

“HE’S GOT A GOOD LIFE, IT’S JUST OFFERING HIM MORE”:
BLACK MOTHERHOOD AND DECONSTRUCTING
THE MYTHS ABOUT MENTORING
THE BLACK CHILD

Lanita Danielle Parker

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Approved by:

George W. Noblit

Michelle Bryan

Dana Griffin

Sherick Hughes

Xue Lan Rong

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ABSTRACT

Lanita Danielle Parker: “He’s Got a Good Life, It’s Just Offering Him More”: Black Motherhood and Deconstructing the Myths About Mentoring the Black Child
(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

The research on mentoring and parental involvement in the mentoring process is limited. Yet the literature that does exist sees parents as barriers to the mentoring relationship. It has been suggested that programs should minimally involve parents. In response to limited research on parent participation in youth mentoring programs, this dissertation examines the generation of social capital through social support systems and social leverage (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez and Watkins, 2003) among black mothers whose children are enrolled in a school based mentoring program. The research design was qualitative, involving interviews with mothers and supplemented with interviews with their children, mentors and program staff as well as observation of program activities. The mothers in this study were found to use the mentoring program to generate social capital and improve the life chances of their children. This study then offers a critical counterpoint to the existing literature--revealing that mentoring research has not taken the time to understand the parenting of black mothers and how their parenting intersects with mentoring programs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I'm reaching out to some of America's leading foundations and corporations on a new initiative to help more young men of color facing especially tough odds to stay on track and reach their full potential.

—President Barack Obama, January 28, 2014

On February 27, 2014, the White House put out for immediate release the fact sheet titled “Opportunity for All: President Obama Launches My Brother’s Keeper Initiative to Build Ladders of Opportunity for Boys and Young Men of Color.” This fact sheet describes in detail the president’s initiative in conjunction with the White House to partner with private businesses, nonprofits, and foundations to address disparities in education, employment, and the criminal justice system. One of the major focuses of this initiative is mentoring young men of color. The phrase “my brother’s keeper” is taken from the Bible in reference to the story of Cain and Abel. In the Bible, Cain murders his brother Abel, and when Cain is asked by God where his brother Abel is, he responds, “I do not know, am I my brother’s keeper?” In the Christian faith, the term “my brother’s keeper” has been discussed as man’s or people’s unwillingness to care for their “brother” or fellow mankind. This passage reminds people of this faith that each person is responsible for caring for his or her “brother,” or for humankind, blood related or not.

While this term has been associated with the Christian faith, the term has also been used in projects with no religious relation. The term has become known, for we are

responsible for caring for our human brothers and sisters. While the president presented his first race-based initiative, aimed at creating opportunity for young men of color through mentorship, it is important to consider how youth mentoring programs have been positioned as a viable solution for social mobility. I would suggest that this initiative, along with others, is shortsighted as it dismisses the role of parents and caregivers. This dissertation is inspired by the interview of a Black mother whose son was a participant in a school-based mentoring program. This mother's statement suggested that mentoring in her son's life is a way of adding to an already good life. She suggested that mentoring is not "making" his life. The mother's statement challenges the notion that mentoring is making his life better. This is how I situate this dissertation project.

In spring 2011, I was a part of a research team who had charge of evaluating the Gold Medal mentoring program. The evaluation team had the task of utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to understand social mobility among the students in the program. We wanted to understand how mentors provided social capital to their mentees. In addition, the evaluation sought to determine how the program affected student achievement and college attendance rates among the participants. The evaluation found the following:

1. Gold Medal is a well-designed mentoring program. It meets and exceeds the best practices established by research on youth mentoring programs.
2. Gold Medal is extremely effective in promoting high school graduation and college attendance.
3. Gold Medal has a significant effect on grade point average of the students but not on test scores.
4. Parents, mentors, and mentees all highly value the program and see it as effective.

5. Race and language are issues with which participants continue to struggle.
6. Staff also highly value the program and, through a commitment to continuous improvement, work to make the program more effective for program participants.

During this evaluation I had the opportunity to interview staff, parents, mentors, and students who are involved with the mentoring program. This consisted of interviewing “triads”—parents, mentees, and mentors. Through my interviews, I was able to hear about the experiences of students in the program and what things they have gained from their mentors. The interviews also provided insight into how the mentors viewed their roles and how they saw the families from which the students came.

The interviews I found most interesting were the ones from the parents, such as the one mentioned earlier. The parents represented in this study demonstrated a level of care and commitment to their children’s success, which is not often reflected in the literature. The parents showed a complexity of emotion, frustration, hopes, and fears. Many of the parents expressed how they felt left out by their children’s mentors. While the parents believed there are benefits for their children through participating in the program, I also saw frustration toward the mentors. I would suggest that mentoring was not only serving the interests of the program and the school district but was also on a larger level serving the interests of the parents and their desires for their children.

This work seeks to understand the experiences and perspectives of parents whose children are involved with a school-based youth mentoring program. This work aims to move *from* documenting the pathology of parents and their parenting, which is so common in the literature, *to* an understanding of how parents generate social capital to obtain resources for their children’s success, how they experience the mentoring relationship, and how they

express what their hopes are for their children's future. In addition, this project aims to reveal the ways in which parents demonstrate participation in their children's schooling in addition to the mentors' participation.

Parents and Youth Mentoring

While the research on mentoring and parental views or relationships is limited, the literature that does exist sees parents as barriers to the mentoring relationship. It has been suggested that programs should minimally involve parents. For example, Miller (2007), detailing best practice principles for formal youth mentoring relationships, urges programs to "seek the support of parents/careers" but "not their active engagement in the mentoring process," as "non-supportive parents can sabotage the mentor-protégé' relationship" (p. 318). Keller (2005b) suggested that mentoring relationships should be within family and agency contexts, however, this model has not been tested empirically. In other words, families are not understood to be part of the mentoring relationship. Other studies show parent involvement can provide complications from the mentor's perspective. Styles and Morrow (1992), in a qualitative study of mentoring relationships, demonstrated problems associated with parents, which include miscommunications between mentors and parents, parents including mentors in family disputes, and parents' attempts to influence the mentoring relationships. While this research includes parents, the research is limited as conducted and reported from the perspective of the mentor.

However, the work of Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, and Lewis (2011) revealed that parents would feel better about their children's mentoring relationships if they were able to establish some kind of working relationship with the mentor. The lack of a personal

connection heightened some parents' concerns and diminished their satisfaction with the relationship.

Parents have received little investigation in the mentoring literature, yet it is clear that they have much to bring to the relationship. Spencer et al. (2011) identified some key contributions parents can make, including hopes and expectations for mentoring relationships, trust in the mentor and satisfaction with the relationship, support for the mentoring relationship, and, importantly, reflections on and experiences with cultural differences being experienced by the child and mentor. Soucy and LaRose (2000) have demonstrated the importance of parents to their children's college adjustment. Their research showed significant interaction between parents who have high levels of control over their children and college adjustment. Rhodes et al. (2000) showed that mentoring relationships can also lead to improved relationships between parents and their adolescent children. While most mentoring research is focused on the experiences of the mentor, little attention is given to the perspective of the parents.

In addition, limited research accounts for race, class, gender, and ethnicity in mentoring literature. Spencer et al. (2011) explored the "parents' observations about the ways that racial, ethnic, and economic differences between their children and their mentors were being negotiated" (p. 58). I situate my work to further explore what they name as "insight into the complexity of the dynamics within these relationships" (p. 58). Their work opens the door to giving parents an opportunity to discuss their feelings around race, class, gender, and ethnicity; however, it is my intention to pick up where their work ends and address the seeming deficit view of parents in mentoring research. Spencer et al. pointed out that there is not much literature based in parents' experiences or voices. Furthermore, while most youth

mentoring programs are aimed at youths of color, there is a need to further understand the experiences of Black mothers. This brings me back to My Brother's Keeper, President Obama's first race-based initiative, which focuses on Black boys. President Obama's mentoring initiative comes at a time of heightened awareness of the injustice and oppression that often interrupt the daily lives of African American boys. More recently in the media, the voices of Black mothers whose sons have been tragically killed have been present. The mothers, who are often left standing alone, are asked what it is that society should remember their sons for? I draw from this example as it points out that the very notion of the need for My Brother's Keeper and other mentoring programs may not actually speak to why we may need programs of this nature.

I would argue that mentoring alone cannot change the ways in which inequality affects youths of color. It is this very inequality that Black mothers recognize and aim to disrupt by taking advantage of programs that report that their children will be successful if they participate. The mothers, who are often navigating the waters of racism, poverty, and limited opportunities, often are doing so with a double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007). They understand what it means for them to be a member of a White supremacist society, however, they also have a strong desire for their children to circumvent these troubled waters and have futures of success. The mothers note success as graduating from high school, attending college, and obtaining a job. This nuanced understanding of the parenting of Black youths is reflected in speeches President Obama has delivered on race. On July 19, 2013, President Obama stated from the James Brady press briefing room,

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the

African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away. (White House, 2013)

In his July 2014 speech, he explains that My Brother's Keeper is a "team approach" to helping boys of color, with the assistance of business and faith leaders, community organizers, and educators, to "give boys and young men of color the tools they need to succeed." While the president demonstrates his understanding that we live in a society where racism is akin to a terrorism that impacts the ways that many Black parents raise their children, Black mothers' child rearing is also at the intersection of hope and desire to provide Black children opportunity. That same hope is the impetus for the president's My Brother's Keeper initiative. I draw on this example as it reminds me of the ways in which the mothers in the evaluation reflected on their own children.. Because the reality of Black women in the United States is often met with an intersectionality that differs from that of White women, I suggest that the implications of this intersectionality are also reflected in motherhood.

Jones (2003) posited that "the majority of Black mothers have managed in spite of realities of single parenthood, poverty, prejudice and limited opportunity to beat the odds and raise healthy and productive young men and women" (p. 238). This perspective is not represented in the existing literature found on youth mentoring.

Literature has suggested that future studies that look more comprehensively into mentoring issues will be of fundamental importance in the effort to improve school-based mentoring programs, particularly for enabling justice, equity, and quality educational experiences for all students and their parents. Understanding parents of color can enhance mentoring effectiveness and support Black youths. In addition, there has been a call by Spencer et al. (2011) to further understand parents' perspectives:

Parents reflect on their own experiences of the mentoring process, rather than simply serving as reporters on the mentoring dyad, yielded important insights and indicated that gleaned parents' experiences could greatly contribute to our understanding of how mentoring works. Finally, understanding what types of parental involvement under which conditions may be the most productive could help improve the quality and efficacy of youth mentoring relationships. (p. 8)

It is from this point of view that I aim to address this gap in literature and move youth mentoring literature to support and include parents' perspectives.

Conceptual Framework

I come to this study as a self-identified Black woman. Although I am not a mother, I identify with Black mothers through my friends and family. I have conversations with them regarding their experiences as Black mothers raising children. In the first study, I found that Black mothers spoke to me in a familiar, conversational way. There was a level of comfort between us that comes with Black women talking to each other. Collins described this as the "taken-for-granted knowledge" that is shared by African American women. At the center of this project is the impact of mentoring programming on Black mothers. Youth mentoring programs are not designed for mothers, however, I would suggest that the experiences of mothers of color are important as their experiences have a direct impact on the lives of their children. This work subscribes to Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009). Collins posits,

For African-American women, critical social theory encompasses bodies of knowledge and set of institutional practices that actively grapple with central questions facing U.S. Black women as a *group* remain oppressed within a U.S. context characterized by injustice. This neither means that all of African-American women within the group are oppressed in the same way, nor that some of U.S. Black women do not oppress others. Black feminist thought's identity as "critical" social theory lies in its commitment to justice, both for U.S. Black women as a collectivity and for that of other similarly oppressed groups. (p. 12)

While Black feminist thought guides the motivation for undertaking this work, I find the work of Briggs (1998) and Dominguez and Watkins (2003) useful contributions to the

conceptual framework of this project. The crux of this project is to understand ways in which Black mothers generate social capital at the individual level.

