the times of__________ and__________ are no longer available. I look forward to solidifying our interview time.

Best,

Calvin
APPENDIX H: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Name:_______________________________

Participant age:______________

Participant school classification:____________________

Participant Cumulative GPA:______________________,

Familial Education History:______________________

Number of formal mentors (past and present)______________________.

Participants favorite subject______________________________,

Participants least favorite subject__________________________,
APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participant Interview Questions

1. What are your feelings concerning the importance of mentorship?
2. What impact if any do you feel that mentorship had on your belief in your academic abilities?
3. In what way if any has mentoring impacted your academic abilities?
4. Please describe any knowledge or skills that you have acquired as a mentee?
5. What are your thoughts concerning the importance of education?
6. What are your thoughts concerning your abilities when you are tasked with completing an academic task?
7. Please discuss any stereotypes that you have encountered concerning your academic abilities.
8. What were your feelings when faced with these stereotypes?
9. In what way if any has mentoring impacted your ability to address stereotypes and stereotype threat?
10. In what way if any have stereotypes impacted your academic performance?
11. What were your feelings when faced with these stereotypes?
12. In what way have stereotypes impacted your academic performance?
APPENDIX J: TABLE 2. EMERGENT THEMES AND SUBTHEME FREQUENCY TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/Category</th>
<th>Frequency/#of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a person in your corner.</td>
<td>All/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Accountability</td>
<td>Emergent/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is integral to success.</td>
<td>All/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Education prevents stagnation</td>
<td>Emergent/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is nothing I cannot do.</td>
<td>All/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. UMLP and its mentors instill confidence.</td>
<td>All/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. UMLP shapes perspective</td>
<td>All/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping is to be expected.</td>
<td>All/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Stereotypes fuel me to succeed.</td>
<td>Emergent/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>