# EXAMINING CAREER SUCCESS AND MENTORSHIP AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN PRACTITIONERS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jack J. Valenti School of Communication

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Erin Sarena Jordan

May 2012

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# ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of mentorship in assisting African Americans in public relations with promotion, salary growth, retention, job satisfaction and overcoming racial barriers. In-depth interviews were used to explore the relationship between career success and mentorship in careers of eleven African American public relations practitioners. The social exchange theory, leader-member exchange theory and perceived organizational support were used to guide this study. Mentoring was shown to contribute to career success, which includes a direct link to job satisfaction and retention, and an indirect link to promotion and salary growth. Additionally, mentorship was perceived as assistance for overcoming racial barriers because of psychological support. The results suggest that because of social divisions, African Americans have taken extra measures to achieve success in the workplace. These findings contribute to literatures regarding mentorship, career success and African American in public relations.

*Keywords:* mentorship, African American, public relations, career success, racism, discrimination

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

The racial diversity deficit in public relations has made it a virtually monochromatic field. Layton (1980) called public relations a "lily-white profession" because of the heavy concentration of Caucasian practitioners, and since Layton's study public relations has not changed much. In the 2008 PRWeek Diversity Survey, 85 percent of respondents "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed the public relations industry "has a problem recruiting ethnically diverse professionals" (Cherenson, 2009). And, overall those surveyed felt that a need exists within the industry to recruit and retain ethnically diverse employees (Billingsley, 2009). As of 2009 diversity in public relations was still recognized as an area of growing concern (Maul, 2010).

The professional identity of public relations is shaped by the professional habitus (Sommerlad, 2008). The professional habitus defines professionals in the field, and stems from political, social, and economic circumstances (Edwards, 2010). The historical, economic, political, and social structures of the United States have caused the identity of public relations to align with the interests of privileged Whites (Edwards, 2010). As a result, public relations tends to consist of individuals with similar backgrounds, and this continues to shape the professional habitus (Edwards, 2010).

Scholars and practitioners have under researched the racial diversity deficit in public relations. According to Pompper (2005), within public relations scholarship the study of race and ethnicity have been overlooked. Edwards (2010) suggested the cultural wealth offered by minorities in public relations is undervalued because the dominant group is uninterested. However, because of the impending demographic shift in the

United States that will make minorities the majority, the dominant group will soon, if they aren't already, become interested in minorities as practitioners and key target audiences. Weick's (1979) principle of requisite variety posits that an organization is the most effective when its employees are as diverse as their environment. That is to say, organizations that align their demographics with the shifting United States demographic will fare the best in the future.

Within public relations there is a particularly low ratio of African American[1] practitioners. In 2010, of the 85,000 public relations managers employed in the U.S., only 3,740,or 4.4 percent were African American, and of the 148,000 public relations specialists employed in the U.S., only 4,144 or 2.8 percent were African American (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). When compared to the ratio of African Americans in the U.S. population, which in 2010 was approximately 13 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010), the percentage of African Americans in public relations is insufficient.

Several racial barriers exist that can impede the successful retention and career success of African Americans in public relations. Once African Americans are hired there are several factors that may cause them to leave their jobs. For example, Tindall (2009) surveyed African American public relations practitioners and found incidents of tokenism, racism, discrimination, and limited opportunities for advancement were barriers they had encountered in their careers.

Scholars posit that a revamping of the recruitment and retention process could assuage the diversity problem (Avery & McKay, 2005; Ford, 2005). According to Avery and McKay (2005), organizational diversity programs tend to solely recruit and hire

[1] The terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout this study and will be defined as persons of African ancestry with United States citizenry.

racially diverse candidates, rather than creating plans to retain racially diverse candidates after they are hired. Avery and McKay (2005) suggest that because of the push from equal employment opportunity mandates, organizations are more concerned with recruiting to increase diversity numbers, but they ignore methods to retain minority employees, which results in higher turnover rates. Focusing on methods of retention involves creating an organizational atmosphere that will decrease the turnover rate of employees, especially newly hired employees.

I propose that mentorship can reduce the racial diversity deficit in public relations by helping minority practitioners overcome racial barriers and feel connected to their jobs (see Figure 1, for a depiction of the projected mentorship and career success model). Mentoring is related to several factors such as coaching, supporting, sponsoring, and in turn, those factors have an impact on compensation, promotion, and job satisfaction (Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Compensation, promotion, and job satisfaction determine practitioners' career success. Through this study I aim to identify the extent to which mentorship helps African American public relations practitioners overcome racial barriers and achieve career success in public relations.

Three theoretical perspectives, social exchange theory, perceived organizational support (POS) and leader-member exchange theory (LMX) link mentorship with career success, and I propose that they are linked to overcoming racial barriers as well. Both POS and LMX stem from social exchange theory. According to social exchange theory, individuals maintain relationships based upon perceived profits and costs, which are the tangible and intangible currencies of relationships (Emerson, 1981). That is to say, individuals give to a relationship based upon what that relationship gives to them. If the

relationship is perceived as positive, individuals will give more, and if it's perceived as negative, individuals give less. Because of the give-and-take nature of positive social exchange relationships employees trust each other more, engage in problem solving, have better teamwork, and have greater productivity and organizational citizenship behavior (Forret & Love, 2008).

Foa and Foa (1974) classified the tangible and intangible currencies within relationships into six social exchange categories: (1) love/emotional support, (2) status, (3) information, (4) money, (5) goods, and (6) services. Many of these categories correlate with three types of mentor-protégé support: social support, role-modeling, and vocational support (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001; Scandura, 1992). Social support and role modeling correlate with love/emotional support, and vocational support correlates with status, information, and services. The relationship between mentorship and the ability to overcome racial barriers is an under researched area. However, I propose that mentorship is related to the ability to overcome racial barriers because of its links to social exchange theory and its career-oriented and psychological benefits.

Perceived organizational support (POS) expounds on social exchange theory by exploring the benefits of organizational relationships. Developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986), POS identifies the reciprocal relationship that exists between employees and organizations. According to POS employees return to organizations what organizations give to them. Therefore, POS is positively related to the level of organizational attachment and commitment employees feel (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001), employees' overall feelings toward an organization, and employees' intentions to quit

(Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Encouraging minority mentoring can increase minority employees' POS, which may reduce turnover and promote organizational commitment.

LMX has been used as a measure for effective mentorship relationships within organizations. LMX refers to interpersonal relationships developed between supervisors and subordinates, which are usually different from formal organizational relationships that are arranged or assigned by the organization (Graen & Cashman, 1975). The quality of interaction between employees and supervisors can predict performance and attitudinal job outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Research has shown that higher LMX correlates with positive results in the workplace such as greater employee effort (Green, Blank, & Liden, 1983) and reduced stress (Harris & Kacmar, 2006). If African Americans in public relations experienced high LMX they may produce better work and feel better about their jobs. This would cause more African Americans in public relations to feel higher levels of job satisfaction and want to prolong their jobs and careers in public relations, thereby decreasing the diversity deceit.

*Purpose of the Study*

While representation of all types of diversity (i.e. diversity in gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, etc.) in public relations is important, this study will focus on what can be done to increase the representation of African American public relations practitioners. This study will explore how African American public relations practitioners use mentorship in their careers and the perceived effects, if any, mentoring has had on their levels of retention, job satisfaction, promotion, salary growth, and ability to overcome barriers.

*Significance of the Study*

The current body of scholarly work related to African Americans in public relations and mentorship is limited, and this study aimed to advance that body of knowledge. More specifically this study provides evidence that (1) mentoring contributes to the perceived career success of African Americans, which includes job satisfaction and retention, (2) mentorship indirectly affects promotion and salary growth, and (3) this study identified strategies and techniques that can assist African American practitioners with having prolonged and successful careers in public relations. Additionally, the results of this study were used to create a foundational model to help African Americans succeed in public relations, and to aid organizations with retaining more African American public relations practitioners.

# Chapter Two

## Conceptualization

This study explored how African American public relations practitioners use mentorship in their careers and the perceived effects, if any, mentoring had on their levels of retention, job satisfaction, promotion, salary growth, and ability to overcome barriers. To help achieve this goal the conceptualization for this study is framed in literature involving the power structure of public relations, mentorship, career success, job satisfaction, employee engagement, leader member exchange and social exchange theory

### *The Power Structure of Public Relations*

Within this section I will discuss how race and ethnicity fit into the power structure of public relations. According to Anthias (1998), social divisions are "the modes for the classification of populations, differential treatment on the basis of labeling or attributions of capacities and needs, and modes of exclusion" (p. 506). Social divisions are social constructions, which are reflected in the structure of public relations. Racism and discrimination are results of social construction, and play a clear role in the experiences of minority practitioners (Pompper, 2005).

Likewise, the public relations habitus determines who is a professional (Edwards, 2010). Because of social hierarchies, the public relations habitus is restricted in terms of race and ethnicity, which is due in part to "othering" and whiteness. Those who do not align with the public relations habitus are "othered" or treated as subordinates to the dominant perspective. According to Edwards (2010), "the day-to-day othering of practitioners through habitus and discourse is reinforced through the structure of the profession" (p. 217).

Frankenberg (1993) defines Whiteness as a "race privilege", a point-of-view from "which White people look at themselves, others and society," and finally, it is a set of unnamed and unmarked cultural practices (p. 1). Whiteness creates a system of exclusion by silencing the voices of the marginalized and legitimizing the voices and social status of dominant groups and those in relation to them (Gillborn, 2008). This system of whiteness may be perpetuated unintentionally, because it is unnoticeable until it is seen in contrast with dissimilarity (Frankenberg, 1993).

*The Stereotype Negation Strategy*. Sommerlad (2008) suggested that more privileged minority practitioners use gender, class or other aspects of their identity to differentiate themselves from stereotypes associated with their racial groups, which is called the individual stereotype negation strategy (Carbado & Gulati, 2003). This strategy is a defense mechanism that helps privileged minorities excel and move upwardly through their careers. For example, Jeanquart-Barone and Sekaran (1996) found "indoctrination had no significant effect on supportive culture or perceive discrimination" (p. 481), and suggests this may be true among African-Americans because they are used to subordinating themselves in social settings where they are the minority.

In addition, because of the current system of oppression, minoritized groups such as African Americans often feel the need to overcompensate to achieve success. Pompper (2004) found that practitioners, for example often feel the need to overcompensate for stereotypes that may be imposed on them in the workplace, through statements such as, "set the bar very high," "work harder," "arrive early and leave late," "offer something more," and "perform tasks no one else want to do" (pp. 287-288). Many also said they go

above and beyond during the job interview process to demonstrate they can perform the job (Pompper, 2004).

*The Velvet Ghetto Study*. As previously mentioned, gender also impacts discrimination in the workplace. The majority of studies within public relations' scholarship related to African Americans have focused on women and their experiences with the "glass-ceiling" or velvet ghetto. The velvet ghetto study conducted by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation was the first study conducted about the growing population of women in public relations. The Velvet ghetto is an arena in which women experience drops in status and salary (Cline et. al, 1986). The study identified three trends: 1) women are more likely to self-discriminate and select the technician role rather than the managerial role; 2) salary gaps exists between men and women, and women are underpaid, and 3) when professions transition from male-dominated to female-dominated, the professions diminish in salary and status.

