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**The Perspective of Black Male Middle School and High School Students in a
Mentoring Program**

By

Quennel W. Cooper

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Educational Doctorate
in Educational Leadership**

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

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The Perspective of Black Male Middle School and High School Students
in a Mentoring Program

Quennel W. Cooper

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the
student's committee:

Dr. Natalie Rasmussen, Advisor

Dr. Melissa Krull, Committee Member

Dr. Timothy Berry, Committee Member

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the perspectives of Black adolescent males in an in-school mentoring program. There are predictable data in education that consistently show that Black males have the lowest graduation rates and the highest behavior suspensions. The purpose of this study was to explore whether a mentoring program containing all the essential components was a successful intervention to help Black males succeed in education.

The study affirmed that a mentoring program led by a strong Black male mentor fostered a fraternal brotherhood, taught academic and social skills, and kept Black males engaged and successful in middle and high school. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a framework, the tenet of the unique voice of color gave voice to the Black males in the study to share their lived experience about what middle school and high school felt like for a Black male. Also, using the CRT tenet that racism is ordinary, this study explored the historical perspective of how the Black community has been viewed in society. Reviewing the film *Birth of Nation*, the desegregation of schools with *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Moynihan report, systemic issues were discussed to highlight the issues Black males faced.

Cross's nigrescence model and Helm's Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) provided insight into the participants' mindsets while in the mentoring program. Interviews provided evidence of what it means to be Black in America and how the gentlemen learned how to navigate toward success in a world that feels like a heavy burden to them. Each of the participants found the mentoring program to be successful.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Problem

The birth of the United States was dominated and controlled by an elitist male Eurocentric view. The history of African Americans in the United States is different from any other race of people. African Americans were brought to the United States and forced into labor and faced oppression (King, 2012). The institution of slavery destroyed families and treated Blacks as inhumane (Jackson, W. 1994). Myrdal's (Fujita, 2007) theory of cumulative causation described the process in which Whites build systemic advantages for themselves that create disadvantages for Blacks that spread over time. As Saha (n.d.) explained, Myrdal's theory "emphasizes that 'poverty is further perpetuated by poverty' and 'affluence is further promoted by affluence'" (p. 6).

Over 200 hundred years of slavery has developed a psychological impact on Black Americans in the present time. The film *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) launched many stereotypes that became ingrained in White America's minds. American civil rights activist and author James Johnson (1915) stated, "The film *Birth of Nation* has done incalculable harm to Black Americans" (Oliver & Walker, 1913). The film displayed to the American audience that the Black male was a threat to justice; Black males were considered big, threatening individuals who needed training on acting like human beings. *Birth of a Nation* gave life to lynching, killings, and the hate group, the Ku Klux Klan, to create more prejudice and racism against Blacks in America.

There has been a continuous psychological battle for Blacks in the United States to feel equal to Whites. Blacks have been fighting to be treated as human beings and not second-class citizens. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/2014) created the term "double

consciousness” for African Americans, defined as looking at themselves through their perspective and, at the same time, through the eyes of racist White society (Du Bois, 1903/2014). African Americans struggle with being Black and American, all while still not being accepted, in this “double consciousness” experience that is very present in schools today. African Americans must strip their culture at the door of a school before entering due to implicit bias, since African American culture is seen as inferior to Western European culture. Baron et al. (2017) completed a study to reduce implicit bias in White and Asian children. The study demonstrated that if children see positive images of African Americans at a young age, it helps destroy implicit bias, and African Americans can be judged on their character.

The significance of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* outcome continues the pattern of an inferiority complex between Whites and Blacks in education. The case established that separate facilities for White and Black children are unequal. The landmark statement from Chief Justice Earl Warren, who was quoting a previous Kansas case, was a turning point in the case:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect on colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of law; for the policy of segregating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. (p. 494)

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case about unequal facilities was also about the negative psychological impact of segregation on Blacks and Whites (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Not only would Blacks develop a mindset of inferiority, but Whites would create an unhealthy relationship with authority.

Today, Black children are still segregated, but instead of being taught by Black educators, White educators teach Black children. After the *Brown* decision, many Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs. Before 1954, there were approximately 82,000 Black teachers, and from 1954-1965, more than 38,000 Black educators were dismissed (Tillman, 2004). Today, only 7% of teachers in the United States are Black (Deroy, 2016).

Critical race theory (CRT) exposes the plight Black males face in education (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Critical race theory will be the framework of this study to examine issues such as the role education has on Black males as part of the school-to-prison pipeline. Today, many states can determine the number of prisons that need to be built by the reading scores of third and fourth-grade students (Bonsting, 2002; Giroux, 2009). The CRT tenet that racism is normal observes that racism is ingrained in United States history and the education system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2010). Other tenets of CRT include interest convergence, social construction, the critique of liberalism, counter-storytelling, and whiteness as property (Delgado & Stefancic, 2010).

The systemic barriers Black males face in education support the CRT tenet that racism is ordinary. With the lack of diversity training for teachers, many White educators rely on the inaccurate negative information they receive about Black males and view them through a deficit lens. To reverse this, one of the most critical factors for student success is helping teachers develop high expectations for students of color (Hattie, 2012). Black males are stereotypically perceived as aggressive, defiant, and intimidating (Davis, 2003; Ferguson, 2000; Monroe, 2005). With this heightened awareness, Black males experience harsher disciplinary actions and already have different experiences from their White counterparts (Monroe, 2005; Skiba,

2001). According to a study completed at a North Carolina Elementary school from 2008-2013, data showed that Black students were less likely to face discipline when having a teacher who looked like them (Klein, 2016).

African American males can be academically successful without an adult Black male, but it helps to have a teacher or mentor understand where the student is coming from (Brown, 2009). Many educator preparation programs are comprised of middle-class White women who do not have the cultural connection to Black male students. (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). The White female educator is a gatekeeper to success. Many White female educators rely on stereotypical information about Black males inaccurately due to a lack of cultural awareness. The negative perception of Black males leads to lower expectations and contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline.

According to reports from the US Department of Education, Black students are four times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students (Toppo, 2016). Out-of-school suspensions are not sufficient, as research shows that students who are suspended are more likely to engage in problematic behavior (Raffaele-Mendez, 2003). Additional adverse effects that result from out-of-school suspensions are diminished relationships with adults and feeling unwelcome at school. Also, drop-out and school failure result in increased criminal behavior opportunities (Pesta, 2018).

Another barrier CRT exposes is the educational tracking of students. Tracking is lumping students together based on academic ability, which creates predictable outcomes (Oakes, 1985). In this process, students are divided into high, average, or low groups. Many Black males are denied rigorous learning opportunities at school as they are placed in the lower academic groups or special education (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Not having robust learning opportunities creates a more significant pathway for

poverty in the end. Failing to close the opportunity gap will be detrimental to the future of America. As Auguste et al. (2009) stated, the American economy has lost billions due to underutilized human potential.

Mentor programs are needed due to the many years of psychological breakdown African American males have faced in society. It has been stated that building positive relationships can help students stay in school. Mentoring programs focused on building self-esteem are a component that can shape the image of the world for Black males by assisting them in developing confidence (LaVant et al., 1997). In addition, mentoring can have a positive developmental and physiological effect (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

Problem Statement

With much discussion in the education system about the opportunity gap between White students and students of color, in this researcher's state of Minnesota, Blacks have a 67% percent graduation rate compared to 88% for Whites (Vergas, 2018). Minnesota ranks as one of the worst states for student of color achievement.

Black males face an array of systemic barriers to success in education and will face the struggles of identity, being singled out, suspensions, and low expectations (Whiting, 2009). While there have been studies on Black males' programs to build engagement in schools, none of this research focuses on the lived experiences of a boys' program that keeps young Black males engaged in a dominant White educational setting. By presenting these Black male student voices, this study will help close the opportunity gap in education.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to examine a boys' mentoring program that can impact Black males' success in education. A boys' mentoring program intentionally focuses on keeping Black males engaged in school and not dropping out (Brown, 2009). Studies have examined the benefits of boys' mentoring programs to control aggression, peer pressure, and inclusion. Small (2017) identified factors of a mentoring program that lead to success, including academic, social integration, and economic empowerment. Small's research was completed in the Southeastern portion of the United States to develop or discover skills for Black males to be successful in society. Other researchers (Edelman et al., 2006; Fleming, 1984; Venegas, 2001) also concluded that mentoring helps students build relationships and enjoy their schooling experience.

The mentoring program being researched is a brotherhood that supports young men through challenging situations in grades 6 through 12 in a suburban school district located in the Midwest. The mentoring program provides a network of mentors to instruct how to navigate school using a 'playbook' of instructions. I will research the effectiveness of Black male students meeting to discuss their goals and the playbook. Ultimately, the purpose of the mentoring program is to help young men reach their dreams by developing tools to navigate the education system.

Research Questions

1. How do Black male adolescents define an effective mentoring program?
2. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males affect their engagement levels in school?
3. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males impact the development of social and academic skills?

Significance of the Research

The study of a boys' mentoring program and its effects on Black males would benefit educational leaders throughout the United States by identifying interventions that can help Black males at an adolescent age bridge a gap for success into high school. Also, when more Black males achieve a successful education, they will create more opportunities for Black males to take leadership roles and be positive role models for the Black community. This would also affect the economy, with more Black males qualifying for higher-paying jobs (Auguste et al., 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation of this study was the small number of participants: The researcher observed a pool of Black males in the mentoring program at one middle school. Also, the only individuals interviewed were the students. This created the delimitation of eliminating the perspectives of the teachers, administrators, or paraprofessional support staff, who have roles that impact the participants' experiences in the school. For example, Black male students could feel that they have succeeded, but their teachers could have a different perception.

Definition of Key Terms

Critical Race Theory. A theoretical framework that examines society and culture as they relate to race, law, and power.

Double Consciousness. The African American experience of looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist White society. This concept is associated with W.E.B. Du Bois, from his book *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Mentor. A trusted counselor or guide (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

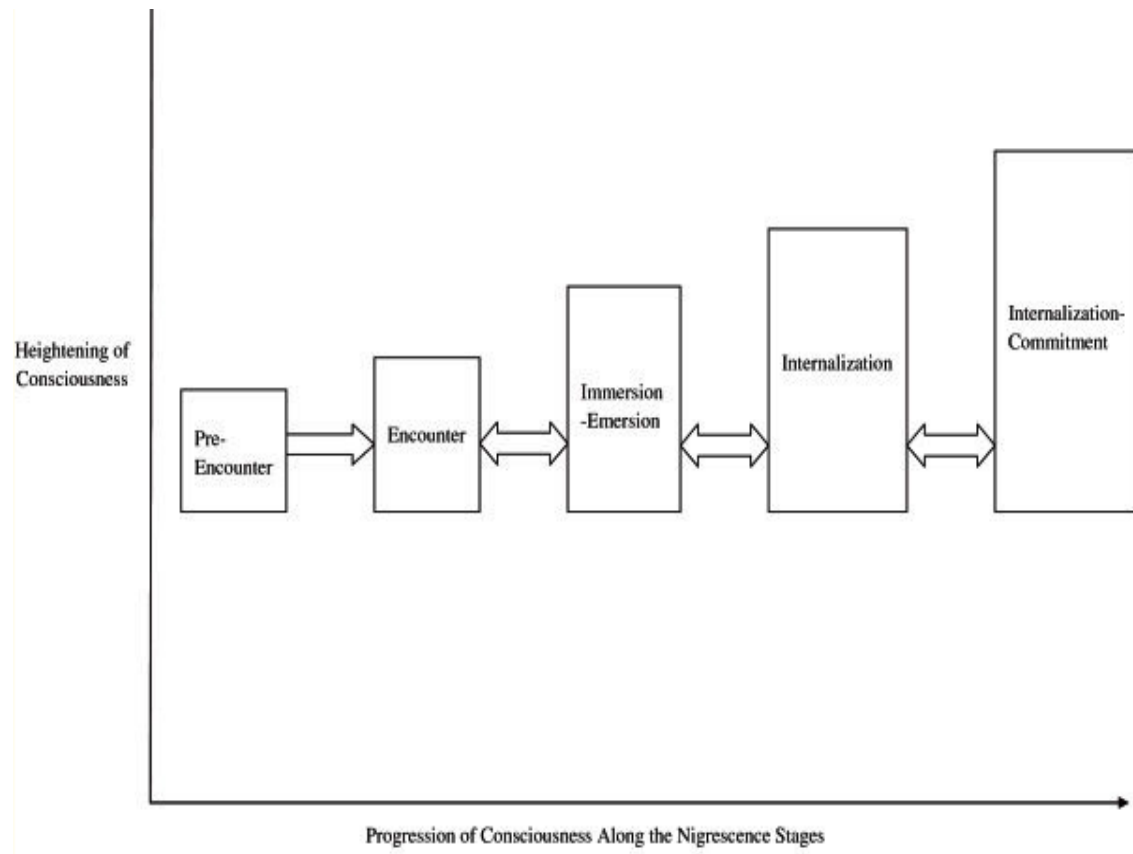
In Jean Piaget's (Smith, 2010) four-stage theory of cognitive development, the last stage occurs in adolescence, around age 11 or 12. Adolescence is a critical stage in life in which the child can move from an egocentric perspective to seeing the world from another person's viewpoint (Smith, 2010). Black male adolescents must start to develop confidence and beliefs that will help them navigate the world. Self-esteem and self-confidence are developed during adolescence when the frontal lobes have matured (Jackson, 2011). Black males face obstacles at this stage of life for various reasons, such as receiving lower school expectations than any other demographic. In studies conducted by Wood et al. (2007) and Nouwen and Clycq (2016), African American boys perceived that their teachers held lower educational attainment expectations than they held for African American girls. Lower expectations lead to poor academic performance and lower graduation rates for Black males (Nouwen & Clycq, 2016). In general, racial discrimination is linked to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Seaton et al., 2014). Placing support around adolescent Black males can change the trajectory of their experience in the education system.

