LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

MENTORSHIP FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE OFFICERS OF FAITH IN THE
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Tanquer L. Dyer

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship has emerged as a critical component for the cultivation and development of leaders. Mentoring is beneficial for the mentee and mentor both personally and professionally. The United States Air Force (USAF) encourages formal and informal mentoring for their leaders through initiatives and regulations. Other branches emphasize leadership development; whereas, the USAF emphasizes career development. While African American female officers of faith continue to hold leadership positions, it is unclear whether mentorship serves as a factor of success. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. The data collected during this research consisted of interviews and observations. Face-to-face interviews conducted via Zoom were the preferred method, in which the interviewer and participants were key instruments. Participants shared their lived experiences and feelings as experts on the phenomenon of how mentorship affected their career development and progression. Observations were applied to identify gestures, body language, or cues. During the research, an officer is generally defined as a person who holds a position of authority as a Company and Field Grade Officer or above. Additionally, this research referred to persons of faith; however, there is no implication made to any particular denomination or religious affiliation. The theories that guided this study were mentor role theory and social cognitive theory.

Keywords: *career development, career progression, leadership, mentoring, relationships*

Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my one and only princess, Cassidy. Thank you for encouraging Mommy to start this doctoral program back up again and complete it. Thank you for all your love, support, and understanding throughout this educational journey. You are truly my greatest inspiration!

This work is also dedicated to the amazing men and women of the military who have served and continue to serve.

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First, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for not only giving me strength, but for actually being my strength when I had absolutely nothing left to offer due to the greatest challenges of my life during this time. Throughout this journey, the song that touched my heart the most was "The Goodness of God" by CeCe Winans. I want to thank my longtime friend, who was instrumental in the paths of both my first and now my last degrees! This dissertation would not have been possible without the love, support, encouragement, and prayers of my mom, daughter, brother, sister-in-law, and friends. Thank you all so much for your unyielding faith. To my sorority sisters, Michele Shelton and LaShondria Smith, thank you for your accountability, constant prayers, and for not letting me give up!

A huge thanks and debt of gratitude is owed to my Liberty University advisors, professors, and dissertation committee!

Thank you to the amazing African American female officers of the Air Force who took part in this dissertation journey. This wouldn't have been possible without you. Thank you for your continued leadership and service in protecting our country and being exemplary leaders.

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List of Abbreviations

Air Force Instructions (AFI)

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Headquarters (HQ)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Officer Performance Report (OPR)

Research and Development (RAND)

United States (US)

United States Air Force (USAF)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The military fosters cultural differences and a diverse community. Leadership is required in order to maintain continual growth and vision of a team or organization. In the development of an organization, leaders recognize the need for diversity. Diversity of perspectives, experiences, and identities lends itself to the advancement of the organization as a whole. Additionally, diversity enhances relationships, commitment, and communication, as well as creates stronger leaders (Bradley, 2020). While African American female officers hold company and field-grade positions, they remain underrepresented. Baldwin and Rothwell (1993) expressed the value of ensuring promotions for women and minorities as they bring a different perspective to the decision-making table while enhancing productivity and motivation.

In the molding and training of leaders, it is important to provide mentorship to African American female officers who desire to advance in career promotions and development. Mentorship, across the board (i.e., the military, civilian sector, corporate America), is recognized as having a plethora of positive outcomes, such as building relationships, improving retention, and advancing careers and skill development. Individuals benefit from mentoring, if conducted effectively, by gaining increased job performance, scholarly productivity, enhanced measures of retention, and different levels of relationships and networking (Koo, 2020). Mentoring is becoming more prevalent as it relates to leadership and professional progression.

Ivey and Dupré (2022) shared a report that identified barriers for minority leaders due to the lack of role models and mentors. While barriers were reported, access to mentors remained achievable. However, when it came specifically to females and minorities in the military, they were found to be at a disadvantage in the process of socialization and edification of career

progression. It appears they are not provided with the proper guidance and hands-on experience that is necessary to practice leadership and improve their knowledge and skills in the workplace. Hill and Wheat (2017) highlighted the disparity of the relationship between female senior leaders and mentorship being explored with junior female leaders. They identified the disparity as one of the major themes of the minimal functions of mentors and role models for females in leadership positions. The role of mentorship is extremely valuable for females in career development at all levels. According to Hill and Wheat (2017), the research showed the inadequacy of leadership preparation and talent was based on a deficiency of guidance, mentorship, support, and sponsorship that could present significant opportunities for leadership positions.

While many outside agencies and the business mainframes have a mentorship program and philosophy available, the United States Air Force (USAF) does not have standardization of policies in place. However, the USAF addresses leadership development concerns through the institution of mentoring opportunities and programs accessible to personnel if they elect to take advantage of them. Mentorship is seen as an essential thread in the fabric of well-rounded and professional leaders. Moreover, it makes a positive difference in the culture and morale of an organization. At every turning point, mentorship is pivotal in an individual's career, enabling effective communication, positive behavior, additional knowledge, skills, competencies, and enhanced mission achievement (Air Force Handbook 36-2643, 2019).

Though barriers exist for minority female officers in the Air Force, proper implementation of mentoring can have a positive effect on individuals, organizations, job performance, and retention. President Bush shared in Part 5 of the State of the Union address in 2003 that mentorship was essential, and he encouraged each person to become a mentor in saying, "One mentor, one person, can change a life forever. I urge you to be that one person"

(Bush, 2003, p.5). It is incumbent as an organization (military or civilian) to incorporate mentorship programs for leaders of all levels.

Background of the Problem

Air Force officers have multiple training opportunities to increase leadership skills and development through formal education courses. While there are formal education courses required for officers to attend and complete, no mandatory mentorship programs are currently in place to enhance the development of leaders. The lack of mandatory mentorship programs can be a delimiting factor of growth for African American female officers.

There is a significant gap in the literature on mentorship, which could be attributed to the success factor for promotions and career development for African American female officers at all levels. African American female officers, despite multiple success stories, still face challenges and barriers, while holding different positions and performing many missions in the USAF. However, little research is available as to whether mentorship contributes to the success of African American female officers, and this particular gap could be a hindrance to new officers, Academy graduates, or accessions when advancing in their careers. Mentoring connections reinforce the building blocks of trust and relationships through leadership principles. Nurtured relationships give birth to communication, which develops trust (Philips II, 1992).

In a male-dominated workforce, including the military, mentorship is viewed to help advance the career of females because they are disempowered, on account of their gender (Tam-Seto & Imre-Millei, 2022). From personal experience, the researcher worked in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility office and observed several studies that reported an underrepresentation of female officers within the Air Force and an even more significant underrepresentation of African American female officers. In attempting to remedy the

underrepresentation of minorities, the military strives to make the military more diverse and inclusive. The military recognizes that service members of different races, genders, religions, and other identities make for a stronger force and are able to execute the mission more effectively due to the various dynamics, ideals, and experiences they bring.

The Department of the Air Force believes that Airmen will have a greater chance of coming into their own and reaching their full potential if they take advantage of the mentoring opportunities that are made available to them. However, speaking from experience, this researcher has yet to witness mandated mentorship for mid-level officers (Captain through Lieutenant Colonel). Lim et al. (2014) shared the RAND Corporation reports demonstrating that females are underrepresented among the Air Force senior leadership structure compared to the lower ranks, and they also have a lower percentage of eligibility when looking at retention, accessions, and promotions. Additionally, Tam-Seto and Imre-Millei (2022) asserted that the mentorship experience is applied in multitudinous professions; however, not much has been researched on how gender and culture in the military influence the success of mentorship, especially research regarding mentorship for females (African American female officers) in leadership.

Theological Literature

It is important to understand mentorship from the perspective of the ultimate mentor, Jesus Christ. Mentorship and discipleship (Koo, 2020) are similar in that both represent an ongoing process of continuously helping followers to grow, develop, and experience new opportunities. Koo expressed that mentorship is a "focused relationship" and explains how Jesus modeled the principle and fundamental concept in the time He spent with the disciples in

teaching, correcting, putting them in positions to lead, and setting an example for them to follow. Jesus taught the disciples the manner in which they should pray, lead, forgive, and serve others (Koo, 2020, p. 165).

In light of the biblical patterns for mentorship, mentoring for leaders should be intentional, on purpose, and others-focused. Mentorship should be intentional, and there must be a strategy identifying how to accomplish the task of spending one's time, talent, and treasure. As Christians, mentoring relates to serving, loving, and building relationships, especially in small groups. Jesus' message embodies mentorship through His origin, life, death, Resurrection, purpose, and the guidance He left for us to make disciples (Campbell, 2016). True servanthood (Doss, 2009) is about building relationships.

Using the biblical allegory of the role and functions of the shepherd explains how leaders ought to be discerning. The Bible identifies the responsibilities of the shepherd as caring, restoring, feeding, watering, shearing, delivering, leading, and protecting. This type of shepherd also identifies certain qualities of a leader, including care, courage, and guidance. The example of the biblical shepherd emphasizes the value of being an effective leader in order for the mission to have an impact on the community. Individuals can have a title and still not be a leader (Resane, 2014).

It has been argued that being Christ-like is being relational. This aspect is especially important as leaders become mentors (Wakeman, 2012) and build relationships through caring and helping others reach their full potential within the community. The Word of God emphasizes, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how ye ought to answer every man" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Colossians 4:6). While mentorship, according to Toach (2014), is not innate or a spiritual gift such as the gift of tongues,

prophecy, or discernment, it is a learned and necessary ability. Elisha was anointed, but he needed to be mentored by Elijah in order to have the experience and understanding of how to be a servant, such as washing the hands of others (Toach, 2014, pp. 70).

Givens (2019) corroborated with Wakeman (2012) that mentorship is a concept of the Christian community and explains how women should demonstrate Christian mentoring according to Titus:

> The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not ashamed. (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Titus 2:3-5)

More specifically, in building community through mentorship, mentors need to understand the worldviews of others. Pettit (2008) supported the relational aspect of the community just as God did and continues in the same vein, namely, that the community provides a sense of belonging, boundaries, participation, and influence. Pettit spoke to the ability to treat others in a manner that each individual would like to be treated accordingly. As a community, growth occurs together because, just as Proverbs says, "iron sharpeneth iron" (*King James Bible,* 1769/2023, Proverbs 27:17). While mentors are to teach and set an example, because there is always an opportunity for the mentor and mentee to learn from each other. The Bible further describes the Christian community in Revelation: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Revelations 12:11). Community is strengthened through the sharing of experiences, love, and testimonies of what others have gone through but came out on the other side. Testimonies give others the strength to make it another day. Thus, viewing mentoring as a

type of Christian community includes treating others like oneself, viewing the relationship as mutually beneficial, and sharing one's life experience.

Pettit (2008) was blunt in expressing that the community is essential for the growth and development of Christians because it is the community that helps in the development of character and brings forth fruition on an individual's value system. It is the community that shines a spotlight on the love that is established through relationships in the community. Additionally, different perspectives and insights are gained through the community.

Theoretical Literature

While the theological literature emphasized the importance of mentoring in the example of Christ and the context of community, scholarly literature also provides a theoretical framework for mentorship. This study will apply mentor role theory and social cognitive theory to the data.

Kram (1983) instituted the mentor role theory with the evolving of career function and psychosocial function. Mendez et al. (2017) gave exploration to the social cognitive theory, which implements cognitive functions in the mentoring experience. In defining mentorship, Muir (2014) described it as a relationship between a more experienced and less experienced member within a profession. Congruently, Wakeman (2012) described mentorship as the process of developing individuals and helping them reach their full potential based guidance from a more experienced member. Laughlin and Moore (2012) further revealed that mentors help mentees achieve balance personally and professionally.

Randolph et al. (2019) found that the Army recommends mentors to be the more seasoned members, with greater experience than their mentees. According to Lancaster (2003), the goal of the Air Force is to fully maximize the capabilities of Airman in order to increase their

professional development. Between the Officer Professional Development Instruction Guide and the Air Force Mentoring Instruction Guide, officers have at their fingertips resources to enhance professional development, a better understanding of mentee and mentor relationships, how to communicate with mentees, and goal setting for personal and professional development (Lancaster, 2003).

There are different types of mentoring, such as workplace mentorship and peer mentorship. Career-related mentorship supports the efforts of mentors guiding members junior to them. Mentors within the same career field are able to coach and help develop junior members with additional exposure to their field, developing networking relationships, clarifying vision, and promotion opportunities within the career field (Ivey & Dupré, 2022).

In contrast, peer mentorship through the lens of knowledge translations references the growth, development, support, networking, and career advancement of mentees amongst those who may also be in junior positions. Through the establishment of relationships, mentors and mentees build the element of trust, which opens the door for conversation about expectations to and from both the mentee and mentor. Traditional mentorship creates both personal and career development opportunities, fosters skill enhancements that yield to the conceptualization of a better working and learning environment, helps to produce higher educational advancements (formal and non-formal), and nurtures the building of relationships (DeForge et al., 2019).

Furthermore, much scholarship exists defining good mentoring from a non-biblical perspective. Philips II (1992) spoke on leadership from the perspective of Abraham Lincoln, who was and is still revered as a great leader who understood the need to build interpersonal relationships. Philips explained how Lincoln allowed people to get to know his character in order for them to trust his guidance. Lincoln voiced the belief that men should get out of the office and

mingle with the staff to get to know them on a personal level. Leaders should not make the critical mishap of isolation if their desire is to be successful in leading. According to Philips, Lincoln understood and valued community.

As defined above, a common goal in mentorship is helping mentees to become more aware of themselves. Laughlin and Moore (2012) corroborated that mentorship should aid mentees in better grasping their personality and leadership style, both of which are critical to the building of relationships. Muir (2014) resolved that self-awareness is not just an endpoint but a continual assessment in life relating to certain aspects of an individual, including purpose, beliefs, values, strengths, and weaknesses. He also argued that leaders build identity in four areas: motivation, conformity and authenticity, power, and relationships.

It can therefore be determined that without mentorship, the highest capacity is not met; and individuals may lack growth in spiritual areas and professional opportunities. Randolph et al. (2019) argued that without mentorship, women and minorities were not promoted and missed long-term success opportunities due to low performance. They also found similarities in colleges and universities where progression for recruitment was lower for minority faculty and students.

Statement of the Problem

Research based on the RAND Corporation (Lim et al., 2014) demonstrated that females are underrepresented among the Air Force senior leadership structure in comparison to the lower ranks, and they also have a lower percentage of eligibility when looking at retention, accessions, and promotions. African American female officers, while underrepresented, hold leadership positions as officers and perform top leader effective missions in the USAF. While their careers attest to many triumphant accounts, there is minimal research focused on what contributes to the advancement of African American female officers. The gap in literature represents the need to

understand better how mentorship impacts African American female officers of faith and will enhance the existing body of knowledge. Faith is at the core of the military, and many military personnel depend on their faith to get through missions, assignments, taskers, or decision-making. None of the literature identified the role faith has on African American female officers in the mentorship experience for the mentor or mentee.

Mentorship establishes a purpose and goal between the mentee and mentor while enhancing fluency in the area of instruction in the mentee who applies the skill(s) in every aspect of their lives (Toach, 2014). This study helped shed light on the need and value that mentorship provides to African American female officers of faith.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. For this particular research, an officer is generally defined as a person who holds a position of authority as a Company and Field Grade Officer or above. Lancaster (2003) indicated that other branches of the military, such as the United States Army and United States Marines, incorporate and apply the philosophy of mentorship and leadership development. It appears the USAF emphasizes career development rather than leadership development. The recommendation made is for the Air Force to mandate effective mentoring programs that support the development of leaders, which in turn would enhance their careers.

The data collected during the research was conducted based on virtual interviews for individuals not available for face-to-face interviews or had scheduling conflicts due to possible

military crises. The data was used to encourage the application of mentorship programs, both formal and informal. The theories guiding this study were mentor role theory and social cognitive theory.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

Assumption and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

The following assumptions are prevalent in this study:

1. Mentorship is beneficial in career development and progression.

2. Mentorship should be continual throughout one's career.

3. Mentors should be leaders and the leaders should attain a certain level of knowledge and experience.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The delimitations of this study include the following:

1. The target population for the study included African American female officers from various USAF bases instead of other races or genders.

2. Geographically, participants are selected from different areas and will be face-to-face unless the participant is not available for a face-to-face.

3. The research will only include female officers from the Air Force and not other branches of the armed forces.

Definition of Terms

1. *Commissioned Officer*: A military officer holding a commission (Vocabulary, n.d.).

2. *Company Grade Officers (O-1 through O-3)*: Junior grades of officers in the Air Force- serves more as administrative leaders (Sloan, 2016).

3. *Field Grade Officers (O-4 through O-6)*: Senior grades of officers in the Air Force with continued areas of responsibility and sizes of commands (Sloan, 2016).

4. *Mentorship*: A relationship between a more experienced member (mentor) and a less experienced member (protégé) of the organization or profession (Muir, 2014).

Significance of Study

This study addressed the problem, as demonstrated above, of underrepresentation of African American female officers in the USAF by explaining whether and how mentorship could offer a solution. The Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (2016) reported the following demographics that illustrate the problem of how: male officers make up 79.5% of the total force, and female officers make up 20.5%, which is indicative of the disparity in males versus females in the military. The data continued with the breakdown of officers according to race: Caucasian- 79.8%, African American- 6%, Asian American- 4.6%, Native American- 0.5, Pacific Islander-0.5%, and Hispanic- 6.5%. This report demonstrated the underrepresentation of African American officers and other minority officers in the USAF. Additionally, Lim et al. (2014) helped broaden the idea of mentoring studies and the benefit of mentorship programs in the career development and progression of leadership positions. The RAND Corporation (Lim et al., 2014) shared how females are underrepresented among the Air Force senior leadership

structure in comparison to the lower ranks; and they also have a lower percentage of eligibility when looking at retention, accessions, and promotions.

The study relied on the literature that has demonstrated the many potential benefits of work mentorship. As described above, mentorship provides a sense of purpose, commitment to job, and retention (Aman, 2018). This study applied the theory of mentorship to investigate how African American female officers of faith explored whether mentorship enhanced their career advancement and countered some of the obstacles to promotion.

Summary of the Design

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, an explanation of unusual situations, and the capability to adjust data collection procedures (Houser, 2009). The advantage of using the method for this particular research was the opportunity to acquire a comprehensive understanding of African American female officers in the USAF and an up-close perspective of how a mentorship model impacted career development and progression. The qualitative method allowed for the following approaches: case study, ethnographic, grounded theory, phenomenological, and historical (Houser, 2009).

This researcher utilized the phenomenological method, which focuses on how humans understand the world or events through their feelings and reactions to a particular study (Houser, 2009). Instruments proposed for the qualitative studies that were relative to the research included the participants involved, the setting, interviews, documents, and observations. Questions were open-ended in order to give participants a better opportunity to share experiences in depth (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). In addition to the above, the researcher was a human instrument in conducting interviews to get a better understanding of how the participants felt before and after

the mentorship model process. The interviews provided data to understand how the mentorship

model influenced the participants' leadership styles, characteristics, and development.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Progress in the advancement of females in upper leadership echelons can be seen in corporate America, as well as in the military. While there has been an increase in the number of female leaders in the military, the numbers are still disproportionate when comparing the number of females versus males in senior leadership positions. Lim et al. (2014) reported that the research conducted by the RAND Corporation indicated the invidious comparison of females among the USAF senior leadership structure compared to the lower ranks. The report also signified the low percentage of eligibility among females, notably when looking at retention, accessions, and promotions.

According to Kram and Ragins (2007), research revealed the value of mentoring relationships when it came to the accomplishments of women in organizations. While the statistical numbers suggested a deficient representation of African American female officers who have overcome challenges and excelled in positions and performance, further review of literature still identified the areas of research peripheral and highlighted the need for mentorship.

More specifically, there was a gap in literature regarding how mentorship, which promotes relationship and trust cohesion, contributed to the success of the mentoring experience (Philips II, 1992). There is no shortage of research in reference to mentoring. However, there is little to be found on mentorship for female officers in the military. Only a few articles studied mentorship of the military, which were predominantly focused on military members in the US Army in general or female officers in the Army. There is even less research on mentorship for members of the USAF, not to mention African American female officers in the Air Force.

Hence, this study helped increase the scholarship literature highlighting the need for and value of mentorship in the role of African American female officers.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. As mentioned above, officers for this study were defined as those who are Company Grade Officers and Field Grade Officers or above. Research based on Lancaster (2003) indicated that other branches of the military, such as the US Army and US Marines, incorporate and apply the philosophy of mentorship and leadership development. In contrast, the Air Force emphasizes career development instead of leadership development. The data collected from this study leads to the recommendation for the Air Force to create effective mentoring programs that support the development of leaders, which in turn would enhance careers and retention.

The data collected during the research was conducted based on virtual interviews for individuals. Virtual interviews allowed the researcher to include individuals not in the local area and those in the area with potential scheduling conflicts or military mission obligations. The data was also utilized to encourage the application of formal and informal mentorship programs. The mentor role theory and social cognitive theory guided this study.

Below are the following research questions that guided this study:

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

Theological Framework for the Study

Mentoring is evident in the Scripture as it relates to the development of leaders and is demonstrated through Christ. Mentorship is also visible in those who follow God. When looking through biblical lens, mentorship is displayed in the life of Christ and is exemplified in His leadership. Jesus is the ultimate leader and mentor, and the greatest examples of Christian leadership and development can be gleaned from the Word of God based on His lifestyle. Growth and development of leaders through the application of mentorship within an organization is pivotal, especially regarding the influence, vision, and commitment to developing future effective leaders in ministry. Bredfeldt (2006) describes Jesus as the Good Shepherd, as according to John 10. In his description of the Good Shepherd, he explains how Jesus led by building relationships, caring, feeding those who followed Him in the spiritual sense, as He is truly the Living Bread, in accordance to John 6.

Christian Leadership

According to Sanders (2007), spiritual leadership combines natural and spiritual qualities, both of which come from the Father above. The Word of God confirmed in James 1:17 that every good thing is given from the Father. Sanders continued that leaders are influential based on their personality traits, which the Holy Spirit empowers. Koo (2020) identified that leaders need to be relational visionaries and understand the power of influence just as Christ demonstrated. The function of leadership is expounded, according to Resane (2014), in relation to the role and functions of the biblical theme of the shepherd. Resane identified the functions of the biblical

shepherd as caring, restoring, feeding, watering, shearing, delivering, leading, and protecting. The qualities of a leader, as exemplified by a shepherd, are caring, having courage, and providing guidance. The foundational theme of shepherding in Scripture emphasizes the value of being an effective leader in order for one's mission to have an impact on the community. There is a quote by Teddy Roosevelt that is still relevant today: "People don't care what you know until they know that you care" (Dickson State University, n.d.). Whether it is serving on the front line or serving the Kingdom of God, people innately want to know that they are cared for and that their service is not in vain. The following quote is applicable in everyday life, especially as leaders in the church, stated by Maya Angelou: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" (Theeuwen & Kim, 2021).