Briggs (1998) suggested that social capital involves connections to a system of human relationships, to accomplish things that matter to us and solve everyday problems

This concept of social capital takes place in two forms (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003):

1. social leverage: social capital that helps one “get ahead” or change one’s opportunity set through access to job information, say, or a recommendation for a scholarship or loan.
2. social support: social capital that helps one “get by” or cope. This might include being able to get a ride, confide in someone, or obtain a small cash loan in an emergency. (p. 113)

This conception of social capital has been best utilized in the work of Dominguez and Watkins (2003), in which the researchers look at how African American and Latino women generate social capital to obtain resources for survival and social mobility. Building off of Dominguez and Watkins, it is my intention to understand how African American parents *generate* social capital within the mentoring context to obtain resources for their children.

This will be enabled by a set of research questions. While social capital is discussed here, it is important to note that Bourdieu, P.(1977) argued that those in upper and middle classes have sets of knowledge deemed valuable in a society that is hierarchially ordered. He suggested that if one is not born into those classes, one may be able to access this knowledges through schooling.

In addition, Harris-Perry (2011) implored the concept of the “crooked room.” Harris-Perry suggested that when Black women confront race, gender, and stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room. The notion of the crooked room is drawn from post-World War II cognitive psychology research on field dependence. The research demonstrated how individuals locate the upright in a space. In the study, individuals were placed in a crooked chair and room and were instructed to align themselves vertically. Researchers found some people were tilted as much as 35 degrees and reported they were perfectly straight. Harris-Perry posited that while Black women are “bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion” (p. 29). I would suggest a part of this distortion is the notion that Black mothers are not adequate at parenting. They often are distorting themselves to fit the distortion of notions about parenting. If we assume they are, however, we can reinterpret their parenting as strategic and responsive to the situations and oppressions they experience. Mentoring, then, needs to be interrogated in relation to Black parenting that is understood as strategic and strength based.

Research Questions

1. What roles do Black parents play in mentoring relationships?
2. What are parents’ perspectives on mentoring, mentors, and the mentoring program?
3. What aspects of this school-based mentoring program contributed to its sustained relationship with parents?
4. How is social capital implicated in the parents’ relation to the mentoring program?
5. What are the implications of the relationships for the future of school-based mentoring?

Understanding the Context

It's important to contextualize the area in which the program is set up. According to U.S. Census data, the town (which I call Addison) where the mentoring program is situated has a population of some 60,000. The racial demographics break down to 72.8% White, 9.7% Black, 0.3% American Indian, and 11.9% Asian, as compared to the state, in which 68% are White, 21.5% Black, 1.3% American Indian, and 2.2% Asian.

Also it is important to note that in the town, 48.3% of folks own a home, and the median value of those homes is \$356,400, as compared to \$149,100 for the state. The median household income is \$52,785, as compared to \$45,570 for the state. In Addison, 22.2% of people live below the poverty level, as compared to 15.5% for the state. The per capita income in the town is \$33,710, compared to \$24,745 in the state, which means that people in Addison make an average of \$10,000 more than other people in the state.

Currently Addison public schools and the district spend about \$5,000 per student, as compared to other local districts, which spend about \$1,000 per student. According to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction data, the performance of each student group on the ABCs end-of-grade tests indicates that 95% of White students, 61.3% of Hispanic students, and 53.3% of Black students passed both the reading and math tests. In the state, schools that are designated as Honor Schools of Excellence have at least 90% of students at grade level and the school made expected growth or more and met all Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs). Addison has more of these schools than most districts in the state—20% of elementary schools in the district as compared to 9% in the state, 25% of middle schools in the district as compared to 8% in the state, and 25% of high schools in the district as compared to 20% in the state are designated Honor Schools. Cohort graduation rate is the

percentage of students in a cohort who graduate with a regular diploma in 4 years or fewer (the 4-year cohort graduation rate) or, for schools with a 5-year program, the 5-year graduation rate. In the district, the cohort graduation rate is 90.0%, as compared to 80.4% in the state.

In terms of the numbers, then, one may conclude that this district is thriving and academically strong. One of the three high schools in the district has been ranked in the top 100 of American public high schools according to *U.S. News & World Report* for the 2009–2010 school year. In 2013, the same high school was considered one of the 133 of America’s best high schools according to *Newsweek* (“America’s Best,” 2013). The school district is known for its exemplary academic standards. However, when it comes to the academic achievement of the Black students, the story is quite different. Black students in the district have lower graduation rates; among Black students attending Riverbank High, 78.8% of Black ninth graders graduated from high school 4 years later, as compared to 91.4% of White students. Among Black students attending Pinewood High School, 82% graduated 4 years later, as compared to 94.4% of White students (see Appendix A).

The mentoring program started as an attempt to meet growing concerns about the opportunity gap, more commonly referred to as the achievement gap of Black students. Local newspapers reflected the turmoil in the town starting in 1996, when one of the articles stated the frustration of the local teachers for feeling the blame of the lack of performance by Black students. The frustration among faculty was also reflected by the school’s principal, the local newspaper reported black students were not doing better at Riverbank High than when he began working there. The principal went further to say the faculty opposes plans to help

black students, nor do they attend meetings to support black students. (to protect identity of school district, citation will not be provided):

It was under these circumstances of racialized tension and concern over the Black–White student achievement gap that the Gold Medal mentoring program was developed. The mentoring program was created as “a district-wide student support program designed to improve the achievement of African-American and Latino students by promoting success in multiple developmental realms.”

The Dissertation

This dissertation reports the results of my study of Black mothers using the Gold Medal mentoring program to generate social capital. In the chapters that follow, I review relevant literature and describe the research procedures for the study, after which I present the results of my research. In the final chapter, I discuss these results and draw conclusions about what this study offers to research on mentoring.

CHAPTER 2: CONNECTION TO THE LITERATURE

When I began this research study, I reviewed literature that has had an impact on the ways in which I thought about this topic. I focused my review on four main areas that are directly implicated in my study. I first reviewed the literature on parenting, specifically on the role of Black parents. Second, I reviewed literature on youth mentoring. While youth mentoring literature is vast, I narrowed the focus to school-based mentoring programs and their outcomes and impacts on youths. I then turned to examining the literature aimed at understanding how parents are discussed in the youth mentoring context. Finally, I explored the notion of social capital.

The debate over where and by whom the child should be educated is long. In the social sciences, the debate goes back to French sociologist Emile Durkheim. The debate is hinged upon who *should* be responsible for raising children, parents or the state. Lamanna (2001) reminded us that Durkheim's view is that the family is not ideal for the moral education of youth. Lamanna stated further,

Durkheim fears that indulgence is the normal attitude of the parent. To socialize the child into the norms and expectations of social, as well as for formal intellectual learning, separation from the family is necessary and the state must play a role. (p. 124)

Lamanna's contextualization of Durkheim's views demonstrates that Durkheim understood that his views could be interpreted as controversial. In his publication *Education et*

sociologie, Durkheim (1922/1966) outlined his understanding of the role of the state in the education of youths:

The rights of the family are placed in opposition [to those of the state]. The child, it is said, first of all belongs to his parents. It is thus they who have the right to direct his intellectual and moral development according to their views. Education is thus conceived of as something essentially private and domestic. . . . But it is not necessary the [the state's]role remain so negative. If . . . education has, above all, a collective function, if it has as its object to adapt the child to the social milieu in which he is destined to live, it is impossible that society be disinterested in such a process. . . . When education is essential social function, the state cannot ignore it. (p. 124)

The notion of whom Black children belong to can be traced back to post emancipation. W. E. B. DuBois wrote in his 1901 *Atlantic* article “The Freedmen’s Bureau” that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” In the article, DuBois offers his interpretation of the rise and failure of the Freedmen’s Bureau. DuBois wrote, “That is the large legacy of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the work it did not do because it could not.” Farmer-Kaiser (2010) provided a focus on freedwomen, asserting,

Although the postwar laws forced both freedmen and freedwomen to endure bewildering losses as parents, they proved particularly detrimental to black mothers, who now as freedwomen faced relentless poverty and poor job prospects and were forced to face head-on the harsh legacies of slavery as they struggle to reclaim children. (p. 101)

The challenges African American women faced post emancipation were focused on trying to be a mother in an environment where newly formed government policies prevented their efforts. We see this continue in contemporary politics.

The Black Mother

A particular national discourse began with the 1965 publication *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, also known as the Moynihan report, named for its author Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan was a sociologist and staffer in the Johnson

administration. The report was preceded by Johnson's War on Poverty, the government's first attempt to address poverty within the Black community on a national level. The Moynihan report has been viewed as controversial in its key reduction—Black family problems are traced to the lack of married couples. The report states, “The fundamental problem in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence not final, but powerfully persuasive—is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling” (p. 4).

Substantial research has documented the social issues and conditions of the Black family in the United States (Du Bois, 1899; Frazier, 1932; Moynihan, 1967). However, the literature demonstrates the complicated nature of the portrayal of Black women. While some of the work attempts simply to blame Black mothers, the work of Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that, for women of color, motherhood cannot be isolated from the historical context: For Native American, African American, Hispanic, and Asian American women, motherhood cannot be analyzed in isolation from its context. Motherhood occurs in a specific historical situation framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender, where the sons and daughters of White mothers have “every opportunity and protection” and the “colored” daughters and sons of racial ethnic mothers “know not their fate.” Racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context not only for racial ethnic women in the United States but for all women.

While historical context is important in understanding the experiences of U.S. mothers of color, that same context is further complicated in what Harris-Perry (2011) describes as the crooked room. Harris-Perry suggested that when Black women confront race, gender, and stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room. Harris-Perry

posited that while Black women are “bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion” (p. 29). They often are distorting themselves to fit the denigration of their parenting. The notion of the crooked room can be applied to education and parenting. The crooked room is the educational system that is full of inequality and ideas often projected on parents and students. As reflected in the data, the mothers have often tried to fit in ideas of what teachers expected of them or followed directions such as putting their child on ADD medication, however over time this distortion which the mothers try to fit into becomes harder to maintain. Part of this distortion is the notion that Black mothers are not adequate at parenting. If we assume they are competent parents, however, we can reinterpret their parenting as strategic and responsive to the situations and oppressions they experience. This has implications for the mentoring studied in this dissertation.

Mentoring needs interrogation in relation to Black parenting that is understood as strategic and strength based. When there is discussion among Black mothers, it demonstrates that the notion of hope can be complicated. Hughes (2006) states, “Hope is a ghost and yet a concrete foundation upon which to stand and fight; a road upon which to migrate to something better, but to be experienced or seen by most” (p. 138). This idea of hope informs this study. Hughes went further to explain, “No doubt educational hope among black families . . . involves resiliency, future orientation and enlightened self interest—but not in any formulaic, deterministic sense. Hope is so much more than such linear information portrays” (p. 138). While the narrative on Black mothers often is demonstrated in pathology, work has increasingly shifted to understanding the strengths of Black mothers (Cooper, 2007, 2009;

Rhodes, 2012). Cooper (2007) found that Black mothers advocate for their children as a form of resistance and a political act:

Their school choice-making and advocacy include mild-mannered, critical and assertive acts. In line with the motherwork tradition, the mothers perceive each type of act as essential for their ensuring their children's survival, empowerment and positive racial identities. Moreover, data confirm the idea that their motherwork is a form of political resistance. It is also a display of care. (p. 506)

Black mothers have often been left out of the literature in mentoring, however to understand the ways in which they are left from the conversation it is important to understand the context of youth mentoring.