Another theory of adolescent development is focused on Black racial identity and speaks to the importance of mentoring. Cross's (1991) model of forming Black identity, called *nigrescence*, traces Black identity from self-hatred to self-empowerment. Nigrescence begins in adolescence and continues through adulthood (Worrell, 2007). As shown in Figure 2.1, in stage one or Pre-Encounter, African Americans have low self-esteem and negative feelings about being African American. Blacks see the world through a White lens and perceive that as being the standard. Stage 2, Encounter,

involves African Americans personally or vicariously experiencing a negative impact of race. Everything a Black individual perceives as “usual” in society has a negative effect. Stage three is Immersion/Emersion, which Cross notes is a pivotal stage when realizing that African Americans’ experience is challenging in American society solely based on race. Everything that happens in this stage is either pro-Black or anti-White. Blacks immerse themselves in Black culture and strong feelings against White people and White culture develop. Feelings are fueled by anti-White hate rather than pro-Black affirmation. This stage is the opposite of the Pre-Encounter stage. In stage four, Internalization, African Americans become secure in their Black identities while living in a country that discriminates against Blacks. Feelings toward White people become neutral. There is a sense of commitment to working on Black causes (Sullivan & Esmail, 2012). In stage five, Internalization Commitment, Blacks have a sense of responsibility for supporting Black causes. This stage creates a “third-person consciousness” that perceives through the eyes of White America and Black America and holds on to the culture of native ancestors from Africa’s continent (De Walt, 2013).

Figure 2.1

Stages of Nigrescence



Note: From “Discourse on African American/Black Identity: Engaging the Expanded Nigrescence Theory With a Diasporic Consciousness,” by P. De Walt, 2013, *Springer Plus Journal*, 2(1), p. 233 (<https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-2-233>).

The period of life at the young adolescent age plays an integral part in how a Black male will encounter each stage (Parham, 1989; De Walt, 2013). The environment and culture he is exposed to will either speed up the cycle or limit the number of times the process is repeated.

This literature review focuses on five areas related to Black male experiences in education and mentoring programs for Black male students. The first section addresses

the historical perspective of segregation, starting with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954. The second section addresses literature about the systemic issues affecting Black male students: peer pressure, lack of educational opportunities, school discipline, and stereotypes. The third section delves into history's Freedom Schools through post-traumatic slave syndrome, culture loss, low future time perspective, and depression. The fourth area addresses four approaches to Black male students' success found in the literature: the student-teacher relationship, principal leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, and freedom schools. The last section explores mentoring programs for Black males.

Historical Background

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 was a landmark decision that desegregated schools in the United States. The lasting effects of the ruling, such as psychological issues and employment opportunities, still impact the Black community. These lingering outcomes include a decrease in Black educators and a mindset that Black students must attend a White school to receive a better education. *Brown v. Board of Education* eliminated schools' legal segregation. However, segregation is still present in 21st-century education (Ford & King, 2014).

In 1955, the Supreme Court's follow-up decision known as *Brown II* issued the plan of how integration would take place (Daughterity & Bolton, 2011). Local and federal courts would decide school integration that in both the North and South were led by White officials and judges. Contrary to the goals of *Brown*, city officials implemented housing and zoning barriers to keep schools segregated. Moving into the 1960s, many Blacks felt that desegregating schools was not an essential aspect for creating a better

education for Black children (Daughterity & Bolton, 2011). A critical factor that helped advance integration into schools were three subsequent Supreme Court Rulings.

In 1968, *Green v. New Kent County* in Virginia ruled that freedom of choice hindered school integration (Daughterity & Bolton, 2011). In 1969, the *Alexander v. Holmes* decision stated that unitary school systems had to be established. Lastly, in 1971, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Board of Education* concluded that bussing was a method that can be used to eliminate school segregation (Daughterity & Bolton, 2011).

Segregation Continues

After *Brown v. Board* and its order to desegregate schools with “all deliberate speed,” many barriers to integration remained. The vague language of “deliberate speed” resulted in an intentionally long process without a timeline. According to an analysis by the UCLA Civil Rights Projects (Tatum, 2017), 75% of Black students currently attend a minority school in Minneapolis-St. Paul. For example, in Minnesota, students of color make up 90% of the enrollment in more than 200 schools (Magan, 2017). *Cruz-Guzman v. the State of Minnesota* argued that the state allowed racial segregation in the schools located in the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts. Families involved in the case also stated that a cause for segregation was parents placing their children in culturally targeted charter schools because they performed better than the low-performing public schools (Golden, 2019). Nekima Levy Armstrong, an attorney representing the charter schools, stated that parents of color needed to have the freedom to select “culturally affirming” schools (Golden, 2019). The families felt that the opportunity to send their children to a school in their neighborhood, even if it was less diverse, was more important than sending their children further away to a more varied school (Vergas, 2018). In 2022, the

Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled against the group, saying a racially imbalanced school system does not violate the state constitution unless it's intentional (Marohn, 2022).

Loss of Black Educators

In addition to the continued segregation of schools, another impact of the *Brown v. Board* decision has been the loss of Black educators. Education is still feeling the effect, with 20% of public education teachers being nonwhite compared to 51% of the student population being nonwhite (Geiger, 2018). Thirty-eight thousand Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs following the 1954 *Brown* decision (Oakley et al., 2008) for several reasons, including punishment for being involved with the NAACP or the Urban League (Tillman, 2004). Besides, White school administrators took the discriminatory action of dismissing Black teachers if they were registered voters (Tillman, 2004). Other steps to deny Black teachers a teaching position after *Brown v. Board* were to deny teaching licenses or to evaluate Black teachers on a standardized test (Tillman, 2004). Various policies and mandated tests continue to keep Black teachers and administrators out of the field of education. In 2013, Minnesota passed a new law that requires all teachers to pass the basic skills test before getting hired (Dahle, 2013). Designed with disparities in race, ethnicity, and English language proficiency, the basic skills test has created another barrier that keeps teachers of color out of the classroom. Approximately 79% of Whites and 37% of Blacks pass the writing portion of the test, and 79% of Whites and 35% of Blacks pass the reading portion (Rupar, 2013). A lack of diverse educators denies Black and White children the positive impacts this diversity brings (Oakley et al., 2008). In schools with diverse teaching staff, students are exposed to different cultures instead of relying on stereotypes. Also, teachers of color can be role models to help students of color build connections with individuals who share their

background, and Black teachers hold higher expectations for Black children (Anderson, 2016). If a Black male student has a Black teacher in fourth or fifth grade, the chances of dropping out of school are significantly lowered (Morgan, 2019).

Systemic Issues Affecting Black Male Students

Systemic issues are those deeply rooted in the fabric of the norms of a culture. A culture's identity is shaped by the way decisions are made about providing fair chances for success. The systemic issues affecting Black males, which at times appear invisible, are identified in this review as peer pressure, lack of educational opportunities, school discipline, and family stereotypes that divert from addressing systemic issues.

Peer Pressure

In a study of the effects of peer relationships on the achievement gap, Darensbourg and Blake (2014) reported that the achievement gap between White and Black students is attributed to cultural differences in students' achievement values. Black students, the authors contended, avoid doing well in school because they do not want to be labeled "White" (p. 192). Students considered popular among their peers performed better in school (Darensbourg & Blake, 2014). Farrell et al. (2017) completed a qualitative study on the factors influencing urban African American adolescents' effective nonviolent responses in problem situations. The study discovered that African American adolescents feared their peers' reaction if they used a nonviolent response. The students would receive acceptance from peers if their response to a nonviolent situation were violent. The researchers concluded that peer influence is a significant factor in an adolescent's behavior.

A mixed-method study completed by Seaton and Tyson (2018) explored pressures beyond academics that adolescent Black males face daily. The study included Black

teenage males and females from the ages of 11-19. Black male students felt that they were always seen as negative (Seaton & Tyson, 2018). Black students also addressed their hairstyle as a factor in how they are perceived. The study concluded that Black adolescent males and females faced peer pressure depending on the advantages and disadvantages of the system's inequalities (Seaton & Tyson, 2018). Black males face more peer pressure in academic settings, while Black females faced more peer pressure with dating and appearance.

Lack of Educational Opportunities

The lack of opportunities for Black students is another systemic issue that explains the achievement gap between White and Black students. The disproportion of African American students in special education programming is a national concern (Maydosz, 2017). Special education is designed to provide students with a disability who need specialized instruction ("Special Education," 2019). Disproportionately placing African American students in special education occurs for many reasons, such as biased test content, poverty, and subjective decisions made by educators (Maydosz, 2017) and limits their educational opportunities by placing them in a more restrictive environment. Enrolling increased numbers of Black students in special education leads to a lower number of these students being identified for gifted programming (Maydosz, 2017). The Bal et al. (2013) mixed-method study found that children of color from poverty-level households were referred to special education classes at a higher rate than poverty-level White students. The study also reported that Black students were two to three times more likely to be referred to special education under an emotional behavior label than their White counterparts. This literature revealed distinct ways Black students are not receiving the same access to quality education as their White peers.

School Discipline Policies

School discipline policies also show a negative impact on Black male achievement. Lindsay and Hart (2017) identified that Black children represent 16% of K-12 enrollment nationwide and 43% of those receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions. Black males are more likely to be suspended than any other demographic group (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). The researchers also found that suspensions dropped 18% for Black males when a Black male teacher taught Black males (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Suspending or expelling students from the learning environment opens the school-to-prison pipeline's gateway, a step-by-step process that begins with detentions and suspensions. Following these school absences, students fall behind or drop out (Nance, 2016). Twenty-three percent of Black males between the ages of 16-24 who have dropped out of school are incarcerated in jail or prison (News America Media, 2009). Black students are three times as likely to be suspended than White students (Nelson & Lind, 2015). African American males have a higher probability of serving time in jail during their lifetime than going to college, getting married, or going into military service (Thompson, 2010).

Hudson's (2011) case study of two African American males who spent time in a correctional facility found that both men struggled through school academically. Both men were also greatly influenced by hostile environments that led to making poor choices that ended in prison time. Also, the men reflected on the experience of not having someone guide them in life as a factor in their imprisonment. The study also found that zero-tolerance policies implemented in the subjects' schools started the two men on a path to prison.

Zero-tolerance policies create predetermined consequences for individuals without considering the background of a conflict situation. These policies were first

implemented to deter drug trafficking in the latter part of the 1970s (Skiba & Nesting, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies were created to stop small offenses that could lead to more serious crimes (Nelson & Lind, 2015). In 1994, when President Clinton signed a gun-free school act that required the penalty of a one-year removal from school (Skiba, 2001), metal detectors began making urban schools look like prison environments. The purpose of zero-tolerance policies was to monitor all offenders, but Black students were targeted more frequently (Skiba, 2001). By 2002, the research uncovered that people of color received harsher penalties than their White counterparts (Bell, 2015). In the 2009-2010 school year, 31% of Black boys across the United States were suspended at least once from school (2015).

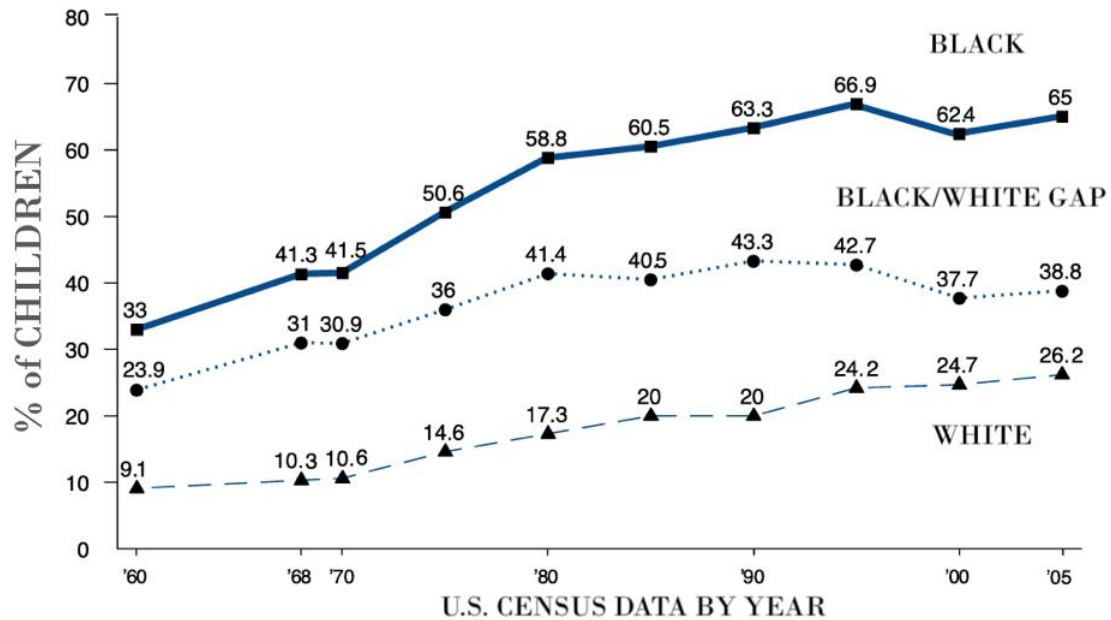
Using Family Stereotypes to Divert from Systemic Racism

A report by then-Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965 contained many assumptions about African American families. “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” (1965), better known as the Moynihan Report, stated that the deterioration of the Black family started taking place in the 1960s (Barton & Coley, 2010). The report identified the Black family’s breakdown with more Black females becoming single mothers and raising their Black sons without a father. This suggested a correlation between this breakdown of the family and the achievement gap. In general, the report blamed the Black community for its struggles, asserting that fathers choose to leave home and have their family grow up in poverty. A child growing up in poverty, according to the report, will lead to poor academic performance. The study also found that if single-family birth rates continued to rise, fatherless homes would harm the entire Black community.