Hiebert (2008) encouraged self-awareness in leaders through the awareness of one's worldview. When a person recognizes their worldview, there is clarity in why one thinks and acts a certain way. Christian leaders need to know who they are through individual self-awareness, and they are to understand who they are as spiritual leaders in Christ. Knowing who you are in Christ includes having a better understanding of the image of Christ, who is exemplary of a compassionate and relational leader. Although the fall of man tarnished the relationship between God and man, Jesus made atonement for sins when dying on the cross. Jesus never intended for man to be alone or even walk this journey alone. The Word is clear in expressing that God created man in His image and then created woman in order for man not to be alone, emphasizing the value of relationships according to Genesis 1:26 (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Genesis 1:26).

Similarly, Corey (2013) concurred that the more self-awareness one has, the less likely one is to harm others in words or actions. As Christians, Pettit (2008) encouraged a strong sense of personal identity because it affords one to be authentic, secure in who they are, and free to trust, serve, and care for others. In addition to the forementioned, a secure identity allows a person to be open, courageous and relaxed around others. Increasingly, we see a lack in sense of personal identity in the ministerial culture. For example, the Barna Group (2017) identified trends of pastors struggling of inadequacy around work, emotional and mental exhaustion, and depression. Their report not only provided insight for pastors struggling relating to work, but also highlighted that youth pastors are not being retained more than three years. The impact and positive variables of mentoring may lead to a promising trend being shifted higher as it relates to pastoral care and retention. Proverbs 11:14 gives confirmation that with guidance and proper counseling, there is safety and success. Mentorship, guidance, instruction, and support have been found to be beneficial in organizations and can be applied in the ministry as well.

Thus, the relationship that occurs through mentoring could help remedy some of the effects of sin and encourage individuals to act in the image of God. Although there was sin resulting from the disobedience of man, God still saw fit to create man in His own image, as evidenced in Colossians 3:10, "And having put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Colossians 3:10). The significance is that even after the Fall of man, God loved unconditionally and desired for man to continue to be in relationship with Him and desired for man to be created like Him. Because God is relational, He knew the importance of human connection with others and this is confirmed in scripture saying, "The Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Genesis 2:18). The Fall of man may

have blemished the relationship between God and man and the *imago dei*. Nevertheless, Jesus atoned for the sins of man when He died on the cross. Those who accept Christ's sacrifice are therefore able to be made anew in His image.

It has been suggested that being Christ-like is being relational. When leaders are mentors (Wakeman, 2012), they build relationships by caring and helping others within the community reach their maximum potential. The relational aspect of mentoring mirrors the command in Colossians 4:6 in which the conversations of those in leadership positions should be positive, uplifting, and speaking life to one another. Givens (2019) corroborates with Wakeman that mentorship is a concept of the Christian community and demonstrates how women should mentor on good Christ-like behavior according to Titus 2, setting an example for the younger generations.

Through the community, different perspectives and insights are gained. As a community, we are able to grow together, validating what the Bible tells us, "iron sharpens iron" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Proverbs 27:17). While mentors are to teach and set an example, there is always learning to be done on both the mentor and the mentee sides.

Servant Leadership

The ultimate leadership of God can be observed through the Christian leadership models of servant leadership and transformational leadership. According to Doss (2009), true servanthood is about building relationships. As Jesus walked the earth, He established relationships wherever He went, including with His disciples. He spent time with them. Doss argues that authentic learning occurs in the creation of relationships, and true serving includes opening up, making oneself vulnerable and becoming like Christ. In strategizing the intentionality of mentorship, it should mimic Christ's example.

Thus, mentoring in a Christian community should follow God's example of servant leadership. Howell (2003) describes how God is tested and proven to be a servant leader and His integrity of claim, character, and conduct is evident and should be the compass for the guidance of others to emulate. Paul explains his philosophy that godly character is exemplified in one's personality, role, temperament, or gifting. The character, motive, and agenda of God's style of leadership identify the who, why, and what of a servant leader and should be replicated according to the Word of God.

There are many biblical examples of servant leadership. Joseph was an example of a servant leader because he served his family despite being betrayed and sold into slavery by his own siblings. Moses was a servant leader because he came back to lead the people of Israel after spending forty years in the desert despite not feeling confident enough to speak eloquently due to stuttering. After being anointed by Samuel, David spent years running and hiding to escape being murdered before he was crowned King of Israel. These servant leaders were tested and had the "proven character" that was displayed by God (Howell, 2003, p. 298).

Furthermore, those who are servant leaders focus more on the impact of the organization over a long period of time. Eva et al. (2018) discussed that servant leadership is an approach that incorporates a holistic perspective of being relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual. Integrity and self-awareness are valuable because they are vital to being authentic to one's inner convictions. Essential elements of servant leadership include motive, mode, and mindset. These elements harness the personal agenda of effective leaders in relation to the spiritual aspect of stewardship and ethical accountability of an organization. Looking more in this, Zada et al. (2022) expressed that servant leaders, in the same sense of valuing ethical behavior, have a

considerable influence on an organization based on their moral standards, incentives, and genuine concern for others.

For an organization or ministry to remain effective, trust and selflessness are essential in the outcome of authentic servant leadership. Building relationships, effective listening, and being a visionary are also critical concepts to the lifestyle of a servant leader, as they encompass the ability to serve and to lead in a way that focuses on those of the organization and not oneself. Characteristics such as personal integrity, ethical behavior, altruism, and role modeling are inherent elements necessary for the embodiment of a servant leader. When members of an organization or ministry can trust the person who is leading and vice versa, a beautiful, trusting, high-performance connection takes shape (Saleem et al., 2020).

Transformational Leadership

Not only is Christian and servant leadership essential in the mentoring relationship, but also transformational leadership. Langston University (2021) credits the development by James Burns and later the elaboration even more by Bernard Bass of transformational theory. The transformational leadership theory is built upon leaders being engaging and inspiring, encouraging those that follow to be more team-centered instead of self-focused. Transformational leaders are visionary and people-focused, seeking to encourage change in others, promote different ways of thinking, and foster new ideas (Langston University, 2021). Transformational leadership reflects the principle in Proverbs, which declares the demise of a people who do not have a vision (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023. Proverbs 29:18). Furthermore, Koo (2020) extrapolated that transformational leaders enhance team performance based on seven principles: simplicity, motivation, facilitation, innovation mobilization, preparation, and determination.

While research recognizes the establishment of the theory of transformational leadership by Burns and Bass, it could be postulated that transformational leadership was instituted by the original Creator and was executed throughout His time on earth as He led and mentored the disciples. Jesus was a visionary and was evident in Mark 1:16-17, when He tells Simon and Andrew to leave their nets to follow Him and become fishers of men. In addition to Mark, He is seen as a visionary in Matthew 14:17-19, when instructs the disciples to bring all the food they had, which was only two fish and five loaves of bread to feed the multitude (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Matthew 14:17-19 & Mark 1:16-17 3). Jesus is identified as being a visionary and inspired the disciples to follow Him, believe in His teachings, model His behavior, and spread the Word of God. The disciples trusted in Jesus based solely on the established relationship He built and His effective communication of truth and transparency. Jesus corrected in love and taught the disciples to have love for all and not just for self, which encouraged them to adhere and act in accordance to what they had seen Him do. Jesus can also be seen in Matthew 9 going about the cities, teaching the gospel in the synagogues, and showing compassion by healing those who were sick.

According to Sharp (2006), transformational leadership deals with individuals from the inside. Paul displays transformational leadership by being a vessel for the Kingdom of God and encourages Titus to be an example of a transformational leader. Paul encouraged the implementation of transformational leadership skills in youth ministries to empower and encourage youth to a higher commitment level of performance and understanding within the community. In a similar way, according to Jibiliza (2020), leaders in ministry execute the model of transformational theory by effectively communicating a vision to followers and ensuring an understanding of the expectations and purpose of an organization in a way that motivates

followers to have a spirit of excellence in accomplishing the organization's objectives and values. Leaders are relational and instill vision indicative of being created in the image of God. Jesus was relational, and His intentions were for followers to be like Him, in addition to those of the congregation and the community.

According to Korejan and Shahbazi (2016), Bass claimed that characteristics were critical elements of transformational leadership and in the display of charisma, inspiration, and encouragement of higher standards. Bass (2008) explained more by categorizing the behavior of leaders into four elements, Four I's:

1. Individualized Consideration- focuses on the sensitivity of leaders and the need to give followers' attention via coaching, mentoring, support, and effective listening

2. Intellectual Stimulation- focuses on creativity and pushing followers out of their bubble of comfort and challenging their thought process, provoking ideas and decision-making through different lenses

3. Inspirational Motivation- focuses on the skills of leaders to effectively communicate the vision, expectations, purpose, goals, and standards through inspiration and challenging followers to go above and beyond the status quo

4. Idealized Influence- focuses on leaders setting the bar and leading by example, fostering team pride instead of self-focused, encouraging accomplishments, and instilling in followers to emulate the values and beliefs of leaders

There are many advantages to transformational leadership. Sahin et al. (2017) identified the advantages of transformational leadership theory as follows: increased leadership effectiveness, enhanced performance within the organization, and optimistic motivation and satisfaction from followers. Additionally, other advantages of transformational leadership include the promotion of a cohesive team, implementation of a quicker turnaround time for new ideas, and endorsement of values, accountability, and responsibility for professionalism (Collins et al., 2020).

Leadership Development in Scripture

While Jesus was the ultimate leader, the disciples also followed His guidance and were leaders as well. Jesus was definitely a servant leader and people-focused, leading with a character of integrity. Jesus was compassionate and showed that He cared about others. Jesus had a heart for the people and the community, equipping, teaching, and mentoring them while helping His disciples began to understand their potential. The Word of God speaks of different descendants, patriarchs, and cultures, such as the Hebrews, Jews, Greeks, and Romans. While there were different cultures and descendants, Jesus also valued the importance of diversity and He loved and ministered to all descendants and cultures. To know Jesus is to understand the concepts of love, relationships, and unity. Jesus showed the ultimate concern and compassion for others, according to John 3:16, by dying on the cross so that those who believed in Him can live again and have life eternally.

Above all, transformational leadership emphasizes relationships that reflect biblical principles. God began creation by showing He was relational in creating Adam and Eve, creating them in His image. Relationships are significant, according to Mulholland (2013), because they are grounded in the image of God. 2 Peter 1:4 demonstrates the value in the relational side of God, encouraging all to partake in the divine nature of Christ. In addition to the above-mentioned literature, Jesus displayed leadership in the form of a servant leader, according to John 13:13, by washing the feet of his disciples and encouraging them to do as He had done. According to Sanders (2007), Peter was a natural leader and was motivated to be a shepherd of the flock. I Peter says:

> Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger,

submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, I Peter 5:2-4)

Furthermore, I Timothy 3:2-7 identifies the following qualities one should behold: faithful, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, gentle, humble, and with integrity.

The study by Yoon (2013) justified mentoring as a part of the holistic development of a person spiritually, physically, and relationally. He explained how mentoring helps in ministry growth and faith sustainment of new members and supports the development of evangelistic preaching.

Part of the process of holistic transformation is the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2 reiterates the power of being transformed in your mind; your thought process should be renewed daily. Siegel (2012) gave further details about how the mind maintains memories of events in life that affect the future, significantly when memories, negative or positive, shape what we learn and how we process it. What Siegel (2012) pointed out was that there is a part of the mind that can find changes in perspective in one's mind, the nonlinearity, and causes the behavior and mindset of a person to change. Additionally, Givens (2019) declared that mentoring is necessary for spiritual development and is an aspect of discipleship in the Christian community. He highlighted the importance of elders setting an example for others to follow and emulate according to 1 Peter 5:1-5.

Biblical Mentorship & Discipleship

As Christians, it is important to understand mentorship from the perspective of the ultimate mentor, Jesus Christ. According to Douglas (2014), Jesus was a mentor to the disciples and under His tutelage, they gained the principles of leadership development and training. Mentorship was established in the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament, mentorship

was demonstrated by Deborah in Judges 4 & 5, where it describes how she is the only female in the Bible to harness the anointing of being both a judge and prophet. As a military leader and God-fearing woman, Deborah mentored Barak and guided him in the deliverance of Israel. In the New Testament, mentorship is demonstrated by Barnabas in the book of Acts, as he mentored Paul. He walked Paul through the process of Antioch and through the first missionary assignment together.

Specifically, to be a mentor is to embody the life of Christ and what He exemplified through the fruits of the Spirit. Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, lead, forgive, and serve others (Koo, 2020, p. 165). Mentors are to be selfless, observable, and available to mentees without being self-deprecating or self-righteous. To be selfless as a mentor means to be engaged as an active listener, applying the wisdom of Christ, and meeting the needs of the mentee (Campbell, 2016). Furthermore, Carter (2009) explains that the responsibilities as Christians include imparting guidance, development, protection, teaching, and encouragement as mentors.

More particularly, this study will highlight five mentoring relationships shown in the Scriptures as an example of the characteristics and attributes of mentorship that Christians ought to practice. Those five relationships are as follows: Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Jesus and the disciples, Eli and Samuel, and Elijah and Elisha.

Jethro and Moses

Exodus talks about the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, who was the Median Priest of the Kenite clan. As Jethro guided Moses in communicating with the Israelites, Moses's capabilities strengthened in order to lead the Israelites from Egypt through the wilderness. Jethro gave Moses instructions on the value of teaching the Israelites the statutes of

God's law. He encouraged Moses to choose trustworthy and God-fearing men to be judges over the smaller groups and minor cases.

Moses and Joshua

Exodus and Numbers record the relationship between Moses and Joshua. Joshua studied under Moses from the time he was a young boy and observed how Moses communicated with the people and with God. When Moses went away for 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Sinai, Joshua remained steadfast and loyal. Joshua observed the behavior of the Israelites and chose not to be rebellious like they were because he wanted to follow in the footsteps of Moses. Even in the midst of a sinful nation, Joshua watched how Moses led, loved, and corrected the people with God's laws. While Moses did not lead the people in the Promised Land, it was his teachings and leadership that helped Joshua love, respect, and remain faithful to God.

Jesus and Disciples

Jesus led the disciples so much during His time on earth, but this discussion particularly captures just a few of the lessons modeled for the disciples to emulate. Jesus taught servanthood by feeding crowds of people, healing the sick, and raising the dead. Proverbs highlights the biblical aspect of mentoring regarding the value in the protégé listening, learning, and taking heed to the guidance of the mentor. In Proverbs, it says, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels; to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Proverbs 1:5-6). When Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek, Jesus understood He would be taken into custody but continued to wash Judas' feet during the Last Supper. When Peter denied Him three times, Jesus continued to love and mentor him, even from the cross. In doing so, He taught unconditional love and the value of relationships. Additionally, Jesus uplifted the

disciples, telling them they were the light of the world and instructing them not to hide their faith. Furthermore, the ultimate instruction in Matthew 28:19-20 says,

> Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus wanted the disciples to follow His leadership of teaching and making disciples. To that end, Jesus taught the disciples faith and how to pray by going before the Father in Matthew 6:9-13 saying, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done in earth, as it is in heaven…" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Matthew 6:9-13). The prayer goes on to thank God for food and to ask for forgiveness as they forgive others.

Eli and Samuel

When Samuel heard the voice of God, he assumed it was Eli calling him. Eli did not hear the voice calling out to Samuel, but with wisdom, he realized the truth of the call after Samuel had come unto him three times. Eli trained and instructed Samuel on how to listen with his heart and know the voice of God. He guided and advised him on how to respond to the call of God. The response, according to I Samuel 3:10, says, "And the Lord came, and stood, and called as other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, I Samuel 3:10). Samuel observed Eli through devotion, and he learned patience, friendship, and servanthood from Eli's mentorship.

Elijah and Elisha

In I Kings 19, the Word of God shows Elijah, as he is receiving the presence of the Lord, that Elisha would succeed him. Elijah immediately went to Elisha to guide him and mentor him. Elijah led by example, and the relationship continued to grow because Elisha never left his side.

Elijah taught him what faith looked like and how to achieve victory over temptation. Elisha witnessed many prophecies come to pass under Elijah's leadership. Elijah taught Elisha what commitment looked like and what it meant to trust the Holy Spirit. Elisha was faithful to the point that Elijah transferred his prophetic gift to Elisha.

Faith in the Military

One final piece of the theological framework for this study is a consideration of how faith is seen and used in the USAF. What is faith for the purpose of this study? Faith, according to Gallegher (n.d.), is having the belief in the purpose and power of God. The Scripture outlines that faith is believing and hoping for a desire, although it cannot be seen. Link (2000) described religious faith and natural faith as both requiring trust in God and believing in His Word and the promises therein. Paul expounded on the teachings and afforded Hebrews to give another perspective…if you do not have faith, you cannot please the Father. The Bible gives guidance to those of faith in the process of shifting the way one thinks by the renewing of your mind according to Romans 12:2 (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Romans 12:2).

Faith is woven throughout the fabric of the United States military and has been key since its inception. According to the Pew Research Center (2008), the history of religion and the military dates to the time when George Washington was the leader of the Continental Army. Chaplains of the Army were established by the government and not the church in 1775 and funded by the Continental Congress. George Washington directed the commanders or commanding officers to select men to be chaplains who set the example of high standards in their character and their personal and professional lives. He also issued the following statement in his general order, "The Honorable Continental Congress having been pleased to allow a Chaplain to

each Regiment, with the pay of Thirty-three Dollars and one-third per month" (Washington, 1776).

According to Pleizier and Schuhmann (2022), the military has always been served by chaplains to help build morale within the organization or to be there in times of need to pray for peace and comfort during wartime missions. While most officers make it a practice to have an open-door policy for the members of their unit to talk, chaplains actually execute openness and an open-door policy for all active-duty members to feel comfortable coming to speak to them about anything, as they maintain confidentiality. Chaplains tend to go out of their way at times to ensure visibility within individual sections of the institution they serve in order for the men and women to be aware of who they are and to know they are available if there are questions or concerns.

Chaplains may contact military personnel formally or informally to show concern for members. To help build trust, Pleizier and Schuhmann (2022) described how chaplains may attend events, trainings, or sports activities. Chaplains can often be seen at activities having casual conversations and just taking time to get to know members of the military units. This time spent at activities may not always be on regular, 7:30am to 4:30pm, military timeframes. Instead, they may take off-duty time, such as basketball games, to cordially get to know members outside of their professional environments, which allows for a more calm and relaxing setting. Chaplains make themselves available to pray for and with military members if they are in need, despite what it is about. There is no judgment. Matthew 26 says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Matthew 26:41). This verse is set in the context of the story about how the disciples were present in the Garden of Gethsemane, but they could not stay awake. Bernard (2021) shared

how chaplains provide military members with the exact presence that the Word of God spoke of in Matthew. Chaplains also exist to abide by the Word of God and encourage the men and women during times of fear, anguish, doubt, and stress. Often, when members have to deploy, it can be a frightening time in more ways than one, as deployments bring concerns about the apparent hazards and safety of one's own person, and also about family left behind. The Bible speaks about encouraging each other in 1 Thessalonians 5, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, I Thessalonians 5:11). Chaplains fill the gap for military men and women, including their families.

By the same token, Besse (2019) reported that 73% of active-duty service men and women identify as people of faith. While there is diversity among the different denominations within the military, it is reported that 70% identify as Christians. The men and women who serve their country every day are strengthened and inspired by their faith. Bowerman (2014) shared that spirituality was not only believing in God or a higher power, but it was more of military personnel having a sense of right and wrong based on their values, beliefs, and ethics.

Moreover, there was a time in the history of the United States military when servicemen and women were required to attend some religious service and to place a religious affiliation on dog tags. According to Lange (2020), the order for military personnel to have dog tags was given in 1916, and they were on a round disc connected by a string or chain. The official name is an identification tag, but it became known as a dog tag. The first dog tag was instructed to remain on the body of military personnel in times of war so that in the event of death, a recording could be made. Military members during World War I would initially place information about who they were on a piece of paper or whatever they had available and placed the information somewhere on their uniforms. While it was great to have the information of the military

members, and it was seemingly basic information written down, the fact remained that the information was not uniform. Not everyone was providing the same information. Enlisted personnel or units were issued the dog tags, but officers had to purchase them if the units did not buy them. By the end of World War I, religious symbols were being added to dog tags, such as C-for Catholic, H-for Hebrew, and P-for Protestant. As of today, military identification tags are standardized; however, the social security number is no longer required. Dog tags only require a name, blood type, religious preference, and a randomly generated Department of Defense identification number, which is the number that replaced the use of social security numbers. Military members have the right to their own religious preference. There are over 200 accepted religious preferences the military accepts. While military members can elect Atheist, None, Heathenry, Paganism, Judaism, Wicca, Jedi, or even Druid, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2010) reported that the top 10 religious preferences designated by military members are: No Religious Preference, Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, Methodist, Humanist, Christian, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Lutheran, and Congregational.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Mentorship Defined

Mentorship is defined by Muir (2014) as a relationship between a more seasoned member and a junior member with less experience in the position. Muir revealed that this relationship affords the protégé an opportunity to observe and engage with others, which sets the stage for the transference of information that helps mentees grow educationally and professionally. In defining mentorship, Wakeman (2012) expressed that mentorship helped develop and maximize the knowledge, skills, and expertise of mentees to the fullest extent possible.

Hay (1995) gave a different analogy of mentorship, expressing it as a developmental alliance, in which the more experienced member helped to equip the less experienced. Zachary (2000) added that both members of the alliance are held accountable for learning, achieving goals, and maintaining the communication of the relationship. According to Toach (2014), guidelines for mentorship include establishing a purpose and goal between the mentee and mentor; enhancing fluency in the area of instruction in the mentee applies the skill(s) in every aspect of their lives; be transparent as the mentor by sharing personal experiences; and select certain aspects at a time to focus on. Mentorship is described as a relationship developed between a mentor with more experience and a mentee or protégé with less experience established to enhance the development of the protégé through feedback, instruction, support, and advice, educating even further and in agreement with previous authors (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995; Haney, 1997).