*Diversity vs. Inclusion*

A study conducted by Roberson (2006) acknowledged that a shift has occurred, whereby an emphasis is being placed on increasing inclusion, rather than increasing diversity. Roberson (2006) found that diversity often refers to the demographic composition of groups, while inclusion often refers to "a focus on organizational objectives designed to increase the participation of all employees and to leverage diversity effect on the organization" (p. 219). Laurie (1997) found that diversity creates an emphasis on inclusion, which ensures the best employees are attracted, hired and promoted within organizations, and enables employees to contribute their best ideas for

better understanding of markets and market segments. The aim of this study is identify ways to increase both diversity and inclusion through mentorship.

*Diversity in Public Relations*

The United States population is more diverse than ever before due to the proliferation of ethnically and racially diverse groups. The 2010 Census reports noted a decline in Caucasian newborns in the United States. The decline is so significant that Caucasian newborn babies now represent the minority, while Hispanic, African American, and interracial babies comprise the majority (Tavernise, 2011). The Caucasian population in the United States has also shrunk in 42 out of 100 major cities (Tavernise, 2011). This shift in population demographics suggests that there is an impending shift in consumer and publics' interests.

In a survey conducted by PRWeek, 41% of Caucasians, 80% of Blacks, and 56% of Hispanics surveyed reported that there is a problem with diversity in public relations (Maul, 2010). Diverse organizations can reap several benefits, and smart organizations should tout their support for all permutations of diversity. Organizational diversity improves employees' productivity by increasing the available pool of resources-networks, perspectives, styles, knowledge, and insights to solve complex problems (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Additionally, diversity within organizations helps combat groupthink and traditional management notions of conformity and predictability by introducing greater attention to heterogeneity, involvement, complication and communication (Krzystofiak, Krefting, & Kirby, 1997).

*Current state of increasing diversity in public relations*. Although diversity is in short supply in public relations, diversity issues in public relations are being addressed.

There is a strong desire from most practitioners and organizations to increase diversity in public relations. Professional public relations societies such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) annually allocate their resources towards addressing and eradicating the diversity issue in public relations (Ford, 2005). As a result, organizations like PRSA now offer several tools that aim to increase diversity, such as online discussion forums, blogs, diversity awards, and handbooks.

Several organizations also use recruitment tactics to attract candidates. Recruitment may be formal, such job fairs and Internet postings, or informal, such as referrals and networking (Arthur, 2001). Diversity recruitment is recruiting to attract desired minorities to an organization (Tindall, 2009b) .To attract diverse candidates some organizations have used diversity advertising. However, this recruitment method may be ineffective if the imagery and language used within these ads is not highly sophisticated to appropriately reach the desire demographics (Avery, 2003).

Another problem with the current diversity measures is that although organizations are emphasizing diversity, some employees feel their organizations are insincere. Hon and Brunner (2000) found some employees were skeptical of their organization's diversity practices. Several employees felt their current organizations were not moving toward a genuine commitment to increase diversity, citing a desire to "fill numbers" as one reason for a turn toward diversity (Hon & Brunner, 2000).

*Mentorship*

Although mentorship has been proven to provide several benefits, currently a gap exists in public relations scholarship pertaining to practitioners and mentorship,. This section will explain mentorship and the benefits that can result from proper mentorship.

Ensher et al. (2001) postulates "organizations that provide a supportive environment for all permutations of mentoring relations maximize their diverse human potential and reap many positive benefits" (p. 436). Mentorship is defined as "a type of supportive and informal organization communication that is very powerful in career advancement," (Hill & Bahniuk, 1998, p. 4). It is an intense developmental relationship where a mentor gives advice, counseling, and developmental opportunities to a protégé, and shapes the protégé's career experiences (Eby, 1997).

Mentorship has been linked to "increased performance, promotion rate, early career advancement, greater upward mobility, higher income, greater job satisfaction, enhanced leadership ability and perceptions of greater success and influence in an organization" (Hill & Banhnik, 1998, p.4). Additionally, those who are mentored tend to receive more organizational information (Baugh & Scandura, 1999), which suggests mentorship improves the effectiveness of communication within organizations both horizontally and vertically, and subsequently reinforces organizational culture.

Organizations annually spend billions of dollars on informal and formal mentoring programs to recruit, retention, and replace employees (Brashear, Bellenger, Boles, & Barksdale Jr., 2006). With formal mentorship, the protégé and mentee relationship is formed by the organization, while informal mentorship is more personal and formed on an individual basis with no organizational intervention (Hopkins & Grigoriu, 2005). Informal relationships are initiated based on friendship or similar values, attitudes, demographics, or experiences with the mentor (Sosik, Lee, & Bouquillon, 2005). According to Sosik et al. (2005) the significant differences in informal and formal mentorship relationships are external control, planning and institutionalization,

intentionality, the depth of the relationship, participation, timeframe, and the nature of the setting. Some scholars believe informal mentorship is the best. Informal protégés have greater career development and psychosocial functions than formal protégés (Gibson, 2004).

Employees with multiple mentors also reap several benefits. Employees who have one or more mentors experience greater organizational commitment, greater job and work satisfaction, enhanced career expectations, increased perceptions of alterative employment, and lower role ambiguity (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Higgins, 2000). However, when the number mentors increase mentees may experience some role conflict, because of the diversity of available perspectives (Baugh & Scandura, 1999).

Mentoring helps employees grow professionally and personally (Fawcett, 2002), and is considered an important individual development tool (Joiner, Bartram, & Garreffa, 2004; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). There are two functions of mentorship: the career-oriented function and psychological function. The career-oriented nature of mentorship relates to functions of mentorship that aim to develop protégés' careers such as exposure, visibility, sponsorship, coaching, networking, challenging, and protection (Allen & Finkelstein, 2003; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Hopkins & Grigoriu, 2005; Johnson, 2003; Kram, 1985).

While the psychological function of mentorship impacts self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, friendship, counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and sharing beyond work (Chao et al., 1992; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins, 1997; Siegel, Reinstein, & Miller, 2001). Additionally, with mentorship African American professionals are making a small impact on narrowing the income gap, salary gap, and other gaps (Allen, Poteet, Eby, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). For example, Alston (2006) found that mentoring of

African American women in their first management role might provide career development and psychosocial benefits that enhance their ability to adapt to management roles.

*Racial Barriers to Retention*

Within this section I will explore the relationship between mentorship and the ability to overcome racial barriers among African Americans in public relations. African American practitioners have reported experiencing barriers at every level of their careers such as pigeonholing, tokenism, performing to a higher standard, and cultural alienation. Performance to a higher standard is the feeling of needing to overachieve to prove oneself as a professional equal. Cultural alienation refers to isolation or being socially left out in an organization (Len-Rios, 1998). Tokenism is being employed by an organization to fill racial or ethnic slots (Len-Rios, 1998). According to Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001), pigeonholing is an extension of tokenism.

Natalie T. J. Tindall (2009) found that pigeonholing by organizations or departments is a concern for practitioners. Tindall (2009) defined pigeonholing as the placement of minorities within organizations to handle or appease certain clients because of their race. (Tillery-Larkin, 1999) identified five forms of pigeonholing in the public relations literature: "(a) being hired to work on primarily race-related projects, (b) being hired into a stereotypical position for an African American, (c) being hired to fill a quota, (d) being restricted from advancing to higher positions in an organization, (e) being restricted from functionary positions with real decision-making power" (p. 19). Pigeonholed practitioners have no input in policymaking and may only be consulted regarding race-related issues Tindall (2009). Pigeonholing has several effects, including

causing minorities to feel the burden of acting as a spokesperson for their race, or being a race representative (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). The inability to overcome barriers may deter practitioners from practicing with a particular organization.

Institutional racism can also be a barrier to retention. Institutional racism is defined as the informal bases or barriers that prevent minority members from being promoted in an organization (Jeanquart-Barone & Sekaran, 1996). Jeanquart-Barone and Sekaran (1996) found that both supportive climate, which is "the extent to which an atmosphere of mutual help, trust, psychological safety and relationship orientation exist in the system," (p. 479) and perceived discrimination lead to institutional racism.

I found no research related to the ability to overcome racial barriers with mentorship. However, through qualitative analysis I examined if the ability to overcome racial barriers and increase career mobility (i.e. career success) was related to mentorship. This study specifically aimed to explore whether the functions of mentorship help African Americans in public relations to mitigate conflicts, such as racism and discrimination in the organizational environment.

*Career Success*

There are several definitions and measurements of career success. This section will give an overview of how career success will be defined within this study. Career success is mostly defined from an objective standpoint concerning observable, measurable and verifiable attainments such as pay, promotion and occupational status (Nicholson, 2000). However, economic turmoil has lessened the desire to have traditional career success, allowing for the objective measurement of career success. (Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008; Hall, 2002; Heslin, 2005; Reitman & Schneer, 2003).

Subjective career success means an individual is satisfied with all aspects relevant to their career (Dries et al., 2008; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). Subjective career success is measured based upon an individual's perceptions of their own success in relation personal career accomplishments and future prospects (Dries et al., 2008; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Melamed, 1996; Nabi, 1999).

In addition to the subjective and objective measures of career success, Nabi (2001) defined career success according to its extrinsic and intrinsic values. Extrinsic career success is based upon the perception of equitable pay, fair income, responsibility, promotional opportunities, whereas intrinsic career success is based upon perceived job happiness, management support, likable work, likable colleagues, good performance evaluations, and supervisor confidence. The subjective perceptions, intrinsic and extrinsic values individuals ascribe to career success will be the focus of this study. These are relevant in gauging the role of mentorship, because of the emotional and interpersonal nature of these types of career success.

*Job Satisfaction*

This section will discuss the effects of mentorship on job satisfaction, as reflected in retention, promotion and salary growth. Several studies support the notion that mentorship leads to greater career success and job satisfaction and faster promotion in comparison to non-mentorship. Employees with mentors learn more on the job than those without mentors, because mentoring results in direct positive employee outcomes (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Siegel et al. (2001) noted that "positive mentorship relationships can reduce stress and increase organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career progress expectations and perceptions of employment opportunities" (p. 2).

There are several definitions and causes of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as the positive emotional state resulting from the assessment and evaluation of one's job (Friday & Friday, 2003). For example, Broom and Dozier (2006) found that being included in decision-making has a higher correlation to job satisfaction. Rice, McFarlin, and Bennett (1989) found that feelings of indifference towards one's job only surface if workers have unmet needs. An individual's job satisfaction is directly related to their organizational environment (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This means employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction is related to discrepancies in what employees have compared to what they desire to have in their workplace.

Achievement goal theory suggests employee job performance and job satisfaction is correlated with goal orientations (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). There are two types of goal orientation (1) mastery which focuses on developing competence, gaining skill, and doing one's best, and (2) performance orientation focuses on establishing superiority over others (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). Janssen & Van Yperen (2004) combined achievement goal theory and LMX and found that mastery orientation helps employees establish a high-quality exchange with their leader, while a performance orientation promotes low-quality social exchanges with their supervisors. Lower quality LMX means lower levels of in-role innovative job performance and job satisfaction (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). This provides information on the quality of LMX African Americans must receive on their jobs to increase the potential for job satisfaction.