Youth Mentoring

Today youth mentoring is used as intervention strategy to address the needs of young people who have been designated to receive additional adult support. Those needs range from academic support to crime prevention. Approximately 5 million youths are involved in school- or community-based volunteer mentoring programs nationwide, including more than 100,000 participants in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) programs (McKenna, 1998). Most of these programs pair a mentor with a youth identified as having a need that would benefit from an adult volunteer from the community. Although the last decade shows increased support for these programs, the history of youth mentoring can be traced back to the early efforts of Ernest Coulter and Irvin F. Westheimer. The two are often praised for their vision of providing a "one-to-one" model for youths in need. The opening of the 20th century was forged amid several major developments in the United States. During this time, there was a growth in technology, industry, and burgeoning social movements. Major cities such as Chicago, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia were emerging as

industrial sites. These cities became places of interest for people from all over the world who were in search of a better and more prosperous life (Zinn, 1999). In 1860, almost 80% of people lived in rural or farming environments; by 1920, almost 60% lived in urban environments. This increased movement toward city centers was attributed to immigrants drawn to fill the needs of the labor force (Levine & Levine, 1992).

In the 1990s, interest in and concern for social programs increased among policy makers and government officials. While the preceding progressive era had demonstrated an increased interest in creating social policy to address the needs of poor immigrants, the late 1980s and 1990s marked a return to conservatism. During this conservative turn, the Democratic Party became the party that wanted to “change welfare as we know it” and became responsible for “the end of the era of Big Government” (Walker, 2005). Giroux (2003) posited that after interest in the 1970s War on Poverty declined, the new zero-tolerant policies were based in moral panic about racial youths:

No longer seen as a crucial social investment for the future of a democratic society, youth are now demonized by the popular media and derided by politicians looking for quick-fix solutions to crime. In a society deeply troubled by their presence, youth prompt in the public imagination a rhetoric of fear, control, and surveillance. (p. 554)

Youth mentoring picked up momentum again around 1995, when an evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) was released. It received national attention in an article in *USA Today*:

A landmark study in 1995 by a Philadelphia-based research group, Public/Private Ventures, was the first to show the benefits of one-on-one mentoring. The researchers tracked 500 mentored, at-risk young people ages 10 to 16 from mostly urban, single parent homes and compared them with a control group of 500 kids still on the wait list for mentors. (Yoo, 2004)

The impact study of the BBBSA program produced evidence that mentoring had positive impacts on a range of important elements in a youth’s life (Tierney, Grossman, &

Resch, 1995). BBBSA has used this impact study and its findings very effectively in its marketing, helping the organization to almost triple in size over the 9 years since the results came out (Walker, 2005).

Mentoring's appearance in social service programs has been traced to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Walker, 2009). Because private business began promoting mentoring in the early 1990s, the interest in one-to one mentoring increased through media (Walker, 2009). Freedman (1999) argued for youth mentoring as an opportunity to meet the needs of youths and to serve a stronger need to preserve voluntarism:

A second reason for maintaining volunteer involvement is mentoring's potential for meeting important needs of adults, who can benefit themselves from the mentoring interaction, through satisfying a sense of generativity. Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship. (p. 125)

Youth mentoring also reached the attention of President Clinton, who said,

Most Americans are not for "big government"; they are for volunteerism and the "personal touch" versus the paid professional in helping people; and prefer to think most individual issues can be resolved by willpower and determination, with a minimum of outside help, rather than by the provision of comprehensive services. (as quoted in DuBois & Karcher, 2005, p. 510)

It is in this moment that the idea of free programming to address the needs of minority and low-income youths emerges—at the intersection of welfare reform. While the early 1990s saw a growth in youth mentoring, particularly as a social capital investment, we see contemporary youth mentoring efforts as a way to improve academic achievement. There have been several studies in an effort to understand the ways in which mentoring works. Much of the literature takes a further look at mentoring relationships, benefits, and further understanding school-based mentoring programs. Indeed, research on mentoring leads to a "cautious optimism" (Rhodes, 2008) that mentoring has positive effects for the mentee.

Tierney and Grossman (2000) suggested programs should support caring mentoring relationships, which in turn provide tangible benefits. Goldner and Maysless (2009) and Rhodes (2008) argued that high-quality relationships are more likely to be beneficial than lower quality ones. Wheeler et al. (2010) added that a low dosage of mentoring in many studies may explain the less-than-robust findings of benefits. Komosa-Hawkins (2010) indicated that programs need to attend to laying groundwork for the program, establishing partnerships and providing coordination. Blinn-Pike (2007) suggested that programs guided by professional educators as opposed to community-based programs are likely to have better benefits. Rhodes et al. (2002) argued for careful screening, ongoing supervision, and setting clear expectations for a long relationship.

Karcher et al. (2006) suggested that there are two key considerations for program goals. Programs should have developmental goals about facilitating the mentoring relationship and instrumental goals about learning specific skills or achieving specific objectives. They also noted that programs need to consider necessary infrastructure and the notion of dosage (strength and length of the mentoring relationship). Finally, they noted that ethnicity, age, gender, and socioeconomic status may moderate program effectiveness.

Sipe (2002) reviewed the research on mentoring programs for adolescents, noting that programs have been shown effective in reducing substance abuse and increasing academic performance. She noted that programs should support mentors in building trustful and meaningful relationships and in developing standardized procedures for screening, orientation, training, matching mentors and mentees, supervision and support, and regular meeting times. Bogat et al. (2008) recommended that relationship supports should specifically address how to avoid terminations of mentoring relationships. Finally, LaRose et

al. (2010) indicated that mentoring program managers should focus on structured meaningful activities in academic mentoring programs, as structured activities are better for the development of adolescents. In addition, LaRose et al. suggested mentors can be seen as more engaged when they are more directive or authoritative.

School-Based Mentoring

School-based mentoring is the fastest growing form of youth mentoring (Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois, 2010). The growth in school-based mentoring can be attributed to the belief that mentoring can improve academic achievement in this area of high-stakes testing. In thinking about school-based mentoring, its important to note the complicated relationship between schools and youths of color. For youths of color, the discourse around academic achievement often has not led to one clear solution. One area of focus has been on teaching and teachers. Rong (1996) asserted, “How teachers perceive students is affected by their own race and gender as are teachers attitudes and behaviors toward students of different racial groups” (p. 284). Rong further stated that the “teaching profession is becoming less ethnically diverse and less able to function effectively for the culturally and ethnically diversified schools in U.S. society” (pp. 284–285). While the idea of underprepared teachers has been explored, there has been some indication that students tend to do better in classrooms where teachers practice culturally relevant or responsive pedagogical methods. Two main theories are relevant to incorporating culturally sensitive pedagogies: culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

Ladson-Billings’s (1995) pedagogical model presented in her work “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” and Gay’s (2000) model of teaching presented in “Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice” are often cited in the

context of how to approach teaching students of color. Gay's model of culturally responsive teaching is targeted at "ethnically diverse" learners, which include African American, Native American, Latino American, and Asian American students. The premise of this model is "unpacking unequal distributions of power and privilege and to teach students of color cultural competence about themselves and each other" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181). Ladson-Billings's (1995) pedagogical model, CRP, also focuses on cultural identity; however, it takes into account the historical significance of educational struggles for African Americans. Another consideration has been what role parents play in school achievement. Bower and Griffin (2011) asserted that the "Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children's education" (p. 84). They suggested that there should be new ways of working with parents from high-poverty and minority backgrounds. Yet the key point for school-based mentoring is that these pedagogies are rarely employed in schools, and thus minority youths are not well served by schools. When it comes to school based mentoring programs, the research is mixed. Nunez et al (2013) found that middle school students in a school based mentoring program found using self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies lead to significant improvements academically. McQuillin, Smith and Strait (2011) reported in a randomized controlled evaluation of a school based mentoring program, administered by college students to middle school students found "school-based mentoring intervention produced no significant benefits in terms of school connectedness, teacher connectedness or school referrals. Moreover, there was a statistically significant negative effect on reading scores"(p.855) Portwood & Ayers (2005) Found that school-based mentoring programs often have lower intensity of mentoring provided as compared with community-based programs.

A second school issue is that of parent involvement, which many believe is a key to better serving youths of color (Epstein 1990, 2001; Fine, 1993; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001). Yet this is also another point at which Black mothers are denigrated. They are seen, according to Cooper (2009), as “generally framed as being inactive, disconnected, aggressive, or confrontational, or as parents who do not care” (p. 381).

Robinson and Harris (2014) have challenged the traditional notion of parent involvement. In their publication, they defined parent involvement as “stage setting.” Robinson and Harris asserted,

We draw on the analogy of the theater because it captures our view of how parental involvement operates in children’s academic lives. In a theatrical performance, actors must internalize the role they are portraying, and stage setters must ensure that the setting reinforces the performance. Similarly, youth must internalize the role of student and parents are responsible for creating a context that allows their children to assume the identity of an academically successful student. Thus we define stage setting as the process of (1) conveying the importance of education to children in a manner that leads schooling to become central to how they define themselves and (2) creating and maintain an environment (or life space) for them in which learning can be maximized or not compromised. (p. 229)

The authors approached parental involvement by considering race and social class through variations in parental approaches to children’s schooling.

The previous works offer a critique of the traditional forms of parental involvement that suggest parents of color are not involved in their children’s education. This supposed lack of involvement is another justification for youth mentoring.

Youth mentoring is most often understood as a relationship between an “at-risk” youth and an adult who is not related. Research has been conducted on youth and parent preferences regarding mentors. Spencer, Basualdo, Delmonico, and Lewis (2011) indicated parents wanting to have mentors of same race to help with the mentor–mentee relationship.

Parents believed being from the same cultural background would make the relationship stronger.

Most of the research is presented from the perspective of the mentor or mentor program staff. Some of the literature sees parents as barriers to the mentoring relationship. It has been suggested that programs should minimally involve parents. For example, Miller (2007), detailing best practice principles for formal youth mentoring relationships, urges programs to “seek the support of parents/careers” but “not their active engagement in the mentoring process,” as “non-supportive parents can sabotage the mentor-protégé’ relationship” (p. 318). Styles and Morrow (1992), in a qualitative study of mentoring relationships, demonstrated problems associated with parents, which include miscommunication between mentors and parents, parents including mentors in family disputes, and parents’ attempts to influence the mentoring relationship.

More recently, a few studies called for more research on parents’ perspective. Spencer et al. (2011) provided parents’ perspectives in their research. They suggested having parents reflect on their own experiences of the mentoring process rather than simply serving as reporters on the mentoring dyad. This work noted important insights into parents’ experiences and suggested parents’ insights could greatly contribute to an understanding of how mentoring works. Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico (2014) found that when youth mentoring agencies state they are committed to parents, their commitment actually varies. The authors suggested that there should be future research to understand the ways in which family involvement is experienced by parents. Finally, the authors asserted that understanding types of parental involvement under varying conditions may be the most productive could help improve the quality and efficacy of youth mentoring relationships. Additional research is

needed to understand the ways in which race and racial identity impact the mentoring relationship (Sánchez et al., 2014). The previous research makes us understand there is a need for a new context of Black mothers in mentoring. While previous works have had a deficit point of view of mothers, a few studies have offered a strengths-based view.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation project utilizes qualitative data. This dissertation project comes out two evaluation studies. The preliminary data in this project have come from the evaluation of Gold Medal conducted in 2011–2012. The original was designed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the effectiveness of Gold Medal. The quantitative data provided an assessment of the outcomes of high school graduation and college attendance. The qualitative data included observations of Gold Medal program activities and interviews of 76 participants, including mentees, parents of mentees, mentors, and Gold Medal staff. Observations and interviews were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software program. In summer 2013, the research team was awarded a second contract calling for a Gold Medal dosage study. This study again utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I will utilize data from both studies but rely mostly on the second study to understand parents' interpretations of these services as forms of social capital, as described by Briggs.