Koo (2020) explained that leadership of the relationship occurs with an individual who knows more and has more experience in the profession, allowing for the chance to share insight, wisdom, and knowledge; to foster relationships, networks, and professional opportunities; and to stimulate intellectual growth, advancement, and conversations for mentees to observe, learn, ask questions for their betterment. According to Holmes et al. (2018, pp. 456), specific characteristics that mentees should look for in a mentor include:

1. Knowledge: one who is knowledgeable of core skills and expectations within their particular career field

2. Credibility: certainty in the person's reputation, seniority in their success, and the ability to provide guidance

3. Communication: being able to effectively communicate, effectively listen, and having the time to commit to building trust and providing feedback

4. <u>Altruism</u>: giving selflessly, being attentive, and providing genuine concern for the growth and development of the mentee

5. <u>Commitment:</u> dedication to guiding and listening or answering questions or concerns, devoting energy, being transparent, and providing resources and opportunities

According to Kram (1983), there are four phases of mentorship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. During the initiation phase within the first year, the relationship is established with the identification of expectations, limitations, and patterns of interactions. The cultivation phase, lasting two to five years, deals with the confrontation of communication and worldview differences to have a better understanding of what is needed to move forward positively and effectively in order for growth and development to occur. This phase strengthens the relationship and enhances the mutual exchange for the benefit of the relationship by becoming more of a two-way street instead of a one-way lane of growth and equilibrium. The phase of separation deals with the mentee communicating what they need to further enhance their knowledge, growth, and progression prior to the onset of less time being spent with the mentor, because the mentee has the expected sense of fulfillment that is anticipated, the mentee outgrows the need for the specified relationship with the mentor. The phase of redefinition deals with both the mentee and mentor seeing each other in a different light with new boundaries.

There are many benefits that result from mentoring, as described in the literature. Foluke (2020) shared that mentoring ties in with the counseling process and is continual over one's life. He argued that mentoring provides learning experiences to mentees that generally would not be available and initiates organization and team productivity. Additionally, mentees receive enhanced knowledge and personal training. Ocobock et al. (2021) reviewed the psychosocial functions of mentoring, which emphasizes the whole-person concept for the mentee. These functions include acceptance, confirmation, role modeling, counseling, and friendship. The

authors further the discussion of mentoring by identifying six categories that helped to establish solid mentor-mentee relationships: affective, instrumental, intellectual, available, respectful, and exploitative.

Conceptualization of Mentorship

The theoretical framework from which this study was grounded explicates two theories relating to the phenomenon of mentoring: the mentor role theory and the social cognitive theory. Mentor role theory and social cognitive theory gives insight through the emergence of mentorship, the developmental skills of leaders have been cultivated, and performance has increased. These theories help to bring into perspective the journey of how mentorship factors in the career progression and career development of African American female officers of faith in the USAF.

Mentor Role Theory

Although mentoring is not a new concept, Kram (1983) developed the mentor role theory, in which career function and psychosocial function evolved. The developmental mentorship relationship consisted of the mentee being junior to the mentor. Within the mentor role theory, career advancement and psychosocial development are accomplished through the vehicles of initiation and reappraisal of adult development (Kram, 1983). In furthering the understanding of psychosocial functioning, Kram et al. (2007) clarified that mentors provide psychosocial support by encouraging a sense of competence in mentees, enhancing identity, and providing a sense of belonging to an organization. Lamm et al. (2017) suggested that the expectations of the mentor role theory were for the mentor to guide, support, counsel, and befriend the mentee, thus providing the psychosocial aspect by building friendships, counseling, and being a role model. The development of a friendship gives the mentee a sense of

appreciation (Kram, 1983). Within organizations, members who have been mentored were found to have significant promotions, and retention is likely to be higher due to their success and career advancements (Roche, 1979). A benefit of having psychosocial support is that work-related stress is often alleviated from the protégé, because of the mentoring relationship, and the research shows enhanced involvement in work from employees (Craig et al., 2013).

Additionally, Shek and Lin (2015) deemed that mentoring is a natural and integral component of leadership, believing that mentorship is conducive to career development and psychosocial adjustment of mentees. The authors suggested primary characteristics that encompass a mentor: effective communication skills, supportiveness, trustworthiness, interdependency, empathy, personality match mentee, enthusiasm, and flexibility.

Bass (2008) asserted that mentors can be inside or outside of the same organization. They greatly influence and provide guidance and visibility for their protégé. He suggested that mentees receive on-the-job training, which improves their leadership skills and development. Providing mentees tools to refine their leadership skills puts them in a better position to have more of an impact on the organization and to achieve external leadership opportunities as well. According to Kram (1985), increasing leadership influence within an organization enhances career functions such as networking and continuing to provide developmental opportunities.

To support the mentor role theory promoting positive psychosocial functions, Ivey and Dupré (2022) suggested that workplace mentorship refers to career-related support and psychosocial support. Career-related support affords mentors the opportunity to be influential in the lives of someone junior to their position, providing them coaching, sponsorship, vision, career exposure, developmental opportunities, and organizational promotions. As has been demonstrated, psychosocial support affords mentees the opportunity to receive emotional support

and guidance through counseling, confidence and morale gratification, and fanfare from organizational success. U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters (2012), in support of psychosocial and professional functions, posits that mentors influence and can develop personal leadership skills within themselves and those within their leadership purview. This support results in mentees feeling motivated and executing retention.

Social Cognitive Theory

Mendez et al. (2017) applied the phenomenological qualitative research approach in exploring the paradigm of mentoring and advocacy networking. He believed the social cognitive theory could be utilized as a framework for mentorship due to the impact of cognitive functions within the mentoring relationship, which asserted that observation, evaluation, reaction, and efficacy of oneself promote motivation and goal attainment. By implication, the cognitive functions are the expected outcomes from mentoring that should ultimately increase career opportunities. LaMorte (2022, p. 6) submitted that Bandura established the social learning theory in the 1960s and later, after more research, developed the theory into what is now the social cognitive theory. He expressed that the social cognitive theory should be employed for the organization and communication of ideas for individuals to learn in a social context, in which the desired result would be for the individuals, environment, and behavior to all be reciprocal regarding social influence. The six constructs are as follows:

1. Reciprocal Determination- refers to the heart of the social cognitive theory, detailing to the dynamic interaction of a person with their learned experiences; the social external context for the individual, and the behavior in regard to how a person responds to the stimuli in order to accomplish the task

2. Behavioral Capability- refers to the behavior a person presents based on their knowledge and skills of both direct and indirect learning in an attempt to achieve a specific outcome

3. Observational Learning- speaks to the ability of a person to reciprocate an observed behavior through the concept of modeling with a desired outcome

4. Reinforcements- refers to the continual behavior that the individual initiates or environment, be it positive or negative reinforcements

5. Expectations- deals with the possible outcomes or consequences that are anticipated based on a person's behavior regardless of whether the behavior is awarded or punished which is derivative of previous experiences

6. Self-efficacy- refers to a person's belief and individual confidence in self to perform or master a behavioral skill

Based on the above definitions, the social cognitive theory afforded mentors the opportunity to be better equipped to guide mentees effectively in the facilitation of tenure and progression processes. Bandura instituted six constructs, in which self-efficacy was added once developed into social cognitive theory (Mendez et al., 2017). Social cognitive theory provides an excellent basis for mentorship, as Bandura emphasized role reinforcement and feedback (Bandura, 1971).

In understanding the theories that helped to develop the concept of mentorship, Aman (2018) classified different types of mentorships to differentiate formal from informal mentorship. The five types of mentorships include executive mentoring, supervisor mentoring, diversity mentoring, peer mentoring, and hierarchical mentoring (pp. 259).

1. Executive Mentoring: mentoring occurring with someone in upper leadership, such as a director, which in turn affords the mentee a greater opportunity for senior leader visibility

2. Supervisor Mentoring: mentoring where the supervisor is the mentor and affords the mentee more career development opportunities

3. Diversity Mentoring: mentoring occurring where the mentor and mentee are of different cultures, different genders, or different sexes

4. Peer Mentoring: informal mentoring in which the mentor and mentee are on the same level within the organization

5. Hierarchical Mentoring: mentoring of a more traditional nature in which the mentor is more experienced, and the mentee is less experienced but affords the mentee the

> opportunity for career progressions due to increased knowledge, experience, and
> visibility for networking

Mentoring in the Military

Some studies have already explored how mentoring is used within the United States

military. Randolph et al. (2019) found that the Army suggests mentors have greater experience

than their mentees. Laughlin and Moore (2012) revealed further that mentors help mentees

achieve balance in their lives by guiding them in their behaviors, relationships, personalities, and

learning styles. They also argued that mentorship is needed throughout life, including the

beginning, the end, or the process encountered along the way. A common goal in mentorship is

helping mentees to become more aware of themselves and who they are. Laughlin and Moore

(2012) corroborated that mentorship should aid mentees in becoming more cognizant of

themselves as it relates to their personality and leadership style, which are both critical to the

building of relationships. Muir (2014) concluded that self-awareness is not just an endpoint but a

lifelong assessment of one's purpose, beliefs, values, strengths, and weaknesses. He also argued

that leaders build identity in the four areas of motivation, conformity and authenticity, power,

and relationships.

More specifically, for the purpose of this study, Lancaster (2003) references that AFI 36-

3401 identifies the goal of the Air Force being "to help each person reach his or her full

potential, thereby enhancing the overall professionalism of the Air Force" by encouraging the

application of mentorship through discussions relating to performance, potential, and

professional development plans (pp.13). While the Air Force has the Officer Professional

Development Instruction Guide available that pertains to all officers, the Air Force Mentoring

Instruction Guide was developed to help foster mentoring relationships in order to increase

retention, enable open communication, and highlight professional development opportunities

through professional military education, academic education, assignment policies, personal development goals, and recognition programs (Lancaster, 2003). Guidelines have been laid out for mentors: they should be advisors, be knowledgeable, be diligent in the commitment of time, create balanced relationships, initiate communication to help establish long-term and short-term career goal setting, be open-minded, provide effective communication and effective listening skills, recommend training opportunities, offer guidance in decision making, and provide overall support for what the mentee may need. There are also guidelines for the mentees. Mentees should pursue educational development, create professional development opportunities, schedule regular meetings with mentors to discuss professional and personal plans and be fully engaged and open-minded in receiving feedback and instruction (Air Force Handbook 36-2643, 2019).

Wakeman (2012) concluded that mentorship fosters relationships in a caring and supportive manner and places emphasis on motivating individuals to develop goals and community partnerships with the hope of helping them reach their full potential. It can be determined that without mentorship, maximum potential is not met, and individuals may lack spiritual growth areas and professional opportunities. Congruently, the Department of the Air Force (n.d.) delineates mentorship as a relationship that an individual has in which one individual has more experience in their profession and more wisdom in guiding a lesser experienced individual in their personal and professional development (Department of the Air Force, n.d.). The Department further explained the value of mentorship in the span of coverage over an individual's career path, developmental skills, strategic vision, and leadership styles that are acquired.

Leadership Development

The military is often the measuring device as to what leadership should look like. Historically, Abraham Lincoln was one of the most respected military leaders, because he led from the front and not the back. He believed in trust, transparency, and empowerment (Philips II, 1992). Two other prominent military leaders shared by Sanders (2007) were Bernard Montgomery and Li Hung Change. Montgomery, a British General, believed leaders could bring an organization together with a common purpose and inspire in them the confidence needed to get the mission accomplished. Li Hung was a Chinese General and great viceroy who believed that leaders were able to get people moving and is quoted as saying, "There are only three kinds of people: those who are immovable, those who are movable, and those who move them. Leaders move others" (pp. 37).

Leaders focus on the strategy and direction in which the organization needs to go, and they conceptualize the way ahead. Taking on challenges and taking advantage of opportunities, leaders are flexible when facing uncertainties, embracing innovation, and promoting growth and development. Knowing the end game and understanding the roadmap as to how to go about getting there, leaders are expected to be astute, committed, visionaries, and expected to be trustworthy. Outstanding leadership recognizes the worth and potential of followers within the organization. Leaders motivate, innovate, originate, and inspire long-rang and thought-provoking perspectives (Koo, 2020). With reference to what leadership looks like, Zaleznik (1992) suggested that leaders are active, influential, more personable, empathetic, and people-oriented. Moving to a different sheet of music, they do not shy away from challenges when developing new ideas and processes, ultimately making decisions for others.

While some may argue whether leadership is a learned behavior or innate, Lancaster (2003) explained that leadership is a skill that is learned from formal and informal educational opportunities. Formal education comes through academic courses with the application of theories and curriculum-encouraged exercises. Informal education, on the other hand, occurs through an assistant training position or apprenticeship. Both formal and informal programs of education are necessary for leaders to be developed. Lancaster (2003) stated a quote by Cohen (1990), "Teachership and leadership go hand-in-glove" (pp. 9).

African American Female Leadership in the Military

Diversity is highly encouraged in the military, and promotion ranks continue to increase among females and other minorities. The Air Force established the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in 2020 to help achieve greater goals in diversity. The theme at one point for the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility office was *Our Differences Make Us Stronger*. According to Martin (2000), diversity is achieved when there is representation of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and cultural experiences within an organization. A diversified organization allows for growth, inclusiveness, different opinions or ideas, openness, and the sharing of experiences.

Moreover, to have a great leadership team, there must be diversity among the ranks. Diverse leadership helps to ensure best practices and norms are moving in a positive direction of commitment and performance, yielding positive outcomes. The military will have to be intentional in pursuing the continual aim of increased diversity to build trust and enable people to feel comfortable and be heard (Martin, 2000).

Despite the positive trend to increase diversity, challenges and barriers still exist among African American females regarding career progression at a comparable rate to their male

counterparts. As noted in Chapter 1, research and statistics reported by the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (2016) presented the data of racial diminishment of diversity in the military: 79.5% of the total force is made up of male officers compared to the 20.5% of female officers with the total force, which is evidence of the disparity between male and female officers in the military. In addition to the comparable data, the report gives an account of each represented race in the armed forces: Caucasian- 79.8%, African American- 6%, Asian American- 4.6%, Native American- 0.5, Pacific Islander-0.5%, and Hispanic- 6.5%. According to Cohen (2021) in the Air Force Times, African American female officers made up less than 1% of the active-duty personnel. In 2022, the Army Active Component Demographic reported that the percentage of female officers in the Army was 20% in comparison to male officers, who were at 80%, which shows the continued disparity. Smith (2010) concluded that if mentorship is not incorporated for African American female officers, there will continue to be underrepresentation among the rank structure, and the underrepresentation presents a barrier to career progression.

The progression in careers pertaining to promotions in rank continues to be a struggle due to lack of information, lack of skills, and lack of knowledge needed to pursue senior leadership positions of higher ranks. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), females are often viewed in a different light than males, primarily due to the stereotypes of women carrying the burden of having to take care of family responsibilities, which causes women to lack leadership skills because of not being able to take on training opportunities that would enhance leadership skills. At the same time, men are typically chosen for positions since they are less likely to take on the family burdens over their careers. Eagly (2007) shared that females were looked upon as not being hard-core, competitive, or rigid in the male-dominated workforce. While the military

requires a physical fitness test for military officers, there are still different standards between males and females. Regardless of military affiliation, Haslanger (2000) explained that historically, females are seen to be less submissive to males, which causes them to continue to be judged unfairly. Even successful women are judged unfairly and negatively by male students (Wallen et al., 2004).

While the military has changed, many still believe the military is a masculine culture, and that females are not as well-equipped to do the jobs as men. Male-centric structures, expectations, and roles remain. Gender roles have been a critical aspect of the military since the Gulf War, although women served their country as well (Titunik, 2000). Women have dedicated their lives to service in all branches: Marines, Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Air Force. They have won awards and been on the front line, serving in battle. Despite the hard work, African American female leaders are not treated equally to their male counterparts due to stereotypes According to Dobbs et al. (2008), research shows that females may be just as effective as males in leadership positions; however, they may be "devalued in leadership roles," resulting in stereotypical women who are "warm and nurturing" being less favored in the workplace compared to males (pp. 133).

Leadership Development of Minorities in the Workplace and Military

In order for outside agencies, corporations, churches, or military organizations to see a difference in growth and development, the culture, environment, and leadership team have to become more diversified. There needs to be intentional recruitment and hiring strategies that afford senior leader opportunities for African Americans. Mentorship has been seen as an essential element in supporting the retention of African Americans who are already in senior-level positions (Murray, 2001). Even Fortune 500 companies have adopted mentoring as a

powerful tool for retention, enhancing job satisfaction, attracting talent, and boosting morale by investing in their people. In 2022, 84% of US 500 companies had instituted mentoring programs, be it formal or informal (Cantalupo, 2022).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) explained that there is a glass ceiling, and the concrete ceiling presents a challenge for African American females trying to make up the ladder, making up less than 10% of the workforce in the non-profit community. African Americans have the education, skills, talent, and determination, but they often run into a well-known obstacle called the glass ceiling. However, the concrete ceiling speaks of an even more substantial barrier that prevents African American females from advancing due to prejudice and sexism. While African Americans may lead many non-profits and hold executive positions, Mentor (2011) maintained that the challenges remain for the vast majority of African Americans who attempt to attain higher positions within their organizations. According to Livingston et al. (2012), African American females are not included in attaining guidance, skills, and resources to help develop the necessary leadership skills needed for upper-leadership positions. Additionally, Price et al. (2017) asserted that African American females do not receive mentorship and professional development due to race and gender. While it consistently remains an issue, it has been highlighted that organizations tend to ignore the issue as if the discrimination is not occurring at all (Cook & Glass, 2013; Price et al., 2017).

Importantly, O'Connell (2010) made a considerable observation in the sense that it is apparent that the glass ceiling is there and will be broken. However, it is when African Americans, especially African American females, break the barrier that acknowledgment and accolades are given, and those individuals are said to be courageous like a plane breaking the sound barrier. They are said to be courageous because it is assumed that they worked overtime

and did almost double the work of their non-minority counterparts. The success of breaking the glass ceiling may very well come from those African Americans who benefited from a mentoring relationship, formal or informal. Kerr et al. (1995) added to the discussion of the glass ceiling, in that it continues to be a barrier to minorities trying to advance in career development and career progression. Jackson and Stewart (2003) concurred that African Americans have the undesired feeling that, unfortunately, the color of their skin remains an obstacle to moving higher in their careers.

The Air Force encourages the practice of mentorship; however, there are no mandatory requirements to be a mentor or to seek out a mentor, although the belief is that mentorship is beneficial to the development of leaders. The Air Force Handbook 36-2643 (2019) states, "Mentoring is an essential ingredient in developing well-rounded, professional, and competent future leaders. The overall goal of mentorship is to help Airmen (civilian, enlisted, and officer) maximize their full potential" (pp. 3). Within the scope of guidance, military personnel are encouraged to take advantage of workplace and peer mentorship, as referenced by Ivey and Dupré (2022). The Air Force provides an online system called MyVector, in which individuals can take advantage of reaching out to others who have volunteered to be mentors. The Air Force Handbook 36-2643. (2019, pp. 18) shares different types of mentoring relationships available to military personnel:

> Flash Mentoring: mentors may not be able to commit as much time but will share lessons with mentees that have been experienced and would be willing to schedule additional meetings as time permits. The advantage for the mentee/mentor is- an opportunity to learn from executives without a long-term commitment.

> Group Mentoring: occurs when there is one or more mentors in a group of mentees who all provide conceptual information, answer questions, provide guidance, and converse with the mentors. The advantage of the mentee's opportunity to extend their mentoring efforts by reaching more mentees in a time-efficient manner is that it resolves the issue of

not having enough mentors and can promote diversity of thinking, practice, and understanding.

Peer Mentoring: relationship occurring with individuals of the same grade and usually the same career fields in order to support the professional growth and development of colleagues. An advantage for the mentee/mentor- mentees sometimes learn better from their friends, associates, or individuals with similar backgrounds and career interests.

Reverse Mentoring: mentor of a junior person to a senior and more experienced person in an effort to share unique knowledge sets, which helps in learning the generational gaps of understanding…advantage for the mentee/mentor- ability to create and maintain an attitude of openness regardless of status, power, or position.

Situational Mentoring: provides the mentor with the help they need at that time based the request of the mentee in which the mentor gives advice, guidance, or correction depending on the scenario…advantage for the mentee/mentor- informal mentoring that usually occurs as a short-term fix to address an immediate situation but can transition to a more long-term connection over time if both the mentor and mentee are inclined to do so.

Speed Mentoring: occurs when a series of short conversations between mentor and mentee where the mentee is afforded the opportunity to ask questions in time slots that are provided in order to connect in a fast-paced manner. The advantage for the mentee/mentor is that mentees are concentrating on key areas of discussion or interest and are provided a variety of viewpoints or exchange of ideas for consideration. Mentees are able to meet numerous matches in a short time, may, and future mentoring relationships.

Supervisory Mentoring: the inherent responsibility of leadership informally and frequently providing daily guidance for the current job/task, which is an advantage for the mentee/mentor- as leaders. Supervisors should also encourage outside mentoring relationships, informal and formal, and allow employees time to cultivate the mentoring relationships.

Virtual Mentoring: the use of electronic tools applied for videoconferencing to occur through the MyVector portal or email; however, the recommendation is to meet face-to-face…advantage for the mentee/mentor- helpful for career fields whose members are geographically dispersed, for personnel who work alternating shifts or night shifts, for personnel who are deployed, or for personnel who are in remote areas and can be a tool to engage an increasingly tech-savvy population.

Related Literature

History of Mentorship

While mentorship has not been mandated in the USAF, as seen in the State of the Union address by President Bush in 2003, it is not a new concept. Additionally, Gough (2008) spoke to the history of mentorship in regard to the Greek origin, highlighting the first usage was in 1750 and was described as someone who was an "experienced and trusted advisor" (pp. 831). It is said that "mentor" is based on the character, Mentor, who was King Odysseus' friend and protector in the Trojan wars, although he was not very good. Mentor was entrusted to take care of the royal family, but Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, really took on the role of caring for the family since Mentor did not. The mentor was to educate and guide King Odysseus' son (Gentry et al., 2008).

According to Irby and Boswell (2016), the term mentoring was put into print in 1778 by Ann Murray, who was the author of *Mentoria: The Young Ladies Instructor.* In 1830, Wild wrote a periodical for youth entitled *The Mentor and Youth's Instructive Companion,* which was established for young men. Then, in 1839, a monthly magazine named *The Mentor and Fireside Review* was initiated. In 1913, a periodical called *The Mentor* was written by a group of men called the Mentor Association by William David Moffat. Mentoring became official in 1918 through the institution of the Big Brothers organization, in which they moved from being social to the schools. Around 2015, the very first mentorship program in the Air Force was called the Rising Physicians Program, which was established for medical students at one of the largest military hospitals, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The initial onset of the program was voluntary, and the Air Force, in particular, lacked individuals willing to step up to volunteer to be mentors to students within the residency program (Scott et al., 2019).