If employees do not experience job satisfaction, this can result in higher turnover. Turnover is the process of employees leaving an organization to seek other opportunities, and not having a mentor may affect the turnover rates of African Americans. LMX has

been found to be a greater predictor of turnover among high-ranking employees such as those in managerial roles (Vecchio, 1985). This lends to the idea that with mentorship more African Americans can maintain managerial and other high-ranking positions. It is important to note that not all turnover is a result of discrimination or other ill feelings held by employees. For example, Vecchio (1985) suggests turnover can occur because employees are attracted away to another organization, because that organization is more appealing than their current organization.

*Employee Engagement*

In the same manner that job satisfaction is important to the success of an organization, so is employee engagement. According to Bakker (2011), work engagement differs from job satisfaction because it combines high work dedication with high vigor and absorption, while job satisfaction is a more passive form of employee well being. Bakker (2011) defined employee engagement as a state when "employees are physically, cognitively, and emotionally connected with their work roles" (p. 268). Employees who are engaged typically feel energized, immersed in their work, and dedicated to work goals (Bakker, 2011).

Additionally, engagement furthers the understanding of cross-racial or different-race supervisor-employee relationships (e.g. mentoring). When employees and their supervisor are of different races employee engagement is essential. Jones and Harter (2005) found turnover is higher when engagement is low and the supervisor and employee are of different races. Conversely, when engagement is high, turnover is lower when supervisors and employees are of different races (Jones & Harter, 2005).

Employee engagement is also linked to leader-member exchange (LMX). Bezuijen, van Dam, van den Berg, and Thierry (2010) found that employee engagement

is linked to LMX through goal difficulty and specialty. For example, leaders engage high-LMX employees by setting more difficult goals and specific learning goals, which encourages employees to rise to their leader's expectations (Bezuijen et al., 2010).

*Challenges in Mentorship for African American Practitioners*

Mentorship enables the transfer of knowledge, socialization, social support, communication and admittance to networks that lead to success in organizations (Chao et al., 1992). Despite the facts, African Americans in public relations who realize the importance of mentorship may still struggle to meet mentors, especially mentors who are African American (Tindall, 2009b). Within organizations where mentoring is informal, mentors select protégées who are like themselves (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). This means that mentoring may be less accessible to African Americans within organizations with informal mentoring systems, because African Americans are typically a part of the organizational minority.

Diversified, especially cross-racial, mentoring relationships have unique behavioral and perceptual processes (Ragins, 1997). These processes include: (1) shared identity and interpersonal comfort, (2) stereotyping and perceived competence, and (3) visibility and performance pressures. These processes may make it difficult for African Americans to receive mentorship from members of dominance within organizations.

In addition to race, gender can also be an inhibitor to mentorship. A study conducted by Tam, Dozier, Lauzen, and Real (1995) found that public relations protégés who are mentored by females achieve fewer career advancements, although women mentors offer more intense and active mentoring than male mentors. Protégés with female mentors earn lower salaries than protégés with male mentors, with women who

are mentored by women earning less than men who are mentored by women (Tam et al., 1995).

*Figure 1*. Projected Career Success and Mentorship Model

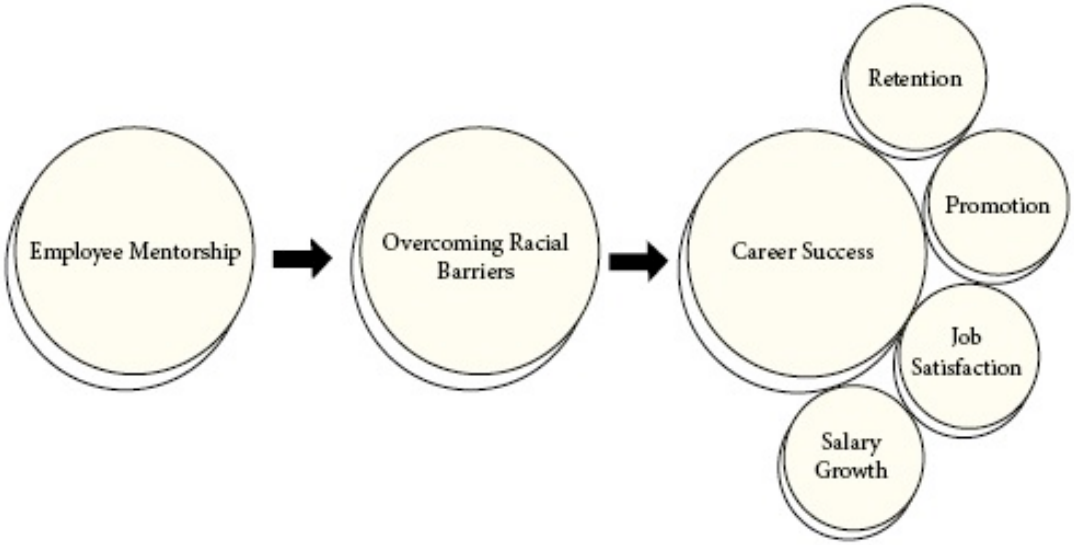


*Figure 1*: This model depicts the projected role of mentorship in career success. The circles have solid lines, indicating a direct relationship between each variable. The model depicts that if there is good employee mentorship it will directly assist that employee with overcoming racial barriers and obtaining career success, which includes increased retention, promotion, job satisfaction and salary growth.

*Research Questions*

This study explores 1) How African American public relations practitioners use mentorship in their careers and 2) if mentoring has impacted their levels of career success, specifically job satisfaction, promotion, salary growth, and the ability to overcome racial barriers. Three research questions are proposed as follows:

RQ1: In what ways do African American public relations practitioners perceive mentorship as assistance to overcoming racial barriers in their careers?

RQ2: In what ways does mentoring contribute to the perceived job satisfaction of African American public relations practitioners?

RQ3: In what ways does mentoring contribute to the retention, promotion and salary growth of African American public relations practitioners?

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

This study examined African Americans' perceptions of the impact of mentoring on their careers in public relations. Conducting this study with qualitative methods provided a unique opportunity to gather information about participant's beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (Frey, Botan & Krepps, 2000). My aim was to analyze the feelings and perceptions of African Americans' towards their jobs, mentoring and racial barriers in their careers. To best study the unique relationships between each variable I used qualitative methods.

In-depth qualitative interviews allowed for the emergence of in-depth responses (Merrigan & Huston, 2009). I used probes or follow-up questions to simplify the interview questions, and to aid participants in providing rich responses. Rich responses or descriptions provide detailed understandings about the ideas and experiences of participants, which are unobtainable through other types of research (Featherston, 2008). Additionally, qualitative interviewing gave me the advantage of building rapport to ease any anxiety participants may have felt about revealing their experiences with success or encounters with racism in their careers. While qualitative research is extremely beneficial, it has a few drawbacks, such as time and generalizability. Qualitative research requires a significant time obligation, and because samples tend to be specific, qualitative data are less representative of a total population, and thus less generalizable (Merrigan & Huston, 2009).

*Interview Protocol*

My interview protocol was designed to reflect the proposed research questions, and to serve as a guide to the interview process (see Appendices A and B, to view the interview protocol and demographic questionnaire administered to each participant). The purpose of the interviews was to explore how African Americans in public relations used mentorship in their careers, and the perceived effects, if any, mentoring has had on their retention, job satisfaction, promotion, salary growth, and ability to overcome barriers. Each question was selected based up the theories that guided this study, a review of interview protocols from related studies, and piloted tests of the interview protocol. The questions were arranged and ordered to ease participants and encourage them to give thoughtful answers.

There were three sections in the interview protocol. The first section of interview questions gauged African Americans experience and perception of mentoring in public relations, which was designed to answer research question two. The second section examined African Americans' perceptions of the effects of mentorship on retention, promotion and salary growth, which was designed to answer research question three. The third section explored the role of mentorship in assisting African American public relations practitioners with overcoming racial barriers, which was designed to answer research question one.

*Data Collection*

The majority of interviews were conducted via video conferencing, two interviews were conducting over-the-phone, and two interviews were conducted in-person. While I would have preferred to conduct all interviews in-person, because of the

resources available the interviews were conducted via the medium most convenient for the participants. Interviewees were asked to choose a location that was comfortable and accommodating for the interview. As a result most interviews were conducted in participant's homes or local coffee shops. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to insure anonymity, and interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes to an hour. This provided enough time to draw an accurate assessment of my participants' perceptions; any time less would have been insufficient, and any more time could have lead to participant exhaustion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign an Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent form (see Appendix C, to view the IRB informed consent form administered to each participant). This ensured each participant was aware of all aspects of the interview and their rights as a participant. This study was approved to use human subjects by the Committee for Protection of Human Services (CPHS)/Institutional Review Board (IRB).

During the interviews, I took notes and audio recorded the sessions with permission from the participants. Each audio recording allowed me to have a more accurate record of the interviews, and provided me with a holistic view of the interview process. The interviews began with participants completing the demographic questionnaire, which was administered verbally. The questionnaire was used to record the participants' age, education, gender, industry (oil and gas, education, healthcare or tourism, etc.), and job title.

*Sampling*

This study used purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Purposive sampling is nonrandom sampling of participants that are of a particular characteristic (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). The snowball sampling method or snowballing "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know others who possess some characteristic that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldofl, 1981, p.141). Thus, once participants are identified, they were asked to recommend other candidates to participate in this study.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that the snowballing method may be the only way to engage people to talk about and research sensitive subjects, which makes it the best method for studying social networks, subcultures, or dispersed people who share similar characteristics and commonalities. Snowballing was well suited for this study because participants were more willing to discuss racial barriers in their careers, job satisfaction and salary growth because a friend referred them to me.

I received overwhelming support of this study. Several public relations practitioners gave referrals or expressed interest in participating in the study. In all, 13 one-on-one interviews were conducted between December 2011 and February 2012. However, due to recorder malfunctions two participant interviews were lost. The lost interviews were from two female practitioners, one located in Houston, Texas and the other in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Those interviews furthered the point of saturation, because they were in line with the findings of this study, no new or aberrant results were offered within those interviews.

In all, eleven usable interviews were gathered from participants recruited from Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Washington D.C. and Maryland. To qualify for this study, the participant must have been an African American public relations practitioner with at least two years experience in the communication field. As previously mentioned, African Americans and Blacks is used interchangeably throughout this study, and the interviewees were those who self-identified as being of African ancestry with United States citizenry.

My recruitment process consisted of outreach to professional organizations and my personal network of public relations practitioners. I began recruitment by contacting the Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth chapters of the Public Relations Society of America, the Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth chapters of the Association of Black Journalists, and the National Black Public Relations Society. Once I contacted these organizations some of their organizational members voluntarily forwarded my recruitment letter (see Appendix D, to view the recruitment letter) to their colleagues as a mass email, or posted it on their social networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook). This process yielded several participant candidates.

To ensure I gained a diversity of participants, I reached out to my personal network of practitioners, who are of various races and ethnicities. I asked people within my network to refer candidates who met my inclusion criteria, or if they met the criteria I asked them to participate. Therefore, a few participants in the study were my former or current mentors. By utilizing these methods I recruited six male and five female participants. In the recruitment process, I aimed to include individuals in public relations and communication roles within organizations, and individuals involved in

communication consulting. Following the interviews, I did not provide my participants with any formal incentives to thank them for their time, due of a lack of funding. However, I sent a thank you card to each participant, and offered to send each participant an executive summary of the final study.