The Moynihan Report noted that links between single parenthood and poverty lead to poor academics (Barton & Coley, 2010). More recent research countered that narrative by finding that culture (precisely the amount of support of education in the surrounding culture), not wealth, is the primary determiner of academic achievement (Crotty, 2013). A study completed by Cross et al. (2019) concluded that children of parents who build a culture of support and less shame would achieve more success in school. The authors also found that parents who have been successful academically bring forth a culture of higher expectations for their children. Children from a lower-income family can still be successful when parents display a concerted effort on education (Hayes, 2011). Figure 2.2. presents the consistent 45-year racial gap in children living in single- or no-parent households.

Figure 2.2

Percentage of Children Under Age 18 Living with One or No Parent, 1960 to 2005



N

ote: Adapted from *The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped*, by P. E.

Barton and R. J. Coley, 2010, Educational Testing Service, p. 23

(<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICBWGAP.pdf>). Copyright 2010 by

Educational Testing Service.

Browne and Battle (2018) also countered the Moynihan Report's negative stereotype of Black families by studying single-mother Black families with nonresident Black fathers. The study found that if a culture of education is established in the home, a Black male can be successful. The research conducted by Browne and Battle also discussed systemic issues that affect Black males and the lack of equitable education for Black students. The achievement gap in knowledge goes further than the family structure but is primarily due to Whites' environments in society (Browne & Battle, 2018).

The basis of the Moynihan report's conclusions was a belief that the factor creating a single-parent household was the breakdown of the structure of the Black family. However, the Black family's analysis is now understood as an effect of systemic racism and the prejudice and discrimination it creates that oppresses the Black community. The Moynihan report does not address the systemic barriers that keep Black males out of the home but instead exploits the stereotype that Black men choose to leave their families. In reality, one of the main factors impacting the loss of Black fathers from their homes is the mass incarceration of Black males. One in three Black males will have been involved with the criminal justice system at some point in life (Coughlin et al., 2016). Sixty percent of the U.S. incarcerated population are people of color (Coughlin et al., 2016). Also, seventy percent of Black men who do not graduate from high school have been incarcerated by the age of 40 (Ferguson et al., 2016). Many Black men who have been incarcerated have come from low-income communities. Black males are penalized to a higher degree for drug crimes than their White counterparts (Alexander, 2012), and this and other systemic barriers keep Black families separated. Research by Elliott and Reid (2019) explored different parenting Black mothers have to do with her Black adolescent sons. Forty-six Black mothers from low-income communities were interviewed, discussing their fears and consequences that their sons will face if incarcerated. Black males face harsher penalties than their White counterparts (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Besides, Black mothers are criticized when their Black sons are in jail due to society's systemic oppression.

Since the end of slavery, barriers such as biased laws regarding imprisonment have been put into place to keep Black people enslaved. The Thirteenth Amendment freed the slaves and gave African Americans full citizenship, but it did not outlaw

slavery. Slavery was essential to the southern states to keep their economy growing. After the Civil War, African Americans started to make progress in America. In reaction to African Americans finding success, different laws were instituted. Southern states began forming vagrancy laws that placed Black men over the age of 18 in jail if they were unemployed (Alexander, 2012). In addition, many laws created during the reconstruction era were instituted that started a boom of African Americans in prison.

As Blackmon (2008) wrote, by 1901, many Blacks had been removed from positions as sheriff or police officers and stripped of their right to vote unless they could read and write and owned property valued at \$300 dollars or more. They were placed into positions working on railroad cars and mines where working conditions were very harsh. Black men were taken from their families and charged with crimes they did not commit and forced into cheap labor for, in many cases, one to five years to pay off being convicted of their crimes. These false arrests and work sentences were essentially the same as Black men sold into slavery.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Regan's war on drugs ushered in another form of Black male enslavement. With the CIA admittedly placing drugs in Black neighborhoods, another spike of Black men going to prison took place (Alexander, 2012). Due to new drug laws instituted in the 1980s and 1990s, today, 80% of African American men have a criminal record that limits their opportunities. In some major cities, half of African American men are in a correctional facility (Alexander, 2012).

In contrast to the Moynihan report's message, Black boys grow up in a home without a father because of the systemic barriers that permeate the social fabric of the United States described above, not because of poverty. As a result, the lack of a father's presence in the home impacts children. Choi and Jackson (2011) determined that the

more contact a child has with a father, the fewer behavioral issues. Children who come from a married household score better in reading and math skills (Nokali et al., 2010). Also, Baker (2014) reported that the quality of parenting from the mother is still paramount. Mothers are more likely to take on the disciplinarian role in single- or two-parent homes (Baker, 2014). A father's part in the home focuses more on financial support, supporting the mother, and creating positive, supportive interactions with the child (Henry, 2016). More findings from Henry's (2016) study showed that the mother and father's relationship was essential to developing a child.

Studies that challenge the Moynihan Report are helping dispel the myth that fatherless Black families are responsible for the achievement gap in our schools. Instead, research explains that systemic racism is pushing many Black fathers out of the home. A Black male's strong presence is needed in the family and society, and change can occur in the community by rooting out systemic barriers such as the school-to-prison pipeline and Black males' mass incarceration.

History's Psychological Impact on Black Male Students

The treatment of Blacks throughout American history has a lasting psychological impact and therefore may impact Black males' academic success by inflicting post-traumatic slave syndrome, loss of culture, low future time perspective, and depression.

Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome

According to Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005), African Americans continue to experience the impact of slavery through a condition similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, which she termed post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). America's years of slavery created a fixed mindset in which many White Americans believe they are superior in thoughts and

actions, while many Blacks see themselves as inferior to Whites. This mindset developed from beliefs captured in a statement from Jefferson Davis, leader of the Confederate Army: “African slavery as it exists in the United States, is a moral, special blessing. . . . You cannot transform the negro into anything one-tenth as useful or as good as what slavery enables them to be” (Murty et al., 2017). As Murty et al. (2017) explained, that statement’s power continues to carry a stigma for African Americans in the United States.

DeGruy (2005) described how PTSS shows up in feelings of stress, trauma, and behavior. Her work discusses the research that shows that human DNA may contain physical memory of the stress Blacks’ ancestors endured and that anxiety and trauma can be passed down from generation to generation. One example of this inherited stress and trauma is the feeling African Americans experience today in the Confederate flag’s presence (Murty et al., 2017). Even though African Americans no longer face Jim Crow laws or slavery, there is a negative feeling about what the flag represents. DeGruy (2005) traces the effects of trauma passed down through generations by parenting skills developed in the slavery era. In a slave family, the White slave master, not the Black male, was the dominant figure. The Black woman taught her Black family how to please the master and survive each day. The enslaved family’s children observed this behavior and repeated their generations’ patterns (DeGruy, 2005).

Post-traumatic slave syndrome also manifests in the belief that society’s opportunities are not attainable (DeGruy, 2005). Reports in the 1990s, for example, revealed that children living in poor neighborhoods engaged in destructive behaviors (DeGruy, 2005). Children would plan out their funerals, starting at ten years old. As Sule et al. (2017) discussed, our beliefs determine our destiny. Centuries of not having control of life and being enslaved are still felt today in the Black community. It has come to the

point that, as a country, the devastating effects of slavery must be addressed to start the healing process. White individuals hinder this process by their refusal to address the effects of slavery and the guilt that comes with its history. Their White privilege gives them the ability to avoid the issue and step out of the picture painted by the horrific acts of slavery that continue to dehumanize African Americans (Sule et al.).

Loss of Culture

Even though the Civil Rights movement removed some barriers for African Americans, it could not replace the African culture Black people lost. White writers in American history have belittled African Americans' accomplishments, leaving the impression that African Americans are inferior to White Americans (Gwekwerere, 2010). Gwekwerere (2010) also stated that White writers have also claimed that Black history is only about slavery and that their ancestors did not contribute to the world, creating a barrier of inferiority.

Many parts of African culture have become woven into the culture of America. When Africans arrived in North America by the slave trade, they brought many aspects of culture, such as stories and folklore incorporated into American nursery rhymes (Holloway, 2005). Foods originating in Africa, such as pancakes and cornbread, also became part of American culture without reference to their roots (Holloway, 2005). In stories and films, cowboys are represented as White males, but one in five cowboys was Black (Holloway, 2005). Holloway (2005) described how Africans contributed in many ways, from medicine to agriculture and architecture, that are never acknowledged in American culture. While White Americans can embrace a demanding work culture relating to their European settlers coming to the new world, African Americans' identity is stripped. It has not been restored in the education system or society (Barton & Coley,

2010). The root of the crisis of education for African Americans is slavery (Patterson, 2015).

Low Future Time Perspective

Studies indicate that African American men disappearing from the household are tragic for the community. Black men are not finding employment and are the largest incarcerated racial group at 35% (Mahaffey et al., 2018). Incarcerated Black men also face different health factors that lead to a need for more mental health services (Mahaffey et al., 2018). Maheffey et al. (2018) also report that Black men do not receive equivalent mental health services to their White counterparts due to discriminatory practices. Black male youths' leading cause of death is homicide, drug abuse, and suicide (Henfield, 2012). Black men not receiving equivalent mental health support due to Black men's negative perceptions and not finding adequate employment to provide for their families lead to a gloomy future time perspective (Henfield, 2012).

Future time perspective (FTP) is the extent to which an individual will think about and plan for the future. In terms of education, a positive FTP will lead to students striving for goals in the present, near-end, and distant future (Schultema et al., 2014). A study conducted among 609 middle school students from Flint, Michigan, explored the role of future time perspective in predicting early violence (Kruger et al., 2015). The study took place in a neighborhood that had high rates of violence. Seventy-four percent of the participants were Black students. The study found that students with a healthy perspective of the present time displayed more violent behavior than those with a weak current-time perspective. The violence around them influenced adolescents with a healthy view of the present. Adolescents with a strong stance on the future displayed characteristics of finishing projects early and having a strong sense of who they are and

how their actions affect the future (Kruger et al., 2015). These findings state that young adolescents must be involved in activities that improve the neighborhood to change their future perceptions. In addition, having strong leaders or mentors in the community will also change perspectives (Kruger et al., 2015).

Depression

African American male adolescents experience high levels of depression disproportionate to other ethnic groups (Henfield, 2012). The stress factors can develop from systemic barriers, such as stereotyping and the pressure to reach their White counterparts' academic progress. Also, the behavioral discipline of Black students is disproportionate to other groups of students. For example, in Minneapolis, Black students make up 41% of the population but account for 76% of the suspensions (Green, 2018). More suspensions lead to more Black students not being in the classroom, therefore missing instructional time and falling behind academically. Henfield (2012) found that Black males suffer more from the unwillingness to reach out for help as it appears to be a sign of weakness and reported that Black males account for 80% of all suicides among Black adolescents.

Approaches to Black Male Student Success

Black males face many issues in education that hinder success. The literature suggests three critical approaches that support Black male student success: teacher-student relationships, culturally relevant pedagogy, and freedom schools.

Teacher-Student Relationships

According to the meta-analysis study by John Hattie (2009), teacher-student relationships are among the most important aspects of a student's positive behavior. A teacher with a student-centered approach will have more engagement and fewer resistant

behaviors in the classroom. Only 2% of teachers are Black males (Toppo & Nichols, 2017). Having Black male teachers helps other Black males see individuals that look like them being a positive image in a school every day that can share in their experience (Pabon, 2017).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Making culturally relevant pedagogy happen in the curriculum is imperative to the success of Black students. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is based on three tenets: cultural competence, academic achievement, and sociopolitical consciousness (Milner, 2017; Aronson & Laughter, 2015). To successfully implement CRP, teachers must first replace deficit perspectives of students and communities. Second, they must become confident in the implementation of CRP. Third, they must understand why culture and differences are essential. Finally, teachers must make connections within the content they are teaching (Gay, 2013). In 2010, 51% of Blacks lived in the suburbs compared to 44% in 2000 (Frey, 2011). All educators must embrace CRP to change diversity in schools and create avenues for Black students to see themselves in the curriculum.

Teachers incorporate the three tenets of CRP in a school by holding high expectations for all students. Teachers can find ways to integrate students taking ownership of their learning (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Next, educators must make the bridge of incorporating culture into academics, which helps students retain information better (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). Another practice is teaching Black students to think critically about their world (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). Educators must educate themselves on social issues and create opportunities for Black students to see themselves in the world they live in (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). To find CRP to

support Black students, many families turn to organizations outside of schools such as church or The Boys Club (Noguera, 2003). These organizations, however, cannot shift what happens in schools. The importance of creating a mentoring program designed for Black males in the school environment fosters a healthy relationship in the school.