Participants

The participants for this study were nine single Black mothers. The mothers in this study volunteered to participate. The mothers self-disclosed that they were single; however, some noted a level of parental involvement by a child's father. While we did not inquire about the educational level of the mothers, many shared that they did not have postsecondary education obtainment or that they had obtained degrees later in their adult lives. Most of the

mothers had multiple children in the program. One of the mothers in the study had a daughter that had graduated from the program. This mother reflected on her experiences of the program as she was no longer in the program; however, her daughter and the mentor were still in contact. The mothers in this study were selected based on availability. The mothers were drawn from the sample used in the evaluation studies. The qualitative data include ten observations of Gold Medal program activities by members of the evaluation team and a total of 76 mentees (former and current), parents of the mentees, the mentors, and Gold Medal program staff were interviewed: twenty eight students/mentees, 22 parents, 17 mentors and 9 staff (including part-time). The observations and interviews were transcribed and entered into a qualitative analysis software program, Atlas Ti. These data were coded, and analyzed for themes related to the evaluation of Gold Medal, social and economic mobility, and other themes that inductively emerged in the analysis. Of the 22 parents, all of the black mothers were used for this study. The mothers not used were Latina or White. In order to get the participants for the evaluation, we needed the assistance of the staff members. Staff members encouraged participants to attend a community dinner hosted by the evaluators; interviews were conducted after the dinner with many of the mothers.

Qualitative Methods

To gain understanding and meaning from the perspective of the participants in this study, qualitative methods are most appropriate. Qualitative research allows for the utilization of purposeful sampling, which provides “information-rich cases . . . from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, p. 169). Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) called for critical ethnographers to consider our own positionality when taking this approach: “Critical ethnographers must

explicitly consider how their own act of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study” (p. 3). Noblit’s call is compelling for me and has shaped the way I think about approaching this work. From this call I realize that I am representing the mothers who I have chosen to look at closely, and there is a power that I represent, even though I aim to consider the perspectives of those marginalized. It is the lens of understanding critical ethnography that has helped shaped the way in which I approach this work. I am also influenced by the work of Madison (2012), who asserts,

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. By “ethical responsibility” I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as result the research feels and ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward great freedom and equity. (p. 5)

Madison’s statement reminds me that the work of research comes with an “ethical responsibility.” That responsibility comes with serious consideration. When I was a member of the evaluation team, I believed it was a unique experience to strengthen my empirical research skills. I was given the responsibility to lead the evaluation team. Perhaps my work could have ended once we had submitted our final evaluation report; however, the responsibility that Madison and Noblit calls for continued to guide my intentions for this dissertation project. I felt an ethical responsibility to make a contribution to the mentoring literature on mothers. It is my hope that my project will contribute to changing the conditions experienced by families of color in the mentoring and schooling contexts, which may lead to “great freedom and equity.”

Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I utilized computer-assisted Noticing-Collecting-Thinking analysis (Frieze, 2014). Frieze adapted this model from a paper (Seidel, 1998) and described it as noticing things, collecting things, and thinking about things (Figure 1). Frieze (2014) stated,

I named the analytic approach “Computer-assisted NCT analysis.” The three thin arrows indicate that the process of analysis can be linear—starting with noticing interesting things in the data, collecting these things and thinking about them, and then coming up with more insightful results. This direct sequential process is however rather rare. More often, analysis means moving back and forth between noticing, collecting and thinking, as shown by the heavy arrows in the middle figure. (p. 12)

I found this method useful in my research for several reasons. First, I came to these data through a 3-year-long evaluation. I have presented several parts of these data. Because I am familiar with these data, the computer-assisted NCT method was best for understanding them. The NCT method is described as a method for understanding data through using Atlas.ti.

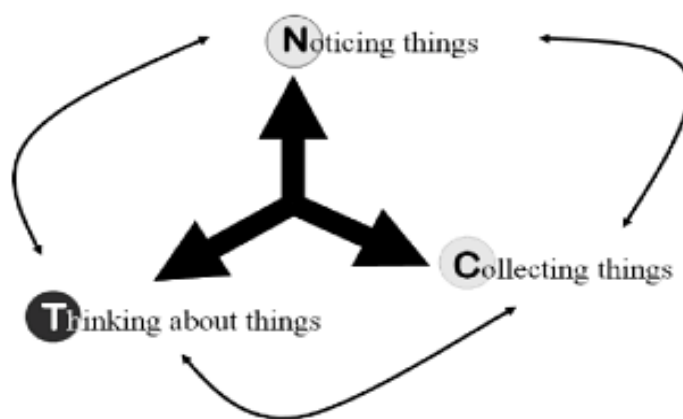


Figure 1. The NCT model of qualitative data analysis adapted from Seidel (1998)

Noticing Things

Because of my initial work with this project, I was able to work with the interviews for other purposes prior to beginning my work for this project. It was in the initial readings that I began to find interesting things. Friese (2014) described this initial process as follows:

Noticing refers to the process of finding interesting things in the data when reading through transcripts, field notes, documents, reports, newspaper articles etc., or when viewing video material or images, or when listening to audio files. In order to capture these things, the researcher may write down notes, mark the segments or attach preliminary codes. Codes may be derived inductively or deductively. At this point the level of a code does not play a role. Codes may be descriptive or already conceptual. The important point is to mark those things that are interesting in the data and to name them. (p. 13)

Collecting Things

Friese (2014) called coding “collecting things.” I had a set of initial codes with which I aimed to work; however, as I continued to read, I began to notice things that I had not noticed in my initial reading. Friese stated,

Reading further, you will very likely notice a few things that are similar to some you may have noticed before. They may even fit under the same code name. If a similar issue does not quite fit under the same heading as the first issue you notice, you can simply rename the code to subsume the two. Even if the term is not yet the perfect code label, it doesn’t matter. You can continue to collect more similar data segments and later, when you review them, it will be easier to think of better and more fitting code names to cover the substance of the material you have collected. (p. 13)

The process of coding using the NCT method is different from grounded theory, according to Friese (2014), as “the NCT analysis does not prescribe to any particular way of coding” (p. 13); however, Friese suggested that various procedures from the literature can be employed at this point. Charmaz (as cited in Saldaña, 2009) called the procedures used for coding as process coding and emotional and values coding (see also Goldman, as cited in Saldaña, 2009). Process coding relates to “ing-words,” referring to action in the data. In the case of these data, actions often comprised mothers taking action to establish social networks

or in response to an event that happened to their children. Corbin and Strauss (as cited in Saldaña, 2009) stated,

Process coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that search for “ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem.” (p. 96)

The second procedure utilized in this research was emotional/values coding (Goldman, as cited in Saldaña, 2009) and values coding (Gable & Wolf, 1993). Emotional coding is used to

explore interpersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions. Since emotions are universal human experience, our acknowledgment of them in our research provided deep insight into the participants’ perspectives, worldviews and life conditions. (Saldaña, 2009, p. 106)

Values coding, according to Saldaña, is using codes that “[reflect] a participants’ values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or world view” (p. 110). Each of these coding methods was utilized in the analysis of the data. Friese (2014) suggested combining these research procedures.

Thinking About Things

In this level of data analysis, Friese (2014) stated,

we need to use our brains from the very beginning of the analytic process. . . . We need to think when noticing things, when coming up for good names for codes, or when developing subcategories. We need to do some more thinking when it comes to finding Paterson and relations to the data. This mostly takes place after coding when asking “How do the various parts of the puzzle fit to develop a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon studied?” (p. 14)

As described earlier, I thought about the data often at the various points in this project. In addition to coding, I utilized what Friese (2014) named “research question memos.” These memos allow for finding answers to questions, identifying patterns and relations in data, and

seeing how various aspects of the findings can be integrated (Friese, 2014). Utilizing this method allowed for themes to come forward throughout the analysis.

Study Design

The data for this study were taken from a larger study. The evaluation included 10 observations of Gold Medal program activities. The observations were conducted by members of a larger team, of which I was the director. A total of 76 mentees (former and current), parents of mentees, mentors, and Gold Medal program staff were interviewed: 28 students/mentees, 15 parents, 17 mentors, and 9 staff (including part-time). The evaluation was conducted over a 2-year period. For the purpose of this study, I selected all the Black mothers who had been interviewed. The mothers not selected for the evaluation were of Latin descent or were White mothers of multiracial students. I used a total of nine interviews for this study. The questions that were asked of the mothers (see Appendixes B and C) in the first evaluation aimed to understand social and economic mobility. The follow-up study aimed to understand how much mentoring was needed to make an impact. Some of the questions asked of the mothers included the following: (a) How did your family come to be involved in Gold Medal? (b) What has school been like for your child? (c) Tell me about all your involvements with Gold Medal?

The second evaluation included similar questions; however, it followed up on issues of race, for example, “Race is a key issue in our society. How has it affected your child’s relationship(s) with mentor(s)?”

The design of the current study allowed for understanding what the mothers experienced in both the school system and the Gold Medal program. The interviews provided

context for understanding social support, social leverage, and social mobility. In the next chapter, I provide insight into what the study revealed.

Role of Researcher

It is important for me that I name my positionality to the reader prior to sharing how I analyzed the data. I am Black woman who grew up in a rural town in North Carolina. I have a Black mother and father, who worked hard to provide for my sister and me. While we had everything we needed, I would not say we were rich by any means. I can remember times where money was tight, but I don't think we ever lacked the essentials. I often remember hearing my mom say, "We're doing the best we can." And it is that sentiment that I believe many parents of color share. My mother and father often leveraged social networks such as the church and sports involvement to instill values and demonstrate the need for further education. The church involvement often provided travel opportunities that my parents would not normally have been able to afford on their own. It was through church involvement that my sister and I were able to travel to camps, attend meetings in other states and have leadership opportunities. As my parents were doing the best they could, the mothers in this study are often doing the best they can. I have several close girl friends and family members who are mothers. They are married, single by divorce, widowed; however, all the mothers I come across, including my own mother, want the very best for their children. I believe a sense of empathy is needed in programs and schools. More often than not, the staff at such institutions do not see the second job being necessary. They do not see the questions children ask about school, the repeated attempts at completing homework, and the pennies being saved (as my mother would say) to send a child to camp.

As a graduate student, when I began to read research on how parents were not involved, I would ask us to consider how they are involved. It is from this lens that I see the world and think about issues related to students of color. My gaze is informed from my time as a teacher working in schools that are considered low income. The parents I encountered were at the school on a daily basis. Most of the parents were single mothers, working multiple jobs. The mothers were fed up with their experiences at the local public school and, in a final attempt to find support for their children, they chose to enroll them in the charter school in which I worked. This school was not perfect; we operated out of an old church; across the street was the more affluent Catholic school, and between us and the local police department was the highway responsible for destroying the once-thriving, all-Black area of town known as the Hayti district. The mothers I met at this school volunteered to cook meals for the athletic banquet at our school. The mothers would come to cheer their students on at athletic events. The mothers would stop by in the middle of the day to bring their children what they needed for school. These same mothers would make sure I knew they were available to talk to their children if they got off track. It is from this that I draw my understanding of Black mothers—from my family, my friends, and my days as a classroom teacher.

I can even draw on my experiences from working at an affluent private day school. I was one of four Black faculty on my middle school campus. I can recall that the first days I was there, several of the Black families made it known they were glad I was there! They were glad their Black children would have a Black teacher. I can remember several Black mothers—single mothers—who sacrificed all they could to afford their child the opportunity

to have an elite education. The Black mothers at this school were by no means rich; however, they, like the mothers at the charter school, were “doing the best they could.”

I remember two occasions on which their parenting style was not understood by the White teachers and even caused some panic. Black faculty would gather privately to laugh and discuss how “Black people do things.” The examination of how Black mothers’ mother is not escaped even at elite institutions. In those spaces, it also becomes a critique of how they parent and thus is a challenge to the idea that their students belong in that space. Even I was not protected by my status as faculty. I had one set of White parents who felt I was not sufficient to be their son’s teacher. Those parents made their sentiments known by writing our principal a nasty letter about me and also expressed to my colleagues that they had never had a Black teacher. It is these experiences in my teaching that lead me to want to be a researcher. It is these experiences that shape my gaze and influence my thinking.