*Data Analysis*

Once data collection was completed I transcribed each participant's interview for data analysis. By transcribing the interviews myself I was able to listen to the interviews in deliberate ways to identify themes, issues or contradictions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I began by manually uploading each interview session to my personal computer. Then the interviews were individually transcribed by hand. Next, I printed each transcription, so I would have at least one hard copy and one electronic copy at all times. When the copies of the transcribed interviews were not in use they were stored in a secure lockbox, and on my password protected personal computer.

The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory. Grounded theory or constant-comparison is a process of finding "relationships between data and the categories in which they are coded" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). The grounded theory method of analysis allowed themes to emerge from the data, thereby generating an accurate interpretation of the participants' perceptions. Within the coding process I coded for the participants' perceptions of mentorship in relation to retention, job satisfaction, promotion and salary growth.

For this analysis I served as the only coder. Coding categories were created through my analysis of quotes from participants and their emotions observed during interviews. I began my data analysis with "in-process writings" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002,

p. 212), which is a process of inserting asides and commentaries into transcribed sessions as record and analysis of "the efficacy of method," "the author's own emotions, thoughts, or understandings," and "details that inform the researcher's understanding". This process helped me recognize and rule out my own biases, and gain a greater understanding of each participant's responses for later categorizing and coding.

The coding concluded with the constant comparison method, which allowed me to compare each interview to the other interviews in order to decide how they could best be categorized (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This allowed common themes to emerge from the data, until no new codes emerged. This signified that my data has reached saturation, which is also the point when the collection of new data does not reveal any issue under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1975). At that point there was no need to recruit new participants, because of the repetition of phrases, ideas, beliefs, experiences and perspectives.

*Demographics of Study*

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Name | Gender | Location | Age | Experience | Work Auspices / Job Title | Industry of Concentration | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gabrielle** | Female | Dallas, Texas | 27 | 7 years | Large agency/ Account Executive | Community Outreach | Bachelor's |
| **Victor** | Male | Dallas, Texas | 61 | 40 years | Large corporation/ Head of Media Relations | Transportation | Bachelor's |
| **Jasmine** | Female | Dallas, Texas | 23 | 2 years | Small agency/ Account Executive | Multicultural | Bachelor's |
| **Darrell** | Male | Dallas, Texas | 28 | 5 years | Small agency/ Senior Account Executive | Multicultural | Bachelor's |
| **Reba** | Female | San Antonio, Texas | 27 | 2 years | Independent practitioner/ Publicist | Entertainment | Bachelor's |
| **Ian** | Male | Houston, Texas | 58 | 17 years | Large corporation/ Administrator of Communication | Education | Bachelor's |
| **Gladys** | Female | Houston, Texas | 50 | 28 years | Large corporation/ Senior Communication Manager | Food Services | Bachelor's |
| **Joyce** | Female | Houston, Texas | 52 | 17 years | Seeking Employment | Healthcare | Bachelor's |
| **Erik** | Male | Washington D.C. | 40 | 15 years | Large corporation/ Director of Communication | Household Products | Bachelor's |
| **Andrew** | Male | Bowie, MD | 37 | 12 years | Large corporation/ Senior Public Relations Officer | Energy & Gas | Master's |
| **Cameron** | Male | Baltimore, MD | 35 | 14 years | Independent practitioner/ Independent Consultant | Integrated Communication | Bachelor's |

Within this study I aimed to learn about the mentorship experiences of a variety of African Americans in public relations. As a result in-depth interviews were conducted with public relations professionals in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Washington D.C. and Maryland. In total, eleven African Americans were interviewed for this study (see Table 1, for demographics of participants). Six of the participants were men, while five of the participants were women, ranging in ages from 23 to 61.

The participants currently hold a variety of positions in the public relations field. In all I interviewed a head of media relations, senior account executive, publicist, administrator of communication, senior communication manager, director of communication, senior public relations officer, independent consultant, a veteran practitioner who is currently seeking employment, and account executives. In addition, the participants work for large corporations, large and small public relations and advertising agencies, or as independent consultants. The participant's industries of concentration or specialization are transportation, multicultural communication, entertainment, education, food services, healthcare, household products, energy and gas, and integrated communication.

*Personal Interest in the Study*

My desire to conduct this study grew from simple curiosity. As an African American female preparing to enter the public relations field I am curious to learn about the experiences of other practitioners. Initially I sought to create a study that would afford me the opportunity to interview individuals who have achieved significant career success in public relations. I desired to identify and interview this segment of people because they had achieved what I one-day hope to achieve. The more I thought about what this type of public relations practitioner would look like, the more I began to wonder how many of them would be African American. I then attempted to recall African Americans I'd met in public relations who had achieved significant career success, and in the process of recollecting I realized I'd never met a female African American public relations practitioner. I had a sudden epiphany; I was trying to become something I'd never seen. Instantly, I sought to work on a study that would introduce me to this demographic.

I decided to incorporate mentorship into the study because it's under researched in public relations. I considered the mentors who have shaped my academic and professional career, and I wondered if mentors had assisted in the shaping of other African Americans' careers in public relations. I hope that conducting this study will help other curious practitioners and interested organizations learn what sustains African Americans in public relations. So in summation, my personal interest in this study grew from curiosity and desire to increase and maintain diversity in public relations.

# Chapter Four

## Results

The data collected provide insight about early career success and mentorship among African American practitioners in public relations. Common themes were found such as lack of organizational recruitment and retention of African Americans, mentoring as a means to overcome racism and discrimination, and mentoring directly increasing retention and indirectly increasing promotion and salary growth (see Figure 2, for a depiction of the relationship between the variables explored within this study). The results also revealed common racial barriers encountered by African Americans in public relations, and how mentoring assists African American practitioners with overcoming racism and discrimination. In the following section I will discuss the results of this study in detail. I will highlight the direct and unique findings for each research question (RQ). The results are organized according to themes that correlate with each research questions. For clarity, themes will be italicized within the text.

*RQ1: In what ways do African American public relations practitioners perceive mentorship as assistance to overcoming racial barriers in their careers?*

Mentoring was perceived to assist with overcoming racism and discrimination mainly because of *psychological support*. *Racial inequality* and *discriminatory supervision* emerged as the major forms of racism and discrimination experienced by participants in their careers. Although participants encountered racism and discrimination they felt that it was often *too subjective to pinpoint*. In addition to mentoring, participants used *overachieving and avoidance/switching jobs* to overcome encounters with racism and discrimination in the workplace. The *systemic acceptance attitude* emerged as a

unique theme in participants' perceptions about racism and discrimination. The following will provide details for each theme that emerged in relation to racism and discrimination.

*Racism and Discrimination Are too Subjective to Pinpoint*

Before I discuss the results that directly answer this research question I believe it is important to first examine participants' experiences with racism and discrimination. Understanding how participants perceive their encounters with racism and discrimination will provide a framework for understanding the role of mentorship in overcoming these barriers. When asked if they had encountered racism and discrimination in their career the majority[2] of participants felt *racism and discrimination were too subjective to pinpoint*.

When asked if she felt she had been denied a raise or promotion because of her race, Gabrielle[3] from Dallas reported she may have been discriminated against and denied opportunities in her workplace. However, she was uncertain, and felt race and discrimination were often covert or just a feeling, making their occurrences too hard to pinpoint:

> Honestly it was just a feeling, and it's kind of hard to pinpoint, just because you work at a big agency, and you see all of these promotions and raises happening, and you get them too, but it's just like it's so many happening. And, maybe it's just because there are so few of us[4] that I see it[5] rarely. Maybe it's just a feeling, but I definitely think so. You know?

Gabrielle went on to explain that although racism and discrimination were subjective,

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[2] Majority refers to more than half. That is to say, at least six of the 11 participants constitute the majority.
[3] Pseudonyms have been used to provide participants with confidentiality.
[4] Gabrielle's usage of "us" or "we" refers to African Americans employed within her agency
[5] By "it" Gabrielle is referring to rarely seeing African Americans receive promotions at the same rate of other racial groups in her workplace.

when she thought it was occurring she felt powerless:

> [I feel] powerless, because I don't know. Like, because you're not the one who has the power or authority to give the promotion away or raise, how do you prove, 'I don't think you gave me this opportunity?' And, I wouldn't say promotion or raise because I've been on par with that, but I like an opportunity. Like you can never give me a promotion for the rest of my life, but if you give me opportunities -- I'll turn it into to something, you know? So, when you say 'promotion,' I really think opportunity, because this world is made up of people who took advantage of opportunities. So, how can you prove, 'I didn't get this opportunity to bring in a new piece of business or whatever, because I'm the Black girl or whatever?' So, because you can't prove that and it's just a feeling, it makes you feel powerless.

Additionally, Victor from Dallas also supports the belief that racism and discrimination were too subjective to pinpoint:

> I don't want to say that it[6] doesn't exist, but it's not as prevalent. You have to look at the issues surrounding it, verses 'was I denied because of race,' 'was I denied because the situation may have called for maybe a skillset that was different than mine, a level of expertise that may be a little different than mine?' But, I do think that it may have been times when I could have done something and was not given the opportunity because of … well, I guess -- what I am trying to say is, I don't think I can ever really think of a time I was denied because of race. I really think it was because at the time I didn't really have the perfect skillset. Now, do I feel I could have done [the job]? Absolutely. Do I feel as though there may have been

[6] Victor's usage of " it" refers to racism and discrimination.

> some factors that caused the people in power not to want to take the chance at the time? Absolutely. [But,] It's subjective, and you don't really know what's in someone's mind.

*Racism and Discrimination Manifested in Inequality and Discriminatory Supervision*

Although participants felt that racism and discrimination were often too subjective to pinpoint, they were able to recount several experiences with covert or overt racism in their career. These encounters with racism and discrimination were mainly manifested in *racial inequality and discriminatory supervision*. Before examining how African Americans use mentorship to overcome racism and discrimination, it is important to first understand the types of racism and discrimination that have manifested in their careers. The following section will discuss participants' experiences with each of these themes.

Participants reported difficulty with *racial inequality* in the workplace. Specifically, participants reported being held to lower standards than their White co-workers. For example, Gladys from Houston explained that because of her race, in the workplace, people assume she is not very knowledgeable:

> There are times when people clearly don't expect me to know as much as I do, but when they find out I know what I'm talking about – I mean they don't mean it in a racist way, but they're like, 'Ohhh! You know about that?' And, it's like duh; I work here (laughter).

When asked why she doesn't consider it racism, Gladys explained that at an early age she was taught that she would likely be held to lower standards because she is African American:

> I went to Lamar High School[7], and my debate coach told me something very true. He said, "well it could work for you, or it could work against you. Some people are going to look at you and say, 'oh, that Black gal doesn't know anything about anything,' and there are going to be other people who are so surprised you can string two sentences together that they're going to say, 'She won! She was the best!'" And, that has been true my whole career, sometimes you benefit from people's low expectations of you, sad but true. And there are other times people decide, 'well she's Black and…' – I had a boss one time tell me, 'well, I know you're probably from one of the wards[8], but…' (laughter) [and I thought] you don't know where I'm from. So yeah, people will sometimes let you know, 'we don't expect you to know much, we know we're going to have to teach you a lot' (chuckles).