Little research has been done on culturally relevant pedagogy and its impact on mentoring. A qualitative case study completed by Zygmunt et al. (2018) studied the power of CRP mentoring with teachers. The study explored 60 preservice teachers connected with mentors from their students' community. The mentors were tasked with showing the teachers how to care in an authentic way to build relationships with their students. In this study, teaching candidates spent one day a week being acclimated into the community with a mentor. The family engagement opportunities ranged from worship services and local community meetings to visiting families. In their findings, the researchers discussed that the teaching candidates became more socially conscious of their students. Teachers moved beyond their student families' deficit mindset and started to understand the community as wealthy (Zygmunt et al., 2018).

Authentic CRP occurs in the classroom and school when the community is connected with strong mentors. Further research on the importance of a school-based mentoring program that carries out CRP is needed.

Freedom Schools

Another program that has shown success with Black males are Freedom Schools. Launched in Mississippi in 1964, Freedom Schools were a part of the Civil Rights movement designed to improve education for Black students in part by including content about social resistance and protest (Etienne, 2013). Freedom Schools developed CRP to focus on five content areas: academic enrichment, parent and family involvement, social

action and civic engagement, intergenerational leadership, and nutrition and health (Williamson, 2013). Students in these summer programs were also exposed to African American literature that many would not read during the school year.

Freedom Schools founder Charles Cobb (2022) stated that young members of civil rights organizations could see early on that there was a connection between education and political struggle—“Blacks were deliberately and systematically kept illiterate (and the public school system was part of this) while at the same time literacy a priority was the primary requirement for voter registration” (para. 13). A study of Freedom Schools in Charlotte, North Carolina, completed in 2010, found that 65% of students that attended Freedom School in the summer improved their reading test scores (Williamson, 2013). Freedom Schools continue across the United States each summer, teaching Black students their heritage and exposing them to different opportunities. Their mentorship from the program pushes students on to college.

Mentoring Programs for Black Males

Mentoring is a critical factor in supporting Black males in education and is offered in many different ways. This section of the literature review describes various mentoring programs for Black males in middle and secondary schools and higher education.

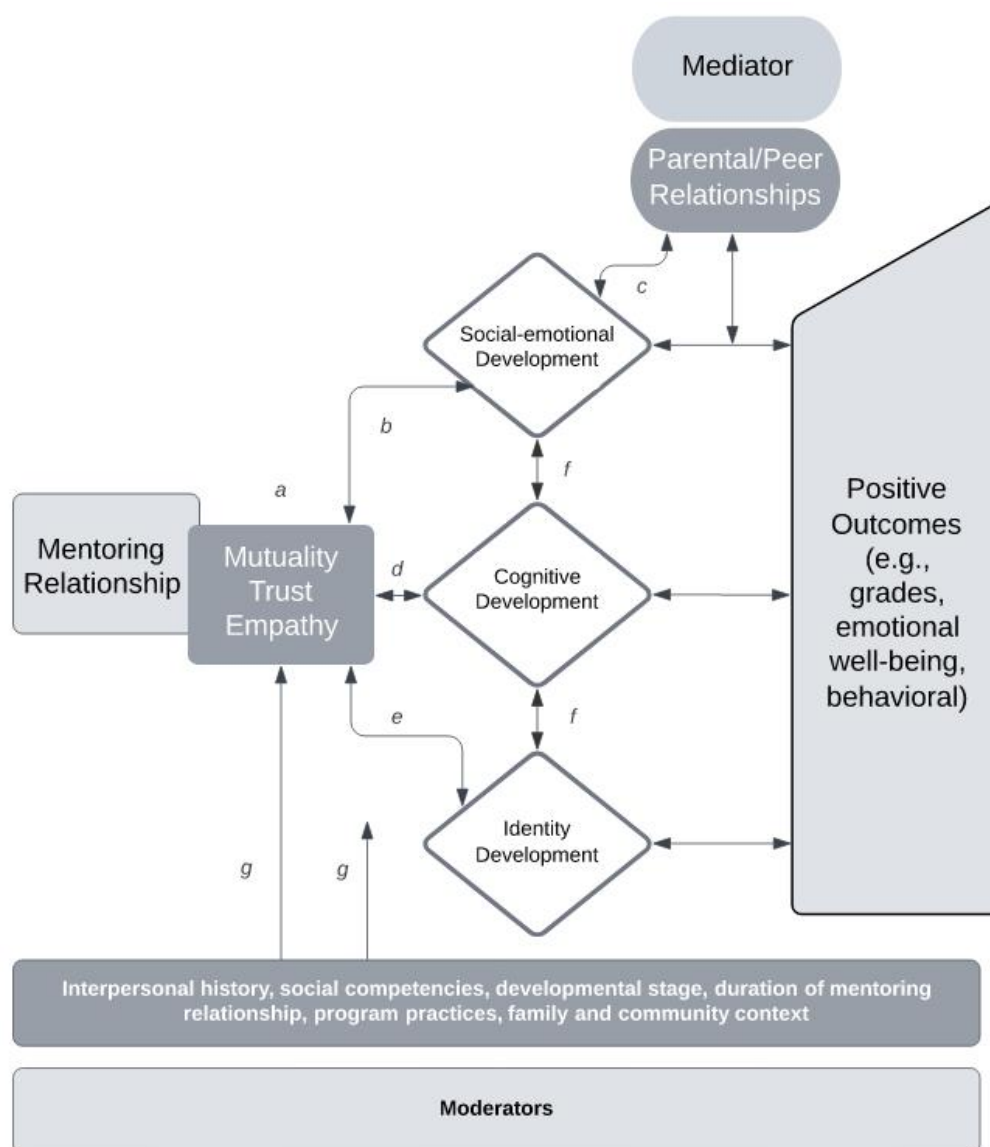
Middle and Secondary School Mentoring

Mentoring can guide a person to make a successful transition to adulthood and become a positive role model in their community. The Rhodes (2002) model of a transformative mentoring program includes the characteristics of trust, empathy, and mutuality, which lead to social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development. Figure 2.3 illustrates each component of this model.

Wakefield and Hudley (2007) wrote that mentorship is all about relationships and racial identity. When minority youth have developed an ethnic identity with a group, they are more likely to have academic, psychological, and social success. Another critical aspect of any mentoring program is developing a process to help adolescents handle traumatic life experiences and exposure to violence (Jarjoura, 2013). According to Jarjoura (2013), young men who have experienced or been exposed to violence and trauma tend to display difficulties with problem-solving and decision-making. Also, there can be a struggle to develop interpersonal relationships. Another essential characteristic

Figure 2.3

Model of Youth Mentoring



Note: Adapted from *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*, by J. E. Rhodes, 2002, Harvard University Press, p. 36. Copyright 2002 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

of successful mentoring groups is teaching young men to advocate for themselves and have hope for the future. With the many systemic barriers and challenges Black men encounter in life, it is imperative to support them with the message that there is hope for a

better experience with great opportunities. The adult males in the program must be exposing the youth to positive outcomes in life. A challenge for Black youth is that they will die early or end up in prison. A young Black male connecting to an adult Black male being a positive role model in the community provides hope.

According to Williams (2017), a mentor not only shares a cultural identity but is also a more skilled and experienced individual who can nurture. In addition, mentoring should be an ongoing relationship. For Black men attending a predominately White institution, a strong mentorship is needed to advance. That mentor partnership can be formal or informal but must have the key components of a mentoring program.

President Barack Obama started the My Brother's Keeper program in 2014 to help Black and Latino males combat racial injustice and prepare them for success. Obama's program sparked an increase in the number of mentoring programs designed to disrupt the prison-to-pipeline process (Nance, 2016). Data shows that 86% of Black boys read below the fourth-grade proficiency level (The White House, 2014). My Brother's Keeper program's goal is to close the educational and employment gaps with male students of color. The program obtains financial support from large corporations, and an appropriate question about school mentorship programs is their ability to find adequate funding without such corporate help.

With each layer of systemic barriers that hinders Black males' growth, emotional, and academic support is needed. A qualitative study in a New York City school (Jackson et al., 2014) found that a structured mentoring program with a caring adult who fosters a positive relationship will have positive outcomes. The authors stressed that the mentoring program must focus on relationships, social, emotional well-being, and academics. The high school-based mentoring program explored in this study created a community in

which each individual involved grows together. The mentees eventually become mentors and pass on everything they have learned. Also, a level of trust is formed that promotes student's voices. Students from the program shared that the program helped them find a purpose in life and lead with integrity.

Higher Education Mentoring

A case study by Dr. Ronald Brown (2009) explored African American male mentorship's perceived influence on African American males' academic success in attending a predominantly White institution of higher education. In this case study, which randomly selected seven young African American young men at the college, the subjects stated that having a mentor of the same race was helpful but unnecessary. The students reported that it was difficult to form relationships with White faculty because the young men did not want to appear that they were not ready for college. The participants also stated that they felt it was important that more African Americans be hired at the university. The study did not show growth in academic performance; it concluded that mentorship is essential for Black males.

Another study conducted at the collegiate level focused on 59 Black males forming positive relationships with other Black males on the college campus (Brooms & Davis, 2007). The study described Black male students' academic and social isolation challenges, low expectations from instructors, and race battles. Another study that took a phenomenological approach found Black males must have self-awareness, self-understanding, and appreciation of who they are on the collegiate level and in the real-world society (Bridges, 2011). The study took place at a predominately White college involving six Black male participants. The Black male students described the racism they experienced on campus, including feeling that faculty assumed they were athletes or not

intelligent. The study concluded that it is important for Black males to develop relationships with Black males. Also, having a space to express themselves will provide a better environment for success (Bridges, 2011).

A quantitative study that explored a community-based mentoring program focused on 130 Black males from the ages of eleven to fourteen inquired if the young men would gain higher self-esteem and show a higher college self-efficacy than non-mentored students (Bryson, 2016). The study did not report any significant impact on Black males that received mentoring and could not capture behavior patterns or success in everyday life in schools for the Black males. Previous research shows that mentoring equips students with skills to navigate school and life (DuBois et al., 2013; Herrera et al., 2013; Thomas & Zand, 2010). The importance of continuing the research through a qualitative lens could help tell Black males' story in a mentoring program.

Summary

W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) wrote, "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back into slavery." The African American male in the United States has made progress but has also been pushed back. *Brown v. Board of Education* was a significant decision to erase school segregation. With that decision came housing laws, busing regulations, and the loss of Black teachers and administration in education. Myth-based ideas such as those in the Moynihan Report addressed school achievement by blaming fatherless homes and poverty rather than the systemic racism that limits Black males' opportunities in society. Post-traumatic slave syndrome (DeGruy, 2017) reveals how slavery continues to impact the mental health and lived experiences of Black Americans today. Research on the obstacles Black males face in a society that directly affects their education provides insights that can help develop more mentoring studies.

We now know that zero-tolerance policies that are part of the prison-to-pipeline phenomenon in education and laws that keep Black men in prison perpetuate the achievement gap. While very few studies on exploring adolescent Black males in a school-based mentoring program have been conducted, existing research shows that programs that are consistent and last for a substantial period of time will provide a “playbook” to navigate through systemic barriers found in schools (Grossman et al., 2012). More studies are necessary to determine if mentoring programs for Black male students are successful interventions.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The qualitative design study uses a phenomenological approach to exploring adolescent Black males' lived experiences in a mentoring program in a diverse suburban middle school in the Midwest. The researcher learned how the participants navigate the school system with a mentor who identifies as a Black male in the mentoring program. Black males consistently show up in academic data as having lower graduation rates than their White counterparts. Furthermore, Black males are at a higher risk of being in prison than their White counterparts. An intervention must be implemented to support Black males in their education journey. Without a culturally designed intervention, many Black males drop out of school or enter special education (Bryan et al., 2016). The lack of cultural awareness in instruction can lead to a perception of a lack of knowledge or engagement that places Black students behind their White counterparts. Black students positioned improperly lead to inferiority and a negative attitude toward school (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

As discussed in the literature review, Black students often feel inferior and deal with a lack of support from public education (Seaton et al., 2014). In 2015, an individual brought a lawsuit against Minnesota officials and local schools. A parent claimed state policies "facilitate and support" segregation and increase the achievement gap by placing poor and minority students in schools without enough resources (Magan, 2017, para. 6).

Scholars have completed studies on mentoring programs, but research on a mentorship program for adolescent Black males is scant. Many all-boys mentoring groups are forming in education to be an intervention of support for Black males. Across the nation, there is an academic and behavioral opportunity gap between White males and

Black males in education. The correct intervention could help close the gap and change the education trajectory. The mentoring program is designed as a “playbook” or guide to school success and beyond for children of color.

Research Context

The research conducted on the mentoring program is located in a diverse suburban school district. The program started in 2009 at a suburban high school and progressed to middle schools and will eventually expand to elementary schools. The mentoring program’s mission is to inspire youth to use education as a pathway to accomplishing their dreams. Students are selected for the program by teachers who feel the young men would benefit from more support. The mentoring program curriculum is a “playbook” designed to build self-esteem, provide tools to navigate the school system, and advise how to “code-switch.” For mentoring to be effective, there must be a relationship with the mentor, consistent meetings and an Afrocentric view. (Gordon et al., 2009). This study sought to determine if these elements exist in the mentoring program.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Black male adolescents define an effective mentoring program?
2. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males affect their engagement levels in school?
3. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males impact the development of social and academic skills?