When I began this project, it was after struggling to read studies that often pathologized Black and Latino parents. It was also after doing a close reading of the literature on youth mentoring that I began to feel that the experiences and voices of Black parents were missing. Most of the work was often done from the point of view of mentors, and there was some work from the students’ perspectives, yet it was rare to find the perspectives of the parents. This is where I situate my project, with understanding the perspectives of Black mothers.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The Analysis Strategy

In this work I examine the use of social capital at the individual level of the mothers. This work utilizes Briggs's (1998) notion of social capital. Briggs noted that there are two types of social capital within "relational networks": social support and social leverage. This conceptualization was also explored in the work of Dominguez and Watkins (2003), which utilized the Briggs framework to "explore the resource attainment strategies of African American and Latin-American women" (p. 112). Dominguez and Watkins asserted,

Ties that offer *social support* help individuals to "get by" or cope with the demands of everyday life and other stress. Social support is most often associated with "strong" ties, which tend to be made of kin, neighbors and intimate friends. These ties generally provide individuals with emotional and expressive support as well as certain forms of instrumental help like rides, small loans or a place to stay in case of an emergency (Briggs 1998). They can also help ensure that basic needs are met, assist in child rearing, and provide tools for improving employment situations. (p. 113)

Briggs suggested that social leverage allows access to resources that can be attributed to "bridges," which can be from "weak or strong" ties. The ties can be drawn across race, ethnicity, and/or social class (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). These social ties are connected to networks or institutions. In this study, the network or the institution is the youth mentoring program and the school system of which it is a part.

Briggs's (1998) and Dominguez and Watkins's (2003) conceptualizations of social capital offer a useful way of understanding mothers' use of mentoring. Dominguez and Watkins suggested in their research on Latina and Black mothers that

ties offer a viable and important alternative when friendship and family based networks are unavailable or ineffective. Although social support is most often associated with "strong ties" we saw several examples of women receiving food, childcare, jobs and even emotional support from social service providers who are in essence "weak ties." (p. 121)

Their argument is that, essentially, when family and friend networks are not available, the women in the study relied on institution-based networks. Their work fills the gap where other analyses of social support networks have excluded professional, institution-based relationships. This is useful for helping me frame the first theme that emerged from my analysis of the data. I will continue in the tradition of Briggs to name the first theme *social support*. In this case, the mothers enrolled their children in the mentoring program to taking advantage of the social support the school-based mentoring program offered.

There were clear moves within the mentoring relationship that the mothers demonstrate in utilizing the mentoring program. They were generating social capital through ties that offered social support or social leverage. In utilizing the social capital of enrolling in the mentoring program, this research reveals that mobility is developed by two strategies: (a) developing a social support network and (b) creating social leverage.

Once the social support network is developed, the second strategy employed is to increase mobility for themselves or their children—what Briggs has named *social leverage*. While Dominguez and Watkins positioned their research in the context of women in their working context, I would suggest this concept is useful for understanding the ways in which one-to-one mentoring is leveraged beyond that which the program intended. In this analysis I

explore how, at the individual level, Black mothers employ social capital to make ends meet so as to provide for their children through mentoring, which intersects with the attempt to get ahead in life (for their children's success).

My work is consistent with what Dominguez and Watkins (2003) asserted:

Our research uncovered a new source of trust and social capital: social service organization. These institutions go beyond providing the basic services as advertised and are becoming important links in the women's social support networks. Some institution-based networks provide clear advantages such as reliable, high quality resources and relationships that are less stressful and burdensome in terms of reciprocity. In addition, in a context of segregation and disadvantage, service professionals can serve as social mobility bridges connecting low-income mothers with appropriate strategies and tools. (p. 129)

I begin my analysis by demonstrating the areas in which the mothers utilized the mentoring program to establish a form of social support to establish "strong ties." This was their first move in developing social capital.

Social Support

My analysis indicated that while youth mentoring is often positioned as a benefit to the child, mothers take advantage of associated programming as well as mentorship to yield more than one-to-one mentoring. My analysis indicated that while youth mentoring can be seen as a viable resource for youths, it does not operate in isolation. Briggs (1998) asserted, "Social capital is generated through ties that offer social support or social leverage" (p. 117). The respondents develop their social support networks in this case from mentors and the mentoring program staff. While the mentoring program may be positioned as a social service for student achievement, it is important to note that the mothers also developed a social support network once trust was Lewis (2011 ed. As Dominguez and Watkins (2003) pointed out,

in cases where women seek out friendships to generate the social support they cannot rely on from family networks, reciprocity and trust emerge as central concerns. Women who turn to non-profit institution do so only when competence, confidentiality and the ability to reciprocate on their own terms can be established. (p. 129)

The mothers often indicated that trust was established through mentors demonstrating respect for them:

Nothing he does, anything he does, he always calls and asks me. He'll call me first and ask me, "Do you think Josh want to do this?" And sometime, I might be at work or whatever, and I'm like, well, you can call him and ask him. After they make their plans, he'll call me back and let me know what their plans are.

This small act of calling the mother to let her know the plans demonstrated a respect for the mother as a parent and was a valued step in creating a trusting relationship.

Trust is reciprocal as well:

it's like, to me he's just like a . . . he's a really good . . . he's a true example of a mentor. I trust him with my son. My son really doesn't . . . well, he does a little bit with other people but I totally trust him with Richard. You know.

In this social support network, mothers utilized the relationship to establish social support.

Once support had been established, mothers then generated *social leverage* by "securing information and resources that may lead to socioeconomic mobility."(Dominguez and Watkins, p.124)

Once trust is established, a relationship comes into being. For these mothers, the mentors were conceptualized within a familial context. Often this was discussed in terms of doing activities with the child's mentor or viewing the mentor as family. One mother said, "Oh yeah, Jessica's like a part of the family. Jessica would come by, she would eat with us, you know, yeah. Jessica's wonderful."

It is important to note that parents mentioned staff of the mentoring program as a key element in developing social support. Some of the characteristics they liked were that they

are approachable and are willing to help individually. The mothers also see staff members as key people for having insider knowledge of how the school system works. One mother discussed how much she appreciates the program and that she even wishes it had been available when she was growing up:

It's individually marketed. And they look at their grades each quarter, they look at their progress reports, they write little notes and they call me, "Do you need this? Do you need that?" Honey, if my mom woulda had this, there's no telling where I would've been . . .

Another mother expressed how she felt about the staff in the mentoring program:

John was there for us too, you know John Thomas [program director], if he's still there and Mary Johnson [program staff]. I mean, they were just there for you. These people cared about young people and what they were doing, and them becoming something.

The staff caring was essential to creating strong ties within this mentoring program. The mothers often indicated that John and Mary made them feel a level of trust because the staff often went beyond expectations to show they cared.

Students in the mentoring program also take part in a separate leadership program at the high school level. Mary is the staff member who is in charge of this program. Mary is an African American woman who is from the community. Mary attended the high school in which the program is housed, and many of the parents know her as a leader in the community. Mary comes from a family of educators who also are known in the community. In our own experience of evaluating the program, Mary was instrumental in being a bridge for our team to members of the community. In the interviews, many of the families shared how Mary was important to them and their participation in the program.

The mentoring program has a service learning component, Service Leaders Institute, (SLI), and Mary is the staff member in charge of this component. While most of the students

who are assigned a mentor are involved in SLI, some are not. SLI is set up around service learning opportunities in the community. Once a year, Mary organizes international travel with the students. When I interviewed her, she expressed that it was important for her that the students (students of color) have the opportunity to travel abroad. I asked her how they got their funding, and she shared with me that it was obtained through a yearlong fund-raising process. This year's trip included going to Paris and Italy. I could tell Mary was very excited about this trip, as it would be the first time many of the students attending would have been on a plane. In the interviews, one of the mothers indicated how she felt about these international trips as she discussed the program director: "I mean I think he's just been tremendous and kind of a trailblazer in the way that he's tried to incorporate lots of different things. Even the various trips they plan for the kids outside of the country."

When discussing the program, many of the mothers were actually referring to staff members. They often believed that being able to be in touch with the staff or how the staff treated them is a main component of their participation in the program. One mother stated,

This program really cares about students that wanted and had something to offer, you know. There were just there for you, you know, I mean, they . . . they went a hundred and ones you know, you think some give a hundred. They give a hundred and ten, you know.

The "strong ties," as Briggs suggested, were instrumental in the social support conception of social capital. These strong ties are established through how the mothers approach the mentoring relationships and the mentoring program staff. The condition of strong social ties made social leverage a possibility.

Social Leverage

Dominguez and Watkins (2003) argued that "networks composed of ties that offer *social leverage*" (p. 113) help individuals to "get ahead" or change their opportunity

structure. Ties that offer leverage can promote upward mobility by providing access to education, training, and employment. I found in my analysis that for mothers in mentoring relationships, strong ties are formed through trust and respect. Once the networks are formed, mothers use them to create opportunities that offer social *leverage*. The leverage in this case provides not only opportunities for the students but in some cases opportunity for the mothers. The leverage utilized here is what Dominquez and Watkins called a chance to “change their opportunity structure.” It is important to note that while many of the students come from low-income or single-parent homes, the mothers do not view their children as lacking because of their circumstances. One mothers said, “I wouldn’t say a better life. I’ve just seen that the mentoring in Gold Medal has contributed in him having a more successful life.” I would suggest that what is lacking in the students’ lives is caused by structural racism within the context of the American school system, where White supremacy exists. This form of supremacy is what Gillborn (2005) described as “more extensive, more powerful version of White supremacy; one that is normalized and taken for granted” (p. 486).

What the mothers are attempting to leverage or gain access to is social mobility, traditionally accessible through education. However, the mothers’ experiences of the educational system have been disappointing; therefore they attempt to access mobility through mentorship. They have good lives, but access to social mobility would also be valuable in a stratified society.

Social leverage occurred through academic support, cultural exposure, and networking.

Academic Support

The academic support discussed included college tours, tutoring, and college scholarships. This social leverage was important to the mothers as they saw academics as a way to the lives they wanted for their children. When asked about their hopes for their children, mothers mentioned getting a good job and obtaining higher education:

I mean, like as far as education, as far as giving the opportunity to go places that he probably would never go with me. So I don't want to say a better life 'cause he's got a good life, it's just offering him more. As far as offering him more in schooling and anything like that, they're going to Costa Rica next year. So it adds on.

One mother attributed the Gold Medal mentoring program to helping their child grow academically:

He gets his homework done before he comes home from school. Um, he's checking with his teacher to see if he's missed any assignments, he's checking to see if he can get extra credit, so all these things that Gold Medal has taught him he's actually using 'em, which is so—my life is so better this year. He's in the eighth grade and I'm not checking his homework folder every night, I know that it's done, his teachers email me and say "I don't believe this is the same kid that they wrote about" because Seth wasn't handing in his homework, he wasn't doing his homework, he wasn't studying, he wasn't doing no extracurricular—nothing extra at all.

The mothers understand that while they clearly understand what they can do with this program to develop social capital, this is less apparent to others. Even though the program is administered through the school system, one mother questions if the program gets the credit she believes it deserves for her son's academic success:

That Gold Medal does make a difference. And I don't know if the city schools really know that they make a difference, I know they can see how many have graduated and went on to college, but when you look at where they started from and where they end up at, even when looking at my son, Sam, I look at where he was, not proficient in reading, now he is reading on 8th grade level. That took everybody working together to get that done. It wasn't just me, it just wasn't the teachers, it wasn't Gold Medal, it was everybody had a stake in that, you know what I'm saying? And I just think that if we continue to work together for that child, for the need of that child, no child would be left behind.

Cultural Exposure

This particular program is more than mentoring; it supplies academic support, community service, summer camps, and college scholarships. In one case, a mother discussed her experience of gaining employment through her relationship with one of the staff members. This mother realized that while mentoring is valuable, it was not the only part of the program with value. Access to the program gave her social leverage as an adult: “Any time I had a question about anything, you know, they answer it, um, John even called and recommended me for a job at the police department.”

While the program is built around mentoring, mentors, of course, come and go. The program, though, enables participation even when mentors are not available. Without a mentor for a year, one mother’s son continued to participate: “There was a little break between not having a mentor. But he still was active in the program and going to tutoring and stuff like that.” While this mother expressed how her son’s mentor had to quit for personal reasons, she continued her son in the program for the benefit of the tutoring program—a point of social leverage even without the network access provided by a mentor.