Jasmine from Dallas explained a similar situation in which she was assigned less work than her White co-worker while interning for a predominately White firm. Jasmine believed that she experienced inequality because of her race. :

> One of my internships in college was for a predominately White firm, and I was literally the only person of color and I was only an intern. There was no one that looked like me. I actually started interning at the same time another girl started interning, and of course she was something cutout of a magazine. She was a SMU student, I was only from UTA, and we had the same desk. And, then ironically, the next day I got moved to the receptionist desk, so all of a sudden the work that we were doing equally, which was media research, compiling media databases,

[7] Lamar High School is located in an affluent area of Houston, Texas.
[8] In Houston, Texas "The Wards" are typically considered the poorest areas of the city.

> and reviewing press releases, was no longer. She was doing it all, and I was put at the receptionist desk, and I was only told to format her media databases, answer the calls and the general inbox, and the "info" email address inbox. And, I actually got out of that internship, just because they totally made me feel uncomfortable.

*Discriminatory supervision,* or a supervisor's unwillingness to provide guidance to employees because of race, was another form of racism identified by participants. For example, Jasmine explained that the treatment she received from her supervisor and mentor during her internship was not equivalent to the treatment her White co-worker received. Jasmine believed that her White supervisor preferred her White co-worker more, because of her race:

> When I walked in I was the eager intern, so they actually paired you up with someone who was supposed to be a mentor-mentee relationship. And, I went to my mentor everyday and I was like, 'hey how are you? So, how do we get started?' (And the mentor would interrupt her and respond coldly) 'Oh, you're at the receptionist desk, and all your assignments are emailed to you.' And, then when she came in (the White intern), she (the mentor) was like, 'Hey! How are you? How's everything going? How's your day going?' and it was definitely friendlier than the cold rundown that I got.

Several other participants within this study also described *discriminatory supervision*. For example, Darrell explained a time when he asked his supervisor for help, and she offered little support, and later criticized him for doing the work

improperly. Darrell believed his experience with discriminatory supervision was related to race, and that it was a form of covert racism:

> I had to write a media plan, they had a crunch time. I asked [my supervisor] for a template, because I had never written a media plan before, and she sent me a template and I was thinking, 'OK, what am I supposed to do here?' I didn't ask her that, it was just in my mind, 'what am I supposed to do?' I asked her to help me out like, 'how do I do this?' And, she was like, 'you don't know how to do this?' So, I just took the work and pretty much regurgitated what she had, because I didn't have a clue what I was doing. And, then I gave it to her, and she was like, 'you copied the same exact thing that I had.' And, I was like, 'you didn't even help me out, you wouldn't even help me out with stuff at all.' That's probably one of the few instances that I ever was like, 'hmm, I think I'm going to leave this person alone it doesn't look like they want to help me out, they don't even want to help me succeed…You know what I think? I think it was covert freaking racism! That's what I think that was. She couldn't say it; she could just be straight-up racist towards me, she would have gotten fired. She just did not like me. I didn't do anything to her, it was just one of those weird things.

*Mentorship, Racism and Discrimination*

Now that I have established that participants have encountered racism and discrimination in their careers, I can address research question one. Participants did perceive that mentorship assisted with overcoming racism and discrimination, and they felt this was mainly because mentorship provided *psychological support*. Psychological support was the only way that participants perceived that mentorship assisted with

overcoming racism and discrimination. Eight of the 11 participants felt that mentorship provided psychological support to help deal with encounters with racism and discrimination. The majority of participants said that they had consulted with a mentor to resolve an issue with racism or discrimination in the workplace at some point in their career. Erik from Maryland captured this sentiment best with the following statement:

> If you have a good mentor, they're almost like a professional psychologist. It's someone you can talk to, and get stuff off your chest. If you hold that stuff in it can present problems for you, you'll walk around with a chip on your shoulder. Your mentor recognizes that, and will try to help you to make sure you don't have that chip on your shoulder, so you don't internalize that. They'll help you have a short memory, and put you on a pathway where you can overcome that situation.

However, other participants did not see the role of mentorship in this way. For example, Reba from San Antonio, Texas felt that mentoring couldn't help African Americans in public relations overcome racism and discrimination, because the ability to overcome is not a lesson that can be taught:

> [Racism and discrimination] is not our problem to overcome, that's [the racist's] problem to overcome. I don't talk to racists, I just move on. A mentor can't help [you overcome racism and discrimination]; it's just something you have to learn yourself, because you have to have confidence and thick skin.

*Additional Methods for Overcoming Racism and Discrimination*

I explored additional methods used by African Americans for overcoming racism and discrimination, because I was curious about how racism and discrimination were mitigated without a mentor. In addition to using mentoring to alleviate encounters with

racism and discrimination, participants cited *overachieving and avoidance/switching jobs* as methods for overcoming and coping with encounters with racism and discrimination. For example, Andrew from Maryland explained that African Americans had to overachieve in the industry. As a result he has acquired additional skills such as speaking Spanish:

> I worked for a water utility and there was a big water main break, and a street was shut down and there was a hospital where the water pressure was low, and it was an emergency. Well guess what? Even with the police mobile unit, the fire department, and the Department of Public Health, I was the communications lead. And, they did not like taking it from me, because the majority of police officers in that part of Virginia are White. They see my strategy in directing people and then (utters a phrase in fluent Spanish), when I speak Spanish they're like, 'Whoa, and you speak Spanish?' I took that on my own, why? Because I want a leg up, and I'm bringing more value. Those are the things we have to do.

Additionally, several participants left their job or avoided their supervisor as a coping mechanism for racism and discrimination in the workplace. Darrell from Dallas explained his method of avoiding an internship supervisor, whom he felt was discriminating against him. To ease the stress of working with a discriminatory supervisor, Darrell avoided his supervisor and learned to operate with minimal supervisory support:

> I ended up just making sure we had decent conversations. And, I made sure that I learned whatever I needed to do, so when I approached her I asked her questions to add on to what I had already done, not asking her questions for her to teach me

> anything. She started to see I was a competent person. We made it more of a business conversation; we never hung out after work or anything like that. I did not hangout with her at all. I just wanted to make sure that the work life was doable and workable, and I found that was my easiest way to get over it[9].

When participants were not provided guidance and support from their supervisors because of their race, it made completing their job an uncomfortable task. When faced with a similar situation as Darrell, Jasmine from Dallas quit her job:

> Well I left, only because I am the type of person who doesn't want to work for someone if I feel uncomfortable. So no matter how much pride I have, no matter how much I tell myself, 'I'm going to go in there and show them. I'm going to go in there and demand respect. I'm going to demand getting work,' it's pointless to me. Only because I would be going in miserable or fighting everyday, fighting the same fight. And, I don't want to go into a workplace where I have to fight or demand respect, when I think that every human being deserves the right to respect. So, I removed myself from that uncomfortable situation and consider it as their loss.

*Unique Theme: Systemic Acceptance Attitude*

Lastly, within the data I noticed a pattern of systemic acceptance of racism and discrimination. This was an unintended finding that I felt contributed significantly to this study. It seemed that participants felt that because they are African American they will inevitably experience discrimination and racism throughout their career. Participants have acquired a *systemic acceptance attitude*, which means they acknowledge and accept that

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[9] By "it" Darrell is referring to the racial discrimination he had encountered in the workplace, while working with a discriminatory supervisor

racism and discrimination are inescapable, because they are a part of the dominant ideology of society. As Andrew from Maryland explained racism is apart of the nature of society:

> [We can't] be overly sensitive, now if they do something that's completely cruddy and completely unethical that's one thing, but even if you own your own firm your clients can be racist to you, that's just the nature of things because people are brainwashed . . . understand that we live in a society that's still driven by race and class, and no matter where you go, you're still going to be who you are, I don't care how high you get. I'm still going to be looked upon as an African American male.

*RQ2: In what ways does mentoring contribute to the perceived job satisfaction of African American public relations practitioners?*

Participants perceived that mentoring contributes to the job satisfaction of African Americans in public relations. *The benefits of certain characteristics of mentors*, *early career mentoring,* and *mentor modeling* emerged as the main themes that may impact the job satisfaction of African Americans in public relations. Each main theme contained subthemes, which are outlined in the following paragraphs. *Obligatory mentorship* emerged as a unique theme of job satisfaction. The following will provide data for these findings

*Benefits of Certain Characteristics of Mentors*

The majority of participants had no specific preference for their mentor's physical characteristics. However, participants reported that *commonality or* shared characteristics impact a mentee's job satisfaction. Specifically, participants perceive that a mentor's

gender, race, and career level impact a mentee's job satisfaction. The following will provide data for these findings.

*Mentor's race and gender*. Most participants had no preference for their mentor's characteristics, however having a mentor of the same gender and race was viewed as a positive, because of *commonality*. Participants perceive that commonality provides greater assistance for African Americans in public relations, because it increases the likelihood of shared experiences and understanding. The majority of participants felt that having at least one mentor of the same race and gender would increase the likelihood the mentor had experienced racial career barriers their mentee would likely encountered. Additionally, participants felt if the mentor was of the same race and gender they could better assist their mentee with overcoming racial career barriers, because of their prior personal experience. For example, Ian from Houston initially claimed that he had no race or gender preference when selecting a mentor. However, he later explained that in unique situations he had sought a mentor of the same race, because they could help him through those unique situations:

> I think that when it comes to business, business is business and people want production, and they want success and their goals reached regardless of what race the person is. So, it's not really that significant to me, to others it may be significant, but not to me. There are those individuals who need to see someone like them, with whom they can communicate similarities, culture. But, I would say if I can sum it up, even though there needs to be some attention in some instances, in the majority of cases, I really don't believe race and gender are important.

However, Ian added that having a mentor with similar characteristics would have several benefits:

> There are not many African Americans in public relations for many reasons, and because there are so few it's important that those who have been there, who have had success, are able to mentor those who are hopeful of becoming successful. And, I believe very strongly that even though it sounds initially like I'm sort of countering what I said earlier about race and gender not mattering, at the same time even if I'm at a company and there is not an African American who can mentor me, if I know that there is an African American perhaps even at another company who has been successful, I can at least find out from them those unique situations that they felt as an African American they've experienced along the way that can help me through it.

A few participants were passionate that African Americans should only have African American mentors, because it is essential to the success of African Americans in public relations. For example, Joyce from Houston explained:

> For the most part the majority, i.e. Caucasians, don't get it. They don't get it. They don't get where we're coming from, they don't necessarily get our point-of-view, and so, they feel that the same things that apply or are relevant to the majority should be the same things that apply and are relevant to people of color, and that's not necessarily the case… [my] mentor was not African-American, and it wasn't until last year that I really did some serious thinking about this and realized that I feel that my career has suffered because I did not have an African-American mentor. And, because of that I sought someone out, an African-

> American female, and asked her to mentor me… We've not developed a relationship, a really close relationship, [but] we've been able to talk honestly about things that we've encountered… [And, I think it's important for African Americans to have African American mentors] because of the likelihood of similar backgrounds and similar experiences.

*Mentor's career level*. Participants also felt that mentors should have more experience than their mentee, and have achieved a certain level of success in their own careers. These factors were shown to contribute to the perceived job satisfaction of participants, because it made it easier for the mentee to navigate the field with an experienced mentor. For example, Joyce from Houston explained that a mentor who has experience is able to show you the ropes:

> You want someone who is ahead of you in the career path -- I mean you wouldn't want someone where you're on a higher-level than they are, and they're trying to get to where you are. As you're navigating the career path you want someone who has the experience that you're moving toward. As an example, if you are in a position where, you are just now starting to deal with the say the chief executive officer, then you need to know how to maybe conduct yourself, handle yourself in those situations, if that person hasn't had that experience then they're guessing as much as you are. So, you need someone to show you the ropes.