Research Approach: Phenomenology

The researcher used a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. A qualitative design places the observer in the world of the study (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative researcher will use multiple forms of data such as interviews, observations, and recordings to determine a finding. Conversely, quantitative research is typically measured using numbers to tell the story. By definition, a phenomenological study looks for the ordinary meaning among several individuals of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Each student in this study shared the experience of attending a public middle school in suburban Minnesota. The purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the individual experience to a phenomenon. This researcher explored Black adolescent males' lived experiences navigating middle school in a diverse setting and through a mentoring program. The mentoring program's qualitative study took place at a suburban middle school in the Midwest. Participants shared their experience as a Black male in the mentoring program. The researcher gathered information about the males' shared lived experiences in the mentoring program by conducting interviews. After the collection of data, the researcher analyzed the data for themes.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher examined the data from the theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT). Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that focuses on how deeply racism is embedded in American society (Parker & Lynn, 2002), and does not deal with incremental progress but the foundation of racism in society and law (Delgado & Stefania, 2012). Following the civil rights era of the 1960s, CRT started to develop in the 1970s (Delgado & Stefania). Critical race theory comprises tenets including racism is ordinary, interest convergence, social construction, differential racialization,

intersectionality, and the unique voice of color, also known as counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Through many of his publications, W.E.B. Du Bois inspired critical race theory in education (Rabaka, 2010). DuBois et al. (2013; no affiliation with Du Bois) promoted three requirements for schooling: First, education requires essential knowledge of history from the past, including African history and world history (2013). Second, instruction should contain culture. Every individual should have a right to learn about their culture and not be seen as insignificant. Third, education must understand humanity's present and future needs (2013). The researcher investigated whether or not the Black adolescent males experienced or learned about their own culture.

For this qualitative study, the CRT tenet racism is ordinary is displayed in the historical perspective of Black males in the United States. It has become the norm for Black males not to be as successful in school as their White counterparts. This study's phenomenological design gave voice to young Black men of their lived experience in a public-school setting in Minnesota. It challenged the stereotypical narrative of the Black men since the Jim Crow era. The tenet involving the unique voice of color was represented by creating a space for the participants to share their lived experiences in the mentoring program. This study also explored the tenet racism is ordinary by challenging the image of adolescent Black males in a school system as not achieving. The young potentially had positive images of Black men connected to them, building relationships.

Rationale

The reason for selecting a phenomenological study was to explore adolescent Black males' lived experiences in a diverse middle school. All the gentlemen shared the

phenomenon of being part of the mentoring program. A vital characteristic of a phenomenological study is understanding the essence of the experience and the researcher describing the nature of the lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The researcher gained the perspective of the participants' lived experiences by analyzing data that describes the participants' shared unique understanding. I have a passion for mentorship and have conducted an all-boys mentoring program. To share the stories and not merely the numbers (score data, etc.) of the Black gentlemen in the study may help other educators understand the impact of mentoring. This study further supports the development of more mentor groups as an intervention for Black males keeping them engaged in school. Additionally, this study has the potential to generate a blueprint for future mentoring groups and will also support other studies on having more Black male leaders in education.

Data Collection and Procedures

To collect data, I followed the data collection protocol from Creswell (2013) by interviewing individuals that have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher interviewed Black male students via Zoom using open-ended questions to gather students' opinions about their experience in the mentoring program. I used an interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers (Creswell, 2015) that followed this structure:

- An assent form is issued to the guardian before the interview.
- Interviews are approximately one hour about their experience in the mentoring program.
- Participants have stated the purpose of the interview and given ice-breaker questions to start the interview.

- Interviews are recorded via Zoom.

All students were asked the same open-ended questions to keep the study consistent, and the researcher interviewed students individually. A pseudonym also labeled students for data privacy in the notes. The interview questions were:

1. What does it mean to you to be a Black male?
2. What is a mentor?
3. What does it mean to be mentored?
4. How would you describe your experience in the mentoring program?
5. Describe what made you join the mentor program.
6. What would you consider the positive benefits of the mentoring program? What are areas of opportunity?
7. How do you feel you have benefited from the program?
8. Describe the relationships formed with the other gentlemen in the program and the mentor in the program? How did they form?
9. What are your overall thoughts on a youth mentoring program you are a part of?
10. How did this mentoring program impact your life?

The Zoom application was used to transcribe the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues in data collection, analysis, and dissemination of reports (Creswell, 2013). I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the Minnesota State University of Mankato to conduct this study. The IRB granted permission to the researcher to begin data collection. Upon

approval, the researcher communicated with the program's mentor and sent emails containing assent and consent forms to potential participants.

The program's mentor selected Black male participants who participated in the program during middle school. The researcher called the participants' families to discuss the research's purpose and asked permission to establish interview times with their sons. Before the interview started, students and parents gave consent and assent on a Qualtrics form. I ensured each participant was informed of the study and that the risk of harm to anyone involved was minimal to no risk. Since each participant ranged from 14 to 17, I informed each participant's guardian of the study. The researcher used pseudonyms in place of participants' names to keep their identities concealed.

Trustworthiness and Validation

The intentional practices of the researcher dictate the trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research. For a study to be considered trustworthy, it must be credible, transferrable, dependable, and confirmable (Krostjens & Moser, 2017). Credibility is the confidence that the research aligns with the participant's views. Transferability is the ability of the research findings to be transferred across different disciplines. Dependability is the stability of the findings over time. Confirmability is confirming the results of the participants in other studies.

Validation of findings in qualitative research occurs throughout the process (Creswell, 2015). According to Creswell (2015), multiple sources can achieve validity. One form is clarifying the bias of the researcher. I, the researcher, clarified any bias by stating my previous connection to a mentor program. A second validity strategy supported by Creswell is member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings. After collecting data, I checked the accuracy of the qualitative data by talking with the

participants to confirm my accuracy in sharing their experiences. The third validity strategy used is rich, thick descriptions to convey findings. In chapter four, I provide detailed profiles of participants and their experiences in the mentoring program.

Participants

The recommended number of subjects for a phenomenological study is 3 to 10 (Creswell, 2013). The mentoring program director selected from a pool of Black male participants. The study participants were Black male middle school students who attended a suburban middle school in the Midwest and had been a part of the mentoring program. The middle school is located in a suburb where the city's demographics were 75.3% White, 5.64% Asian, 5.16% Hispanic, and 10% Black (Data USA, 2020). Public data about the middle school stated that it served 862 students in grades six through eight. The school demographics were 55.4% White, 15.9% Black, 14% Latino, and 7.7% Asian (Minnesota Report Card, 2020a). Black males were 34.9% proficient in reading and 36.3% proficient in math, and White males were 74.2% proficient in reading and 81.9% proficient in math (Minnesota Report Card, 2020b, c, d, e). Thirty-eight percent of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch (Minnesota Report Card, 2020a). Every student was offered academic support classes, had access to a Chromebook during the day, and participated in band/choir. The suburban middle school serves students from its city and surrounding cities.

Interview Process

Interviews took place via the Zoom application. The participants and I were in a different secure location. I scheduled each interview individually, and interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom application. The interviews started with two pre-questions to check the participant's connection to the study as Black males. Each

participant was asked ten questions following pre-questions to gather their lived experiences as an adolescent Black male in a mentoring program. Interviews only took place after parents and students gave consent and assent.

Instrumentation

The data interpretations cannot be separated from the researcher's background (Creswell, 2015), and I have worked in education for over ten years. I worked in an urban and suburban elementary school during those years. Also, I have completed administrative internships at the middle and high school levels.

While working as an assistant principal in a diverse suburban elementary school, I formed a mentoring program for fifth-grade boys called Boys to Men. The program designed an intervention for fifth-grade boys to set goals, make positive choices, and become community leaders. The Boys to Men group would meet bi-weekly with diverse speakers to share their journey through school. I used bracketing to avoid influencing the data collected from the research study. Bracketing in qualitative research is a method to mitigate potential harmful effects that may taint the research (Tufford and Newman, 2010). To check for any unconscious bias in data collection, I had interview questions reviewed by the university advisor. I reflected while analyzing the data by making notes. According to Tufford and Newman (2010), reflecting is another way to mitigate any effects on the data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves understanding and interpreting the text to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2015). Van Manen (1990) described data analysis as a phenomenological reflection in a phenomenological study. I started analyzing the data by reviewing transcripts from the interview, listening to recorded

interviews, and reflecting. After reviewing the data, significant themes were grouped about the participants' experiences from the study, as directed by Creswell (2013). Next, I started highlighting keywords in the participants' answers, which led to the development of pattern codes that created patterns by the interviewee (Saldana, 2011). Grouping the information into codes helped me summarize information that developed themes (Creswell, 2013). After developing themes, a total of three themes emerged. I highlighted the themes in three different colors. First, yellow was highlighted for racialized and gendered pressure. For instance, "weight on your shoulders" and "feeling of pressure" were highlighted. Second, I used pink to highlight words for mentoring support as a means of academic success. Words discovered in the interviews such as "help" and "extra push" are examples. Third, I used blue to highlight words or phrases about brotherhood through a fraternal community; these included "teaching you," "hang out," or "bond."

According to the process described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I developed a narrative from the data displaying the Black males' lived experience in the mentoring program. After interpreting information, the data began to tell a story through a critical race theory framework. All the interpretations were based on the researcher's insight and asked, "What were the lessons learned?"

Emotion Coding

Emotion coding is the process in which the responses of interview participants are scanned for emotional expression, and I assigned emotional codes to express emotions from the interview data. I used emotion coding to analyze answers to the participants' interview questions that reflect emotions from their lived experiences in the mentoring

program. According to Saldana (2009), “emotion coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies” (p. 87).

Values Coding

Values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflects the participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing their perspective worldview (Saldana, 2009). Value coding is assigned to participants to the question, “What does it mean to be a Black male?” I counted the participants’ responses that expressed their values, attitudes, and beliefs.

According to Saldana (2009), value coding is appropriate for exploring cultural values, participant experiences, and actions. Value coding allowed me to understand better the participant’s experience in the mentoring program as a Black male navigating a school in a diverse setting.

Pattern Coding

Pattern codes are explanatory codes that identify emergent themes in interview data (Saldana, 2009). Pattern coding allows for condensing large amounts of data into more minor themes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), pattern coding is appropriate for the second cycle of coding after initial coding. This process helped me identify significant themes in the transcript data for this study. The major themes that emerged were racialized and gendered pressure, mentoring support as a means for academic success, and brotherhood through a fraternal community.

The contents in Table 3.1 summarize the forming of codes and themes. Each theme was assigned a color to assist with finding themes in the transcripts. The frequency codes are quotes from the participants that were mentioned often in the interview.

Table 3.1*Pattern Code Formulation*

Frequency Codes	Emergred Themes/Subthemes	Color Assigned to Theme
* Weight on my shoulders * Watch your back * Stand out more than others	Racialized and Gendered Pressure	Yellow
* Mentor is someone who guides you * Someone there to encourage you * Gives constructive criticism when needed	Mentoring Support as a Means for Academic Success	Pink
* We're all in it together * Having people around that you enjoy * Get together and have fun	Brotherhood Through a Fraternal Community	Blue

Theoretical Analysis

The researcher interpreted pattern codes for this study through the perspective of critical race theory. The pattern codes were analyzed through the CRT tenets racism is ordinary and unique voice of color. Critical race theory helped decipher themes of racialization in the participants' responses.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter presents the results of a phenomenological study examining adolescent Black males' perspectives in a mentoring program. The three major themes that appeared were racialized and gendered pressure, mentoring support as a means for academic success, and fostering brotherhood through a fraternal community. This chapter presents the findings of the research questions: 1. How do Black male adolescents define an effective mentoring program? 2. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males affect their engagement levels in school? 3. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males impact the development of social and academic skills?

The researcher asked two pre-interview questions and ten open-ended questions:

1. What does it mean to you to be a Black male?
2. What is a mentor?
3. What does it mean to be mentored?
4. How would you describe your experience in the mentoring program?
5. Describe what made you join the mentor program.
6. What would you consider the positive benefits of the mentoring program? What are areas of opportunity?
7. How do you feel you have benefited from the program?
8. Describe the relationships formed with the other gentlemen in the program and the mentor in the program? How did they form?

9. What are your overall thoughts on a youth mentoring program you are a part of?

10. How did this mentoring program impact your life?

Each of the above questions assessed the adolescent Black males lived experience in the mentoring program.

Participant Profiles

The nine participants of this phenomenological study all identified as Black males. Each participant participated in the same middle school mentoring program. Also, each gentleman attended the same high school in a suburb of Minnesota. The researcher used pseudonyms in the collection of data for participants' privacy. Eddie identified as a tenth-grade Black male. Terry identified as an eleventh-grade Black male recognized as an all-city football player. Avery identified as a tenth-grade Black male that enjoys being the center of attention. Jerry identified as a tenth-grade Black male involved in the Black Student Union. Dennis identified as a sophomore Black male raised by a single mom. Jake identified as a Black male senior adopted by a White family. Kingston identified as a Black male junior and Dwayne as a Black male senior who had selected his college. Maleek identified as a Black male high school junior.