Benefits of Mentorship

Mentorship is reported to be beneficial on multiple levels. The benefits received are not just related to a person's work, but the benefits include personal development of self-actualization, enhanced cultural awareness, and an increased perspective of the world (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995). Mentorship is said to enhance positive attachments and attitudes toward the organization due to the optimistic relationship with the mentor (Dawley et al., 2010; Finney et al., 2012). In regard to the military, positive attachments and attitudes toward the organization could lend to military members desiring to stay in the USAF longer than anticipated due to job satisfaction and effective mentor relationships. Additionally, it would aid with the increase of retention and representation. Aman (2018) shared the benefits of mentoring, including how organizations benefit from the commitment to the job and the service as a whole in regard to retention. Additional benefits include increased development of new skills, enhanced engagement with employees and job performance, and positive associations with compensation, promotion, career satisfaction, and career commitment. From the aspect of the military, 'excellence in all you do,' is one of the core values; therefore, military members are expected to always perform their best. Yet, it does not mean that an Airmen performing excellent would actually consider it job satisfaction or career satisfaction. Experiencing an effective mentoring relationship could be the catalyst that changes the trajectory of an Airman's career.

According to Ivey and Dupré (2022), benefits from mentoring include subjective and objective outcomes not limited to promotion, enhanced performance evaluations, and career progression. Overall, mentorship has been reported to increase the retention rates in teaching, social work, and the practice of law environment (Boe, 1997; Collins, 1994; Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Martin, 2000; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Whitaker, 2001; Samantrai, 1992; Schuster, 1988).

Peer mentorship through the lens of knowledge translations references the growth, development, support, networking, and career advancement of mentees. Through the establishment of relationships, mentors and mentees build the element of trust, which opens the dialect for conversation of expectations to and from both the mentee and mentor. Traditional mentorship creates both personal and career development opportunities, fosters skill enhancements that yield to the conceptualization of a better working and learning environment, helps to produce higher educational advancements (formal and non-formal), and nurtures the building of relationships (DeForge et al., 2019).

Mentorship Roles and Responsibilities

Attaining a better understanding of the function of mentorship will assist in differentiating the roles of the mentor and mentee. Mentees may seek mentors intentionally, or mentors may take mentees under their wings because they see their potential and would like to help them in their career progression. Mentoring provides an opportunity for advancement in skill level for both the mentee and mentor, as the mentor may desire to enhance leadership skills within the relationship (Hicks & McCracken, 2009). According to Wagner (2009), the responsibilities are shared in the relationship in regard to holding one another accountable for seeking out leadership opportunities for growth and development.

Furthermore, Kram (1985) suggested that mentors inspire and help to build the self-esteem of the mentee in formal and informal ways. Formal relationships between mentor and protégé usually occur in a working relationship that is mutually established to improve the career development of the protégé. In a formal setting, the mentor takes time to lay out the expectations and guidelines, giving the mentee an orientation of what can be expected and developing a rapport of trust and communication on the front end (Chao et al., 1992). According to Chao et al.

(1992), both members stand a chance to benefit professionally and personally from the relationship when they commit to the process. Many organizations recognize the benefits and require leaders to be mentors to the less experienced members of the organization. According to Karkoulian et al. (2008) information on relationships, as it relates to mentorship, can come from family members, friends, coworkers, or teachers.

While barriers continue to exist for women, mentors can help support the leadership development aspect of career progression by helping mentees understand the value of commitment (Raabe & Beehr, 2003) and the goals and structure of the organization (Page, 2005). African American females are often underrepresented and are not afforded resources to advance in their careers. Many times, women are overlooked for senior leadership positions because of the lack of leadership development. A mentor relationship, according to Bower (2009), prepares women for leadership roles by ensuring mentees have the support, knowledge, skills, feedback, and understanding of the position. Mentors help mentees make the necessary connections of educational applications, training, and business skills.

More specifically, Lea and Leibowitz, as cited in Adams (1997) submitted that there are ten roles often embraced during a mentorship alliance:

1) Teaching provides education and knowledge, which develops skills for enhanced job performance.

2) Guiding directs and broadens the lens scope of the organizational policies, procedures, and expectations.

3) Advising provides transparency and experience based on requested guidance from the mentee, personally or professionally.

4) Counseling- provide a listening ear, support during times of stress, and guidance to achieve career goals.

5) Sponsoring creates platforms for networking opportunities for career growth and development.

6) Role Modeling sets an example for the mentee to mirror one's behavior as patterns of traits and conduct are observed.

7) Validating approves and confirms the mentee's goals through feedback, evaluations, or modifications.

8) Motivating inspires and encourages accomplishments and moments when the mentee achieves desired or set goals.

9) Protecting gives a safe space for the mentee to be honest and transparent without judgment and stand in the gap or be an advocate in times of need.

10) Communicating establishes open and effective communication for the mentee to feel comfortable to address any concerns without hesitation.

Rationale for the Study and Gap in Literature

Rationale for Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. The study included USAF officers stationed at various installations, in the US and overseas. The data collected during the research was conducted based on virtual face-to-face interviews for individuals with scheduling conflicts or military crises. This data, in addition to mentoring documents and mentorship programs, was used to identify types of mentoring programs and utilization timeframes. The data was also used to encourage the application of mentorship programs, both formally and informally. Officers were generally defined as a person who holds a position of authority as a member of the armed forces. The theories guiding this study value the benefits of building relationships and professional development through mentorship for African American female officers.

Gap in Literature

Research based on the RAND Corporation (Lim et al., 2014) demonstrated how females are underrepresented among the Air Force senior leadership structure in comparison to the lower ranks, and they also have a lower percentage of eligibility when looking at retention, accessions, and promotions. Nevertheless, African American female officers hold different positions and perform many missions in the USAF, and there are many success stories. However, there is little research available as to what contributes to the success of African American female officers, and this particular gap may prevent new officers or Academy graduates from advancing in their careers.

Mentorship **(**Toach, 2014) establishes a purpose and goal between the mentee and mentor while enhancing fluency in the area of instruction in the mentee who applies the skill(s) in every aspect of his/her life. This study will help shed light on the need and value mentorship plays in the role of African American female officers.

The gap in literature refers to the need for mentorship and faith, which encourages principles of leadership that reinforce the building of relationships and trust. The nurturing of relationships promotes communication, which in turn helps to develop trust (Philips II, 1992).

Profile of the Current Study

African American women have made great strides in corporate America and the military as it relates to attaining leadership training, education, and top leadership positions. However, females are still underrepresented compared to men in top leadership positions. It is believed, according to Randolph et al. (2019), that women and minorities will continue to be passed over for upper leadership positions without mentorship. Mentorship has yielded considerable benefits in corporate America with retention, promotions, and job satisfaction. Many Fortune 500

companies strive to ensure mentorship programs are implemented within their organizations (Cantalupo, 2022). Hill and Wheat (2017) reported that the inadequacy of leadership preparation and talent was based on the deficiency in guidance, mentorship, support, and sponsorship, all of which, could present more significant opportunities for leadership positions.

In the military, there is no established demographic percentage rate set for African American female officers, but research indicates a disparity between female and male officers, as well as a disparity between African American officers and White officers. While the numbers remain marginalized, African American female officers continue to push through obstacles and share success stories of reaching the upper echelons of leadership ranks. However, there have been minimal studies regarding the contributing factors of success in African American female officers. This gap in the literature represents the need for studying the potential benefits of mentorship for African American female officers of faith in the USAF. Faith is at the core of the military, and many military personnel depend on their faith to get them through missions and make decisions. Filling this gap in the literature will also identify the role faith has in the mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee. Mentorship depends in part on the leadership skills of the mentor. Value is placed on trust and being relational, both of which are characteristics of Christ. Communication is enhanced, and trust is developed when the mentor and mentee put forth great efforts in building their relationship (Philips II, 1992). Additionally, mentoring empowers relationships, builds personal growth, and heightens career development (Aman, 2018), as well as enhances job performance and retention rates.

The phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted in order to explore and gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of African American female officers pertaining to mentorship received impacting career skills, development, and promotions. This

design allowed the researcher to delve into the feelings and reactions of the participants. Face-to-face interviews and observations were the preferred methods of data collection. Open-ended questions were administered to give participants an opportunity to share freely without restrictions. Semi-structured interviews were ideal in allowing for flexibility for clarification of the participants' interviews pertaining to events and experiences in the form of additional questions. Observations by the researcher included the participants' behaviors, events, processes, concepts, and interactions. Verbal and non-verbal communication were key during face-to-face interactions, especially in identifying gestures, body language, or cues. The interviews were recorded, which were beneficial during the observations and aided in the transcriptions.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Mentorship is increasingly recommended as a strong tool in the growth and development of students and employees of different organizations and amongst multiple fields, including church organizations, medical fields, universities, and the military (Aman, 2018; Bevan, 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Toach, 2014). Researchers have found mentorship to yield considerable benefits in relationship building and career development (Lund, 2007; Mendez et al., 2017). Additionally, research shows that African American females continue to hold leadership positions in the military, specifically in the USAF (Baldwin, 1996). However, there is little research that explores if and how mentorship plays a role in their leadership progression and development.

Moreover, it is essential to identify the role of faith in mentoring from the perspective of the officers in order to better understand the mutual impact of those variables on the career development of African American female officers in the USAF. The phenomenological qualitative research method best allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the officers. Having conducted research using this qualitative design, it was imperative to understand that the phenomenological methodology related to the purpose and setting of the research, the roles of the researcher and participants, and ethical considerations.

Research Design Synopsis

Qualitative research advantageously allows inquirers to conduct an in-depth study and gain a better understanding of a phenomenon for a group of people, environments, programs, and events (Houser, 2009). Phenomenological research provides an opportunity to delve deeper into the thoughts and feelings of participants in the research and affords them the space to share their

experiences, behaviors, and perspectives (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative research enables the application of open-ended questions so that participants can express the phenomenon being examined in their own language. Qualitative research also allows the researcher to establish a personalized relationship with the participants, which invites them to share their perspective during the interviews (Cypress, 2018). Embedded in the qualitative method design are the research problem, purpose, and set of questions that will help bring clarity to the social phenomenon of the research participants' lived experiences.

For the present research, the phenomenological qualitative research method was selected in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the topic of mentorship. Due to the desire to attain in-depth knowledge from a philosophical and psychological perspective, the researcher applied phenomenological research culminating in the participants' shared trajectory of experiences through interviews with open-ended questioning. To ensure the validity of the study, it was important to triangulate information from various sources to establish themes and coherent justifications of the participants' viewpoints to ensure the validity of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Applying the phenomenological method gave the researcher the advantage of increasing awareness of previously minimal research, revealing certain relationships and themes, and helping uncover possible obstacles (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Research Problem

The research problem, according to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), often fills the gap of knowledge or practice, gives a voice to the unheard in society, explores unanswered questions, or increases an understanding from previous research. The research problem provided a background to the purpose of the study and research questions. In addition, the research problem below gave

a better understanding of why there is a need for the study of mentorship as it relates to African American females in the USAF.

Research data indicates that African American military on active-duty makes up 17% of the population. Out of the 17% of African American military members, only 9% are officers, which is indicative of underrepresentation (CFR.org Editors, 2020). According to Cohen (2021), 4% out of 28.92% of the military population are African American females, and only 1% out of the 28.92% make up African American female officers. Research furthered by Baldwin (1996) presented both that African American female officers are underrepresented compared to White female officers and have a lower promotion rate. While there is no set rate or percentage of how African American female officers should be represented, the data consistently shows underrepresentation instead of a higher population rate.

African American female officers hold leadership positions and perform top leader effective missions in the USAF. Great accomplishments have been achieved, yet literature is minimal as to what contributes to the success of African American female officers, and this particular gap may prevent new officers or Academy graduates from advancing in their careers. Similarly, Hill and Wheat (2017) reported a disparity between the relationship of female senior leaders and mentorship being explored. They identified this as one of the major themes of the minimal role of mentors and role models for females in leadership positions. The role of mentorship is extremely valuable for females in career development at all levels. The research assumed the inadequacy of leadership preparation and talent was based on the deficiency in guidance, mentorship, support, and sponsorship that could present more significant opportunities for leadership positions (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Nevertheless, the role of mentorship is extremely valuable for females in career development at all levels.

The gap in literature also represented the need to better understand mentorship for African American female officers of faith. The presence of faith in the military was established with the installation of Chaplains as being at the core of the military, and many military personnel depend on their faith to get them through missions and make decisions. The study will also identify the role faith has in the mentorship experience for both the mentor and the mentee.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. Traditional mentorship creates personal and career development opportunities, fosters skill enhancements that yield to the conceptualization of a better working and learning environment, produces higher educational advancements (formal and non-formal), and nurtures the building of relationships (DeForge et al., 2019). However, mentor role and social cognitive theories guided the study.

Research Questions

The focus of the interviews provided African American female officers in the USAF with an opportunity to share their lived experiences of how mentorship impacted their career development and progression, and what barriers they may have encountered. The interviews also provided the officers an opportunity to describe how the role of faith factored in the mentorship experience.

The following research questions guided this phenomenological research study:

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

Research Design and Methodology

The phenomenological qualitative research method allowed the researcher to explore, describe, interpret, and understand the phenomena or events of experiences shared by participants in a more natural environment with greater detail and flexibility (Houser, 2009). The goal of the researcher was to have a minimum of 10-12 but no more than 25 African American female officers in the USAF as interview participants, as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2016). The researcher interviewed a total of 15 participants. The central focus of the researcher was to pursue an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the female officers in their own words to gain insight into the impact of mentorship.

The design method of phenomenological research should include both data collection and data analysis. Data can be collected through a variety of strategies: observations, interviews, objects, written documents, audiovisual materials, electronic entities, texts, emails, lived stories, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, poems, music, and metaphorical visual narratives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Cypress, 2018). For this research, interviews and observations were employed. To protect the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher ensured five strategies during the data collection process: reflexivity, triangulation, data and memo differentiation, evidence exceptions and contradictions, and site visit considerations regarding the time spent. Observations were necessary in the interview to recognize the fluctuations of the

participants' voices or the non-verbal data, such as gestures, body language, or questions. Because the interviews were conducted via Zoom, no observations about temperatures, activities, or other physical settings that could impact the interview were necessary. Additionally, observations were made when reviewing the recordings or transcriptions of the interview (Cypress, 2018).

Data analysis is essential in the qualitative research design through the application of organization, management, transcription, and coding. Analyzing data includes data reduction, theme identification, condensing codes, and data configuration. Transcriptions should be numbered and edited to correct spellings, specifics of events, errors in names or places, and identification of compared themes. Upon completion of the transcriptions, coding should be implemented to break down the themes, identify relationships, draft concepts, and identify literature interpretations (Cypress, 2018).

In the phenomenological study, the instrumentation of extensive and thorough interviewing was necessary to understand the lived mentorship experiences of African American female officers. Qualitative interviewing (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) permits the researcher the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and virtual interviewing methods with the use of open-ended questioning to get a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), the interviewee and interviewer are the critical instruments in which the interviewer relies on questionnaires or surveys through the process of examining documents, behaviors, or participant interviews. Prior to the interview, the researcher was prepared with additional open-ended follow-up questions besides the research questions presented above to make cross-point participant comparisons (see Appendix A). The

researcher also applied the recommendation provided by Cypress (2018) to prepare participants for the termination of the interview in order to provide closure of the interview process.

Setting

When interviews are conducted, the setting for qualitative research is usually located at the site where the participants experience the phenomenon to be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead of participants going into a lab, it is recommended that the data collection occurs in a natural setting where there is direct communication. The face-to-face interviews are more personalized and often occur over multiple interactions.

While it is ideal, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), to interview at the site where participants work, it was not ideal for officers in the military. So, this researcher proposed two settings to protect the participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality. The choice of setting was based on the participants' comfort level. The first geographical location setting for the proposed study was at different USAF installations. Including participants at different military installations provided a better opportunity to obtain holistic data. The names of the bases were omitted to help protect the identity of participants and to ensure confidentiality; instead, pseudonyms were used to identify military installations and officers. If participants were too far to travel to, the setting occurred virtually on a conferencing platform.

The second proposed setting was the participants' residence, in their own natural and relaxed environment, which helped to achieve the natural setting of the phenomenological qualitative research design. The residence was an option for officers to feel comfortable speaking freely and expressing their perceptions in their own words as they relate to the mentorship experience.

While the proposed settings for the interview included on-base, at-home, or virtually, there had to be flexibility due to the location of participants, differences in time zones, and the needs of the USAF. Therefore, interviews for the research study occurred via Zoom. Some of the officers participated from the privacy of their homes, and some chose to be in their private offices.

Participants

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), the sample size of participants in the qualitative research design should be smaller because of the depth and breadth of the data collection for the phenomenon. Houser (2009) suggested that standard sampling methods for participants include simple random sampling, systemic random sampling, stratified random sampling, and convenience sampling. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), a common form of non-probability sampling is convenience sampling, in which no representative population is identified.

For this study, individuals who were ready, available, and met the criteria were selected for the sample, with an ideal sample size of 25-30 individuals. Convenience sampling was also appropriate due to the mission of the USAF, which could require last-minute temporary assignments or deployments, causing some of the population not to be available at the time the interviews were conducted. Whereas the intended goal was to identify 25-30 participants for the sample, the delimiting factor was the lack of randomization sampling. The purpose of identifying a sample size of 25-30 was to ensure the desired amount of 8-10 participants, in which 15 was the final sample size. Stamped consent forms from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were sent to each participant in order to confirm participation and commitment (see Appendix C).

Initial interviewing, aside from the research question interviewing, was conducted to ensure clarity, understanding, eligibility, availability, and commitment to the study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher stretched beyond the strategic, ethical, and personal aspects of the qualitative research process. Reflexivity was an important concern of the researcher in identifying their biases, values, and personal background as it related to their culture, history, and socioeconomic status. The researcher addressed ethical concerns of the research, such as ensuring participants were briefed of the research procedures, confidentiality, and their privacy rights. Additionally, the researcher ensured the interviewees received informed consent forms with an understanding that participation was voluntary and could have been withdrawn at any given time if that is their desire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Specifically, the researcher needed to reflect on past experiences and how those experiences shaped their interpretations of the study, possibly identifying favorable or unfavorable positions on particular themes. It was also important for the researcher to identify any connectivity to the study in order to be transparent and upfront with any biases. For example, it was important to identify this researcher as a former military officer in the USAF. While none of the officers being interviewed were peers, reflecting on the relationship between the researcher and the USAF as an organization was extremely important in identifying the connection and disclosing any compromises for the research to protect the credibility of the research study. Additionally, the researcher provided the purpose of the study and the Liberty-Stamped Consent Form (approved by the IRB) to each participant before the interview, as well as gave a reminder prior to beginning the first interview for each participant (see Appendix C and Appendix E).

Ethical Considerations

Adhering to ethical considerations and standards (Creswell, 2013) throughout the research process, from the onset of the study until the end, was highly recommended to avoid risks to the credibility of the research. Cypress (2018) encouraged the ethical considerations regarding the research site as it related to the approval of entry, privacy rights and consent of the participants, sampling size, recording techniques, and the security of data storage. Protecting the rights of the participants was needed and approved by the IRB via the submission of permission (see Appendix E). Additional ethical concerns included authenticity, cross-cultural contexts relating to the research's role, and research credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To ensure compliance with ethical standards according to federal regulations, the researcher submitted the research proposal to the IRB so that they could safeguard violations against the human rights of participants in the research. The IRB was responsible for holding the researcher accountable for conducting a risk assessment for participants, be it physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal. Additionally, it was the responsibility of the researcher to submit the procedures on how to attain entry to the site and information on participants to the IRB in order for them to determine whether the researcher was placing participants in harm's way at any point during the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Subsequently, IRB approval was granted (see Appendix E), and the IRB provided the final Recruitment Letter (see Appendix D) and the Stamped Liberty Consent Form (see Appendix C).

Because participants currently served as active-duty military at the time of the study, an additional approval was needed by the Department of the Air Force. The Liberty Recruitment Letter and the Liberty-Stamped Consent Form had to be submitted for compliance review for the protection of human subjects. Based on the methodology design and the documents submitted,

the researcher's request for interviews with the officers was approved by the Human Resource

Protection official review board.

In identifying a very detailed proposal of ethical considerations, Creswell and Creswell

(2018) are very specific in anticipation of ethical issues prior to the study, at the beginning of the

study, during the collection and analysis of data, and during the process of reporting, sharing,

and storing data. They also recommended ways to address the ethical issues. Some potential

issues for the study included authorship negotiation and falsification of research publication,

ensuring participants understood their involvement was completely voluntary with no pressure at

all, being sensitive to the needs of participants. Moreover, potential issues included the

researcher ensuring equity and transparency across the board for all participants, not leaving

participants high and dry after the interview, avoiding favoritism, avoiding reporting only

positivity during analyzation, and avoiding plagiarism, publication duplication, and sharing of

data.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Collection Methods

With the fluidness and flexibility (Flood, 2010) of the phenomenological study, Cypress

(2018) suggests that data collection of the research design include different techniques

mentioned above. Data collection for this study consisted of interviews and observations. The

participants of the research shared their lived experiences and feelings as experts on the

phenomenon of mentorship in relationship to career development and career progression. The

interviewee and the researcher were the key instruments of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Instruments and Protocols

Interviews

Interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured, or structured. Structured interviews are formal, provide pre-prepared standardized questions, and limit the participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews are also formal, with pre-prepared standardized questions. However, they allow the researcher to ask additional questions, if additional information is needed for clarification, or if the researcher has follow-up questions based on the answer given by the participant. Unstructured interviews are informal with no specific structure, and the researcher essentially has a conversation with the participants (Taherdoost, 2021). The interview should be focused more on the account of the experience of the participant rather than the factual accuracy without interpreted generalizations or explanations of the cause (Cypress, 2018). Flood (2010) added that reflectiveness should be incorporated within the interviews, and they should provide the ability to explore and illuminate the lived experience.

The semi-structured interview was the best method for this research study, because it gave the researcher the flexibility to clarify events or experiences of the participants in the form of additional questions. Semi-structured interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to request the expansion of a thought, look, or word provided by the participant. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews helped the researcher successfully gain an in-depth understanding by probing deeper with some of the questions and concepts.