Additionally, Participants seemed to have increased job satisfaction when their supervisor was also their mentor, because they worked in close proximity, received feedback, hands-on training and possible promotions for doing well in the workplace. For

example, Darrell from Dallas explained that his mentor trained and empowered him to better communicate with clients:

> My boss has actually been my best main mentor, not just because I work with her, but also because she has helped me understand how to communicate with clients, and be confident in my communication with clients. That was something before that I didn't really have. I mean I knew how to talk to them, but I would kind of just let her do all the talking. But, like now I don't even need her anymore, I don't need her help I can do it myself, because I understand. She empowered me and told me, 'hey, this is how you need to talk to them, you need to let them know that you are smart, you are confident. You need to talk to them and let it be known.'

*Multiple mentors*. Participants believed that having multiple mentors could have a positive impact on career growth and job satisfaction among African Americans. Additionally, participants felt mentors should be selected based upon the mentee's career goals and aspirations. Multiple mentors were seem as a positive in early career levels because the mentee could gain exposure to a variety of specializations in public relations. For example, Jasmine from Dallas said she wished she had multiple mentors to gain a diversity of perspectives:

> Being a young professional I wish I had multiple mentors just because there's so many areas of public relations I'd like to tap into. Public relations is multidimensional, so having people in all those areas, even if it's not all, but it's just like the top three areas that you're interested in it… It would be good to have a mentor in every area, because one mentor is not going to know everything,

> they're only going to know what they experienced, as well as what they've been used to working. So, having multiple mentors is good leverage.

*Importance of Early Career Mentoring*

The majority of participants met their mentor on the job, because they shared common interests or because the mentor took an interest in the mentee's growth. For example, Victor from Houston explained that his supervisor became his mentor because he saw his aptitude, "[I met my most significant mentor] on the job. [He was a] supervisor, and he wanted to make sure that people who showed an aptitude and an interest and the energy to work were successful. And, he just took the additional time to make sure that I understood the field."

Early career mentoring also seems to be important for African Americans, because mentors provide several benefits, which assisted with achieving job satisfaction. The participants reported that mentors gained in the early formative years of a mentee's career boosted confidence and provided guidance. The following quote from Gabrielle from Dallas supports this notion, "I would say [my mentor taught me] confidence. Confidence in what you're saying and confidence in your knowledge of the industry."

In addition, Cameron from Maryland said his mentor, who was a family friend, helped guide his career:

> My first year in undergrad I declared my major and it was going to be sociology and then I said, 'you know what this is boring' (laughter). So, then I had a chat with my mentor about her career track in public relations and what it entailed, and that was probably my first consultation as a mentor and mentee so to speak, with

her. And, then throughout my career, I could always fall back on her help with questions.

*Mentor Modeling*

The results also suggested an inclination among African Americans for mentor modeling, which was related to early career mentoring. I have found that because of mentor modeling, or the desire of the mentee to emulate their mentor's work habits, organizational beliefs and attitude, mentoring was the most impactful in the formative years of a mentee's career. Mentees often adopted their mentor's attitude towards their workplace and career, which impacted their job satisfaction. When the mentors enjoyed their jobs, their mentees valued their jobs as well. The following statement from Gabrielle in Dallas illustrated that a mentor can have a positive or negative impact on one's attitude towards one's job:

> It can either be a positive or negative effect on your job just because you know instinctively you're going to look up to [your mentor], and their opinions or attitudes will filter into your thought process at some point. It might not overtake it completely, but once you weigh the pros and cons of how you could have resolved the situations better you're going to have that voice in your head (the voice of your mentor).

*Unique Theme: Obligatory Mentorship*

Once African American mentees reached a certain level of success they seemed to experience *obligatory mentorship*, which means that because they had achieved success they felt a mandatory need to reach back and mentor others, specifically young African Americans beginning their careers in public relations. Participants who spoke of

obligatory mentorship specifically explained the duty that they feel to mentor the next generation of African American practitioners. This theme emerged in three participant's interviews. Gladys from Houston explained this theme best with the following quote:

> I feel responsible to those coming behind me to let them get the benefit of everything that has happened to me in the last 20 years. I think it's important that we don't hold back from each other. People who are not of color may have more opportunities to network. African Americans especially need to talk to other African Americans who have been down the road.

*RQ3: In what ways does mentoring contribute to the retention, promotion and salary growth of African American public relations practitioners?*

Participants perceived that there is, in general, low organizational recruitment and retention of African Americans in public relations. Recruitment and retention were shown to directly relate to mentorship, while promotion and salary growth were shown to indirectly relate to mentorship. *Perceived organization commitment* emerged as a unique theme in the role of mentoring in retention. *Mentor's company clout / mentor's positive company image* emerged as unique themes in the role of mentoring in promotion. The following will provide support for these findings, as well as outline unique themes identified for retention and promotion.

*Retention and Recruitment in General*

Participants are unaware of any strides currently being made by organizations or agencies to assist with the recruitment and retention of African Americans in public relations. For example, Cameron from Maryland said within his career he has not seen much done to encourage diversity:

> From my vantage point it looks that there's a lot of work that needs to be done. In my 14-year career there hasn't been a lot of communal groups or efforts in the agencies or environments that I've worked in that supported or encouraged any kind of real diversity particularly of the African American perspective.

Participants identified college campus recruiting, job fairs and professional organizations such as The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and The Black Public Relations Association (BPRS), as means of recruiting African Americans. For example, Erik from Washington D.C. explained that he had personally seen organizations recruit through BPRS, "Well in my experience, what I've seen is a lot of companies reaching out to secure African American professionals through professional organizations like the Black Public Relations Society."

Additionally, a few participants seemed upset about the current retention and recruitment of African Americans. "They don't want to hire us, let alone retain us," was the statement Gladys from Houston gave when asked about the retention and recruitment of African Americans in public relations.

*Mentorship and Retention*

Mentorship is directly related to retention through fostering organizational commitment among African Americans. Having a mentor in the workplace seemed to make African American mentees want to stay with employers longer because of the relationship they held with their mentor. For example, Darrell from Dallas stated he was on his third year at his job and he was staying with the company not only because he likes what he does, but also because the mentorship and guidance he receives from his mentor and supervisor keeps him motivated to excel and achieve more within that company:

> A good mentor can help you grow into your career, and wants to help you grow where you are. So, if you're talking to them on a normal basis and you're talking about different things, more than likely they give you ideas and tips for how you can succeed in that company you're at, or move on to the next role. Obviously, there are times when, if you're really unhappy at your job and you're talking to them saying you can't do it anymore, then of course a mentor is not going to tell you don't leave, or you can't leave you need to stay there. I think next year it'll be going into my third year [at my current job] and not only am I staying there because I like what I do, but the mentorship and guidance that I'm getting is keeping me motivated to keep increasing and wanting to go to a higher level within the company, and really help the company as much as I can.

Additionally, Ian from Houston explained that everyone should have mentors, not just African Americans, and if increasing African Americans is the focus, mentoring can increase inclusion:

> No one wants to feel as if having a mentor for African Americans is a sign of weakness, that African Americans must have a mentor while everyone else can be successful without them. It is important that everyone have a mentor, but if we're trying to be more inclusive then having a mentor -- my mentor was not African American -- it helps African Americans to become acclimated more quickly and to be accepted more quickly and to be enabled to do the job, and to do it more quickly.

Ian went on to say that having a good mentor could possibly cut down on employee failure and turnover among other things:

> So, really if used correctly the mentor gives the mentee an inside to success verses someone who was hired by the company where there was no formal training or informal training, and then they're just out there absorbing things almost by osmosis in many cases. There's a direct injection of knowledge and information and immediate feedback that is vital I think to the success of that individual. I just wish every company could afford, because they can't, to provide a mentor. We would have fewer people who failed at the job, probably less turnover, probably it would effect or impact retention greatly, just all kinds of positives about having a mentor.

*Mentoring's Role in Promotion and Salary Growth*

Mentoring seemed to have an indirect relation to promotion and salary growth among African Americans. Participants felt no direct links existed between mentoring, promotion, and salary growth. Instead, participants felt that promotions and salary increases were a direct result of mentee's hard work, and indirectly a result of a mentors guidance and support. Nine participants said they had indirectly received salary increases because of a mentor.

All participants agreed, as Darrell from Dallas explained that mentors only provide support, which the mentee can translate into a salary increase or promotions:

> A mentor kind of helps push you to be more than what you are, you know? [They] help you improve to get to the next level. With that type of motivation behind you as you carry on through your career, that affects everything that you're doing and helps you have the earning potential; maybe not immediately but maybe a couple years down the line that motivation can help you get raises and stuff like that.

In addition, Gabrielle from Dallas explained, "mentors don't get you a salary increase. You do. You [have to] bring your insight, knowledge, wisdom, and recommendations from the mentoring and implement that [to earn a salary increase]."

*Mentor's company clout / mentor's positive company image*. Only in situations where the mentor was also a supervisor or a person with organizational clout did participants feel that a mentor would have the ability to positively influence a promotion or salary increase. In this situation the mentor's clout would give them the ability to talk on the mentee's behalf. For example, Gabrielle of Dallas explained that having mentors with company clout, helped her earn promotions and salary increases:

> Megan was my direct supervisor, but because she was my direct supervisor she saw my potential, and she saw me trying, and she was able to give me advice or help me in a situation that propelled me to do well in front of our director, you know? But, because Zain is like the Chief Strategist of the agency he has the ear of the founder of the company, and he has the ear of my director as well. So, even though the chief operating officer or the founder of the company can't promote, or whatever just because of what Zain says, they see me in a different light. So, honestly I just have to thank God that it was a perfect combination of someone who was right over me and someone who was multiple steps [ahead] so I could see from the top-down and from where I am up.

*Additional Findings: Advice to African Americans Entering Public Relations*

At the conclusion of each interview I asked participants what additional advice they would like to offer other African Americans in public relations. Overall participants believe that African Americans should find a mentor, gain experience, sharpen weak

skills and join professional organizations. For example, Victor from Dallas believes that mentoring makes a career difference. He advises African Americans in public relations to, "seek a mentor you trust, who is positive and that can make a positive difference for you early in your career."

Participants also believed that African Americans should gain experience. Darrell from Dallas encourages African Americans to "do internships and work at a public relations firm for free if necessary, but get experience." Additionally, participants believe African Americans should focus on a strong skillset. For example, Gladys from Houston encourages African American practitioners to, "know your stuff, grammar and editing; be honest with yourself, go get help in areas where you are weak. "

Lastly, participants also believe that joining professional organizations is beneficial. For example, Joyce from Houston believes professional organizations can help you advance and expand your network:

> Join [professional organizations] whether it's Public Relations Society of America, IABC, and American Marketing Association, join several organizations and volunteer for committees. Make yourself known; integrate yourself as much as possible into the mainstream. Because more and more in terms of advancement, it's about whom you know, and whom you're connected with, which can help get you in the door and help you make those contacts [to excel your career].