Eddie was a sophomore who had been a part of the mentoring program since elementary school. The mentoring program allowed him to be around like-minded peers that needed assistance in making positive decisions. Eddie came from a two-parent household and planned to attend college after high school. Also, Jerry was a sophomore who had been a part of the mentoring program since elementary. Jerry was raised by a single mom who pushed him and wanted him to be around other strong Black males. Jerry struggled at times to stay focused in school. The mentoring program gave him

stability and a good group of friends that pushed him. In the mentoring program, Jerry gained confidence, and the program made him believe he could accomplish his goals. In addition, Maleek was a sophomore raised by a single Black mother. He stayed to himself and struggled academically. Next, Avery was a sophomore raised by a single Black mother. He was involved in social groups such as the Black Student Union to bring awareness to issues facing Black students. Avery enjoyed making others laugh and being the center of attention.

Terry was a junior in the mentoring program since elementary school. Raised by a single mom, Terry was a star football player for the high school and got recruited by colleges. The family viewed him as the one who would make a difference. Terry credited the mentoring program for getting him to where he can now play football. Also, Dennis was a junior in high school raised by his mom and dad, who lived in a separate household. He was involved in sports and succeeded academically. Dennis enjoyed connecting with other students on the same path of graduating high school and being successful.

Jake was a senior who started the mentoring program in elementary school. Jake identified as a Black male adolescent. He came from a two-parent Black home and had been adopted by White parents. Jake was the only Black male on the hockey team who had participated for four years. He did not always connect with the gentlemen in the program but felt supported by the mentor.

Kingston was a senior and had been in the mentoring program since middle school. He played sports and stayed focused on his academics. Last, Dwayne was a senior raised by a single Black mother. He excelled academically and stayed connected

with other young men similar to him. Dwayne already had the next chapter of his college life planned out.

The contents of Table 3.2 summarize the participant profiles. Each participant's grade level and years in the mentoring program are displayed.

Table 3.2

Participant Profiles

Participant	Grade Level	#Years in Mentoring Program
Eddie	10 th Grade	6 years
Jerry	10 th Grade	6 years
Jake	12 th Grade	8 years
Terry	11 th Grade	7 years
Kingston	12 th Grade	6 years
Maleek	10 th Grade	6 years
Dwayne	12 th Grade	8 years
Avery	10 th Grade	6 years
Dennis	11 th Grade	4 years

Emotion and Value Personified

Jerry, Eddie, Terry, Kingston, Maleek, Dennis, Dwayne, Avery, and Jake shared their lived experience in a mentoring program. This section communicates the participants' emotions and values from the interviews. Within the sharing, the participants' feelings displayed how they felt about being a Black male, being in the mentoring program, and their connection with the mentor.

Jerry

Jerry's experience in the mentoring program gave him a sense of direction and a drive to better in school. He felt that having a mentor helped guide him. Jerry did not have much structure or belief in himself. Being a part of a group and connecting to other individuals made him feel special. By being in the mentor group, other Black males were like-minded in reaching their goals. The one thing Jerry gained through the mentoring program was confidence.

The biggest benefit from the mentoring program was self-confidence. You got to be confident. Chase what you want and put time into it. Hours and hours to be good and feel good.

Jerry credited the mentoring program for keeping him focused on school and connected.

Eddie

Each mistake you make is an opportunity to learn. Eddie's experience in the mentoring program was an opportunity to step outside of his comfort zone. He had been in a mentoring program since elementary and the mentoring program gave him guidance and connections to other gentlemen. Eddie enjoyed the guest speakers that shared their stories. One moment he will never forget is a guest sharing their experience in school.

Someone said something and it kind of stuck with it for the rest of my life, and it helped me go on. Someone said to learn from your mistakes. Every time I make a mistake, I see what I did wrong, and I can fix it later.

Eddie remained connected to the other guys in the group and encouraged others to join a mentoring program. In the end, Eddie felt that mentoring truly makes you a better person.

Terry

Terry's experience in the mentoring program made him feel like a better person. Terry always saw himself as a bad kid. Terry joined the mentoring program in elementary and initially did not think it was for him. As guest speakers would come in and share their experiences, Terry started to make connections. Terry wanted to stay in the program through the link between the speakers and the other gentlemen. The memorable moment that stands out for Terry is wearing a tie in the program.

As part of the fifth-grade mentoring program, we had to wear a tie. It made me feel professional. If someone was to see me, it made me feel like a better person, and people would think I am a different person, like a professional.

Terry did not only make connections with the speaker but also with the mentor. Terry vividly remembered his talks in the office with the mentor about different African-American leaders in pictures and how they overcame tremendous obstacles. Terry credited the mentor program with where he is today.

Kingston

Kingston's experience in the mentoring program was about connection. Kingston was aware of who he was and his appearance. Kingston was a 6-foot 3 Black male with a prominent body structure. His mom was a significant influence on him and advised him on how to navigate life as a Black male. Also, the program's mentor impacted Kingston most significantly. It wasn't always about the lessons taught but the advice to work on yourself and become a better individual. The mentor was someone he could go to not just for school advice but also for personal advice. Kingston did nothing when facing any obstacle or struggle in school. He was not confident talking with his teachers to get advice. A mentor gave him the encouragement and support to do better.

A mentor taught me just how to be a man. The one important thing was that once you start something, always finish it. If you're going to do something, do it at your best potential or ability. So that's something that always follows me.

Kingston believed that joining a mentor program was very influential, no matter who you are or whether you are doing well. Kingston credited the mentoring program and his mentor for helping him reach graduation and receive a football scholarship.

Maleek

Maleek's experience in the mentoring program was about making connections. Maleek struggled to make connections with other students and struggled with work and speaking to others. He needed a guide and support to navigate through school. Some gentlemen in the program were also in his classes, which helped him form a bond with his peers.

The program helped me open up more to people and feel more comfortable talking to people. Having people around makes things easier and life more comfortable.

Maleek continued to use the mentor program as a place for support.

Avery

Avery's experience in the mentoring program started with him not taking it seriously. The only reason Avery joined the program was that the program's mentor reached out to him. The mentor told Avery that he had potential and could reach goals by listening to what was said to him. Once Avery joined the program, he realized other young Black males were in the same situation as him—trying to navigate school and do better. The element of the program that connected Avery to the program was listening to the guest speakers.

I like when we would bring in speakers. I thought it was a great opportunity so that you could hear from someone else who was once in your shoes and see how successful they are and just think I could be like them also.

Avery felt he had continued to grow in maturity from sixth to tenth grade and that while sometimes it can still be challenging, the mentor group's support makes a difference.

Dwayne

Dwayne's experience in the mentoring program started as something he did not think would be beneficial. Dwayne watched closely how Black men are perceived in the media. He came to understand that he must protect his back. Dwayne reflected on first entering the mentoring program, and the mentor was Black. As Dwayne moved into high school, another Black male mentor came into his life that started to help with advice around the college. Having another Black male in the school boosted Dwayne's confidence and showed him what he could be in life.

I feel that mentoring programs should continue from elementary, middle, and high school.

Dennis

Before the program, Dennis had a relationship with a mentor who constantly told him he had potential. Still, he chose not to listen to the advice. Once Dennis joined the program, he connected to the other gentlemen in the program. After that, something just clicked.

The biggest thing [positive benefit of the mentor program] is that other kids are there with you in the same position as you. You are not the only one. Other students in the program struggle with listening or getting work done. No one is better than the other.

Another aspect of the program that helped Dennis was having the guest speakers come in and share their stories. That resonated because he was not the only student who had struggled, and he could still be successful.

Themes

The interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. Three themes emerged from the interviews: racialized and gendered pressure, mentoring support as a means for academic success, and fostering brotherhood through a fraternal community.

Racialized and Gendered Pressure

Analyzing the research study's findings through a critical race theory framework displayed many of the tenets in the themes. The critical race theory tenet of intersectionality was found in the participants' responses to how it feels to be a Black male. Intersectionality examines race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The Black male participants can face multiple forms of oppression due to their race and sex. When adolescent participants were asked questions about what it means to be a Black male, many responded with feeling a weight on their shoulders. Black people must be tough and learn how to deal with everyday life. Difficulties arise for Black males that do not occur for their White counterparts. It does not matter if a Black individual is a student-athlete or just a student; everyone is watching the Black male. The Black male must carry themselves professionally. The images seen through social media or the news are what people correlate to a Black male. Dukes and Gather's (2017) study of negative news stories of posthumous minority victims by the police illustrated how minorities are often dehumanized and criminalized. When reporting on the shooting of eighteen-year-old victim Michael Brown, the media described him as acting like a thug (Dukes &

Gather, 2017). Each participant was aware of how they were perceived in society and felt the pressure as a Black male.

I believe being a Black male, you have to watch your back. Everybody sees stuff on the internet all the time. Two police killing Black men and racist stuff all around, I just think watching my back is the best thing for me. (Dwayne)

I don't know, I just feel like if I were a different race, it wouldn't be the same. . . . The difficult parts of being a Black male, I don't know, like cops, they could think something else while you tell them, or you might not get all the opportunities as other races. (Maleek)

The adolescent Black males felt much pressure on being Black males at a young age. There was also an awareness that other races don't have to think about all the things a Black male will face navigating life and school. The mentoring program assisted with changing those feelings. Each participant felt the mentoring program helped them. The mentoring program made life easier in school by giving them a sense of confidence and an adult with whom they could relate and discuss any issues. Most participants felt the program helped them make better choices.

I feel like we should have more mentors with color, someone we can relate to. I felt like I benefited by learning respect, the responsibility of my actions, and having more respect for staff in the school. (Avery)

In the mentoring program, each participant started making better choices in school. The program gave the gentlemen tools to succeed in life beyond school.

Another tenet of CRT, counter storytelling, is critical to changing the destructive, one-sided stories that have been told for many years about Black males. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated that using counter stories challenges the narrative of the dominant

white voice. Each participant's interview allowed others to relate to their experience in school and gave power to other voices. The Black males in the study were able to be successful in navigating middle school and high school through the mentoring program by hearing not only each other's stories but also adults that looked like them telling their stories.

Mentoring Support as a Means for Academic and Social Success

When adolescent Black males were asked how they benefited from the mentoring program, the most prominent theme displayed was a feeling of support. Academic success for the participants was completing assignments and passing their classes on track to graduate from high school. Many participants thought they could achieve more, which was accomplished by the mentor giving an extra push. Social success came in the form of the participants learning to advocate for themselves in school. The mentor and the program gave the participants support to stand up for themselves and solve problems by themselves. In addition, the program taught most participants how to be better people and how vital the role of a mentor is in a mentoring program.

One essential thing that a mentor taught me is just how to be a man. . . . Once you start something, always finish it. And if you're going to do something, do it at your best potential or your best ability. So that's something that always follows me. (Kingston)

The program's mentor was influential in making the gentlemen believe in themselves and keeping each participant dedicated to the program. The mentor did not just supply advice for school but also for the real world. Being a Black male, the mentor could relate to what the adolescent Black males were feeling and experiencing. He was able to provide advice and guidance to the Black males.

Fostering Brotherhood Through Fraternal Community

The critical race theory theme of the unique voice of color supported analyzing the theme of fostering brotherhood through fraternal community. The unique voice of color pertains to oppressed individuals' different experiences that enlighten us about the inequities in the systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Participants in the fraternal bond listened to each other's perspectives and assessed their own experiences. The critical race theory tenet of the unique voice of color is evident in the theme of brotherhood through a fraternal community. When the gentlemen were in an affinity space, their voice was heard. Affinity groups are people with common interests, backgrounds, and experiences that come to support one another (Moore-Southall, 2017). An affinity group makes everyone feel included. The mentoring group for the participants became their affinity group. When the adolescent Black males were asked to describe their relationships with other gentlemen in the program, many participants stated that it was more than a friendship; it was a brotherhood. Each gentleman in the group experienced something familiar that helped form their bond. The program made each individual feel they were in this together. Each strove to be better and reach their full potential.

The biggest thing is that other kids with you are in the same position as you. It's not just you." (Dennis)

They were excellent relationships. We were happy together. There was never any arguing or fighting or anything. It was just like, if someone said something about this, maybe they'd disagree, but we'd all just talk it out. (Dennis)

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

In this section I discuss the findings of the research questions for this study.

Research Question 1: How do Black male adolescents define an effective mentoring program?

A mentoring program is effective when there is a relationship between the mentor and mentee, they meet consistently, and there is an Afrocentric view, according to Gordon et al. (2009). The participants in the research study provided evidence through their interviews that their mentoring program contained the elements to be successful. Each Black male in the study shared the bond they made with the mentor. There was a feeling that the mentor of the program supported them. In addition, the mentor would reach out to them and hold them accountable. The participants expressed how important it was to talk with another Black male in the school. The gentlemen would meet weekly and have informal check-ins with the mentor. The group's mentor brought in guest speakers that helped the participants see that other Black males were successful, further supporting the program's Afrocentric view.

Research Question 2: How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males affect their engagement levels in school?

Many of the participants in the study felt that being a Black male created much weight on their shoulders. Experiencing life as a Black male for the participants made them perceive that life is complicated. As a Black man, they each concluded, there will be obstacles to overcome, and you must watch your back. As the adolescent Black males entered the program, their view towards school was that it was hard. Some of the gentlemen did not have any direction in navigating school. By building a brotherhood with the other gentlemen in the group, they did not feel isolated in school. Dressing up and wearing a tie to meetings made them feel professional. The Black males thought they

had other peers they could relate with in their environment. The participants felt they mattered and were seen in the school.

Research Question 3: How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males impact the development of social and academic skills?