During the interview process, there were three phases: the pre-interview process, the face-to-face interview, and the follow-up process. The pre-interview process afforded the researcher an opportunity to ensure participants received the purpose of the study, explanation of how the study will be used, the intent of the recordings, the essence of confidentiality, and

informed consent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher also informed the participants of the time frame of the interviews, the frequency and purpose of the interviews, and the way the results would be applied. In providing the timeframe and frequency, it was explained that at least three interviews with the participant were possible. Multiple interviews enhance the researcher's opportunity to construct context, assemble meanings, recognize behaviors, and focus on life history (Bevan, 2014). During the face-to-face interview phase, the prepared questions were asked, interviews were recorded, and necessary observations were made.

Additionally, throughout the face-to-face interviews, the role of the researcher is critical, according to Creswell (2013), in taking accurate notes, which will essentially be beneficial in increasing the trustworthiness of the research and the reliability of results. A key role while giving the interview was for the researcher, as recommended by Bevan (2014), to be an active listener in order to engage in clarification and probing of the testimony being shared. Pre-prepared interview questions asked of the participants are provided in Appendix A.

During the follow-up phase, the researcher clarified and asked additional questions in order to make cross-point participant comparisons. The researcher also prepared participants for termination of the interview during that phase, in which a brief synopsis of the study and what occurred during the face-to-face interview was explained. In addition, the researcher gave the participants an opportunity to provide additional information or ask questions regarding the study and the different aspects of the process (Cypress, 2018). As a whole, the interview process followed the recommended procedures according to Taherdoost (2021). Figure 1 below gives an example of the Interview Process.

Figure 1

Interview Process

Address Entry Requirements	→	Introduction of Self and Organization	→	Explain the Purpose of the Study	→	Ask Prepared Interview Questions	→	Gather Efficient Responses and Record	→	Conclude Interview with Closure and Gratitude for Participants
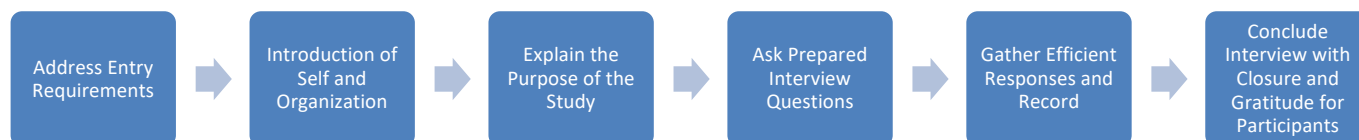
Observations

Taherdoost (2021) explains that observations are viewed in behaviors, events, processes, concepts, and interactions. The benefits of observations included additional information, evaluation of natural setting, flexibility, freedom from bias, and reliability. During the face-to-face interviews, both verbal and non-verbal communication of the participants were observed to identify gestures, body language, or cues. The recordings of the interviews were beneficial during the observation phase to recognize behaviors possibly missed during the interview itself. Part of the settings that impacted the interviews and were observed later in the recordings were activities, the distractions in their office or residence, WiFi, standard internet connections or other physical settings. Observations by the researcher were also made when reviewing the transcriptions of the interview (Cypress, 2018).

For this study in particular, participants described the performance reports that were used in the evaluation process to determine if the officer was eligible for promotion. The recommendations of promotion potential is based on the perspective of the officer's rater (AFI 36-2406, 2019). Hard copy performance reports were not observed, but participants provided clarity in understanding how performance reports impact career development and career progression.

Data Analysis

Analysis Methods

When applying the qualitative research design, data is required to be analyzed. Data can be collected in a number of ways, such as interviews and observations. For this methodology, the analysis of data is the process through which the researcher applies the following for the study: organization, management, transcription, and coding.

Organization and Management

Cypress (2018) discussed the challenges of analyzing data while simultaneously stressing the importance of organization at the same time. With data organization, the researcher named and created a digital filing system with a secured method to ensure the laptop used was password protected in order to secure and safeguard the data, which was necessary for the privacy and confidentiality of the participants' shared experiences. After the data was collected from the face-to-face interviews and the observations via Zoom, the researcher analyzed the data by data reduction, theme identification, condensing codes, and data configuration. As part of the organization and management for data analysis, the researcher utilized the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. The main principle of the method was to continuously compare the content, categories, and patterns identified in the research. Based on the theoretical ideas, the researcher was able to code effectively. The use of the constant comparative method also helped to increase the validity and reliability of the study (Boeije, 2002).

Transcription

Once the organizational piece was completed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times in their entirety to ensure clarity and to make sure there was a live and vivid

comprehension of the experiences. The researcher analyzed the memos and notes that were possibly jotted down in the margins while conducting the interviews to identify further ideas or themes surrounding the phenomenon. Transcriptions helped to clarify the data and tended to reconstruct the perspectives of the participants of the study. The researcher numbered the transcriptions and identified incorrect spellings, pinpointed specifics of events, pointed out errors in names or places, and associated compared themes (Cypress, 2018). Additionally, the researcher used the iTranscribe app on the iPhone™ for the transcription process.

Recorded interviews were helpful in allowing the researcher to go back and review verbal and non-verbal communications, such as pauses, raised voices, or emotional outbursts significant to the told experience that may not have been caught during the actual interview. Recorded interviews of the participants helped the researcher in the transcription conversation, which gave the researcher the opportunity to ensure a more valid study (Cypress, 2018).

Coding

Upon completion of the transcriptions, coding should be implemented to break down the themes, identify relationships, draft concepts, and identify literature interpretations. While organizing, management, and transcriptions are all essential to the analysis of data, coding is also vital to the qualitative research design methodology. Coding can be conducted by hand, hard copy transcripts, or software. Coding breaks down the themes, sheds light on literature and perspective interpretations, categorizes documents and data, creates diagrams, highlights quotes, identifies relationships, drafts concepts, and assigns labels to the identified codes (Cypress, 2018).

The initial aspect of constant comparison was to process open coding. With open coding, the researcher reviewed the transcripts of the interviews, determined what was actually being

shared, and then placed a label on the passage with the proper code. Open coding enabled the researcher to develop the necessary categories specific to the studied phenomenon, which in turn, provided a better understanding of highlights and inconsistencies. After reviewing the codes, connections were made based on the comparisons of the interviews. This analytical coding required the researcher to interpret the meaning of the codes, themes, categories, and classifications based on the process of the method (Boeije, 2002). Leedy and Ormrod (2016) proposed that qualitative analysis can be time-consuming, and it could be helpful to have preliminary categories for coding the data. Thus, the researcher applied the recommended beginning list of codes: specific topics, characteristics and attributions, actions, processes, emotions, beliefs, values, and evaluations (Leedy and Ormrod, 2016p. 293). The researcher also utilized the NVivo12™ software to assist with coding identification.

Multiple strategies can be used in order to ensure practical analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Data reduction was also suggested by Cypress (2018) in data analysis. Greening (2019) provided four steps, which Moustakas provided in 1994 when conducting a phenomenological research methodology. The four steps include bracketing, intuiting, analyzing, and describing (Greening, 2019). During bracketing, the researcher identified any preconceived biases based on previous military experiences. Within the intuiting phase, the researcher demonstrated a clear understanding of the phenomenon through the immersion of the research and data variance. Analyzing and coding were applied. The most critical step shared was describing, in which the researcher defined the phenomenon based on comprehension of the data.

Trustworthiness

While data collection consisted of interviews and observations, the instruments of the study, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), were the interviewee and the researcher

(interviewer). In the qualitative research design, trustworthiness, credibility, and confirmability are essential. Specific strategies can be employed, such as acknowledgment of biases, thick descriptions of data, and extensive time in the field. Triangulation is also often used to ensure trustworthiness.

Triangulation of information is recommended to ensure the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the researcher applied triangulation through the convergence of data in the form of the demographics of the participants, the definitions of terms that are provided in the literature, and the transcriptions from the interviews. To identify the demographics of the female officers, they were asked to provide the following: years of service, unit, and career specialty (Cypress, 2018). Moreover, the researcher applied the use of the constant comparative method to increase the validity and reliability of the study during the analysis of the data analysis phase (Boeije, 2002). Within the methodology, the IRB approval and direction were also a key component with assurance of trustworthiness by making sure all ethical considerations had been assessed and conducted correctly during the process.

Acknowledgment of biases was fundamental, especially with the researcher being an instrument. Biases can peak due to the human mind recalling experiences. The researcher, therefore, reflected on the personal relation to the phenomenon, because of prior service as an officer in the USAF (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This reflexivity helped to articulate experience and provide a filter through which the data was reviewed. Multiple interviews with participants and spending extensive time with them also helped to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Chapter Summary

In sum, phenomenological qualitative research is utilized in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of participants in particular situations in the words and language of the participants. It was incumbent for a researcher to understand the scope of the qualitative research methodology. It was best to apply open-ended questions to conduct interviews. Within the methodology, it was also critical to examine the requirements and process of the IRB and other ethical considerations prior to beginning the research in order to maintain the validity and reliability of the research study. Also critical in the methodology was having a grasp on the expectations of the role of the researcher and how to ensure compliance with population sampling and the environment in which to conduct the research.

Finally, data collection and data analysis are within the qualitative research method. Data collection includes lived stories, journals, letters, field notes, conversations, music, metaphorical visual narratives, and poems. Data analysis includes the application of organization, management, transcription, and coding.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

African American women hold leadership positions in the Air Force, but as the rank structure increases, the diversity of race diminishes. The statistics forementioned indicate the disproportionate representation of African American women. While they make up an impressive percentage of the demographics in the Air Force, there is not a proportional number of female officers. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. The intent was to further investigate for a deeper understanding of those officers who have experienced formal and/or informal mentorship. Mentoring has been identified as a critical element in the progression of employees for higher-level positions. The lack of mentoring relationships has been a barrier for women and may be the cause of the underrepresentation of African American females in the military, as well as in Fortune 500 companies (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). Ragins (1989) posits that men are more comfortable mentoring other men versus initiating a mentoring relationship with a female. The results of this research yielded five themes: mentorship journey, factors for successful mentorship, mentorship significance, impact of faith on mentorship experience and career development, and recommendations for good mentorship experience. This qualitative study posed six research questions:

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of

participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Data for this study was collected via interviews; however, each participant was provided with the IRB-approved consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix C). Participants were instructed to return the signed consent form agreeing to the conditions of the interviews to be recorded with the understanding of the data being used for future research and publishing of content. To attain audio and video recordings, interviews were conducted using both Zoom and the iPhone ™ voice memo app. Individual interviews were scheduled, and each participant was able to select a date and time that was most convenient for them by signing up through Calendly. Once participants were logged on, the digital audio recording device of the voice memo was turned on, as well as the Zoom recording application. The recording devices were activated at the beginning of the interview protocol and deactivated after the participant completed all questions and final discussions. The interviews lasted 30 minutes to one hour. All interviews were conducted within a six-week timeframe.

Demographic and Sample Data

Through the application of criterion and convenience sampling, a purposive sample population consisted of 15 African American female officers who were all active-duty members of the USAF at the time of the interviewing. Data saturation was achieved by having more than 10 participants share their mentorship experience. The qualifiers for this study were for the participants to be: 1) Female; 2) African American; 3) Active-duty Military (not Guard or

Reserve); and 4) Officer in the United States Air Force (not Army, Navy, Marines, or Coast Guard).

In order to be an officer in the USAF, one must have at least a Bachelor's degree; therefore, participants' academic degrees ranged from baccalaureate to doctorate. There were 30 officers who volunteered for the study, but only 15 met the criteria and completed consent forms. All participants answered the interview questions related to the mentorship experience. Table 1 displays the breakdown of additional demographics of years and ranks of the officers.

Table 1
Demographics of Service and Rank

Participant	Years in the Air Force	Rank
Cassie	14	Lt Col
Andrea	17	Col
Ava	22	Lt Col
Chanté	22	Lt Col
Krystal	21	Lt Col
Brittney	18	Lt Col
Sydney	6	Capt
Bridgette	13	Major
Sheyna	19	Lt Col
Kaniah	8	Maj
Leah	9	Capt
Tanya	16	Lt Col
Melanie	18	Lt Col
Tiana	29	Lt Col
Felicia	11	Maj

Data Analysis and Findings

Analysis Methods

For this study, the qualitative research design was applied, wherein data was collected and analyzed. Interviews were conducted to collect data and observations were made based on the data. During the methodology, the data analysis was processed through the applications of organization, management, transcription, and coding.

Organization and Management

According to Cypress (2018), an organization is an important aspect in the process of analyzing data for research. Data for the phenomenological study was collected and recorded via Zoom interviews and also recorded on the voice memo application of the iPhone. Once participants were logged on, the recording devices were activated, and the participants were all asked the open-ended interview questions. The original eleven questions revealed positive responses and were clearly understood by the participants. As part of the organization and management for data analysis, the researcher compared the content of the interviews, in which Glaser and Strauss developed the method in 1967.

Transcription

Once the organizational piece was completed, the researcher embarked on the procedural requirement of transcribing. Therefore, the digitally recorded interviews from the voice memo application were converted to transcripts using the iTranscribe application (app). Transcripts were verified for accuracy throughout the process through a comparison of the audio recording and the actual dictation on Zoom. The researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times in their entirety in order to ensure clarity and to make sure there was a clear comprehension of the experiences. Additionally, the transcripts were emailed to the participant for their review and

approval. Transcriptions helped to understand the data, identify incorrect spellings and misinterpreted words, and pinpoint specifics of events and associated theme comparisons (Cypress, 2018).

Recorded interviews on Zoom allowed the researcher the opportunity to go back and review verbal and non-verbal communications, such as pauses, raised voices, or emotional outbursts significant to the told experience that may not have been caught during the actual interview, which would help to ensure a more valid study (Cypress, 2018). However, there were no unusual verbal or non-verbal types of body language to report. Multiple approaches are used in qualitative data analysis since there is no individual unified basic approach when going through data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusions (Hamilton & Finely, 2019). The actual names of participants, their mentors, their mentees, and installations were not used in the results of the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participants' privacy, ensure anonymity, and maintain confidentiality.

Coding

According to Cypress (2018), coding by software or by hand helps break down themes and gives perspective to literature and interpretations. Coding also helps to identify relationships, draft concepts, and create diagrams. In congruence, it was best to have preliminary categories for coding, although it can be time-consuming (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

In order to analyze the transcripts, Braun and Clarke (2006) provided guidance on the six-step thematic analysis approach, in which part of the process was to become familiar with the data. A thorough review of the transcripts was conducted, in which short notes were made subsequent to the participants' responses to the interview questions to ensure an understanding. After the process of familiarization, in which the researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple

times and identified common phrases and keywords used by participants, the initial codes from

the 15 analyzed transcripts were developed. After the codes were established, the themes were

identified by categorizing the initial codes. The final steps included the reviewing and renaming

of the identified themes, during which a total of five themes were identified. Additionally, the

NVivo12™ software was the selected tool for organizing and interpreting the data into thematic

representations.

Data was organized in NVivo12™ by uploading of interview transcripts in the order of

the participant interview. While the organization method was time consuming, this particular

process afforded the initial independent coding of the data from all the interview responses. Data

was compared through the software in the context of the interviewer's responses to prevent

possible biased interpretations. Each interview question was uploaded and labeled in order to

provide a cross-point of data from the transcript to the participant.

Trustworthiness

While data collection consists of interviews and observations, in agreement with Leedy

and Ormrod (2016), the instruments of the study were the interviewee and the researcher

(interviewer). In the qualitative research design, to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and

confirmability, strategies such as acknowledgment of biases, thick descriptions of data, and

extensive time in the field can be employed. Triangulation, recommended according to Creswell

and Creswell (2018), was applied in this study to ensure trustworthiness and validity. For this

study, the researcher applied triangulation through the convergence of data in the form of the

demographics of the participants, the definitions of terms in the literature, geographical diversity,

and the transcriptions from the interviews. To identify the demographics of the female officers,

they were asked to provide the following: age, years of service, unit, and source of commission (Cypress, 2018).

Data Analysis of Findings

According to Hill and Wheat (2017), there is definitely a disparity between mentorship and female senior leaders. The underrepresentation of African American females in the USAF diminishes the availability of female mentors as officers. The gap in leadership identifies the need for mentorship and faith in the career development and progression of African American female officers. Ragins and Cotton (1991) posit that finding formal mentors to commit to pouring into women may be a challenge; as well, women tend to have more informal mentors due to seeking mentors out for themselves. Kram (1985) describes the informal mentorship experience as unstructured. All of the participants shared that they had experienced mentorship at some point during their careers. The mentor role theory developed by Kram (1983) associates career advancement and psychosocial development with the enhancement of identity and competence for the mentee.

Findings by Emergent Themes

With the use of the NVivo12™ software during the coding process, responses and themes were sorted into categories. The process provided independent coding of the data from the interviewees' responses. The data was compared to the context of all the responses to prevent influenced interpretations.

The following analysis presents a more comprehensive profile of each of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of mentorship, including specific extracts from the interviews shared as they relate to the value of mentorship. Additionally, the analysis presented narratives from each participant as to how mentorship and faith impacted her career progression and

development. According to the responses of the participants, the following themes were identified: mentorship journey, factors for successful mentorship, impact of faith on mentorship experience and career development, and recommendations for good mentorship experiences.

Table 2

Theme Descriptions

Theme	Description	References
Theme 1. Mentorship Journey	A highlight of the mentorship journey for the different participants. The highlight looks into the types of mentorships they went through (formal or informal) and the diversity of mentors (if they had one mentor or multiple mentors).	20
Theme 2. Factors for Successful Mentorship	Outlines the factors that can determine the success or effectiveness of the mentorship. Additionally, these factors influence the mentor-mentee relationship.	16
Theme 3. Mentorship Significance	Outlines the significance of mentorship for career development and how participants perceive the significance.	20
Theme 4. Impact of Faith on Mentorship Experience and Career Development	An outline of the impact that faith has on the experience of the participants during their mentorship journey.	11
Theme 5. Recommendations for Better Mentorship Experiences	Outlines the recommendations by the participants on how to enhance the mentorship experience.	4

Theme 1. Mentorship Journey

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the mentorship journey consists of two considerations: whether your mentorship is formal or informal, and whether one should seek out diverse mentors or those with shared characteristics and experiences. Both aspects of the mentorship journey will be discussed below.

Mentorship Type: Informal/Formal

All of the participants of the study were aware of mentorship and the value placed on the importance of having a mentor. While 12 of the participants shared that they gained awareness of mentorship early in their careers, three participants expressed not having the awareness until later in their careers. One participant received mentorship; however, she was not aware she was receiving mentorship until years later. Another participant was aware of mentorship but shared that the execution of the mentorship experience is underwhelming in the USAF. Furthermore, many of the mentorship experiences were deemed informal mentoring relationships. Very few participants expressed being formally, and intentionally mentored. Out of 15 participants, only 33% had a formal mentor experience. Below are the recorded responses from participants describing their perspective on the formality (or informality) of their own mentorship experience.

Participant 1: Cassie

I have been in the Air Force approximately 14.5 years. My mentorship experience started at the onset of my career when I first got to my first assignment. My first commander was a female, and she instantly took me under her wings and decided to mentor me on how it was to be an officer, but also how it was to be a female officer. The mentorship experience with my commander was both formal and informal.

Participant 2: Andrea

I have been in the Air Force for 17 years, and I almost instantaneously was approached about mentoring by my Chief Nurse, who was Caucasian. And then there were some African American Majors and a Lieutenant Colonel that pulled me to the side and they asked me what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. That's when I first learned about the glass ceiling, where you think you're in reach, but you're just out of reach.

Participant 3: Ava

I have been in the Air Force for 22 years, and I really didn't know a whole lot about mentorship. I did not get my first mentor until I had been in the military for eleven years. I was a senior Captain and up for the promotion board for Major. At that time, I got a new squadron commander who also became my mentor at that point.
Participant 4: Chanté

I had been in the Air Force for 22 years and 11 months. I consider my first base to be a blessing because there were some senior officers who were really passionate about mentoring, and there was a group called Air Force Cadet Officer Mentoring Action Program (AFCO MAP), in which the President was a Lieutenant Colonel. I became a part of that group from the very beginning, and the Lieutenant Colonel looked at my first OPR, my first draft for review. That was my first awareness of mentorship.

Participant 5: Krystal

I have been in the Air Force for 21 years. I was in a different branch prior to coming in the Air Force, where I had mentors the whole time. When I came to the Air Force side, I did not have a mentor. I went to the personnel members who I thought were in certain positions that could assist and shared with them what I really wanted to do and asked how I should go about accomplishing it, but was not provided guidance. My supervisor, even though he was my flight commander, was more so preparing for retirement instead of mentorship. It was not until my second assignment that I got a mentor, who was an Army commander. After four years overseas, I came back stateside to my next assignment, where I received my first mentor, who was Air Force.

Participant 6: Brittney

I have been in the Air Force for about 18 years, and I realized mentorship was important early on. I came into the military knowing about mentorship, because they talk about it early on, but the execution of the mentorship experience is another story. The awareness of mentorship was there because it is something Air Force placed value on. They try to have a lot of formal in mentorship programs, but I have not been a part of them, and I'm not sure how good they work because I am not sure of very many people who are part of the programs either. But outside of that, I have people to mentor me on the side, very informally.

Participant 7: Sydney

I have been in the Air Force for six years. I became aware of mentorship when I first got in because my husband was already in the military and shared the value of getting a mentor. However, I didn't really get a good understanding of how mentorship could impact my career until about my first or second year in the military. As a prior enlisted member, I did not really have a mentor. I saw one of the Chief Nurses and decided I wanted to be like that when I grew up. So I went to talk with her about mentorship, and the Chief Nurse became my mentor. She talked about career progression and the medical field, and that's when I actually got a grasp of what it meant to have a mentor in your career and the actual job I was going to do.

Participant 8: Bridgette

I have been in the Air Force for 13 years. I recall having mentorship from the beginning. My very first Chief Nurse was actually an excellent Chief Nurse. However, I did know

what mentorship was in the Air Force because I didn't hear anyone talking about mentorship. But in retrospect, I was actually being mentored by my first Chief Nurse, because the Chief Nurse laid out the plan of my trajectory for my career. While I had the mentorship experience in my first year, I did not realize deliberate mentorship until four years into my career.

Participant 9: Sheyna

I have been in the Air Force for 19 years and will be 20 years in 2 months. I received guidance and informal mentorship from the beginning of my career, unknowingly. It wasn't until I was a mid-captain, almost 10 years into my career, when I proactively sought out mentors.