# Chapter Five

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study have added to the current body of knowledge concerning the effects of mentorship on early career success among African-Americans in public relations. The study successfully supported several of my initial propositions. First, the results showed that participants perceived mentorship as assistance for overcoming racial barriers in their careers. Second, mentoring was shown to contribute to the perceived career success of participants, which includes job satisfaction and retention. And third, the results shed light on participant's encounters with racism and discrimination, and revealed several unique themes.

Conversely, my initial propositions regarding salary growth and promotion were not supported. I initially theorized that mentorship directly affects promotion and salary growth; however, the role of mentorship in promotion and salary growth seemed to be indirect. Instead salary growth and promotion were shown to directly relate to the mentees' work effort. However, participants perceived that, if applied correctly by the mentee, a mentor's advice and guidance could indirectly assist a mentee with earning a promotion or salary increase.

### *Theoretical Implications*

*Towards a model of mentorship and career success.* The results indicate that the projected career success and mentorship model (see Figure 1) needs to be refined. As depicted in the revised model (see Figure 2), employee mentorship assists African Americans with overcoming racial barriers and achieving career success. Specifically, mentorship directly influences the retention and job satisfaction of African Americans.

The revised model also depicts the indirect relationship between mentorship, promotion and salary growth. Because even in situations when the mentor is also a supervisor, the promotion or salary increase is ultimately based on the mentee's job performance. In all cases, advice given to the mentee by the mentor indirectly impacts the mentee's ability to earn a salary increase or promotion.

*Figure 2*. Career Success and Mentorship Model

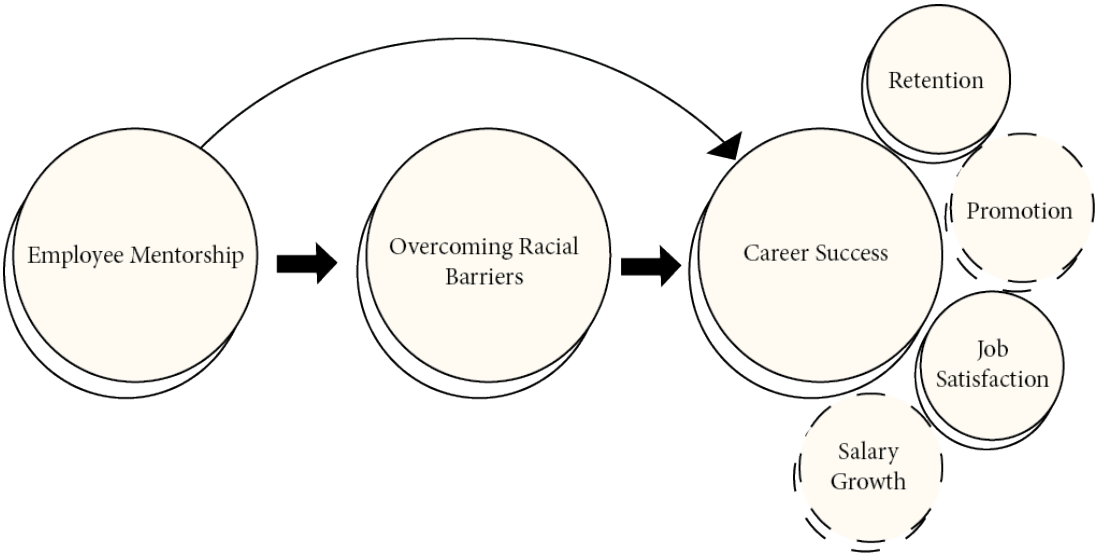


*Figure 2*: This model depicts the role of mentorship in career success. The model illustrates that mentorship directly leads to career success, and that mentorship can also lead to the ability to overcome racial barriers, which assists with achieving career success. Within the model, career success is connected to circles with dotted and solid lines. The circles with solid lines indicate a direct relationship between that variable and career success. The circles with dotted lines indicate an indirect relationship between that variable and career success.

*Mentorship*. Mentorship was shown to be extremely important to African Americans in public relations. Mentorship was proven to help African Americans grow

professionally and personally (Fawcett, 2002). Participants did not show a preference for informal or formal mentor relationships, but cited a need for mentorship at the beginning of their careers to assist with building their network, gaining guidance and confidence. The coaching, supporting and sponsoring functions of mentorship were also shown to impact compensation, promotion, and job satisfaction (Turban & Dougherty, 1994), although not all factors were shown to have direct links to mentorship. Likewise, in situations where the mentee's mentor had organizational clout or a respected status within the organization, the mentee was more likely to receive a promotion or salary increase.

Participants reported that they were more inclined to adopt their mentor's work habits, organizational beliefs and attitude towards their job. Because of mentor modeling a mentor's positive or negative feelings towards a job or organization will more than likely be emulated by his/her mentee. For example, when a mentor leaves a company the mentee is likely to leave as well. And, when a mentee is feeling unhappy with their job, advice from their mentor can typically help them feel more satisfied. Mentor modeling is similar to the role modeling identified by Ensher et al. (2001).

Additionally, once a mentee achieves a level of success he/she feels inclined to "reach back" to mentor others who are of their same race. This desire of African American practitioners to reach back to assist the next generation of African American practitioners may point to a form of self-perseveration among African Americans, in regards to furthering the success of other, less experienced African Americans in the field. This may also be linked to the findings of Tsui & O'Reilly (1989), which suggest that within organizations where mentoring is informal, mentors select protégées who are like themselves. Exploring why African American in public relations feel a desire to

assist other African American in the field could possibly be explored in greater detail in future research.

The African Americans interviewed felt that mentorship was significant and mentees learned more on the job than those without mentors, because of the benefits mentorship offers (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Additionally, the results confirm that management of racial barriers is a psychological benefit of mentorship among African Americans interviewed. This finding adds a new dimension to the psychological benefits of mentorship identified in previous literature (Chao et al., 1992; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins, 1997; Siegel et al., 2001). Additionally, because mentorship seems to help African Americans with overcoming and coping with racism and discrimination in the workplace, I believe that this confirms the findings of Siegel et al. (2001), that positive mentorship can reduce stress and to an extent it can increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

*Retention and recruitment*. Participants perceive that recruitment and retention of African Americans is low, which provides support that the diversity deficit exists. Some participants were skeptical of their organization's commitment to diversity, as identified by Hon and Brunner (2000), and felt that little was being done to increase representation of minorities within organizations. Additionally, when recruitment for African Americans in public relations occurs it was done mainly through professional organizations (e.g. PRSA and BPRS and historically Black colleges and universities).

The results also supported the existence of othering and the racial divisions that exist within the public relations habitus, as explained by Edwards (2010). Similar to Tindall's (2009) study, participants cited incidents of tokenism, racism, discrimination

and limited opportunities for advancement were barriers they encountered. Participants expressed that they expected to be othered and treated unequally because it is the nature of the system and it is difficult to change. I labeled this acceptance and expectation of unfair treatment the systemic acceptance attitude.

Conversely, although participants expressed a systemic acceptance attitude it is evidence throughout the study that African Americans have found ways to empower themselves and cope with racial divisions in the public relations habitus. For example, participants often cited overcompensation as a coping tactic for unfair treatment in the workplace. Rather than be a victim of the negative stigmas placed on African Americans because of their race, African Americans have empowered themselves by working harder to transcend negative stigmas

Pompper (2004) identified the need felt by African Americans in public relations to overcompensating for acceptance. The findings of this study support Pompper's (2004) findings. African Americans reported overcompensating for acceptance to prove their worth to their colleagues, supervisors, and organizations. It is possible that overcompensation may be a form of stereotype negation for African American mentees, because they acquire new skills and attempt to excel in areas to separate themselves from racial stereotypes. Future research in this area should further explore overcompensation as a form stereotype negation.

Racism and discrimination were identified as barriers to retention. Overall, participants felt racism and discrimination were too hard to pinpoint, but participants revealed experiences with racial inequality and discriminatory supervision. Discriminatory supervision is linked to employee engagement. This further supports

scholarship regarding employee engagement. Discriminatory supervision and employee engagement are linked; discriminatory supervision represents a new form of low engagement.

Leader member exchange theory and perceived organization support were shown to relate to the ability of African Americans to overcome racial barriers. When African American employees did not experience LMX at the same levels as their non-African American peers it lead to increased work effort and higher turnover. Work effort increased as an attempt to gain favor from the supervisor, thereby increasing LMX.

*Job satisfaction*. Participants perceive that mentorship contributes to job satisfaction. Because of the closeness of a positive mentor-mentee relationship, a mentor's advice, example, or encouragement was shown to directly increase the mentee's job satisfaction, performance and retention. Interestingly, participants felt that having a mentor of the same race and gender would lead to greater career success, because the mentee and mentor would share greater commonalities. This is not necessarily in line with Tam et al.'s (1995) suggestion that mentees with White male mentees achieve greater career success. It appears that good or positive mentorship is key, as opposed to the race and gender of the mentor. However, African Americans interviewed suggest that other African Americans in the field a can achieve the greatest career success with at least one mentor of the same race and gender.

I did not determine any differences in the career mobility of participants because of their mentor's race or gender. Participants desired to gain multiple and diverse perspectives about the public relations industry, and to learn from a mentor who may have experienced similar racial and gender inequalities within their career. As a result

participants reported seeking a mentor of the same race and gender, and a desire to have additional mentors who belonged to different racial and gender groups.

Participants were open to multiple mentors of diverse races because they felt multiple mentors would increase their exposures to diverse industry perspectives (Baugh & Scandura, 1999). Additionally, participants did not report difficultly finding mentors who belonged to different racial groups, which is contrary to the findings of Tindall (2009b). If multiple racial groups were represented within their organization, the participants were able to form cross-racial mentorship relationship. However, the majority of participants expressed a desire and preference to have at least one mentor of the same race and gender.

The results of this study and previous research conducted in this field suggest that African Americans should seek multiple mentors. Specifically, African Americans should seek two to three mentors, ensuring they have one mentor of the same race and gender who holds a senior position, and one mentor who is a direct supervisor and/or a White male mentor supervisor (Tam et al., 1995; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

*Core theories examined*. Additionally, the findings of this study support Leader Member Exchange theory (LMX). Participants reported that interaction between them and their supervisors played a significant role in their performance and attitude towards their job, which supported the findings of Gerstner and Day (1997) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). LMX played a pivotal role in participant's careers and directly impacted their levels of retention. If a supervisor's interactions were negative, unsupportive or unfair, the participants reported that they avoided them and/or switched jobs.

However, both low and high LMX among African Americans resulted in greater

employee effort, which was contrary to the findings of Green et al. (1983). When interactions with a supervisor were negative, the African Americans interviewed worked harder to earn the respect of their supervisor. However, if the goal is to retain African Americans there must be positive LMX. This would cause more African Americans in public relations to feel higher levels of job satisfaction, thereby decreasing the racial diversity deficit. Conversely, mentoring was not shown to increase perceived organizational support. Having a positive mentor relationship did not make participants feel that their organization provided them greater support. However, participants were willing to stay with an organization longer to avoid ending their relationship with their mentor.

The social exchange theory was shown to apply to participants within this study. The give-and-take nature of positive social exchange relationships (e.g. mentorship) caused participants to trust their mentors more and have greater productivity (Forret & Love, 2008). Additionally, this study also supported the importance of the achievement goal theory, which suggests employees' job performance and job satisfaction is correlated with their goal orientations (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). The African American interviewed reported that they relied heavily on the mentorship to develop competence, gaining skills, and to an extent, do their best on their jobs (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). Without this support participants were more likely to leave their organization.