I found that while the mentoring programming is known in the school district for its one-to-one matching of mentors and mentees, the program offers more than a one-to-one match. In addition to the preceding list of services, the program also offers tutoring, college tours, summer camps, volunteer opportunities, tickets to sporting events, and cultural outings. Many of the mothers indicated that this aspect of the programming was essential to their goals for their children. One mother shared that her son was able to attend the local performing arts center to see the nationally known Rockettes: “This Christmas, they went to

the PAC (Performing Arts Center). And I know this is something Trent would had never went to the PAC if it was me, they went to see, um, what's the um, the Rockettes?" Another mother further discussed the opportunities her child is able to take advantage of through the mentoring program:

But like she took her . . . she brought her to pottery class and she made a cup, the carnival, and movies, and she went to Camp Bob which is the first time she had been away without any friends overnight for a week.

This mother expressed how the experience of going to summer camp has benefits beyond the weeklong session:

I think it broadens her perspective because there are lots of different kids there from all over North Carolina and that particular camp . . . I don't know if kids come over from Tennessee. But being in the mountains, exploring nature, and it's more reinforcement in terms of cooperation and working with other people and I think it's helped her confidence.

Another form of cultural exposure was introducing the students to things that the mothers would not be able to. One mother discussed how her son was able to learn how to tie a tie:

I mean, just simple things like teaching him how to tie a tie, something I don't know how to do, but they had a little retreat last year and they learned how to tie ties, and you know we still struggle with it on Sunday mornings, but at least they know the basics, you know what I'm saying, you don't have to go completely untie it and find a man to tie the tie. So I just think it's really good. And they really focus on what the kids' need.

Another mother shared her experience of listening to a CD in the car, and her son knew who the artist was from his exposure in the mentoring program:

And one day he was listening to the CD in the car a friend of mine picked up and he goes, "I love them. They're awesome." He goes, "Oh, we went to go see them last week." You know. Just to hear . . . and so some of the stuff that he's done that Gold Medal has afforded has just been awesome.

Networking

In addition to travel, networking is important to the mothers. The mothers indicated that because their children come from a single-parent home, having a Black male role model was important for the mothers. I call this a form of networking. The mothers felt that having the Black male role model was essential to their sons' growing up:

They wanted to match him with someone that would be good for him, you know, what his likes and what he doesn't like, so they were really catering it towards Sam's needs, so I thought that was really good. They found a very strong male because he didn't really see very many strong Black males in the neighborhood, so I thought it was really nice and I thought it was a good match.

One mother indicated how her son's successful Black male mentor also provided him the opportunity to meet his mentor's network of friends. This exposure provided the opportunity to meet successful Black men whom he may not have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. In addition, meeting the men provided a chance to confirm some of the lessons the mother had tried to teach her son:

With Mike, I think it has really helped Trent to see that there are some Black men doing the right thing. I really think that this has been an eye-catcher. And he went to meet a bunch of Black surgeons or Black doctors somewhere, which was a friend of Mike, and you know he came back and we talked about it and I said, "Well you know, I've been telling you that."

Racialized experiences are also a key concern for parents. One mother leveraged the mentor's career of being a police officer to provide the son some "insider knowledge."

Raising a Black male, mothers are aware of how they are more likely to be stopped by police officers in the area in which the mentoring program is located. As one mother explained,

The second mentor is actually a police officer and I had him talk to James about what to do if he gets stopped by the police, you know, if he's hanging out on Main Street or if he's driving. You know.

These data have revealed a new understanding of social support, social leverage, and social capital. Social support networks are developed through ties to mentors and mentoring staff (John and Mary). These networks are able to be created once trust is established, and we see trust is established through mutual actions. Through the establishment of social support, social leverage is employed to promote upward mobility. The upward mobility that the mothers aim to take advantage of is seen through academic support, cultural exposure, and networking.

While it is common for people to develop sources of social capital, the efforts of Black mothers are poignant because of the special contingencies they and their children face because of White supremacy.

Contingencies: Recognizing Inequity

It is important to note the ways in which the mothers discuss issues of inequity. I argue that one of the reasons mothers seek systems of support is in response to the lack support that school systems provide. The respondents provided insight into how they felt about issues that ranged from racial inequality in the local school system to misdiagnoses of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Noguera (2003) demonstrated that Black males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or as suffering from a learning disability, more likely to be placed in special education, and more likely to be absent from Advanced Placement and honors courses. The mothers speaking about their experiences support these claims.

It is important to note that while the mentoring in this case has been identified as a way to address academic achievement, the experiences of these mothers complicate the notion that the one-to-one mentoring match can resolve structural inequality and systems of

oppression that are demonstrated in historical and contemporary contexts of public schooling. This mentoring program is provided by the school system to address academic achievement of students of color. The mothers want teachers to know they are there to support the teacher and their children. However, when teacher support is lacking, these mothers demonstrated their agency in a way that they felt they would advocate for their students.

One mother shared her experience of a son being diagnosed with ADHD:

Like I said, in the beginning, kindergarten was kinda rough. Even in daycare, he had his good days and his bad days. So I took him to the doctor because I felt like he might've had ADHD, or ADD, and the doctor that I took him to, she specializes in stuff like that, and so he was on Concerta in the first grade? Brian? That medicine? And the first grade, and um, he wouldn't eat and you see he's already small.

The mother noticed how the drugs affected her son's overall disposition:

It made him stop eating. So then, probably in the second or third grade, we decreased his dosage, and it helped a little bit but he still wouldn't eat, so I say by the time he got in the fourth grade, I was like, "I don't think he needs to be on it" because he pretty much could control his self. Um, when he got in middle school, it was like he just grew up, you know, that's basically it.

Being diagnosed and being labeled started early for this student. Yet this mentoring program establishes the one-to-one mentoring match beginning in fourth grade. At this point in a child's experience of the school district, he or she has had 3–4 years of dealing with a school system and what it requires of Black children.

The second level of frustration seemed to stem from teachers who inadequately know how to deal with students. Mothers on more than one occasion shared their stories of having to go to the school, or otherwise were in schools. These mothers demonstrated that they are willing to come to the school or express a deep interest in having teachers call them at any point. The parents indicated that they wanted the teachers to know that they "are not playing" and that they deeply value their children's education:

So he went to Cedarwood fourth and fifth grade. And he had a little problem when he first got to Cedarwood, but the teacher, she pretty much any time she had a problem, you know, I told her don't hesitate to call me. I had no problem coming over there, I had no problem coming in talking to anybody, and you know, once that, once he seen that I was not playing with him and that he needed to get his act together, he just, you know, he just grew up. He just grew up and got on track.

While this was to the benefit of the child, there are also cases where this was also an intervention for the teacher. The parents also wanted the teachers to know that they value their children's education and that they are willing to support them in the process. Mentoring in this case also seems to address the parents' need to supplement an inadequate school system filled with systematic injustices. One mother stated, "It's like the whole schools system influencing everybody that works for the school system." This complicates what we understand of parenting and parental involvement, especially how Black parents are viewed. It is important to note that the mentoring program allows students to begin participating in the fourth grade. Some of the mothers noted that they had already become frustrated with their children's experiences by that point. I would argue that because of parents' frustration with the ways in which Black students are often treated in schools, the mentoring program comes at a key intersection where it meets already existing parent frustration, and thus parent willingness to disrupt the status quo of the schooling experience at that point:

That's the worst place for a Black male to go, Riverbank High. That's the worst place for a Black male. If they don't have a supportive parent, Riverbank High will eat your child alive. Yes. Eat them alive. I'm serious. It's so messed up.

The mothers' frustrations with the school indicated a larger trouble with the inequality in the system of the school and further demonstrated that mentoring may not always be a solution to address a complicated system of oppression. In one case a mother sought out her own extra mentorship from a Black male school resource officer:

Honey, ever since Jerome been there, every petty thing he does, he charges him for it. And he even told Jerome one day . . . when I talked to him, I said, “You know, you send Jerome home but can you just tell him have a good day?” You know, “Make good decisions?” He walks up to Jerome and says, “Jerome, your mama told me to talk to you. Is it gonna be a positive conversation or a negative conversation?” I was like “Whoa.” He started, “Yeah.” I said, “Come on now.” And this is coming from a Black male.

When this mother sought mentoring from the Black male police officer, the police officer let the mother down, which demonstrated the system of a school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2012). It also demonstrated that while one would expect and hope that Black males would want to mentor, systematic racism prevails. The police officer is part of a larger system, despite being a Black male. The mother also named this a problem with the larger White school system as well.

Parents expressed the value of the Gold Medal programming and wished that they and even their own parents had had this opportunity. The parents believed that the support of the program staff and mentors is essential to having a good experience in the program, and in the school system. The parents responded often that living as a single parent is difficult, however, they want the mentors to recognize this as part of the “hard work” they put into their children.

One respondent discussed an incident that happened with her son and his teachers. The mother recalled a time her son was disciplined at school for getting into a dispute with the teacher. The mother was never informed by school officials or her child. It was only after she found the notice in her son’s book bag that she was alerted to the situation. The mother described the situation:

Because his attitude is he gets pissed off at his teacher, they kick him out of class. They had a police officer come and get him out of class. Yeah. It was a mess. . . . He got cussed out. The teacher admitted. He said he was having a bad day. We had to

meet with the teacher. Yeah. The teacher admitted it. He said he was having a bad day, he apologized, said it was out of character for him.

After learning of the incident, the mother decided to take action to make her concerns known:

I called the principal, assistant principal and told 'em my concerns. I said, "Y'all tried to hide this and it's not gonna go further." So I met with the superintendent and it went there. I went to the superintendent. At first they gave me the runaround. I had to move the meeting with the superintendent.

The mother demonstrated her willingness to advocate for her son. She was troubled by the actions of the teacher. The parent revealed during the interview that her son's teacher had a history of altercations with students. This mother was more frustrated with the school system and their response. She believed that school administrators did not protect her son:

And you called to have my son escorted out of school? So I'm still hurt by that. Nobody protected my son and they swept that under the rug. And had I not found that disciplinary notice, I would have never known.

Another mother shared her experiences with a teacher:

But see, in the second grade, a teacher told Josh that he would never be anybody, that he would never read or write, um, he probably sell drugs on the street. And she actually told me to my face that she actually felt sorry for me at home. And that's when I told them that they needed to take the child out of the room right now, so I had to clean up a little bit of stuff and let her know that my day on Saturday started before she got up out of the bed, that you know, he was in swimming classes, he was doing basketball, and we go to church on Sunday, so don't tell me that he can't sit still. So don't tell me what he going to be, 'cause you don't know what the future holds.

The mothers also demonstrated that even though they were frustrated with some of the schooling experiences, they did not acquiesce to the system. They turned to advocating for their children. In many circumstances, the mothers understood the context of how Black boys are treated in the school district:

I advocate for my child. I attend all those IEP meetings because I know about special education—that's what I worked in when I worked in the school system. And you know, being that he's a Black child, Black boy, I know how they try to put our kids in special ed and you know, from my older son, when we was in Addison County schools, it was just a mess, and you know, I vowed that I'm not going to let that

happen to my boys. You know, you put my boys in special ed and they always have that label. I refuse to let that happen. You know, I wish other parents would know what it details when your child is in special ed and I feel like somebody should explain it to them a little more than what they get from the teachers because some of them just really don't know.

Another mother shared her experience of working in the school district and the ways in which race played out:

Yeah. But when the Black kids did it, it was a big issue. They wanted everything to be mailed out; they wanted the parent was notified right then and there. It was not sweeping up anything under the rug. So that experience, it taught me a valuable experience of how to handle my son in Addison schools— so I said I'm gonna be an advocate for my son, I'm gonna be very supportive of my son and my daughter because I see how Addison schools do this. If you're not a supportive parent, they will tear your child apart. And that's the truth. If you don't support your child, advocate for your child, they will tear your child apart. I am serious.

In addition to the mothers having a critique of the school system, the mothers also believed that mentoring required a level of commitment from those who signed up. The mothers felt strongly that mentoring was a strong responsibility and that if the mentor could not commit to the responsibility, it was better not to sign up:

And so they will commit to being a mentor but then during the time reality is they don't have the time to actually be a mentor, so the kid don't get to see them as much as you would like them to see 'em.