Participant 10: Kaniah

I have been in the Air Force for eight years. Immediately after COT, I saw the need for mentorship. It was a huge transition to go from working as a civilian nurse or outside of the military to transitioning into the military because it's a complete cultural shock. So, I knew immediately that I needed assistance to help me adjust. I wasn't sure how to ask for that assistance. Because of the military culture, everyone's in uniform, and you're not sure who to ask what questions, tools, or points of contact to ask for. I was a new provider at the time, and I'd made that transition from being a nurse to being a Women's Health Nurse practitioner. So simple things would come up, such as what is appropriate or how to wear your uniform.

Participant 11: Leah

I have been in the Air Force almost nine years now. I'm coming up on my ninth year in December. I probably became aware of mentorship when I was a baby Lieutenant, maybe even before that because I did ROTC and I had some African American instructors who were officers too. There were some enlisted Cadre as well. Back then, I went to predominantly white school (PWI), and it probably about five of us that were African American. It might have been a couple other minority groups, but it was very nice to have some other African American officers right there in our detachment that gave us the "sit down" talk.

So I would say I had mentorship before I commissioned and had somebody to sit me down and say, "Listen, this is how it is. This is what you need to expect." But it wasn't as specific for my career field, so I'd say I got more specific career field mentorship once when I was a baby Lieutenant. At my first assignment, there was a Lieutenant Colonel, and he was my boss's boss, and he was really good. I had been there about six months, and we were just sitting around in office. He was the first to tell us you need mentors, you need ones that look like us, and you need white mentors also.

Participant 12: Tanya

I have been in the Air Force for 16 years, and I'm not sure if it's so much as quote-unquote called mentorship, but your Chief Nurse sits down with you and goes over this path that they have set for you and tell you this is the track and this is all the things and they call it mentorship, but I don't know if it is. I guess it is according to the Webster definition of mentorship, but in my opinion, there are different flavors of mentorship. So those basic forms of mentorship, I was pretty much aware of from the very beginning, and I must admit I did have a pretty good Chief Nurse.

So even though it was more of the standard of how we develop as nurses, she still took the time to actually listen and move me into what things I was interested in and help me grow in those senses. It is very distinctive when she's mentoring me and when it's more of that friendship role, and I think that's when I really embodied or have that that true mentorship experience because it's more of that feeling of I'm vested in your growth, and I'm vested in you getting where you are, and they actually care about you when you're making some of these missteps. So, I would say that was probably two to three years into my military career.

Participant 13: Melanie

I have been in the Air Force for 18 years, and I have been aware of the need for mentorship because the Air Force stamped on mentorship my whole career. Even when I was in ROTC, I was immediately connected and actually told to get a mentor as a senior. The requirement from my Commandant of Cadets was that one had to be active-duty in my career field, and the other one could be any other person, civilian, a military, or same career field. So I thought that I wanted to be a flight nurse, and I had done a visit at Maxwell with my detachment, and I ran into this African American Captain, and I thought that I would follow her, and she would just forward to me and show me the way as a new nurse.

And then I had another mentor as a civilian, and so I walked in my Commandant's office, and I told him I got my two, and he said, you can keep your two if you want to, but you're going to take this one that I have for you, and we're still friends. In my 18 years, I've seen how membership has weighed a lot. Now, as a Senior Leader, people are looking to me as their mentor, and I definitely understand the value. I just don't think that is executed as well, and definitely not among officers of color.

Participant 14: Tiana

I have been in the Air Force 29 years, and I actually was enlisted first. I crossed over into social work twelve years into the military, and when I learned that mentorship was important was probably when I was a Captain. In regard to how important, I would say two years into the career field when, I started noticing others getting mentored around me. I did go to a couple of people that I trusted and asked them to be my mentor, and they

did. And as you go along and continue in your career, you pick up additional mentors along the way.

<u>Participant 15: Felicia</u>

I have been in the Air Force for 11 years, and I became aware of the value of mentorship early on in my career. It was preached to me as a commissioned officer in training. I was a civilian nurse prior to joining the military, so I came in the military as a Captain, and the expectations of me were very high because I wore the rank. But I didn't know all the ins and outs of somebody that's been a Captain for a longer period of time. And in my training, they said to always find a mentor, one that is a senior enlisted member and one that is another officer.

Diversity of Mentors

In congruence with the mentor role theory, Bass (2008) posits the value of having mentorship, be it outside or inside the same organization. Within the realm of the social cognitive theory, Aman (2018) enhances the concept of different types of mentorships, supporting specifically diversity mentoring in which the mentorship experience is shared among cultures, genders, and sexes. While all the participants experienced mentorship in some form, many of them shared the importance of having a diverse group of mentors. Here are their responses:

<u>Participant 1: Cassie</u>

Seek out different types of mentors. As I mentioned, I have males, females, different races, different ranks in the military and outside the military. It's just as important for the mentor to reach out just as it is for the mentee to reach out and check in with the mentor sometimes. It doesn't have to be a scheduled check-in. As African American female officers, I do believe it is important to seek out mentors that look like us.

<u>Participant 4: Chanté</u>

I've always sought out most perspectives, and I haven't limited myself to just women or black people. I have my circle, and I'm very blessed with a tight circle with all kinds. I got men, women, black, white, Asian, it doesn't matter. I don't discriminate. I have line, non-line, and retired. I don't throw away people, especially good folks.

Figure 2

Mentorship Journey
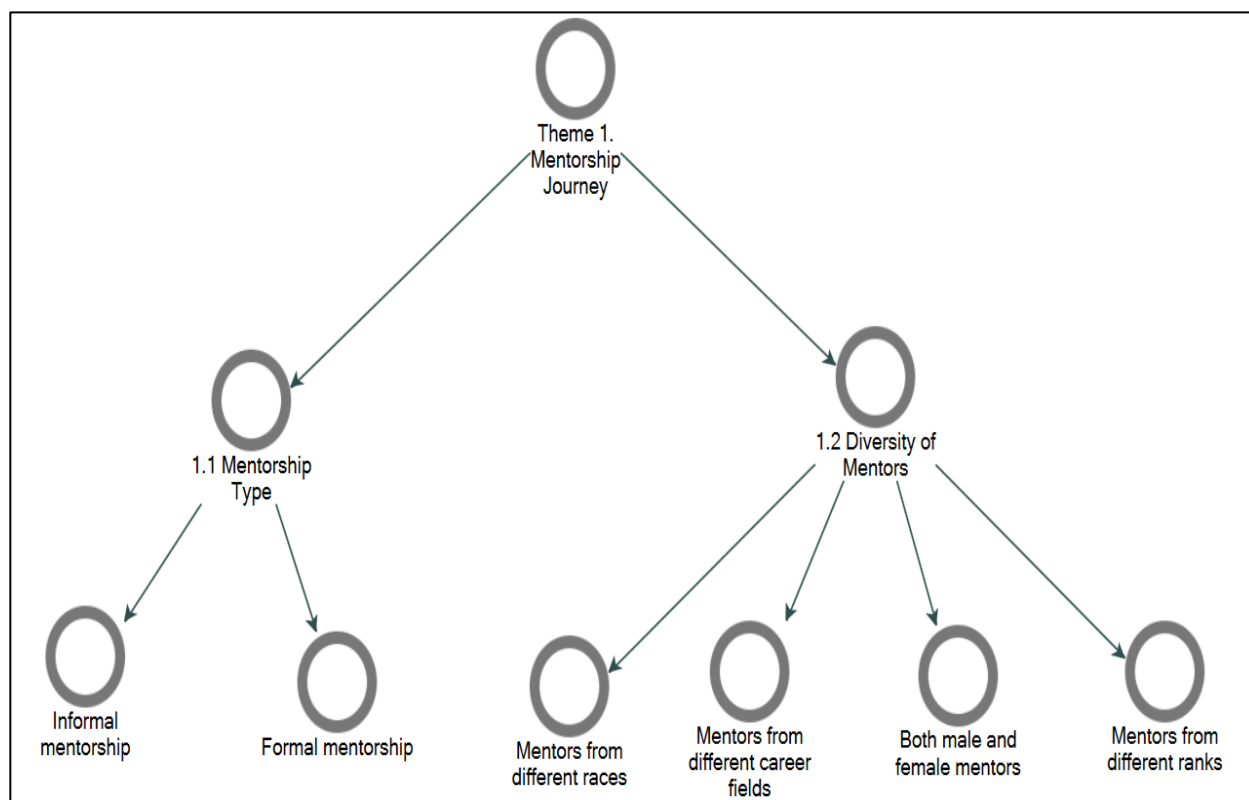
In sum, the first theme of the mentorship journey revealed a strong correlation with all of the participants regarding the experience of mentorship. All of the participants encountered a form of mentorship from a formal and/or informal perspective. There is no formal mentorship program in the Air Force, but there is a mentorship initiative offered on MyVector. However, none of the participants could speak to having a successful experience, either because they never felt the initiative to be advantageous or because the attempts made to attain a mentor through MyVector were futile. Four of the 15 participants discussing MyVector stated that the mentorship experience should be more personable, more organic, more invested, and more of a connection.

Additionally, many of the participants encouraged the benefit of having a diverse group of mentors. Ten of the 15 participants specifically referenced the value of having multiple and/or diverse mentors. While all ten participants did not state a preference for African American mentors, it was recommended by one of the participants to have a mentor who "looks like you" for support and understanding. A diverse group of mentors provides additional insight and different perspectives on the significant developmental aspects of progression and career opportunities.

Theme 2. Factors for Successful Mentorship

There were a number of factors that participants identified as influential in the effectiveness of mentorship and the quality that is experienced in the mentor-mentee relationship: cultural relevance, gender similarity, communication consistency, and relationship building.

Cultural Relevance

According to Lyness and Thompson (2000), there continues to be a lack of role models and mentors for females. Many of the participants noted that cultural relevance should be taken into account in the mentoring setting. Not only do African American females face the challenge of existing in a male-dominated workforce and military, but the female population is predominantly of the White culture. While many of the officers discussed and expressed their gratitude for the mentors from different ethnicities who impacted their lives, they shared a sense of relief, ease of communication, and the comfort of relating to someone from their own culture. Barriers were not identified as an official theme. However, African American females continue to face specific barriers, even in the USAF, and participants reflected on how it helps to have someone with whom they can identify when dealing with challenges of racism or other

discriminatory factors impeding their career or mental health. Below are excerpted some of the

participants' discussion on cultural relevance in mentorship:

Participant 1: Cassie

As African American female officers, I do believe it is important to seek out mentors that look like us. I have one really close mentor, and she's an African American female. And her rank is Colonel, O-6, and we understand the things that we deal within our career field. And so I really look to her in a big sister way, just to get a sense of, you've been in my shoes before and how do you navigate this, because Caucasian women are navigating this very differently.

Participant 9: Sheyna

There are some discussions I've had with mentors about micro-aggressions and perceived biases from leadership at different times in my career. It's one thing to be told that you're aggressive or angry or non-compliant, but then somebody else of a different race can say the exact same thing you said, just in a different way, and it be perfectly fine. It has been difficult, but I'm grateful for mentors that understand and look like me and understand when I have concerns. They can speak to that a little bit more in-depth and see it the way that I see it as well.

Gender Similarity

Gender similarity was identified as a factor in which having a female-to-female mentor

afforded the mentee the opportunity to have a more relatable and more effective mentor-mentee

relationships. As African American females, participants expressed the challenge of being in a

male-dominated working environment.

Participant 1: Cassie

So it's authentic. But from female aspect of things, like, we talk about career concerns, because some of us are in the same careers. But then it's also being able to identify because we're females.

Participant 2: Andrea

We are not allowed to soar or shine the way I think other ethnicities are. For African American female officers they need someplace safe to go for mentorship, somebody they can relate to.

The above participant responses demonstrate that female-to-female mentorship is essential in the elevation of higher-level positions and opportunities (Harris, 2008; Mangatu, 2010; Mattis, 2001; Parker & Kram, 1993; Toland, 2007).

Communication Consistency

Another factor highlighted for an effective mentorship experience was the need for consistency in communication between the mentor and mentee. It was specifically reported that when the mentee strives to maintain a consistent and continual sense of communication with the mentor, they receive better support and feedback from the mentor. Participants revealed that mentoring should be with someone who is trusted in order to feel comfortable enough to communicate openly, as well as to receive feedback in a constructive manner, especially when the feedback is not as desirable. Communication is referenced by over 50% of the participants. According to Philips II (1992), communication is instrumental in the mentorship experience. Here are some insights that participants shared during the interviews:

Participant 3: Ava

I think mentorship should be more personable, mentors should take more time out to spend with mentors. Even if they seem mean or unapproachable, I keep my same tone. I think mentorship should improve in consistency.

Participant 7: Sydney

I believe it definitely has to be open communication as to what is wanted from the mentee, and then also from the mentor just to be honest and transparent, and tell the mentee the good, the bad, the ugly, and the mentee to be able to accept it. It's important for the mentee to be able to accept the negative feedback, because everything is not going to always be what we want to hear.

Relationship Building

The final factors that contributed to a successful mentorship experience were the mechanisms and personal characteristics that a mentor-mentee relationship embodies,

specifically for the mentor and mentee. Figure 2 shows four factors for an effective mentorship that appeared from the data collected during the interviews.

Figure 3

Factors for Effective Mentorship
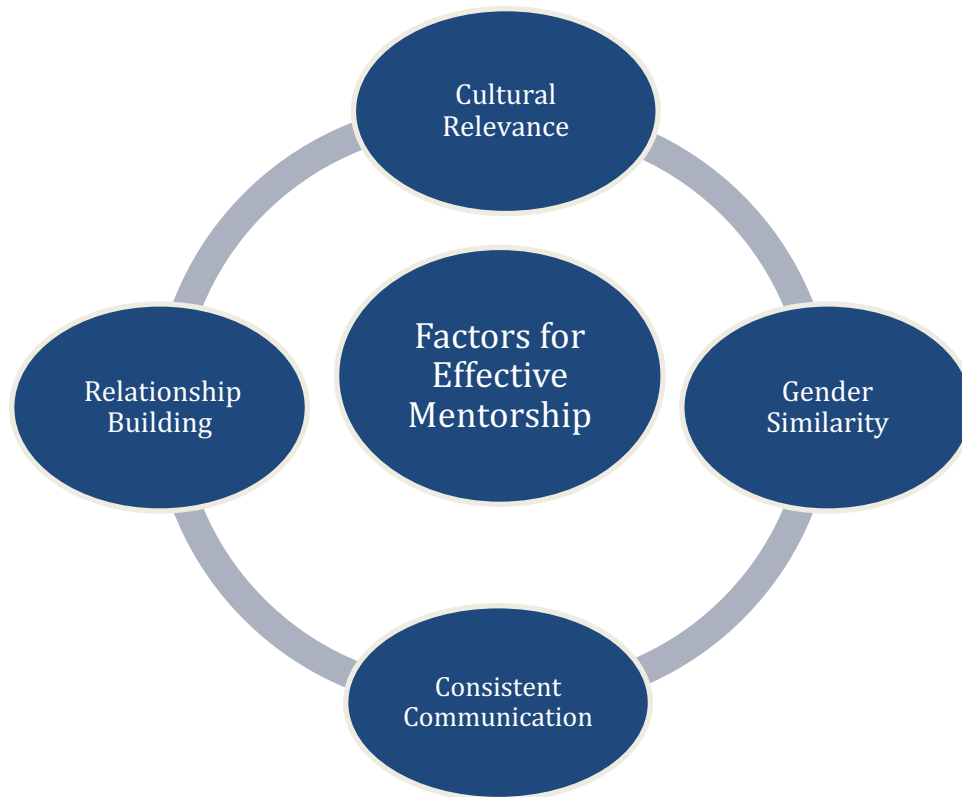
Participants shared how they appreciated mentors who genuinely cared about them and played an integral role in their personal growth and the development of their career, as well as mentors who consistently showed up when the mentees needed them. One characteristic that was mentioned throughout the interviews was having a mentor who was trustworthy. Philips II (1992) speaks to the essence of communication being a rich ingredient in building trust, which develops into a better relationship, enhancing the performance of the mentee. The theme of relationship building through care, consistency, and communication is evident in the following excerpts from the data transcripts:

Participant 2: Andrea

The people that I mentor, we don't have to hang out, but I like you enough to be available to you whenever you need it because mentorship is hard work. It requires personal time and availability. I let all my mentees know that they can call me or text me anytime.

Participant 3: Ava

Get a mentor who is trustworthy and transparent, and don't lose your faith. And you have to have somebody who helps to lead and guide you, so you have to seek out mentors. If you're a mentor, be personable and get to know mentees personally, their interests, their hobbies, their families. It shouldn't always be about work. Take time to get to know them, and that builds the relationship and builds trust.

Participant 6: Brittney

I think it's important to build relationships and connect with mentors who are genuine and authentic. You have to be able to trust the person, at least for me, in order to hear what they have to say. You want to be able to have a mentor who is available and flexible, especially when you may find yourself in dire situations.

Participant 8: Bridgette

So I think, first, that person needs to be trustworthy, and that person needs to be someone who you can say whatever you want to say, tell them exactly what you're experiencing or what you're thinking or thinking about doing, and they will give you positive and constructive feedback, even if it's not what you want to hear. They're going be totally transparent with you and make sure that they're telling you what they want you to know. And they create a safe space. So having a safe space to go to someone is always helpful. They encourage you, and I think encouragement is big deal. And if you have a safe space, you have someone to go to, somebody who's going to just be there to listen to you and not judge you.

The data revealed a strong correlation among all the participants that building relationships is a critical factor in the mentoring process. Many of the participants suggested they wish they had taken advantage of mentorship opportunities offered to them sooner rather than later in their careers. In hindsight, the participants emphasized the value of mentorship early in the career process in order to be more successful and have more career opportunities. Participants shared how challenging it is to be a female in a male-dominated workforce, in addition to the cultural differences they face. Having different mentors of different genders and

races is an essential component to the mentorship experience, but it is also advantageous to have a mentor who is relatable as a female and as an African American. Participant 6 shared, "Within the first three years, I met people who were black women who wanted to help and mentor me. Some of them actually are still my friends today, and they still provide their mentorship." Having someone more relatable increases a stronger connection and enhances the ease of communication. Consistent communication in mentoring leads to the hope of a more significant experience between the mentor and the mentee.

Theme 3. Mentorship Significance

Participants of the study reported how the mentorship experience impacts their career development in three major ways: **1)** motivation, **2)** guidance, and **3)** support and encouragement. Some of the participants shared that having a mentor who invests in their progression and follow up with genuine concern provides the motivation needed to increase performance, knowledge, and skills.

Motivation

Mendez et al. (2017) submit that the framework of mentorship allows for the development and enhancement of self-efficacy in participants, thus resulting in self-motivation. Motivation, according to participants, was specifically directed to put in awards even if it was not what the mentee would typically do. The motivation given by mentors makes participants feel as though they have someone vested in their career goals and desires. The excerpt below provides insight:

Participant 10: Kaniah

The mentor and the mentee need to be aware of generational differences. I think a mentor should be invested because sometimes people have another agenda, and so they're not getting the appropriate mentorship or advice that they need. I think they need to have

open communication and to be available, especially if the mentee needs support. I think they need to be available and truly invested, and not doing it for a bullet.

Guidance

Mentors guided realistic feedback, even if the feedback was not favorable to the mentee. Participants also reported how mentors helped them navigate challenging situations during their careers. Participants discussed how mentors were honest and shared opportunities that eventually opened doors that their peers were not aware of or were not privy to the information. Kram (1983) identified two functions that mentors provide in the relationship: career and psychosocial functions in which the enhancement of the mentees' career is advanced through the mentor's guidance and coaching, and mentees have a higher sense of identity and competence professionally. Perspectives by participants are shared below:

Participant 3: Ava

Basically, I took the things that she said, and I didn't get offended by it. I took it as though she was really cared for me as another African American female officer, and she was guiding me because I was her only African-male female officer in her squadron. And so, she kind of guided me and help me get that firm foundation.

Participant 12: Tanya

So a mentor has been great in that sense just to help navigate things unfamiliar…having that mentor that you can ask how to navigate this or to share with them the problem you've been given, and this is what was done, and to share this is what I think I should be doing.

Support and Encouragement

Lastly, participants reported that mentors provided support and encouragement, which was helpful in times when mentees needed to persevere during difficult times and career-altering moments. Participants shared the vital role mentors play in consistently encouraging them to strive for excellence in their performance and taking new opportunities, even if the mentee did not see the short-term benefit. Participants also shared how encouraging it was to have a mentor

show support during challenging times when mentees could not necessarily see the light at the

end of the tunnel. Participants give an account below:

<u>Participant 1: Cassie</u>

I can remember getting to one base, and we had an incident in our organization as soon as I got there, and my boss put me on it. It was an eye-opening experience. I had an amazing year in that position and that set me up for the next position. I was told I should not have gotten the position because it was typically a senior Major position, and I was a just putting on Major, but my commander submitted my records anyway, and I was selected for the position. From early on, having mentors and seeking out those folks that provided awesome support and guidance really helped to propel my career and set me up for success.

<u>Participant 15: Felicia</u>

In times when I faced barriers of leadership not seeming to be supportive, I had mentors to encourage me. I think it's very important that African American female officers get mentored because we are a minority, and you need someone who looks like you to encourage you to withstand whatever obstacles that you're going to have so you will know that you can overcome the obstacles.

A correlation was discovered among participants within their experiences of how

mentorship played a significant role in participants' receiving guidance that catapulted their

career development and progression. The motivation received helped to build their confidence

and helped them grow professionally and personally. The support and motivation received

during challenging times for many of the participants revealed the necessity of mentorship, as it

was the saving grace for their careers as it pertains to retention and remaining on active-duty. It

was explicitly mentioned how they were aware of many officers who elected to separate from the

Air Force due to a lack of mentorship and guidance. Support and encouragement were needed for

the participants to step out of their comfort zones and take advantage of opportunities that

ultimately enhanced self-efficacy and career gratification.

Theme 4. Impact of Faith on Mentorship Experience and Career Development

Many of the participants in the study viewed faith as their primary source of strength and

hope; some participants also viewed faith as a guiding moral compass. Based on the lived

experiences of the participants in the study, it is clear that faith is critical in the mentorship

experience, career progression, and personal growth as a leader. The participants use their faith

on a regular basis in the steps that they take and the decisions that they make. While many of the

participants expressed that they do not push their beliefs on their Airman, they are not ashamed,

nor do they hide their beliefs or faith. They acknowledge the simple fact that without faith, it

would be impossible to show up for work every day, sometimes under extreme circumstances,

without faith in God leading and guiding them in the right direction. The following excerpts from

the interviews are evidence from them:

<u>Participant 4: Chanté</u>

Faith is everything to me. In my leadership, it's helped me to have grace in the moment, and it's made all the positions manageable because I know I'm not by myself.