Many participants felt they were inferior, and as a Black male, life was more challenging. Participants learned to overcome the feeling of inferiority and learned how to navigate school and gained confidence. The gentlemen learned how to advocate for themselves and talk to teachers. Before the program, many of the participants would have let the obstacles derail them. Nothing was holding the participants accountable. Having a mentor who navigated school and invited speakers to share their stories on how they learned to overcome the barriers gave the mentees confidence that they could do it. It was necessary for the mentor to check in on their academic and social-emotional progress, and the mentor giving constructive feedback made the group feel like family. The mentor also connected the gentlemen with other leaders in the community who assisted them with applying for college and financial aid. The mentor showed the gentlemen how to approach a teacher and ask for help. The mentor program gave the gentlemen confidence. High levels of self-confidence are considered critical for the success of African American males (Ruekberg, 2006). Black males with high self-esteem levels have better educational attainment, occupation quality, and positive mental health (Ruekberg, 2006).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This chapter contains the overview of the study, systemic barriers, components of an effective mentoring program, and implications for future research. The reader will also examine the participants' identities on Cross's nigrescence model and Helm's racial identity attitude scale.

Overview of the Study

This study chronicles the lived experiences of adolescent Black males facing barriers and learning the skills to overcome them. The purpose of this study was to examine a male mentoring program focusing on the phenomenology of adolescent Black males' engagement in the education setting. It is predictable every year that Blacks have the lowest graduation rate of all demographics. African Americans have struggled in American society and battled a "double consciousness" mentality (Du Bois, 1903/2014). African Americans struggle to be Black and American while still not being accepted. W. E. B Du Bois (1903/2014) stated, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (p. 2). Today, in schools, African Americans must strip their culture at the door due to implicit bias. The cultural mismatch between White educators and Black students can trigger implicit bias in White educators that lead to a subjective decision regarding discipline and academic outcomes for Black students (Staats, 2014). Systemic barriers are in place to produce the predictable results that appear every year. These barriers placed on Black students include the bias of White educators as informed by the media, the stripping of

Afrocentric education, and school discipline policies, just to name a few. I will elaborate on these barriers later in this chapter.

Black students not being present in the educational environment leads to the academic achievement gap and low school efficacy. School efficacy is the concept of being academically successful in school (Ellis et al., 2018). Black adolescents with school efficacy of their identity in their school environments can neutralize stereotype threats (Ellis et al., 2018), and Black males with school efficacy are likelier to set goals and desire to continue their education after high school. Research has also found that Black students who feel stereotyped as intellectually inferior or experience stereotype threat can experience disengagement and poor academic performance in school (Steele, 1997).

Stereotype threat is the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about an individual or group. This can happen consciously or unconsciously to a group or an individual (Freeman, 2017). Examples include the stereotype that Asian students are great at math. When Asian students are in a math class, they will be more pressured to fulfill that stereotype. Stereotype threats directly impact the negative academic performance of students. Steele and Aronson (1995) completed a study on the impact of stereotype threats on African American and European American college students on a verbal intellect test. In the study, European American students outperformed African American students. Results confirmed that negative stereotypes had an effect.

This analysis of this phenomenological study illustrates the success of a mentoring program for adolescent Black males. Also, the study provides evidence to support the benefit of a mentoring program to help Black males stay engaged and be successful in school. The study included open-ended questions for interviews with nine

participants who were part of a middle school mentoring program for Black males. The open-ended interview questions allowed participants to share their stories from their perspectives with full descriptions versus yes or no answers. Still, the open-ended questions focused on a topic that could be expounded on from the participants' responses. Each interview was conducted via Zoom and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. The overarching research questions for this study were:

1. How do Black male adolescents define an effective mentoring program?
2. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males affect their engagement levels in school?
3. How does participation in mentoring programs for adolescent Black males impact the development of social and academic skills?

The qualitative data analysis from this phenomenological study presented several benefits of participating in a mentoring group for adolescent Black males. First, the mentoring group created a fraternal brotherhood with the participants that lasted beyond the confines of the mentoring group. Second, the participants were academically and socially integrated with their school environment. Third, they discussed the social and academic gains they made. This chapter will provide a summary of the benefits of the mentoring program.

Systemic Barriers

Opportunities like mentoring programs may offset some of the harm when Middle school Black males do not get a fair opportunity to be successful due to the bias of White educators. Along with bias comes traditional stereotypes of Black males. As discussed in Chapter 2, the negative image of the Black male has been seared into the mind of the American public as aggressive, defiant, and intimidating (Davis, 2003; Ferguson, 2000;

Monroe, 2005). Black men in film, TV, and other media often represent a deficit mindset driven by negative stereotypes; they are often depicted as dangerous, thugs, or criminals (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020). Two more systemic barriers discussed in this section are the stripping of Afrocentric education and school discipline policies.

The portrayal of Black men in the media affects society and education. Black males lose out on academic opportunities because of the images placed on them. Participants in this study were aware of how they were seen and felt they would not get an equitable chance to succeed in school because of the color of their skin.

The harmful effects of the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) have done generational damage. The film depicts the Ku Klux Klan as a savior group against the aggressive oversexualized Black man. For individuals who had never met a Black man, this imprinted a negative Black image in White America's mind (Urwand, 2018). Following the film, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan started, there was a rise in the lynching of Blacks, and segregation increased. Racism is the negative falsehoods, beliefs, and attitudes of one race group regarding another (Bell, 2004). Black men in the media often represent a deficit mindset driven by negative stereotypes. The media portrays black men as dangerous thugs or criminals (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020). The portrayal of Black men in the media affects society and education.

Black mentees were aware of how society saw them and how the media portrayed Black males in negative images. Kingston stated, "I'm a bigger guy. When I walk into certain areas, I can feel people feeling intimidated." During his interview, Dwayne mentioned many negative images of Black men on social media. In school, the adolescent Black males expressed their fears and problems with the murder of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis police. Dwayne said, "A lot of people saw what happened.

It left scars and trauma in all of us.” The Minneapolis Police Department has a history of conflict with the Black community. Only 20 percent of the population in the city of Minneapolis is Black, but about 60 percent of the incidents that use force involve Black residents. The Minneapolis police are seven times more likely to use force with Blacks than Whites (Furber et al., 2021).

Another systemic barrier to Black male students is the stripping of Afrocentric education. Afrocentric education was inspired by Carter G. Woodson’s (1933) *The Miseducation of the Negro*, which stated that it was important for African Americans to know their identity and strip away the Eurocentric ideas. Afrocentrism places African ideas at the center of any analysis involving African culture and behavior (Akua, 2020). The Afrocentric idea is a cultural construct with African values and perspectives (Wang et al., 2013) that includes finding oneself in the center of one’s cultural perspective (Harris & Smith, 1999). Incorporating an Afrocentric view in education makes Black students feel safe and boosts self-esteem. Students involved in a mentoring group with an Afrocentric focus supported students in their racial identity journey, built self-esteem, developed brotherhood, and gave a voice to the unheard.

School discipline policies significantly impact Black students more than any other racially ethnic group (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Zero-tolerance policies have contributed to the high number of suspensions and expulsions of Black students (Noguera, 2003). A student’s background or situation is not considered a factor with zero-tolerance policies. The perception and bias of White educators determine the consequence (Skiba & Nesting, 2001). When a Black male teacher teaches Black male students, suspensions drop eighteen percent (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). The Black male educator’s perspective of the Black male student experience leads to different discipline outcomes.

Components of a Mentoring Program

The following section elaborates on components of a mentoring program that assist adolescent Black males to navigate the systemic barriers: the attributes of a mentor, formation of a fraternal brotherhood bond, academic and social integration into the school environment, and the social and academic gains that take place.

The Mentor

A mentor is an experienced individual who guides and supports their mentee (Zimmerman et al., 2002). Mentorship concerns relationships and racial identity (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). A mentor who shares the same racial identity and a similar background as the mentee can have long-lasting positive effects. A positive outlook on school may develop, and a higher sense of self-worth will be attained.

Black male middle and high school participants shared their thoughts on how they experienced the effects of the relationship with their Black male mentor and how it informed their growing racial identity. Eddie (10th grade) stated, “A mentor is someone who could help you and guide you in the right direction,” Dwayne (12th grade) stated that he joined the mentoring program because his mom wanted him to have the experience of being under the guidance of a Black male. Each participant shared how important it was that a mentor guide them in the right direction. Avery (10th grade) stated that the relationship with the mentor happened organically. The participants felt they had a mentor who cared for them and was going to hold them accountable for reaching their goals. An essential characteristic of successful mentoring groups is teaching young men to advocate for themselves (Rhodes, 2005). The adolescent Black males stated they learned the skills to communicate with their White teachers and receive assistance.

I understand the importance of having a mentor to teach you how to navigate school. The environment and social norms in which I was raised were not the same as the school environment. Growing up, I learned that if someone hits you, the response is to hit them back. In school culture, it is about informing an adult of the situation if someone does something against you (Kunjufu, 2013). That also brings up the issue of no snitching—don't tell anyone about something happening. It takes a strong and relatable mentor to build a bridge from home life to school life for a Black male to navigate success.

Fraternal Brotherhood

The critical race theory tenet of the unique voice of color explains that the oppressed are the most legitimate and competent voices to describe racial experiences in inequitable systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Participants in the fraternal bond of the mentoring program listened to each other's perspectives and assessed their own experiences. When the gentlemen were in an affinity space, their voices and experiences were validated. In the interviews, each gentleman expressed that he could build a bond because he realized shared experiences connected them.

The mentoring program created an environment for a brotherhood connection. This connection formed as the mentor guided the participants by holding them accountable and making them feel important. Accountability is evident in the mentor's practices of ensuring the students attended class, completed assignments, and advocated for themselves when needed. The mentor was the consistent adult who made the participants believe they could accomplish more than they previously thought. The mentor gave constructive criticism to the mentees in the program to build self-esteem. Eddie's (10th grade) experience in the program included feeling recognized: "It makes

me a better person . . . keeping up with grades and doing good in sports.” Kingston’s (12th grade) perspective aligned with Eddie’s on the importance of a mentor as a person to guide you and hold you accountable with the awareness that there is always room for improvement: “A mentor is there to talk to you and tell you if you are doing something you shouldn’t or should be doing.”

Participants learned skills on setting goals and reaching them, advocating for themselves, and preparing for life after high school. Adolescent Black males in the program consistently expressed that the mentoring program helped them become better students. Terry’s (11th grade) perspective on attributes that made him a better student was that “wearing a tie made me feel professional, a different person. It made me happy.” Jerry (10th grade) also shared how much he benefited from the program by stating, “It boosted my confidence to be more of myself, stand up for myself, and solve problems by myself.”

Describing his connection to the young men in the group, Dennis (11th grade) said, “There are other kids in there with you that are in the same position as you . . . we all have something we are working on, and no one is better than the other.” Peer influence is a significant factor in adolescents’ behavior (Farrell et al., 2017). Everyone holds the other accountable. A study on the importance of brotherhood with Black males found that a brotherhood acts as a level of support (Grande et al., 2013). Trust is formed in the group when individuals share their stories and can identify with their peers. Building a bond of trust also helps each gentleman establish their identity in the environment. Kingston elaborated on the belief he built with his peers in the group by stating, “We were together for so long, we could crack jokes on each other that made us closer. We will probably be friends past high school.” Dwayne (12th grade) expressed

how a situation at school formed a bond: “My relationships formed when a walkout at my school was taking place. Students wanted to fight, and we were able to talk with one another and the mentor for support.”

Academic and Social Integration

Brown v. Board decision had an impact on the loss of Black teachers. Thirty-eight thousand Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs following the 1954 *Brown* decision (Oakley et al., 2008) for being involved in the NAACP, a registered voter, or being denied a teacher license for not passing an evaluation test. Black educators have been shown to provide a cultural environment and relationships with Black students. Black educators have the ability to support Black students by understanding their counter-story in situations that other ethnic groups would not know how to support. Counter-storytelling is essential for the mentees to share their experiences and affirm them. The mentor program is a counter lifestyle. Participants are given an experience with the same ethnic groups that develop the social skills to integrate into the school environment.

Black students often bring in a set of situations that are grounded in racism and inequalities. Black educators have the ability to assist students in navigating racist systems, which starts to build confidence in Black students because of the support (Milner, 2006). Black teachers are aware of the social needs of Black students, which supports the motivation and engagement of Black students in school (2006).

According to Small (2017), factors of a mentoring program that lead to success include academic and social integration. Participants needed to gain the skills to be successful academically and socially. Confidence is a skill that is vital for student learning. The Black male participants gained confidence in themselves by seeing other

Black male adult leaders standing before them, sharing their stories of overcoming obstacles and achieving success. The mentor made cultural connections with students and provided an environment to hear their stories. Academically, Black educators are likelier to hold high expectations for Black students and empathize with situations outside the school (Siddie-Walker 1996). In addition, Black educators are more likely to address the inequities in education and place value on Black culture (Maiorano, 2017). The mentor of the participants in this study guided the Black males on strategies to communicate with White teachers to advocate for themselves.

This phenomenological study revealed that participants learned the skills to advocate for themselves by asking for assistance from White teachers. These new communication skills gave the gentlemen influence in their environment. Dennis stated, “I feel more mature by being in the program. Teachers will not hold your hand; you must take the responsibility yourself.” Kingston shared the same thoughts, stating, “I was always getting in my head. I was quiet when it came to talking to my teachers. The mentor encouraged me, and I found my confidence to speak.”