This narrative appeared repeatedly. Many of the mothers felt disappointed that mentors would start out strong in the program and then fall off; “So now, the only downfall with the program is sometimes you can get a mentor who doesn't realize how busy they are.”

Much of the concern from the mothers came from wanting to protect their children. Mothers indicated that they are single parents, so that their children didn't see their fathers. Their family circumstances created concern about multiple people being left out of their children's lives:

But he's got Daddy . . . it's from his father. He's going through . . . he's growing up and he's talking about his dad and then he was talking about a former boyfriend of mine and then he was talking about his mentor. So it kind of started with his dad, you know, "Guys don't stick around" or something. And so I hate that feeling. I mean, he understands that the first mentor had to go off to medical school and to the mentor, um, and so he's okay with that. But it bothers him and he . . . again, he just . . . I was like, "Call him. Say 'hey.' You need to." He was like, "I'm not gonna do that."

The mother felt that her son was disappointed that communication had fallen off. The mother encouraged her son to get back in communication with the mentor.

This failing of his mentor affected the child, but the larger point is that the contingency a mentor created by failing to live up to his commitments was related to the larger efforts in which the mothers were engaged. They were fighting racial oppression and a school system that perpetuated it in special education, discipline, and instructional practices. They were fighting all this with what they could. They sought out all the social capital they could through the mentoring program. They developed social support and social leverage in the process. They had to do this by themselves and in face of systemic racism. The mothers valued the mentoring program for what it provided but, maybe more importantly, for what the Black mothers could do with it. The school system, even after reading the evaluation report, never understood what Black parents do. The school system never recognized what a resource they had in these mothers and thus could not imagine what the system could do with them and their capabilities.

Summary

This analysis revealed the ways in which Black mothers generate social capital for their children. It should be noted that this work considers the mothers' participation in ways that have not been explored before. The mothers are coming to mentoring in this school district after having frustrating experiences with White supremacist notions of schooling. The

mothers attempt to secure social support systems as a direct response to trying to generate social mobility. The mothers want their children to have “successful lives” in the context of a society where education is viewed as the way to secure success. The mothers seek strong ties with mentors and program staff, relationships they are able to leverage to secure social capital. Though this process occurs at the individual level, mothers are creating these networks for their children to secure successful futures.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The aim of the research was to determine how the mothers in the Gold Medal mentoring program created social capital. With this in mind, I examined how they develop social support and social leverage to help their children through resources the mentoring program provides. The research questions that guided the project were as follows:

1. What roles do Black parents play in mentoring relationships?
2. What are parents' perspectives on mentoring, mentors, and the mentoring program?
3. What aspects of this school-based mentoring program contributed to its sustained relationship with parents?
4. How is social capital implicated in the parents' relation to the mentoring program?
5. What are the implications of the relationships for the future of school-based mentoring?

My analysis addressed these questions, and in addition, the research provided insight into concepts I had not considered prior to this research. My intent with this research was to take a closer look at the mothers and their experiences. Although I was familiar with this work from being on the initial evaluation team, taking a closer look at the mothers' interviews offered a different perspective on mothers of color in youth mentoring programs. To begin this discussion, I share how the data analysis answered the initial research questions.

Following this, I demonstrate how the data revealed interesting concepts not considered prior to project beginning. I then provide conclusions for this work and close with a discussion of limitations and recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

The research began with five questions that guided this dissertation project. To answer them, I analyzed qualitative data drawn from two evaluation studies of the Gold Medal mentoring program. The first question asked: What roles do Black parents play in mentoring relationships? Through my analysis, I was able to understand that mothers can play different roles in the mentoring relationship. The initial role is signing up their children for the program—initiating program involvement. The data showed that the process of signing a child up for the program involves a number of factors. One factor is resulting frustration with practices in the school system. My initial thought was that the parents were signing up their children to obtain academic support. While in some cases this was true, once their children were enrolled, my analysis revealed that mothers spoke of frustrations that occurred early in their children’s schooling. The frustrations were from misdiagnosis of learning and behavioral issues.

In addition, mothers signed their children up to seek Black male mentorship. This leads to a second role Black mothers play in the mentoring relationship: advocating for their children. The mothers in this study discussed how they would advocate for their children within the mentoring relationship and through the use the mentor and the program staff and resources. This form of advocating involved finding and securing the type of mentor they felt was best for their children. Some mothers discussed wanting to have a Black male mentor. They believed, in cases where fathers were not present, that having a Black male mentor

would give a child access to knowledge his mother could not provide on her own— knowledge of Black men who had succeeded against the odds. In cases where mentors were assigned, and they were not working out, the mothers indicated that they contacted the mentor program staff to advocate for another mentor. The mothers also provided a critique of those who signed up and did not take their schedules into consideration prior to enrolling.

Another role that mothers played was going beyond the mentoring aspect of the program and networking with program staff to be able to leverage a social support network and facilitate access to academic support and insider knowledge. Many of the mothers discussed not having the financial resources to afford tutoring, and thus they valued the resources the program provided.

The second research question asked: What are parents' perspectives on mentoring, mentors, and the mentoring program? The mothers considered mentoring to be quite important to their children's development. One mother felt that her life would have been different if her mother had had access to mentoring. Mothers also found that mentors were important to their children and their children's experiences in the community. One mother valued the mentor so much that she was hopeful that her child and the mentor would remain friends beyond her son's graduation. Many of the mothers indicated that the program was so valuable that they hoped the people knew how important the program was. Other mothers felt the program was so valuable that they wanted to share it with others or get many of their friends involved. Mothers also valued the program staff. The mothers felt the staff cared for them and their children and that their level of caring made a difference to children's and mothers' experiences within the program and the school system at large. Last, the mothers found that the mentoring program was not making their children's lives "better," as they felt

their children already had good lives. Rather, they felt the mentoring program added to their children's otherwise good lives.

The next research question asked: What aspects of this school-based mentoring program contributed to its sustained relationship with parents? One of the keys to maintaining the relationship was mentors being viewed as members of the family. The data showed that mothers want to see mentors as members of their families. However, this connection was only identified after trust was established and both parties had demonstrated a level of respect. Mothers discussed being involved with the mentors' families outside of the one-to-one mentoring process. Some mothers discussed being involved with mentors' families, attending weddings and so on. The other aspect discussed concerned mentors who demonstrated a level of commitment from the initial formation. Students in this program enter at fourth grade and, according to the mothers interviewed, many of the students had the same mentor from the beginning. Mothers attributed dissolving relationships to mentors not being patient with their children or to mentors not realizing the time commitment required of mentors. One mother believed that in the cross-race relationship, the mentor may have not been as patient with her Black son as he would have been if the child were White. Thus race and racial awareness and sensitivity were important in sustaining a mentoring relationship.

The next question addressed asked: How is social capital implicated in the parent's relation to the mentoring program? As Brigg conceptualized, social capital is generated at the individual level. Social support is sought from institutional networks (mentoring program) and, through strong ties, bridges into social leverage. This seems applicable in this case of mentoring. Mothers sought social support from the youth mentoring program; over time, strong ties were formed with mentors and mentoring staff. It is through these strong ties with

program staff and mentors that bridges were built to allow for social leverage. Social leverage secured opportunities for the children, such as academic support, scholarships, cultural outings, and networking. The social leverage also allowed for one mother to have the mentor program director assist her with securing local government employment. The mothers in this study knew the value of the program so that they actively sought to maintain relationships with the program staff. In one case, a mother described the program as unable to match her son with a second mentor for a year, but despite not having a mentor, the mother made sure her son was involved in the other aspects of the program.

The last research question asked: What are the implications of the relationships for the future of school-based mentoring? While I will discuss this further in the future research section, its important to note here that the mothers' voices provide context for future consideration. The initial evaluation was carried out to understand social mobility in youth mentoring. The follow-up study was meant to gain an understanding of dosage, or how much mentoring was needed to be successful. However, neither one of the evaluations examined only the experiences of Black mothers. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by understanding how Black parents were involved. The mothers in this study showed that they want to be involved and are involved in the lives of their children, in their children's schooling, and in the mentoring program. I suggest school-based mentoring consider the ways in which this work demonstrates that Black mothers are using mentoring in intentional ways. In addition, I suggest that school-based mentoring understand the context in which they are an opportunity (as well as a service) for Black parents to seek social capital. While mentoring has been implemented in this case to address academic achievement, the

mothers addressed issues of inequality that were a result of teachers' and administrators' beliefs and schooling practices that disadvantaged their children.

Conclusions

I came to this project 3 years ago. Over time I got to know the program intimately. My involvement with the program started with spending considerable time with the director of the program. I asked him many questions. His knowledge of the program was detailed, and he knew all of the students. If I asked him about a specific student, he could recall the entire situation regarding the student. Much of our early interactions were around examining the files of all the students in the program. Many of the files included notes from mentors discussing the one-to-one meetings. The notes would include having mentees do chores around the mentors' houses. Some of the notes reflected deficit thinking about youths of color. It was shocking to see that one of the notes had recommendations for how the student needed to sit in his chair at school.

My understanding of the program also came from interactions with an African American staff member. Many of our conversations were about the local school district and community. I was able to gain a better understanding of the history of the area and the program, especially from the perspective of an African American woman. I also spent a lot of time interviewing mentors of the program. Many of the mentors discussed how they came to the program. Many mentioned how coming to the program allowed them the chance to "re-parent" and/or to practice parenting. The mentors saw themselves in a parenting role. The interviews with the mentors made me think of the actual parents. Did they see a mentor as a second parent to their child? Did the mentor think that he was a second parent to the child because the child's parents were not performing their role as well as the mentor thought they

should? It was later in the process of the evaluation that I met with the parents. When I had the opportunity to interview them, I could hear in their voices concern for their children and their attempt to do the very best they could.

In our evaluation, we wanted to find if mentoring led to social mobility and, for the follow-up study, how much mentoring was needed to see an impact. However, in our first evaluation, we did not consider what the parents brought to the relationship or what it was they wanted out of the mentoring program. We did think about what parents wanted for their children, however, the study was not explicitly about parents. The study was about mentors and how they create opportunity for social mobility for mentees. While we did see areas of social mobility for the mentees, absent in both our evaluation and the literature are the ways in which the social capital is generated by the parents.

It is clear now that we should give more credit to parents for enrolling their children in mentoring programs. My results demonstrate that social capital is generated through this initial action and then later leveraged to generate potential social mobility. The implications of my study suggest that there is room for a closer look at the parent's role in the mentoring relationship. By including parents as the focus of mentoring research, programs can build the capacity for stronger relationships. In addition, research that aims to look closely at parents' experiences with mentoring programs can further calls for continued research in this area — as outlined by the work of Spencer et al. (2011). In my research, trust was established in the mentoring relationship and “strong ties” were formed. This supported Spencer et al.'s findings that parents experience trust when mentors show (a) clear commitment, (b) genuine positive regard for their child, and (c) respect for parental guidelines. The researchers pointed out from their work,

...parents may play a significant but, to date, largely unnoted role in youth mentoring relationships. All of these parents were active participants in their child's relationship, whether by teaming up with the mentor in an effort to address specific concerns or running interference behind the scenes when the mentor fell out of touch or behaved in ways the child had difficulty understanding. (p. 57)

Conversely, in one research study, program staff believed that "a parent can make or break a match" (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014, p. 77). This study interviewed staff of BBBSA mentoring programs, and the researchers of this study suggest the following:

Further in light of the considerable diversity among the youth and families served by mentoring programs nationally, it will be important to consider the role that culture plays in the implementation and effectiveness of family involvement practices among different ethnic and cultural groups. (p. 81)

In summary, the findings of my study of the Gold Medal mentoring program do support Briggs's theoretical framework of how mothers generate social capital by establishing strong ties in mentoring relationships, thus enacting social leverage. Once mothers felt trust had been established, they were able to create strong ties. The strong ties within these mothers' experiences were explained as a feeling of family with the mentor, seeking advice from the mentor, and being involved in mentors' family events. The mentoring relationship was also described as successful when the mothers felt the mentors were invested in committing time to their children. It is important to note that while this is a mentoring program, the program also included several program elements such as mentoring, social and cultural outings, and scholarships. As found in Dominguez and Watkins (2003), the leverage Latina and African American women, created often yielded jobs, financial support, and child care. My study also found that the mentoring relationship yields an opportunity for leverage. This leverage, I would argue, involves mothers generating social capital under the contingencies of systemic racial oppression in the school system and society. The desire, here often described by the mothers as Black male mentorship, academic

support, and exposure to cultural and social outings, is an expression of what they see as needed to navigate White supremacy. This finding suggests that there should be more research on the ways in which parents have been marginalized by school systems and a racialized society and how these same parents are active agents in addressing the oppression they and their children experience.

Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be noted. The data for this study were gathered from secondary data analysis of a larger evaluation study. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the study participants, but generalizability is not expected of qualitative studies anyway.

The mothers represented in this study are mothers who are involved in the mentoring process. These mothers participated in this study, and while their perspectives offer us a way to understand mentoring differently, this study does not reflect the experiences of mothers who are not involved in mentoring. The research also only reflects the experiences of one mother whose daughter is in college, I would suggest gathering data from more families with children in post mentoring relationships to collect reflective experiences. In addition, the Gold Medal mentoring program is somewhat unique, and thus the findings are limited to this context. Finally, this study took place just as issues of race and the role of parents were beginning to be explored in earnest in the mentoring literature. This means that this study is part of an intellectual baseline for future research. It is hoped that what was discovered here will be but one of the initial steps mentoring researchers will take toward seeing these issues as fundamental to understanding mentoring as a social phenomenon.

Recommendations for Future Research

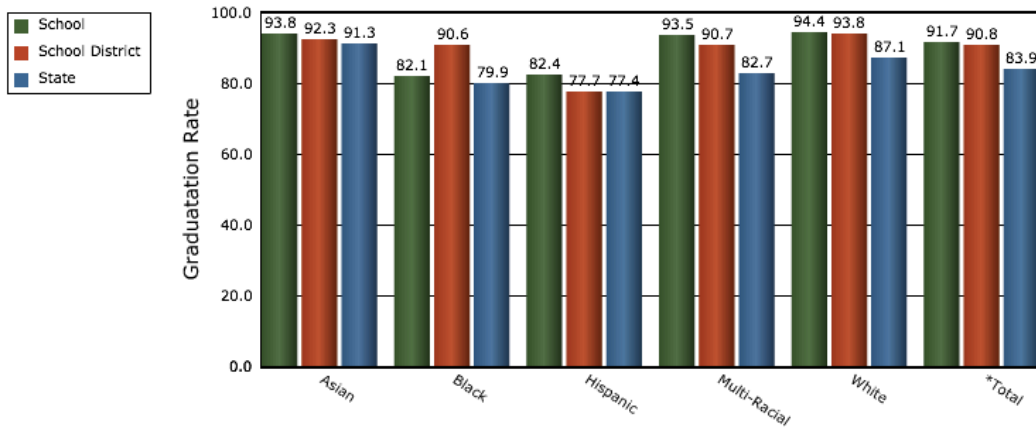
This dissertation project takes a look at the voices of Black mothers with children in youth mentoring. It is important to include the voice of the parents as the perspectives of parents are often left out of mentoring research. To build on this current work, I propose several directions for future research. While this research includes Black mothers, I think it is important to include the voices of other marginalized groups, such as Latina mothers. Latino and Black students are enrolled in mentoring programs, and the experiences of all of their parents are needed.

I also recommend that future research consider the lessons learned from this project, including considering the context of schooling experiences as central to the reason parents seek out mentoring programs. Similarly, existing mentoring programs tend to view themselves rather narrowly as a social service delivered to children in need. This study suggests that mentoring programs should also be considered as sites of possibility. There is much more going on than an adult–child pairing, and a full understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of mentoring requires seeing the possibilities expansively. Relatedly, I suggest that future research consider the myriad ways in which parents participate in the mentoring process.

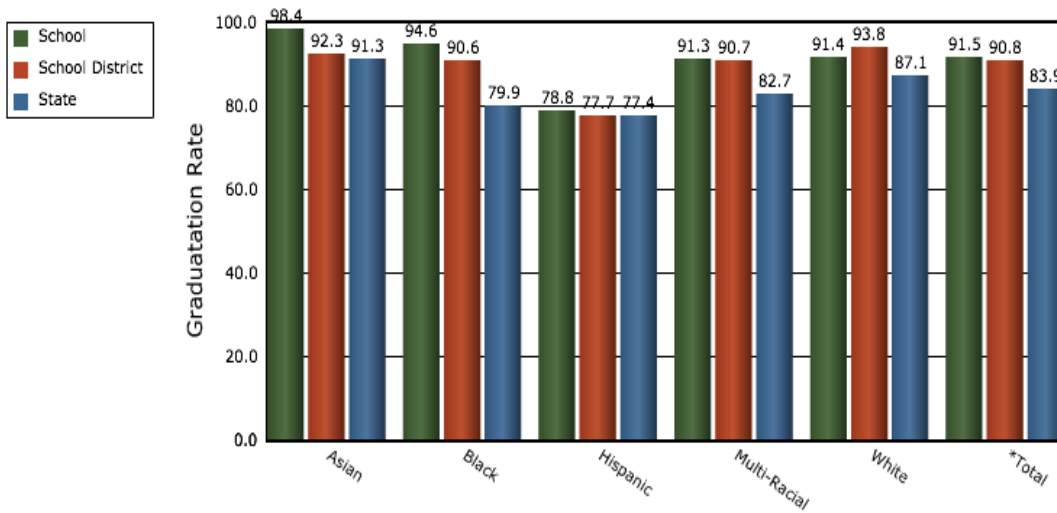
Finally, my study benefited from using social theory addressing social capital. I would argue that mentoring is under theorized and that future studies should explore social, cultural, and economic capital theory more fully (Bourdieu, 1977). Yosso's (2005) expansion of this theory into a theory of community commonwealth seems especially promising given how the mothers in this study used the mentoring program to advance their own views of parenting, childrearing, and navigating a racialized society.

APPENDIX A: FOUR-YEAR SCHOOL COHORT GRADUATION RATE BY
ETHNICITY FOR ADDISON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Pinewood High School



Riverbank High



* The North Carolina Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate reflects the percentage of ninth graders (their cohort) who graduated from high school 4 years later. Data below illustrate the

Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate broken down by student group. The data include students who transferred into the school minus students who transferred out of the school. In a student group where the number of students in the denominator is too small (fewer than five), a blank cell is displayed.

APPENDIX B: Gold Medal PARENT OF MENTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.

As you read in the consent form, we will not reveal who says what to the Gold Medal.

As you indicated, I will only take notes, not audiotape this interview.

OR

As you indicated, I will audiotape this interview, but you can ask that I turn it off at any time.

1. What is Gold Medal to you? How did your family come to be involved in Gold Medal? What attracted you about it? What was your thinking at the time?
2. Tell me about your child (or children) who have been part of Gold Medal. What has school been like for your child? (If more than one child has been part of Gold Medal, do each one individually.)
3. Tell me about all your involvements with Gold Medal? (Probes: Interactions with staff, summer camps, retreats, parent training, middle school transition workshop, individual meeting on high school transition, “give back” orientations)
4. Tell me about your child’s mentor. (If more than one child has been part of Gold Medal, do each one individually.) Has there been more than one mentor? If so, then tell me about each. Tell me about changing mentors.
5. Describe your child’s relationship with the mentor(s). (If more than one child has been part of Gold Medal, do each one individually.) What did you think the relationship would be like? What has it become? What sorts of things do they do together? What has worked well about the relationship? Describe any “rough spots”

- in the relationship. How has the relationship changed over time? What would your child and your child's mentor say about each other?
6. Describe your relationship with the mentor(s). (If more than one child has been part of Gold Medal and/or if there has been more than one mentor per child, do each one individually.) How do you get along? What sorts of things do you do with the mentor? Describe any "rough spots" in the relationship. How has the relationship changed over time? What do you think the mentor has learned from you? What was your role in the child-mentor relationship?
 7. Race is a key issue in our society. How has it affected your child's relationship(s) with mentor(s)? How has it affected your relationship(s) with mentor(s)? Tell me about times you have discussed racial and/or gender issues with the mentor and/or your child related to the mentor and mentoring relationship.
 8. Gold Medal hopes that mentoring will help your child do better in life. What evidence do you see of this, if any? How has Gold Medal and/or the mentor(s) helped your child navigate school, education in general, the community, the wider society, work (if appropriate)? Who has your child met and/or come to know that may not have happened without the program? How did these come to be?
 9. When do you feel comfortable standing up for your child with the mentor? Tell me about times you and Gold Medal have stood up together for your child. Tell me some times the mentor stood up for your child. Tell me some times when you would have liked for Gold Medal and/or the mentor to stand with you for your child.
 10. What is particularly important for him or her to do, to believe, to know, and to value? (Probes: aspirations, navigating social institutions, resisting inequitable treatment,

- multiple speaking styles, connections to specific people, connections with family)
- How have you worked toward these with your child? How does race play into this?
11. What should education be about for your child? What is the reality of education for your child? Have there been instances when your preparation of your child has conflicted with what schools are doing, what Gold Medal has done, or what the mentor(s) is (are) doing? Please explain.
 12. What are your goals for your child? What role, if any, has Gold Medal played in meeting those goals, and/or your mentor played in these goals?
 13. How have you influenced Gold Medal?
 14. What would you change about Gold Medal? Are there any messages (without telling who said them, of course) you would like the research team to share with mentors, your family, the Gold Medal program, schools, and/or others?
 15. What should I have asked that I did not? Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Any final thoughts on the program and/or what we talked about in this interview?

Thank you for sharing so much with me. We will use what you have told me to help the Gold Medal improve.

APPENDIX C: MODIFIED GOLD MEDAL PARENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.

As you read in the consent form, we will not reveal who says what to the Gold Medal.

As you indicated, I will only take notes, not audiotape this interview.

As you indicated, I will audiotape this interview, but you can ask that I turn it off at any time.

1. What is Gold Medal to you? How did your family come to be involved in Gold Medal? What attracted you about it? What was your thinking at the time? (Probe: How did you think Gold Medal could assist with what you already do as a parent? Probe: Has your thinking on Gold Medal changed over time? How so? Why not?)
2. Tell me about your child (or children) who have been part of Gold Medal. What has school been like for your child? Probe: experiences in classes? With teachers/administration? With schooling? With classmates? Ask for stories throughout different grades and ages. (If more than one child has been part of Gold Medal, do each one individually.)
3. Tell me about all your involvements with Gold Medal? (Probes: Interactions with staff, summer camps, retreats, parent training, parent university, middle school transition workshop, individual meeting on high school transition, “give back” orientations)
4. Tell me about your child’s (or children’s) involvements with Gold Medal. ? (Check each: Mentoring; Youth leadership programming; Tutoring and instructional support; Parent involvement and development; Advocating for Gold Medal students within

- school district; College and career exposure; Social and cultural enrichment; Educational programs; Visiting colleges and other postsecondary education institutions; Service programs for local, national, and international groups; Economic resources for extracurricular, summer, and postsecondary programs) (Probe: How do these involvements help with your overall goals for your child/children?)
5. For each involvement in #4, what was it about and what did your child (children) get from it?
 6. Which involvements were the most important for your child (children)? In what ways?
 7. What is it like to interact with Whites/Anglos? Is this different in Gold Medal activities? Which ones and how so? (Probe: As a person of color (Latina/o, specify ethnicity/nationality), what is it like to work with White people? What is it like to have them work with your child? What is your relationship with the mentor/staff like? Your child's? Has it changed over time? How? Probe: Trust)
 8. What more could Gold Medal do? (Probe: For your child? For your family? For the community/school?)

Thank you for sharing so much with me. We will use what you have told me to help the Gold Medal improve.

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