<u>Participant 5: Krystal</u>

My faith is strong because I know who my being is. My faith has never wavered, and I have certain mentors who are also prayer partners. And I can say I need you guys…I need you praying for me because of what I'm going through. So, my faith has basically kept me going this far. I think God knows your strength, and he knows that He's not going to put you through more than you can handle. Everything that I have done for the last 20 to 30 years has been from strength that I'm getting from the Lord.

<u>Participant 6: Brittney</u>

I would probably be in a mental home. But faith has been instrumental because I don't think I would have made it without faith. It has helped me come to work with confidence and, being authentically who I am and walking in my truth. It has helped me to walk and not be afraid and not be afraid to take risk and not being worried about what other people say. Because at the end of the day, it don't matter no way. I just truly believe that God did not put the destiny of my life in the hands of haters.

<u>Participant 9: Sheyna</u>

We have our core values, and I just don't believe that you can say integrity first and just have that founded on yourself. That has to be founded on something. So I'm accountable

not only to myself and to my family and my peers and my superior, but I'm accountable to God for what I put out, so it really impacts how I lead.

Participant 11: Leah

Faith has impacted my experience because the right people have been put in my path. I do believe that things have been the way they are in my career and worked out, like the positions and the opportunities, have just been God. Faith has helped me with just being better, being able to speak to people differently, just a lot of personal growth as a leader.

Participant 12: Tanya
Faith helps me with Imposter Syndrome for me to know that I belong here, that I belong at this table. Faith gives me the motivation and just the feeling of belonging regardless of who's sitting to your left or, your right, or across from you.

Participant 15: Felicia
Faith has attributed to my development as a leader because I would not be where I am without God above. My favorite scripture is, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and that verse helped me so many times when I wanted to give up.

Many other participants could have been quoted in expressing the role faith has played in their career development, in their day-to-day activities at work, the interaction with their individual units, and their daily motivational prayers or devotions. Each participant expressed how faith has had an impact on their personal and professional lives. Some participants even expressed that the certain positions they have served in sometimes caused their faith to grow even more due to the challenges and obstacles they had to overcome. They recognized that without faith, it would have been impossible to be successful in their careers, even with a mentor. The word tree created by NVivo in Figure 3 below illustrated the top phrases from participants and how they linked to their faith. Some of the key words that were paramount in Figure 3 that were shared by some of the participants were that faith guided, strengthened, lead, and developed them; faith gave them knowledge; and faith definitely played a major role in their leadership and mentoring experience.

Figure 4

Word Tree of Faith
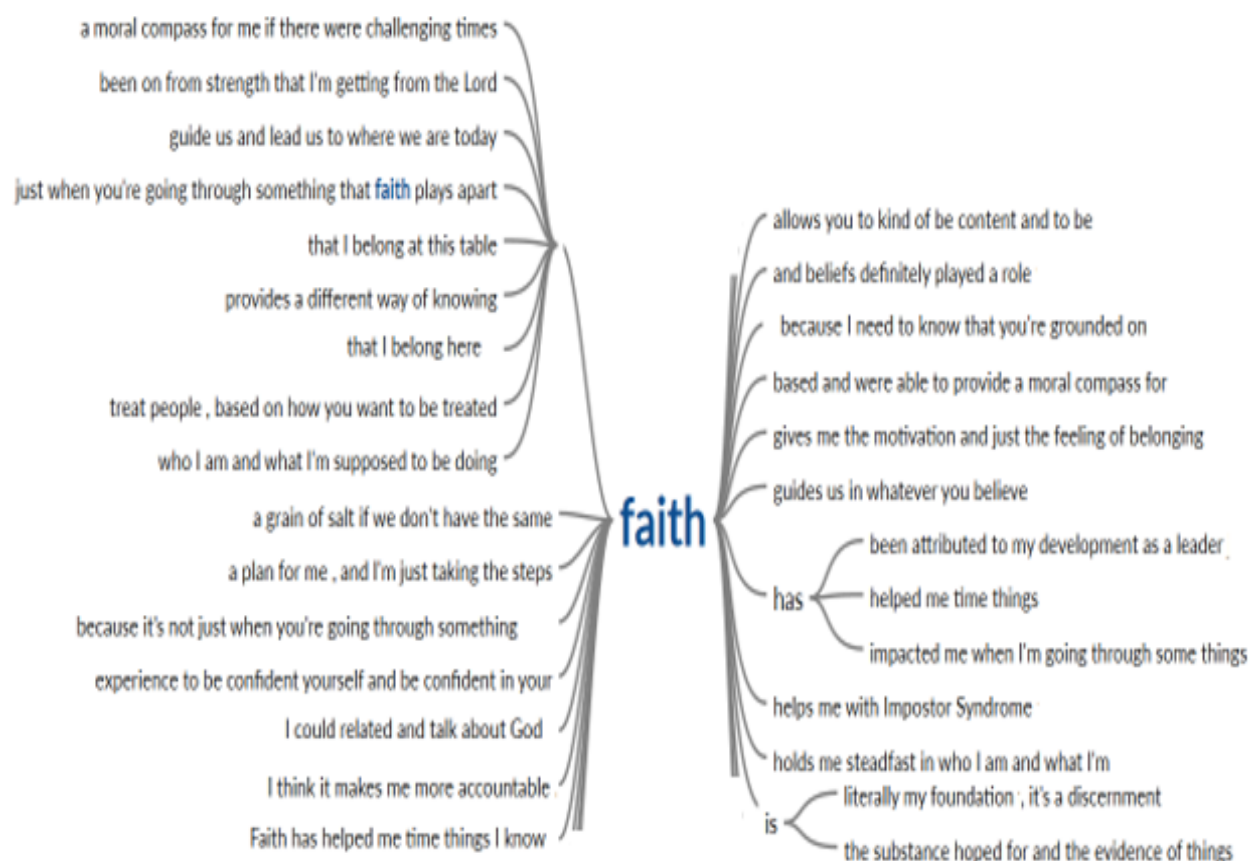
A correlation was discovered among all participants of the study that faith definitely played a significant role in their mentorship experience and their career development as leaders in the military. Faith has been a part of the military fabric since men were selected to be Chaplains to provide prayer for peace and comfort during the wars. Continuing to be prayerful, participants believed faith is what nurtured their mentorship experience and was a significant contributing factor in the growth and development of their careers.

Theme 5. Recommendations for Better Mentorship Experiences

This study identified recommendations to improve the quality of the mentorship experience, and thereby increase the effectiveness of mentorship in the USAF. These

recommendations included training for top leadership on how to mentor effectively or to hire

professional experts or coaches outside of the military who can offer a quality mentoring

experience to junior leaders. Additionally, it was recommended for mentors to be intentional and

for mentees to seek out different mentors in order to have a deeper breadth of knowledge and

skills to be more successful. Below are excerpts from participants:

Participant 1: Cassie

I think we need to go to the experts. I think we need experts who do this as their day job
and can coach people on how to be better mentors.

Participant 4: Chanté

So, just being intentional about how the mentor and mentee engage is important. Some
people don't have the experience or know-how to mentor. So mentors should have some
training. And they should have topics to cover but then also leaving it open for anything
that may come up that mentee or mentor want to share.

Participant 9: Sheyna

I always tell people you need multiple mentors, and you need to be a sponge and soak up
everything they have- the good and the bad. Some of my best leadership lessons came
from the worst leaders.

The theme revealed a strong correlation with all subjects regarding the value of

mentorship across the board, but the need for improvement was highlighted in order to have a

better mentorship experience. Participants made specific suggestions for improvement in the

areas of training leaders and being intentional. Training leaders on the significance of mentorship

and how to mentor effectively suggests enormous dividends in retention, which will also enhance

African American representation in the USAF, create greater quality of relationships, and boost

job satisfaction and performance. When leaders are intentional in building relationships and

providing effective communication to mentors, there will be an increase in information being

shared, more of the same tutelage will be provided, and mentors will do better in helping mentees reach their full potential and attain career goals.

Findings by Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. The goal was not to prove a hypothesis or theory but to share a report on the impact of mentorship and faith on the career development and progression of African American female officers. Therefore, research questions were projected to guide the study in efforts to educate military members about the significant impact mentorship has on the career progression and development of African American leaders. The phenomenological research study produced findings that answered the projected research questions (see Appendix B for a table charting the correspondence between interview questions and research questions).

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

The following analysis will assess how the findings from the research process answered or contextualized these research questions.

Research Question 1

The following interview questions were asked to answer research RQ1:

1. How has mentorship impacted your job knowledge, skills, and expertise?

2. How do you believe mentorship has influenced your career development and progression?

3. How did mentorship impact your performance reports and awards?

Participant responses revealed that mentorship definitely influenced the career development and progression of each participant in some form or another, especially as it related to mentors being instrumental in informing mentees of opportunities, they may not have been aware of if it were not for mentors. The word "opportunity" was mentioned 17 times by the participants. Additionally, participants shared that mentors were key in helping them navigate positions and provided feedback in regard to completing officer performance reports (OPRs) and writing up award packages. While some participants expressed they would rather put others in for awards than themselves, participants adhered to the wise counsel of the mentors, who advised them that awards are necessary to be competitive for promotion. One participant expressed, "If it wasn't for my mentor, my records wouldn't have started off stellar." Another participant shared, "Mentors provided guidance that helped propel my career and set me up for success." It is significant to address the fact that OPRs play a significant role in the career progression of officers, so having mentors to review and provide feedback is necessary to ensure OPRs reflect the contributions made as a leader in the officers' current positions.

Research Question 2

The following interview questions were asked to answer research RQ2:

1. Describe how you became aware of mentorship in your career and position.

2. What experiences of mentorship would you pass along to others?

3. What conditions and mechanisms are perceived as most effective in mentoring relationships among African American female officers?

In answering these questions, participants identified a variety of advice on the mentoring experience. Table 3 below summarizes advice participants said they would pass to others.

Table 3

Suggestions to Pass Along for Others

	Suggestions to Pass Along to Others
1	Seek out different types of mentors (Males, females, different races, different ranks, inside military, outside military, line officers, non-line officers, retired officers, senior enlisted)
2	Seek mentors who look like "us"
3	Mentor-Should reach out to mentees
4	Mentor-Should be available
5	Mentor-Should take time for mentee
6	Mentor-Should be personable (Get to know mentees interests, hobbies, goals, family members)
7	Mentor-Should be trustworthy
8	Mentor-Should be transparent
9	Mentors-Should be authentic
10	Mentors-Should be genuine
11	Mentors-Should be flexible
12	Mentors- Should be honest
13	Mentors-Should be a good listener
14	Mentees-Know what you want to do
15	Mentees-Speak up
16	Mentees-Check in with mentor
17	Mentor/Mentee-Build relationships
18	Mentor/Mentee-Build trust
19	Advice-Don't be scared to reach out to mentors
20	Advice-Don't be afraid to make connections
21	Advice-Don't be afraid to give back as an African American leader
22	Advice-Don't be afraid to take the path less traveled
23	Advice-Don't make yourself smaller for someone else to feel better

All participants, whether at the beginning of their career or some years into it, revealed they were aware of the importance of mentorship. Mentors display different characteristics and mechanisms in the mentor-mentee relationship that make the experiences more effective. Collins (1983) outlined certain qualities a mentor should exhibit, which included listening, building relationships, nurturing, devoting time, and sharing constructive feedback. Despite their differences in rank, participants' responses in the study identified the following top five positive characteristics of a mentor: availability, trust, transparency, listening, and being relatable (see Table 4 below).

Table 4

Mentorship Characteristics

Mechanisms/Characteristics of Mentorship Experience	Referenced
Available/Availability	27
Trust/Trustworthy	20
Transparent/Transparency	13
Listen/Listener	13
Relate/Relatable	12

Research Question 3

The following interview question was asked to answer RQ 3:

1. Explain your understanding of the impact mentorship has on African American female officers.

2. How do you believe mentorship has influenced your career development and progression?

In response to these questions, participants expressed how mentorship impacted their career based on barriers and successes relating to development and progression.

Barriers

Participant responses revealed that 12 out of 15 acknowledged and/or experienced the barriers that remain a part of the military culture. Although African American women hold leadership positions as officers with the same education as their peers, they still encounter barriers to what they consider to be micro-aggressions, racism, and discrimination. Williams (2020) pontificated those micro-aggressions "reflect implicitly prejudicial and aggressive motives" (pp. 4). In order to give an account of the lived experiences, the reality of the barriers is expressed in the responses of the interviewees below:

Participant 1: Cassie

Some of the barriers I've experienced are peer-to-peer, where they are not used to seeing African American females coming and handling business, peers who just aren't like you're probably the first black person they probably interacted with, or they're just not used to competent Black people. And sometimes people try to create a barrier but it doesn't work. I think when people see you doing your due diligence, they want to help you be successful for the most part, in my experience.

Participant 2: Andrea

Barriers, for me in particular, are those leaders who think they got your career figured out. You're not letting me grow and be the best I can be. I'm always being turned in whatever position and being placed in whatever slot you think I should be placed into. As we move up the ranks, the further up we go, the less leadership looks like us. And we have to navigate that when someone says I really think you would do good at this. Or you go to them and request X, and then they turn around say they never saw you in that position or never considered you for the position. We are not allowed to soar or shine the way I think other ethnicities are. For African American female officers, they need someplace safe to go for mentorship, somebody they can relate to.

Participant 3: Ava

The Chief Nurse, who became another mentor of mine, was an African American female. So, she became a huge part of my life and became another mentor of mine. And so, without her being there to help guide me along, I don't know if I would have survived. It

definitely would have been harder, so whenever the squadron commanders will give me a lot of pushbacks and would be stabbing me in the back for or no reason. Those squadron commanders were three Caucasian males, and the rest were Caucasian females. So, it felt like I was in the battle by myself.

I was able to pick up the phone and ask to meet with her. She would make time to talk to me, and there was no time limit. She would talk to me for as long as I needed her to talk to me, to keep me on track, and encourage me to continue what I was doing.

Participant 5: Krystal

I am passionate about the medical field as a nurse, and that's been written on reports. As an African American in the Air Force, I carry myself like I'm from the South, which I am very hospitable, and I am a friendly person. I do think that certain leadership look at you based on your hair, your hair texture, your skin, your makeup. I'm just me, and I don't think you should be classified based on your picture. You should be looked as an officer, a Chief Nurse, based on the fact that she knows her job, and you should accept what she's telling you. So, I would say, as an African American female, not getting mentorship throughout my career, I don't want to fall into a certain category of the skin color, and then they say that you're so strong and you don't know how to talk. And they always think that African American females always go off to the left field, and that's not true.

Participant 7: Sydney

I believe they treat officers differently; I feel like for one as an African American and two as a female. Those two things by itself when I first entered the military, and then when it came to promotions and just opportunities. I do believe that there are a lot of barriers when it comes to African Americans in the military. I believe, of course, just being a female, especially in a male-dominated environment. A lot of times, you have to be loud but not aggressive. You have to know how to speak yet and be able to articulate the things that you want. And as for black women, we have to make sure that we're not coming off as angry because, a lot of times, they do see us as the "angry black woman." The percentage of African Americans, especially female African American officers, is really low. I think only 1 % of the United States is in the military, and so, of course, that percentage is way less of black female officers.

Participant 8: Bridgette

My career has been pretty good, but I notice that when I meet peers a lot of times, I'll know things that they didn't know. Or I'll talk to people who have been in the Air Force longer than me, and they'll be the same rank. But I've learned with African American women, we are not being deliberately mentored, and they just don't know a lot. And I think what's happening is we, as African American females, work really, really hard. And we think that our hard work and dedication is supposed to pay off for us. I come to work, I do exactly what I'm supposed to do, and I go above and beyond. And that's going to get me rewarded and promoted. And what I found out from mentorship is that is just not

enough. It's not enough for you to be great at your job because you have somebody who really, really sucks at their job. But because they got the deliberate mentorship, they knew how to check the right boxes. They knew how to get a strong package. They already know how to play this game of you're going to look at my package and not me as a person. And I think that's where we fall short as African American women officers. We need a lot more when it comes to mentorship, and we're not getting it.

<u>Participant 9: Sheyna</u>

I think there are some discussions I've had with mentors about those micro-aggressions and perceived biases from leadership at different times in my career, where a mentor has had to help me navigate those situations. It's one thing to be told that you're aggressive or angry or non-compliant, but then somebody else of a different race can say the exact same thing you said, just in a different way, and it's perfectly fine. So, having a mentor to help learn how to navigate that is important. It has been difficult, but I'm grateful for mentors that understand and look like me and understand when I have concerns about that. They can kind of speak to that a little bit more in-depth and see it the way that I see it as well.

Successes

Participants revealed that mentorship has yielded excellent results in their career development and progression. Additionally, participants suggest that African American female officers need more formal mentorship opportunities to continue to be successful. Each participant expressed perspectives that provided insight into the benefits of mentorship based on how they have had certain opportunities afforded to them because of the mentors in their lives. While it may not have always been from within the military organization, participants attributed their successes to the guidance, encouragement, and navigation of mentors during difficult times. For example:

<u>Participant 4: Chanté</u>

I wouldn't have been successful or wouldn't have done half of the things that I've done if it was not for my mentors, even when it comes to organizations to help me to develop as a leader.

<u>Participant 14: Tiana</u>

I would say mentorship had a significant impact because I progressed pretty well, being that I'm a Lieutenant Colonel, an O-5, so I consider that pretty good. Mentorship helped with PME and getting through ACSC…that was challenging.

Research Question 4

The following interview question was asked to answer RQ4:

1. How do you believe mentorship has impacted the retention of your Air Force career?

Responses from 100% of the participants revealed the belief that mentorship plays a huge role in retention. One participant expressed, "Mentorship is something that costs us nothing." Three participants' responses revealed that if it were not for mentorship, they would not have stayed in the military themselves. Other participants shared how they knew of other people who had gotten out of the military due to bad mentorship experiences, bad leadership experiences, no support, not feeling appreciated, or no mentorship. One participant expressed that the military is not pouring into the people they already have, and another participant expressed that without mentorship, retention will continue to decrease.

Research Question 5

The following interview question was asked to answer RQ5:

1. How do you believe your faith has impacted your mentorship experience?

Participant responses revealed that 100% of them believe that their faith has been a major contribution to hope and strength in times of need, especially during challenging moments of their career. Each participant shared their perspectives and experiences of what their career would have been like if it was not for their faith. The following response is an example of this perspective:

<u>Participant 11: Leah</u>

I guess discernment would probably be my biggest thing. I guess faith has impacted my experience because the right people have been put in my path. I do believe that things have been the way are in my careers and worked out like the positions of the opportunities have worked out has just been God. I know that, and so I just know that that's probably the biggest way that faith has impacted my mentorship is the people that have been in my life at the right time, and I know it's not because of me. I was where I needed to be for the right reason.

Research Question 6

The following interview question was asked to answer RQ6:

1. How did your faith contribute to your development as a leader in the military?

Participant responses revealed that 100% of them believe that faith contributes to who they are as a person and in their leadership positions. Participants conveyed how they would not be where they are today, mentally or spiritually, if it were not for their faith. Praying and leaning on the wisdom of God has been their guiding light in decision-making skills. As just one example, see the following:

<u>Participant 15: Felicia</u>

Faith has been attributed to my development as a leader just in general and whole-heartedly because I would not be where I came without God above. My favorite scripture is, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and that verse helped me so many times when I wanted to give up.

Additional Finding

While it was not identified as a theme, the research study identified suggestions by the participants for leadership of the USAF to consider in developing a formal mentorship program. The suggestions shared in Table 5 (below) are based on the feedback from the participants using MyVector and from participants who have experienced formal and/or informal mentorship.

Table 5

Recommendations for Air Force Leadership

	Recommendations	Description
1	Feedback for MyVector	1. Mentors do not respond
		2. Relationships are not organic; not relatable
		3. Not catching members who are introverts
		4. Checking the box mindset
2	MyVector Recommendations	1. Should be mandated
		2. Mentors should have to formally confirm acceptance to mentor
		3. Mentor/Mentee should exchange information (work, cell, email)
		4. Identify designated time (monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, etc.)
		5. Mentor/Mentee should update portal after each session on what was covered-career choices, feedback, next move, opportunities, etc.)
		6. Have measurements to capture mentorship experience progression
		7. Ensure everyone has a mentor (Assigned or Personally Selected)
		8. Have touch points for mentee and mentor
		9. Touch points should inquire of mentor-mentee experience
3	Recommended Mentor Qualities	1. Transparent
		2. Approachable
		3. Invested/Committed
		4. Accountable
		5. Intentional (Text or call directly)
		6. Personable (Get to know mentees)
4	Recommendations for Leaders	1. Provide expert training & guidance
		2. Coach leaders how to be mentors
		* Have suggested topics to cover
		* Leave time for open topics to cover
		3. Be consistent (Communication & Time: weekly, monthly, bi-weekly)
		4. Leaders should sign contracts
		* Commit to the mentorship experience
		* Commit to building relationships
		* Commit to established/scheduled times to meet (Be Flexible)
		5. Training can be conducted in COT or OTS
5	Ex 1: Formal Mentorship in AF	Board of the Biomedical Science Core
		1. Discover mechanisms to relate to other people
		2. Lines of effort established to determine career requirements
		3. Lines of effort established to provide tools to assist career goals
		4. Ensure mentors are available, committed, and willing to serve
	Ex 2: Formal Mentorship in AF	Unit/Flight Commander
		1. Ensure everyone has a mentor in the unit (enlisted/technician/ nurse)
		2. Ensure everyone has the same information
		3. Deliberate; bring experts to provide professional development tools

In response to RQ9, many participants elaborated on the mentorship program initiative the USAF has within the MyVector portal. The participants expressed that the mentorship initiative could be more successful from their perspective. Some of the participants shared their personal experiences of using MyVector to seek a formal mentorship, in order to grow and gain insight for career development and overall career guidance. Some participants had never used MyVector to attain a mentor due to the inability of experiencing authenticity and transparency with members within MyVector whom they do not know and are not familiar with.

The data does not speak for all African American female officers in the Air Force. However, the 15 participants of the study congruently affirmed the desire for a formal mentorship program of some sort, as well as the need for improvements within the mentorship initiative on MyVector. The portal offers the opportunity to sign up for a mentor; however, participants shared that they don't know the person providing the mentoring, and the person doesn't know them, indicating the relationship is not personable and they do not feel the person has a vested interest in their career. Participants have the impression there are a number of members signed up to be mentors on MyVector just to "check the box" or "for a bullet" on a performance report or evaluation. They consistently expressed the need for mentors to have training in order to better to understand the purpose and value of the mentorship experience in order to be more effective. Hence, the reason many of the participants discussed the need for better communication and consistency. Participants listed below expressed their perspective or personal experience of going through the process of the mentorship initiative on MyVector.