*Practical Implications*

Several practical implications can be suggested from the results of this study. First results of this study can be used to give organizations insight to what it takes to recruit and retain more African Americans. Organizations should create an environment that

encourages diversity. Additionally, more provisions should be made that encourage the inclusion of African Americans within organizations. For example, by encouraging the mentorship of newly hired African American employees by senior employees of varying races and genders, organizations would increase the inclusion and the retention of diverse employees, specifically African Americans.

To succeed in public relations participants advise that African Americans in public relations should find a mentor, gain experience, sharpen weak skills and join professional organizations. The results suggest that once African-Americans enter the workforce, having a mentor can assist them with overcoming racism and discrimination. Mentorship was shown to have strong psychological benefits among African Americans, to the extent that mentors were often seen as unofficial professional psychologists to mentees. This supports and adds a new dimension to current literature which established the benefits of mentorship as self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, friendship, counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and sharing beyond work (Chao et al., 1992; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins, 1997; Siegel et al., 2001). Additionally, the information from this study can be utilized by groups such Public Relations Society of American and the National Black Public Relations Society to educate its members on the personal, professional and organizational benefits of mentorship.

*Limitations of Study and Future Research*

Overall, this study contained limitations regarding the participants' interpretation of mentorship, racism and discrimination, and participant demographics. First, within this study participants were not given a definition of mentorship. Each participant reported on their experience with mentorship based upon their perception of mentorship. To counter

this weakness, participants were asked several probing questions to gather a complete picture of their view of mentorship. To add greater clarity, future studies may choose to provide a definitive definition of mentorship in addition to probes.

The second weakness of this study is similar to the first weakness; participants were not given definitions of racism and discrimination. As a result, initially participants seemed uncertain about identifying racism and discrimination in their careers. However, I countered this weakness by providing participants with scenarios of various types of racism and discrimination. Providing descriptive scenarios assisted the participants with recalling their encounters with racism and discrimination. However, adding definitions in addition to the scenarios may have provided additional assistance.

Additionally, future studies should be designed to counteract personal/group discrimination discrepancy (PGDD), which states that people do not associate themselves with negative stigmas that are associated with their group (Hodson & Esses, 2002). Hodson and Esses (2002) suggests people chose to associate themselves with positive attributes about their group, and to protect themselves they disassociate with negative attributes of their groups. In addition to problems with definitions, this may also explain why some participants were uncertain if they had experienced racism or discrimination. Future studies of this nature should create an interview protocol that counteracts the effects of PGDD.

The third weakness of this study was related to the demographics of the participants, specifically their location, gender and age. The participants in this study were located in Texas (specifically Houston, Dallas and San Antonio) and the upper east coast of the United States of America (specifically, Maryland and Washington D.C.).

Some might argue that participants should have been recruited from a single geographic location. However, I felt that recruiting participants from different geographic locations provided a more encompassing study of African Americans' experiences. And, although participants varied in their locations the data reached saturation.

The participants also varied in their genders and ages. There were six males and five females, and the oldest participant was 61 and the youngest was 23. There are several major differences in the experiences of men and women, especially in mentorship and public relations (Tam et al., 1995). Additionally, the recognition of the generation groups such as baby boomers, generation X and generation Y, signifies the differences that exist among age groups. Because of the unique relationship between race, gender and age, conducting gender and age specific studies could lead to discovering experiences unique to targeted demographic groups.

Lastly, future research in this area should focus on longitudinal studies of African American public relations practitioners' experiences with mentorship. Longitudinal studies could examine African Americans' experiences with early career, mid-career and late career mentorship in public relations. Turning points with mentorship could be examined in this type of longitudinal study with in-depth interviews, surveys or focus groups. Furthermore, conducting a similar study with the inclusion of focus groups could lead to rich descriptions that can further research in this area.

*Appendix A*
Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible.

Gender:

○ Male ○ Female

Age: _____

Highest Level of Education:

○ High School ○ Some College ○ Associates Degree ○ Bachelor's Degree ○ Postgraduate

Job Title: (Ex: public relations specialist, communication technician, spokesperson, etc.)

_____

Industry: (Ex: healthcare, oil and gas, education, etc.)

_____

How many years have you worked in public relations? _____

‘

*Appendix B*
Interview Protocol

I'd like to begin by discussing the recruitment and retention of African Americans in public relations:

1. In general, what strategies assist with the recruitment and retention of African Americans in public relations? Please explain.

Now, I would like to discuss mentoring in public relations:

2. Have you had a mentor in your career? Why or why not?
3. Have you had multiple mentors in your career? If so, how important is it to have multiple mentors? Why?
4. Please describe the most significant mentor relationship in your career.
    a. How did you meet that mentor? Why?
    b. How long were you mentored? Why?
    c. What did that mentor teach you? How did that impact your career? Why?

4a. If you haven't had a mentor, please describe your ideal mentor relationship.

    a. How would you prefer to meet your ideal mentor? Why?
    b. How long would you prefer to be mentored? Why?
    c. What would you like your ideal mentor to teach you? How would that impact your career? Why?

5. When selecting a mentor, in what ways are race and gender important? Why?
    a. What is the race and gender of your ideal mentor? Why?
6. When selecting a mentor, in what ways is their career-level important? Why?
    a. What is the career-level of your ideal mentor? Why?
7. In what ways is mentorship important for African Americans in public relations? Why?
8. In what ways, if any, can mentoring impact your attitude towards your job? Why?

Next, I would like to discuss the effects of mentorship on retention, promotion, and salary growth. In your career:

9. In what ways, could mentorship increase the likelihood you would remain with an employer longer? Why
    a. Has having a mentor made you stay with an employer longer? Why?
10. In what ways, could mentorship help you earn a job promotion? Why?
    a. Has mentoring helped you earn a promotion? If so, how?
11. In what ways, could mentorship increase the likelihood you would earn a salary increase? Why?
    a. Has mentoring helped you earn a higher salary? If so, how?

Finally, I would like to discuss mentorship and overcoming racism and discrimination:

12. Please take a moment to reflect back on your career. Can you recall a time when you were treated badly or unfairly?
13. Can you recall a time, in your career, when you were treated badly or unfairly because of your race? If so, would you please share what you experienced?

13a. (If the answer is no) Racism and discrimination can occur in ways that are not open and obvious. My following questions are about specific forms of racism and discrimination in the workplace. Please answer yes or no to the following questions:
    a. Have you ever had a feeling you were denied a promotion or raise because of your race? If so, please explain. (What happened? How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    b. Have you ever had a feeling you were denied clients or projects because of your race? If so, please explain. (What happened? How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    c. Have you ever been assigned minority or multicultural projects because you're African American? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    d. Have you ever felt less accepted or respected? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    e. Have you ever felt excluded because of your race? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    f. Have you ever felt stereotyped because you're African American? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    g. Have you ever felt the need to overachieve to prove you're a professional equal? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
    h. Have you been asked to give your opinion on minority or multicultural projects, because you're African American? If so, please explain. (How did it make you feel? How did you handle it? Why?)
14. How do you overcome encounters with racism and discrimination in your career, or how would you, if you haven't experienced it? Why?
15. In what ways, can mentorship help African Americans in public relations overcome racism and discrimination? Why?
16. This concludes the interview, is there anything you would like to add that you feel would be helpful to African Americans in public relations?

*Appendix C*
Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**PROJECT TITLE**: Examining Career Success and Mentorship Among African-American Practitioners in Public Relations

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Erin Jordan from the Jack J. Valenti School of Communication at the University of Houston. This is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts under the supervision of Dr. Lan Ni, from the School of Communication at the University of Houston.

**NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore how African-American public relations practitioners use mentorship in their careers and the perceived effects, if any, mentoring has on their levels of job satisfaction, promotion, salary growth and ability to overcome racial barriers in their careers.

These understandings will contribute to existing scholarship about African-American practitioners in public relations, and the retention of African-Americans in public relations. The duration of the entire study is four months.

**PROCEDURES**

You will be one of approximately 40 participants to be asked to participate in this project. If you agree and sign this consent form you will complete a brief demographic questionnaire and participate in a one-on-one interview, which will take place via video conference (Skype, Tango, etc.) or in-person for approximately 40 minutes.

I will ask for your permission to audiotape the interview for purposes of accuracy; however, you will have the right to decline being taped. In that case, I will then take extensive notes. Only my advisor and I will have access to the data you provide. Data will be securely stored in my locked box and on computers, hard disks, audiotapes, and hard copies. Adequate provisions will be made to protect your privacy and to maintain confidentiality of identifiable information. The data will be destroyed when they are no longer needed but not before a minimum of three years after data collection.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each participant's name will be paired with a pseudonym or false name by the principal investigator. This pseudonym will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the participant's name to the assigned pseudonym will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

**RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

Because interview participants will only be audiotaped and will not be identified by name, this project presents minimal risk to you. The identities of participants will remain confidential. Participants will be told that your participation is voluntary and that you can decline to answer specific questions or to end your participation at any time without penalty.

**BENEFITS**

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the role of mentorship in the careers of African-American practitioners, ways to help African-Americans achieve career success in public relations, and tips to help organizations recruit and retain African-Americans in public relations.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

**PUBLICATION STATEMENT**

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual participant will be identified.

**AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES**

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audiotapes can be used for publication/presentations.

___ I agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.
  ___ I agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
  ___ I do not agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

___ I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview.

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PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.

2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.

4. Any benefits have been explained to me.

5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Erin Jordan at esjordan2@uh.edu. I may also contact Dr. Lan Ni, faculty sponsor, at lni@central.uh.edu.

6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.

7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and her faculty sponsor. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Participant (print name): _____

Signature of Study Participant: _____

Date: _____

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I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE PARTICIPANT AND/OR THE PARTICIPANT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE PARTICIPANT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE PARTICIPANT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE PARTICIPANT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator:_____

Date: _____

## *Appendix D*
## Recruitment Letter

Hello,
My name is Erin Jordan, I am a graduate student in the Jack J. Valenti School of Communication at the University of Houston. I'm working on my master's thesis under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Lan Ni, from the School of Communication at the University of Houston.

I am contacting you because I am need of participants, 18-64 years old who are working in public relations, for my study. This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713)-743-9204. The purpose of the study is to explore the role of mentorship in the careers of African-American public relations practitioners. You are one of approximately 20 participants that have been asked to participate in this project. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be given a consent form containing a brief description of the research and all potential risks and benefits. You will sign this consent form confirming your voluntary involvement. You will then respond to an interview, which will take place via video conference (Skype, Tango, etc.) or in-person for approximately 40 minutes. I will ask for your permission to audiotape the interview for purposes of accuracy; however, you will have the right to decline being taped. In that case, I will then take extensive notes.

Only my advisor and I will have access to the data you provide. Data will be securely stored in my locked box, on computer hard disks, audiotapes, and in hard copies. Adequate provisions will be made to protect your privacy, and to maintain confidentiality of identifiable information. The data will be destroyed when they are no longer needed but not before a minimum of three years after data collection.

If you would like to accept the interview, please let me know via email or telephone listed below. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Erin Jordan
Phone: 832-696-1478
Email: erinsjordan@gmail.com

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