Social and Academic Gains

As discussed in Chapter 2, peer influence is a significant factor in an adolescent’s behavior (Farrell et al., 2017). Black adolescent males face peer pressure depending on the advantages and disadvantages of the system’s inequalities (Seaton & Tyson, 2018). Darensbourg and Blake (2014) contend that a component of the achievement gap is the cultural differences between White and Black students. Black students would avoid doing well, so they would not be labeled White. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) named the process of Black students achieving less success in school to avoid appearing like White students

“camouflaging.” Black males’ perception of themselves during adolescence is that they are always seen as negative (Seaton & Tyson, 2018). When Black students are grouped together with like-minded peers, they do better. Horvat and Lewis (2003) examined that the culture of the school environment has more of an impact on Black student success. A factor in the success of student achievement is “peer pressure” surrounding the individual. The pressure to reach their White counterparts’ academic levels may lead to depression. African American male adolescents experience high levels of depression disproportionate to other ethnic groups (Henfield, 2012). When students have a role in the school and feel they belong, there is an opportunity created for student success.

At the start of middle school, each mentee discovered that he faced a double standard regarding how he was treated in the school environment. Terry’s thoughts were, “People will think everyone that is Black is bad. I’m Black doesn’t mean I’m bad.” The findings of this phenomenological study indicate feelings of racialized and gendered pressure. Analyzing the research study’s findings through a critical race theory framework included the notion of intersectionality. Intersectionality examines race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). None of the participants had a unitary identity since they were Black and male. The participants expressed the societal pressures of being both Black and male. Avery said, “You have to speak up and be confident as a Black male. People do not take you seriously.” Dwayne shared, “I have to watch my back all the time as a Black male.”

Cross and Helms on Black Identity Development

Race shapes our identities and lived experiences. Psychologist Janet Helms contended that racial identity is based on the collective group’s perceived take within that

racial group (Helms, 1990). As discussed in Chapter 2, Cross (1991) also developed a theory on the racial identity of Blacks called *nigrescence*. The five stages of nigrescence are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. Nigrescence begins during adolescence when Blacks begin to know that they are different from their White peers because of the color of their skin. Cross (1991) stated that the third stage in nigrescence, immersion/emersion, is the most pivotal because it is the African American understanding that the challenging experience faced is solely based on race. Helms (1990) developed a racial identity attitude scale (RIAS) from the development of Cross's racial identity model and Erik Erickson's (1950) model of human development that addressed the lived experiences of people of color, biracial, and White people in the U.S.

This study on the mentoring program provided the students' perspective in the center of their cultural experience moving along Cross' nigrescence stages and Helms' RIAS. The RIAS identified the types of attitudes found in each of Cross' nigrescence stages.

The information in Table 5.1 illustrates the correlation of the stages of Cross' (1971) nigrescence at the top, and at the bottom is Helms' (1990) Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale.

Helms and Parham (1981) examined the relationship between Black college students' racial identity attitudes on the preference of race with a counselor. They discovered that students in the nigrescence pre-encounter stage associated with White counselors. Students in the nigrescence encounter and immersion/emersion stage preferred Black counselors. The racial identity attitudes had a direct effect on the preference of counselors.

Participants in this study displayed different stages along the different nigrescence stages and RIAS. The common theme in the mentoring group was that all the Black males preferred a Black mentor. Avery (10th grade) informed the researcher that mentoring programs would be better with more Black mentors. All the participants were aware of how their race impacted them when asked what it means to be a Black male—their responses included: “Things will not always go your way,” “You face obstacles,” “People do not take you seriously,” and “I have a lot of weight on my shoulders.” Young Black males must be in a supportive environment at this third stage.

Table 5.1

A Comparison of Cross and Helms Racial Identity Development Phases

Cross (1971)				
Pre-encounter: “White is right” and “Black is wrong.”	Encounter: Acknowledge the impact of racism in one’s life.	Immersion/Emersion Surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity and active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness.	Internalization Secure of own sense of racial identity; Pro-Black attitude. Willing to establish meaningful relationships with Whites.	Internalization/Commitment: Found ways to translate one’s personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action. Commitment to concerns of Blacks as a group. Comfort with one’s own race and those around them.

Helms (1990)				
Conformity: Views the world “raceless.” Unaware of significance of group	Dissonance and Appreciating “Liberty and justice for all” shaken. Feels devalued and rejected	Resistance and Immersion: Redefining self. “Black is beautiful”	Introspection: New Identity. A new sense of security results. “Say it strong and say it loud: I’m Black and I’m proud!”	Integrative Awareness: Own achievement as advancing the group’s cause. “I can learn from both Latinos and Whites.”

Table 5.2 displays the participants’ racial identity and attitudes during the interview.

Table 5.2

Participant RIAS and Nigrescence Stage

Participant	Nigrescence Stage	RIAS Stage	Participant Interview Quote
Eddie	Internalization	Introspection	“As an African American, I stand out.”
Jerry	Immersion/Emersion	Resistance/Immersion	“I have a lot on my shoulders as a Black male.”
Jake	Encounter	Resistance/Immersion	“As a Black male it is hard...I struggled with fitting in.”

Terry	Immersion/Emersion	Resistance/Immersion	"I have a lot of weight on my shoulders...people will think I am bad but Black doesn't mean I'm like bad."
Kingston	Internalization	Introspection	"Mom has told me I have to be tough as a Black male...I can feel people being intimidated by my size and that is one obstacle I have to deal with."
Maleek	Encounter	Dissonance/Appreciating	"It's a pleasure to be a Black male. You may not get all the opportunities as other races."
Dwayne	Internalization	Introspection	"As a Black male you have to watch your back with all of the stuff on the internet with Blacks being killed...I am learning how to be a Black male in society."
Participant	Nigrescence Stage	RIAS Stage	Participant Interview Quote
Avery	Immersion/Emersion	Resistance/Immersion	"As a Black male, I have to be confident...Coming out of COVID, Black men need support and have faced trauma from the George Floyd murder."
Dennis	Immersion/Emersion	Resistance/Immersion	"As a Black male held to a higher standard...I have to do more than the other races."

The researcher determined the stage of each participant from the interview. It was determined that each Black male was not in the pre-encounter stage as they were all aware that being a Black man in America comes with different obstacles. Maleek and Jake are set on the encounter stage because they are aware of being Black; they are treated differently but don't state anything about avoidance of any White symbols. Jake

is adopted by a White family and has adopted another son that is White. He (Jake) faces racism while playing hockey as the only Black player on the team, which brings an understanding that everything is fair.

I identified Jerry, Terry, Avery, and Dennis as in the immersion/emersion stage of nigrescence. In the interviews, each gentleman appeared to be aware that their Black skin made a difference in how they were treated in society. Jerry and Avery were involved in the Black Student Union, taking pride in their Black heritage. Eddie, Kofi, and Dwayne were further along the nigrescence chart by demonstrating Black pride in their interviews, starting to develop relationships with Whites, and having a sense of what they want to do. As a researcher, this process confirmed my experience navigating school during adolescence when I understood that the world saw me differently as a Black man. During middle school, I would have been like Jerry, Terry, Avery, and Dennis on the immersion/emersion stage. Unlike them, I didn't have a mentoring group to help guide me and build up my self-esteem to understand that I am important. That is a major benefit of a mentoring group.

Family Stereotypes

Barton and Coley (2010) reported on the Black family in a follow-up to the Moynihan Report (1965). The Moynihan Report claimed that the reason for the struggle of the Black family was the lack of a father in the home. Barton and Coley challenged the report, stating that the White environment was responsible for Black students' lack of success in school. In this environment, White educators may have their own biases about a Black male growing up in a single-parent home. Six out of the ten participants in this study of a mentoring program for Black male students were raised in a female-headed single-family home. This may partially explain their academic challenges since,

according to Barton and Coley, the bias that makes negative assumptions about Black children coming from a single-parent homes is an invisible barrier that affects teachers' expectations of Black males, thus leading to unsuccessful outcomes in school. From my experience in education, many White educators will blame the family and not take a look at the school environment as a source of struggle. Negative talk about the Black student will start before the student even steps into the classroom. Bias statements that can be heard from educators are: "Will mom be present at school? Will there be a family conflict? There probably isn't much structure in the home." It is important to look at the barriers of the school environment and not blame the family. Booker T. Washington stated, "It makes a great deal of difference in the life of a race, as it does in the life of an individual, whether the world expects much or little of that individual or of that race." Educators must check their biases and create high expectations for all students.

According to Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005), African Americans continue to experience the impact of slavery through a condition called Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). The removal pattern of Black males is a strategy of weakening the Black family since slavery. Young Black males witnessing other Black males being removed from society is tragic. It is devastating when adolescent Black males are removed from the educational community. Through school suspensions, Black males are removed from the learning environment more than any other demographic (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Black students are three times as likely to be suspended than White students (Nelson & Lind, 2015). As African-American males are removed from the classroom, they fall behind academically, leading to leaving school.

Removal patterns are just one action leading to a negative future perspective (FTP). FTP is the extent to which an individual will think about and plan for the

future. In terms of education, a positive FTP will lead to students striving for goals in the present and distant future (Schultema et al., 2014). Adolescents with a strong stance on the future display characteristics of finishing projects early and having a solid sense of who they are and how their actions affect the future (Kruger et al., 2015). A negative FTP will have students in a fixed mindset believing they cannot reach their goals. Low FTP may lead to homicide, drug abuse, and suicide (Henfield, 2012). Attributes of a positive FTP are Black adolescents having a solid sense of their ethnic identity and support (Adelabu, 2008).

Despite the systemic barriers they confronted, students in the mentoring program completed assignments and attended class. Dwayne connected with guest speakers who gave insight into applying for college. Kingston and Terry earned scholarships to attend college. Participating in the mentoring program helped the Black males feel connected to their school environment. Meeting with their peers, they had a safe space to talk with one another about issues they were facing in the school.

Implications

Implications for Schools

Previous studies at the collegiate level demonstrated the benefits of a mentoring program. Chan et al. (2016) determined that the power of incorporating a mentoring program at the adolescent age would help close the achievement gap and decrease dropouts. Rhodes et al. (2000) demonstrated that young adults with mentors do better in school, and Chang et al. (2010) discussed how this improvement is consistent across different cultures that support young people with an influential adult guide; such students engage in less disruptive behaviors and are more involved in school. Creating more mentoring programs is part of the solution to closing the achievement gap between Black

males and their White counterparts (Grey, 2019). Black male students need to feel connected and that they matter in their educational environments and have an adult hold them accountable. Participants in this study demonstrated reaching their full potential with a mentor guiding them, affirming that it is critical for early adolescent boys to feel important and valued (Durand, 2019). Black mentees need tools to help them navigate obstacles and gain confidence, and providing a mentoring program will help Black male students see beyond high school and continue to be successful in adulthood.

Implications for Black Male Leaders in Education

As discussed in Chapter 2, the loss of Black educators has harmed education for Black students. A lack of diverse educators denies Black and White children the positive impacts of diversity (Oakley et al., 2009). Teachers of color can be role models to help students of color build connections with individuals who share their backgrounds. Black teachers hold higher expectations for Black children (Anderson, 2016). Downey and Pribesh (2004) evaluated White teachers assessing Black kindergarten students as having more behavior concerns than White kindergarten students. The Black teachers observed fewer external behaviors from the Black kindergarten students than the White teachers. The results were the same with Black and White eighth-grade students. Students that match their teacher's racial and ethnic backgrounds most likely will have a better experience (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

This study also impacts the value of Black male leaders in the school environment. It demonstrates the importance of creating environments where Black males feel connected to the school. A critical point in closing the achievement gap in schools is the consistent presence of a Black adult and building cultural connections (Pitre, 2014). Educational leaders must create more avenues and incentives for adult

Black males to be present in schools. Barriers to keeping Black educators out of teaching must be eliminated (Dahle, 2013).

On a personal note, as the researcher I identify as a Black male administrator in education. I have experience in leading a mentor program for students and have witnessed the benefits it has on students. I learned that young Black males were more engaged in school by the stories from parents. The school engagement increased for the Black males in the group because they realized how they were role models for the younger students. Cross's identity model made me reflect on my experiences in school and how I navigated each stage. As an adolescent, I realized the immersion/emersion stage and understood that skin color impacted my life. I was not secure in this racial identity until a college class taught me about African Americans' history. This study provides insight into where an adolescent Black male shows up on Cross's racial identity graph and how to help support them.

Recommendations for Future Research

The positive effects of this study's perspective on adolescent Black males in a mentoring program must be further assessed at different schools with diverse backgrounds. Future studies on the teacher and parent perspective would provide more in-depth information on the mentoring program's effects in other areas. The teacher's perspective would provide insights into engagement in the classroom environment and share more knowledge about specific academic and behavioral skills. In addition, the parent perspective has the opportunity to provide insight into home life. A parent's observation of attitude and desire to set goals would be critical. A quantitative study should be completed to provide numerical data associated with student engagement for future studies.

In conclusion, an effective mentoring program for Black males that consistently meets with a mentor that fosters relationships with the students and provides an Afrocentric view for Black males is critical for closing the achievement gap. This phenomenological study of the perspective of adolescent Black males in a mentoring group provides a sample of what can happen when Black males are supported. All the Black male participants were projected to graduate and make plans for the future. For many young Black males, the opportunity to experience the benefits of an affinity group may never happen without a school-offered project such as a mentoring program designed specifically for them.

The results of this study provide many positive outcomes. The time is now to make that change and offer more mentoring groups in schools to support Black males. Further research completed with larger samples is needed.

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