Participant 5: Krystal

Me personally, I have done the MyVector where I went in the portal and chose someone that I've known in the past and expressed that I really need to be a mentored. I shared I need you to mentor me to a couple of people and they never responded back. So, the

system is not really effective, and I think in order for it to be effective, for these people to really get mentors, it needs to be mandated.

Participant 8: Bridgette

I think it would be good if we can figure out how to make it all-inclusive. I think some of the strategies that are going right now, like MyVector, where it gets you to thinking about mentorship, and the word mentorship is buzzing… all of that is helping. So now people are like, I need a mentor. And I think most people know they need to have some form of mentorship; however, I think it starts at the bottom. As a flight commander, I do deliberate mentorship for my people because it matters.

Participant 9: Sheyna

I would recommend a formal mentoring program, which I know they're actually working on in different ways. But formal mentoring, such as MyVector thing, hasn't really done what it needs to do because I'm on there, and I have two or three mentees in there, and they barely write me.

Participant 12: Tanya

In my opinion, mentorship is something that's organically grown. It's not something that can be manufactured. You have to consider the folks who are introverts that don't really like to talk.

Based on the participants' suggestions, training and guidance for mentors are definitely at the top of the list in order to improve the mentorship experience. There needs to be accountability, and the mentorship process needs to be measurable. This researcher applauds the Air Force for the implementation of the mentorship initiative on MyVector. However, from the feedback of the participants, there should be more of a hands-on approach to mentorship that would provide that personable touch referred to by the participants. Knowing someone on a more personal level yields a greater opportunity for the mentor and mentee to be more transparent and connect professionally and personally.

Communication was also a key indicator for improvement, including communication on setting goals and an established timeframe to connect on a monthly, quarterly, or as-needed basis, depending on the needs and desires of the mentee and mentor. One suggestion by a

participant was to initiate mentorship at the unit level. The researcher agrees that starting earlier

in the officers' careers and at a lower level, such as the unit, has the potential for a greater

success rate for African American female officers to understand the value of mentorship, as well

as attain the guidance beneficial to career development and progression. The Air Force could

benefit from researching already identified mentorship strategies used in Fortune 500 companies

or other corporate American entities in order for African American retention and representation

to increase, as well as for African American officers to excel and progress to the upper echelon

above the rank of Colonel.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The qualitative phenomenological research provided a deeper exploration and

understanding of the perceptions and experiences of mentorship and faith shared amongst

African American female officers in the USAF. The employment of open-ended interview

questions shed light on the social phenomenon of the mentorship experience from the

participants in their own language, both from informal and formal perspectives. The questions

were answered with triangulated data: demographics, rank diversity, career fields, geographically

diversified, and interview transcripts, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data presented

in the study. While the study has limitations, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, the qualitative

phenomenological design was determined to be the most appropriate methodology for this study

(Moustakas, 1994) in order to gain a better understanding from the perspectives and interviews

of participants.

Conclusion

The available literature provides a great deal of insight on mentorship and the impact it

has on career progression; however, there is a lack of related research on the impact of

mentorship for African American females, especially for those serving as officers in the USAF. This study investigated the mentorship experience, and the impact mentorship has on the career development and progression of African American female officers of faith in the USAF. The stories and lived experiences of the participants illuminated the phenomenon of mentorship through the discussions of the qualitative, open-ended questions relating to the topics of the mentor-mentee relationship. The data analysis consisted of organized transcripts of the 15 participants who shared their insights through face-to-face interviews on Zoom. The study results revealed five themes: mentorship journey, factors for successful mentorship, mentorship significance, impact of faith on mentorship experience and career development, and recommendations for evolved mentorship experiences. Overall, the consensus of participants was that faith and mentorship are both pivotal in leadership and career.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Mentorship has emerged and is widely recognized as a profound component of the development and progression of personnel striving toward higher-level positions within corporations, organizations, churches, and the military. The literature identified that women often experience challenges and barriers to attaining mentorship, which could be a critical aspect in the rationale as to why African American females remain underrepresented in corporations and the military (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991).

As a prior service officer in the USAF, the researcher was often the only female and the only African American sitting at the table. There were challenges, and the path ahead was not always favorable. After honorably serving this great country, the researcher became interested in the idea of whether or not mentorship would have made a difference in the decision for retention and staying in to serve longer. As the researcher began to ask current members serving in the military and to read literature on mentorship, it became evident that mentorship could have made a difference in the researcher's career. Yet, more importantly, mentorship could make a difference and be the turning point in the career of those officers currently serving and those who decide to serve in the future. Mentorship, according to Scandura (1992), has a significant impact on career development and advancement. Five distinct themes emerged from the data analysis of this qualitative, phenomenological research study. This chapter will discuss the significance of the study to leadership, the extent of the results and answers to the research questions, limitations of the study, interpretation of the findings that add to the professional body of knowledge, applications in practice, and recommendations for future research.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of African American female officers in the USAF regarding the impact of mentorship received in their career development and progression. Further, this study explored the role of personal faith as a potential factor in the mentorship experience. Interviews of participants were conducted, and the criteria for the research included the following requirements:

1. Female

2. African Americans

3. Active-duty Military (not Guard or Reserve)

4. Officer in the Air Force (not Army, Navy, Marines, or Coast Guard)

Research Questions

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Mentorship has been noted as an essential factor for the development of skills and expertise, as well as career progression, as it relates to the significance of OPRs used in the assessment of promotion eligibility. This study contributes to the overarching understanding of how mentorship impacts the career development and career progression of African American

female officers in the USAF. This section provides a discussion of the findings, the implications, and applications for practice.

Conclusions

The knowledge and insight acquired during this study enhance the literature on mentorship within the military, ministries, and corporate organizations. The research questions were designed to reflect on how mentoring contributes to the development of skills, knowledge, and expertise of officers within the organization. Additionally, the research questions lead to a better comprehension of how mentorship cultivates relationships, which provides exposure for officers and the opportunities that enhance career moves and collaboration of leadership approaches. This research gives voice and visibility to the experiences of African American female officers in the USAF. The research gives an interpretation of the organization's cultural practices and sheds light on the barriers that continue to evolve. Additionally, the research supports the need for mentorship. By ensuring mentorship, there is the potential to increase retention, awareness of leadership development opportunities, and representation of African American female officers in senior leadership positions.

Implications and Applications

Theoretical

The findings of the qualitative study had positive implications based on the mentor role theory with the enhancement of skills and knowledge of mentees through the experience. Additionally, formal and/or informal training played a significant role in the career progression and development of the participants, which aided in promotions based on the OPR process.

Mentor Role Theory

Kram (1983) instituted the mentor role theory with the evolution of career function and psychosocial function. Within the mentor role theory, mentees experience advancement in their careers and enhanced knowledge and skills. Kram et al. (2007) continued that mentors provide encouragement, enhance identity, build competence, and promote a sense of belonging. According to Lamm et al. (2017), mentors should guide, support, counsel, and befriend the mentee, which results in the psychosocial functions of friendships, counseling, and being a role model. Roche (1979) believes promotions and retention increase when mentorship is developed, resulting in career success and advancement. Bass (2008) added to the mentor role theory that mentorship can occur inside or outside of the same organization. Shek and Lin (2015) suggested that mentor-mentee relationships should embrace the characteristics of effective communication skills, supportiveness, trustworthiness, interdependency, empathy, personality match with the mentee, enthusiasm, and flexibility.

In effective mentoring relationships, participants concurred with Shek and Lin (2015) regarding the experience of receiving support, timely communication of feedback, trustworthiness, motivation, and flexibility. Participants who expressed a positive mentorship experience suggested that retention was higher because mentors were there in times of distress. According to the 15 officer participants in this research, mentorship can change the trajectory of a career when provided with the proper guidance, motivation, and support.

Dahlvig (2010) shared that mentorship is multifaceted, which cohered with the results of this research. Participants shared experiences where mentors provided professional as well as personal advice. Participants of the study shared how encouragement and insight provided career opportunities, special duty assignments, and awards, which pushed them to strive for excellence

even more. During struggles with peers, supervisors, and educational training, it was the support

and motivation of mentors that gave them the extra drive they needed. Participants recalled

occasions when they provided their opinions or insight and were misconstrued as being an angry

black female, being too aggressive, or showing too much strength. In those times, participants

appreciated even more when mentors provided encouragement and a different perspective on the

circumstances that gave them insight on to how to deal with similar instances in the future. There

is no way to combat someone else stereotyping an African American female, but mentorship

helps individuals to be prepared and overcome the obstacles when faced with them.

Social Cognitive Theory

Mendez et al. (2017) believed the social cognitive theory could be applied as the

framework for mentorship because it impacts the cognitive functions associated with

observation, evaluation, reaction, and self-efficacy of promoting motivation and accomplishing

of goals. The implication is the increase in career advancement due to the positive outcome of

cognitive functions. Bandura (1971) submits that the social cognitive theory is the basis for a

mentorship experience, emphasizing the need for feedback and the role of the mentor to provide

guidance. In reference to the theories, Aman (2018) suggested that formal and informal

mentorship could be experienced through executive mentoring, supervisor mentoring, diversity

mentoring, peer mentoring, and/or hierarchical mentoring.

Social cognitive theory renders feedback and guidance, which could prove beneficial for

officers new to the military and their career fields. It was stated by Participant 9, "You don't

know what you don't know." While formal mentorship was not as applicable for many of the

participants, the contribution of informal mentorship to the officers paid huge dividends to their

career development. Not only did officers have opportunities that others may not have been

aware of, but they also were placed in unique positions, received awards, and received stratifications needed to be more competitive for promotion. Many of the participants shared that without mentorship, success in these forms would not have been possible. It was also stated by Participant 1, "…it's like having an insider who was telling me about the awards that were coming out and making sure I submitted my package." Having a mentor invest in the officer's career and goals builds the competence and identity that Kram et al. (2007) discussed.

Barriers

Corresponding to the research explored in other literature, many participants revealed the success they have experienced by having mentors. However, the majority of the participants shared that barriers still exist and that having mentors have often helped them navigate through those barriers. Micro-aggressions, racism, and discrimination were the barriers shared by the participants. Specifically, participants revealed there is a lack of information being shared, a lack of emotional intelligence, a limited scope of human capital, and a lack of genuineness among leadership. Discrimination still exists within the cultural differences of hair texture/style, makeup, skin, and stereotype of the "angry black woman." It was shared that the tone of African American females is taken as aggressive when they are passionate about what they are doing or discussing. Participants shared that they are not comfortable with spending time amongst other African Americans without feeling judged of there being multiple African Americans in one area. Diversity, equity, and inclusion training has been conducted within the USAF; however, the organization could benefit from conducting additional training specific to cultural differences and the continued self-awareness of unconscious biases and prejudices. In addition, increasing the representation of African American females through recruitment and retention in order to

have more diversity, leadership with rank, and other African American female mentors should be

considered to caveat racism, discrimination, and stereotypes.

Theological

The findings of the study and the experiences shared also had positive implications on

faith, relationships, and prayer. Each participant expressed the value, pertinence, and power of

their faith and prayer. Participants shared how they prayed before going to work daily, and some

participants shared how they are known in their organizations for believing in the power of

prayer.

Servant Leadership

Jesus was the ultimate leader and mentor; He exemplified the guidance He shared with

the disciples. As a servant-leader, Jesus was people-focused, led with integrity, and was

compassionate. Christ was adamant about teaching and building relationships. To be like Christ

is to be relational. Participants in the study exemplified servant leadership within their own

organizations. For example:

Participant 3: Ava

So, I think mentorship should be more personable, mentors should take more time out to
spend with mentees. There are two enlisted individuals and some younger Airmen. I try
to encourage them in the way that sometimes other people cannot or don't know how. I
grab my younger Airmen and talk to them in a casual way to make them comfortable. So,
if they do need a mentor, if they do need somebody that's going to be able to help them
through hard times, they all know that they can trust me.

Participant 15: Felicia

The characteristics of the mentors that I've had exemplified, I would say, had high morals
and high values. They practiced servant leadership, where they served the people that are
following them. They exude qualities that I want to exude as a leader. I want motivate
people that follow me. I want to encourage them. That's the type of leadership that I like
from like my leadership. My philosophy is servant leadership, and if my employees talk
about me or if my staff talk about me, I want them to be able to say those things about
their leader.

The aspect of building relationships was fostered by Wakeman (2012) discusses mentors building relationships through caring and helping those in the community to reach their full potential. Jesus was compassionate and showed that he cared about others and the community, equipping, teaching, and mentoring while helping them realize their potential. Even though Elisha was anointed, he needed to be mentored by Elijah in order to have the experience and understanding of servitude. Elijah guided him through the service of washing hands. In I Kings 19, Elijah went to Elisha as the Word of God instructed him to in order to guide him and mentor him (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, 1 Kings 19).

Building Relationships

In building community through mentorship, Pettit (2008) supports the relational aspect of the community from the perspective of God, specific in valuing relationships and kinship connections. Pettit stresses the importance of mentors to understand the worldviews of others. As a community, we are made stronger through the sharing of our experiences and testimonies. One participant expressed how a mentor shared her testimony and helped her see things differently by stating:

Participant 11: Leah

I sat down with her for probably an hour-long lunch conversation. She and I had no other dealings with each other, but that probably changed my whole outlook on the military because at the moment, I was going through a rough time. She shared a lot of things about her experience that change my perspective and just help me get out of the funk that I was in. Through her own challenges and experiences, she was able to navigate through her lens, and that helped me see that obviously, it's possible.

Also, in knowing the community and understanding worldviews, it would be important for ministers or pastors to understand the different perspectives, aspects, and generational differences in order to be effective in guiding and ministering to the congregation and mentoring

younger pastors who are walking in their footsteps. Mentoring is not just applicable to the military or corporations, but it should be exemplified in the church just as Christ did with the disciples.

Wisdom of Mentorship

Imparting words of wisdom to mentees is essential, and it's even more important for the mentee to heed the words spoken by the mentor. Proverbs 1 says, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2023, Proverbs 1:5). Participant 3 was debating rather or not she should separate from the USAF and a civilian job, but she stated in reference to her mentor, "…he pulled me aside and gave me some words of wisdom about not basing my whole career decision on the first base."

Research Limitations

While the qualitative phenomenological design was applied appropriately and the criteria were executed, the scope of the data was limited in the study to the generalizability of the findings. The first limitation of the study was due to the participant size of the study and the nature of the exploratory phenomenon. Participants shared their personal experiences, and proper measures were taken to mitigate the risks of bias, ensuring the trustworthiness of the results of the study. While the purposive study of 15 participants included geographic and rank diversity, the participants may not be representative of all female officers or all African American female officers in the Air Force.

There could also be a limitation in the qualitative study due to the risk of researcher bias due to similarities perceived between the researcher and the participants in regard to being an African American female officer in the USAF. However, many decisions were made to lessen

the researcher's personal experience or opinions. Interviews were professionally conducted and were strictly from the perspective of interviewees. The excerpts were the direct words from participants instead of paraphrasing or summarizing, and making use of NVivo12™ was used to identify themes based on the audio files that were transcribed to mitigate the risk of researcher bias and partiality. Additionally, no questions were asked as to why a participant was in a current position or rank. The researcher asked the interview questions approved by the IRB.

The study was further limited due to participants having to rely on past recollections of mentorship experiences and recalling the timeframe in which specific situations of their career occurred, as well as participants only being in the USAF.

Further Research

While the results of the study's findings contribute to the larger body of knowledge and research as they relate to mentorship for African American females in the USAF, further research is still needed. The first recommendation is for further research to be conducted based on the identified sub-theme of gender similarity: female-to-female mentorship experiences. This future research could identify whether gender mentoring is more impactful for female officers, especially in the sense of development and the knowledge of career opportunities. This research could also be beneficial to corporate America in the identification of expectations and developmental guidance for females. This research could also be relevant for the other branches of the military; Navy, Marines, Army, and Coast Guard. Global relevance could be addressed as it translates for minority populations in general.

Based on the findings for different types of mentoring, formal and informal, the second recommendation is for further research into specific formal mentorship programs that could be

beneficial to military members, especially in their overall development, relationships, and opportunities.

Summary

Prior to the study, the researcher had the conception that the mentorship experience had the proclivity to enhance the career of African American female officers. The researcher believed effective mentorship would provide guidance, opportunities, and support that otherwise would not be attained just by going to the office every day and doing your job. The researcher believed that by providing mentorship for African American females, they would appreciate a different perspective and receive negative or positive feedback, from a mentor with whom they have an established relationship.

The research study conducted confirmed the necessity and positive impact of mentorship on the career development and progression of African American female officers. Five themes emerged from the study through the data and content analysis. The study also confirmed the positive impact role that faith plays in the development of officers and the mentorship experience. From personal experience, the researcher believed that had mentorship been a staple as it is today and had she received the mentorship that so many participants experienced, the thought of staying until retirement would definitely have been entertained and likely executed. The research study proved that the impact of mentorship included retention, networking, relationship building, unique career opportunities, and rank progression.

The researcher did not account prior to the research for the possibility of poor mentorship experiences. The research study, while not a consensus, revealed how mentors were sometimes not effective in communicating or providing the necessary feedback. It was shared that

mentorship can be negative or positive, and you have to take the good with the bad and learn from the ineffective leaders and mentors, just as much as effective leaders and mentors.

Participants in the research stated that they believed that multiple mentors were essential for the enhancement of knowledge and guidance in career development. Some participants described the mentorship experience as extremely positive due to the healthy relationships they were able to build, nurture, and maintain over time. They also responded that when organic relationships are established, they tend to be more effective for both the mentor and the mentee because they are able, to be honest, relate to one another, and constructively receive the feedback even, when it is not positive. Participants described the mentorship experience for their career progression and development as helpful, a blessing, encouraging, and supportive.

The most important take-away from the results of the research is that the mentorship experience is critical to the growth of African American female officers of faith, in their career development and progression. It would benefit those considering a career in the USAF to seek out mentors immediately upon entering and arriving at the first duty station. It would also benefit the USAF to implement a program that ensures the mentorship experience is executed effectively, to hold both the mentors and mentees accountable.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-prepared Interview Questions

1. Describe how you became aware of mentorship in your career and position.

2. How has mentorship impacted your job knowledge, skills, and expertise?

3. How do you believe mentorship has impacted the retention of your Air Force career?

4. What experiences of mentorship would you pass along to others?

5. Explain your understanding of the impact mentorship has on African American female officers.

6. What conditions and mechanisms are perceived as most effective in mentoring relationships among African American female officers?

7. How do you believe mentorship has influenced your career development and progression?

8. How did mentorship impact your performance reports and awards?

9. What would you recommend in order for mentorship to be more successful?

10. How do you believe your faith impacted your mentorship experience?

11. How did your faith contribute to your development as a leader in the military?

APPENDIX B

Pre-prepared Interview Questions to Answer Research Questions

RQ1. How do participating officers describe the impact of mentorship in the development and progression of their careers?

RQ2. What key components are described as influential in the mentor-relationship?

RQ3. What are the barriers and successes of the mentorship process in the lives of participants?

RQ4. What is the perceived impact of mentorship on career retention?

RQ5. How did the mentees describe the role of faith in the mentorship process?

RQ6. Did you have mentors who were persons of faith and if so, how did their faith impact your development, personally or professionally?

	Pre-prepared Interview Questions	**Goal to Answer Research Question**					
		RQ 1	**RQ2**	**RQ3**	**RQ4**	**RQ5**	**RQ6**
1	Describe how you became aware of mentorship in your career and position?		X				
2	How has mentorship impacted your job knowledge, skills, and expertise?	X					
3	How do you believe mentorship has impacted retention of your Air Force career?				X		
4	What experiences of mentorship would pass along to others?		X				
5	Explain your understanding of the impact mentorship has on African American female officers?						
6	What conditions and mechanisms are perceived most effective in mentoring relationships among African American female officers?		X				
7	How do you believe mentorship has influenced your career development and progression?	X					
8	How did mentorship impact your performance reports and awards?	X			X		
9	What would you recommend in order for mentorship to be more successful?			X			
10	How do you believe your faith has impacted your mentorship experience?					X	
11	How did your faith contribute to your development as a leader in the military?						X

APPENDIX C

Liberty-Stamped Consent Form

Research Consent Form (Air Force Officers)

Title of the Project: Mentorship for African American Female Officers of Faith in the United States Air Force
Principal Investigator: Tanquer L. Dyer, Doctoral Candidate, School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be: African American company grade or field grade officer in the United States Air Force (only), active duty member (not Guard or Reserve on active orders), and members identifying as the female gender (she/her/hers). Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand the lived experience regarding the impact of mentorship in the career development and career progression of African American female officers in the United States Air Force, as well as identify the role of faith in the mentorship experience.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Participate in an in-person or virtual face-to-face, audio/video recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in audio- and video-recorded, in-person or Zoom follow-up interviews in order to clarify experiences shared in the previous interview(s) that will take no more than 15-30 minutes.
3. Participate in reviewing your interview transcripts, the developed themes, etc. to check for accuracy or confirm agreement that will take no more than 15-30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants could potentially learn some things about the mentorship experience they had not previously considered prior to discussing in the interview.
Benefits to society include increased awareness to benefits of mentorship programs and the recommendation of mandated mentorship programs to Air Force leadership.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and dissertation committee will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer/phone, and hardcopy data will be stored in a locked fire-protected safety box. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer/phone until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Tanquer L. Dyer. You may ask any questions you have now or later via phone or email: ███████████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David M. Edgell, at ████████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio- and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Letter

Dear Research Participant:

As a doctoral student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Leadership. The purpose of my research is to understand the impact of mentorship in the career development and career progression of African American female officers in the United States Air Force, as well as identify the role of faith in the mentorship experience, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be: African American company grade or field grade officer in the United States Air Force (only), active duty members (not Guard or Reserve on active orders), and members identifying as the female gender (she/her/hers). Participants, if willing, will be asked to take part in face-to-face interviews in person (preferably) or virtually. All interviews will be audio- and video-recorded. Initial interviews should take approximately an hour, but the follow-up interview should take 15-30 minutes. Participants will also be asked to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study and the interview will be audio/video recorded, but the information, responses to the interview, and your participation will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at ████████████████████████ for more information or to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, please reply to this email with the signed consent form prior to the interview.

Sincerely,

Tanquer L. Dyer
Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
████████████

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 30, 2023

Tanquer Dyer
David Edgell

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-142 Mentorship for African American Female Officers of Faith

Dear Tanquer Dyer, David Edgell,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: August 30, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office