A NARRATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG BLACK WOMEN

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

BY

ALICIA NICOLE COOPER DENTON

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. MICHELLE GLOWACKI-DUDKA

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2023

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for Young Black Women

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This study sought to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. Due to the unique challenges that Black women face regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, they are in need of mentorship programs to overcome these challenges. The Critical Race Feminist Theory was the theoretical framework for this study. This qualitative study included the narratives of five Black women between the ages of 23 and 33 years old, who grew up in a working-class family and are former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program. These narratives were collected by utilizing the life history approach to narrative research and semi-structured virtual interviews to better understand how the "Ruby" mentorship program affected them as they were transitioning into adulthood as Black adolescent females. This study answered the research questions: (1) What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females? (2) How does the "Ruby" mentorship program support and prepare Black adolescent females for higher education degrees? (3) How does the "Ruby" mentorship program assist Black adolescent females with transitioning into adulthood? (4) How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females? The examination of the data and thematic analysis of the participants' narratives

showed the emergence of three themes that included: hardships, self-identity, and perseverance and six sub-themes that included: financial, environmental, educational, empowerment, support system, and a way out. The study's findings revealed that the perceived benefits of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females was finding a sense of self, empowerment, peer and mentor support, hope, and guidance. The study's findings also revealed that the "Ruby" mentorship program supported and prepared Black adolescent females for higher education and adulthood by educating them with state approved curriculum and being positive role models for them. The study's findings also revealed that socioeconomic status indeed influences the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females due to the lack of funding and resources invested in under-resourced urban areas. The study demonstrated that Black adolescent females who lived in under-resourced urban areas had low self-esteem and felt hopeless and alone prior to joining the "Ruby" mentorship program and that they needed this program to thrive and change their outlook on life.

Keywords: Black adolescent females, adolescents, mentorship, mentorship for Black girls, Black girls, lower class socioeconomic status, intersectionality, critical race feminist theory, Black feminism

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my beautiful mother, August, my late great-grandmother, Vernetta (Grannie To-To), and my late grandmother Mandy (Grandma Cooper).

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

I Can and I Will

I body of a woman

Vow to carry courage when fear comes

I will turn my struggles into triumphs

I will turn my wounds into power

After every fall I will rise like every sun I see

I am divine and filled with resilience

No challenge is too great for me

I am strong and worthy

I will find and speak my truth even if my voice shakes

I can and will fulfill my dreams

I can and will reject anything that says otherwise

Jaynese Poole (2017)

I grew up in a working-class family on the southside of Chicago. My mother was a single mother, and we had limited resources pertaining to food, clothing, and housing. Our housing conditions were poor, and our neighborhood was riddled with shootings and gang violence which contributed to the limited resources in our impoverished community. It was unsafe for children to play outside in front of their own homes due to the fear of being shot or robbed. The only resources that we had in our community was the “Neighborhood Watch” group that watched the

happenings of the neighborhood from their windows while calling the police to report any acts of violence in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood watch advised the children in our neighborhood to lay down on the ground quickly should the gang members start shooting to ensure that we would not be harmed by stray bullets. All of the children in the neighborhood including myself took heed to their advice without hesitation. It was normal for us to lay down on the ground when shots rang out and it was normal for us to play on the floor away from the windows once it got dark outside to avoid stray bullets. Most of us had roaches and rats in our homes, and we never envisioned that life could be different for us if our parents had the opportunity to earn more money.

The predominantly Black elementary school that I attended was also negatively affected by gang violence. At eight and nine years old, I distinctly remember walking through metal detectors at school and having to carry a clear (see-through) backpack to school because the older students were bringing weapons to school. This under-resourced urban area greatly affected my access to a quality education due to school funding. Despite the lack of school funding our principal, who was a Black woman, ensured that our school had programs to help positively influence the future outcomes of the youth.

The mentorship program that really made a positive impact on me was the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program. The director of this program was a Black male police officer. He mentored us about self-awareness and told us memorable stories about the dangers of drugs and alcohol usage. He also encouraged us to not give in to peer pressure.

This program was very significant to the students because most of us lived in impoverished neighborhoods and saw the negative effects of drugs, alcohol, violence, and peer pressure firsthand. This program helped me to understand the dangers of giving into peer

pressure despite my environment and made me want to strive to be better than what I witnessed in my neighborhood. The lessons acquired from this mentorship program would stay with me all throughout my life and educational journey. Being educated on the effects of drugs at an early age helped me learn the importance of saying no and not being ashamed of advocating for myself. I was privileged to see Black men and women in positions of power at my elementary school, and I aspired to make a difference in my community as well.

Early on in my academic journey, I began to see how intersectionality negatively affected me and my academic journey as a young Black girl living on the southside of Chicago. However, I did not know this until I transferred to a predominantly White elementary school in Northwest Indiana in the 5th grade. The curriculum difference was very noticeable, and I often felt behind regarding the new curriculum that I was being taught. On the other hand, my new school had access to the newest technology and educational resources. I no longer lived in fear of being shot in my neighborhood, and we no longer lived in poverty.

However, I had new challenges to confront which included being a young Black girl at a predominantly White school battling a poverty mindset. A poverty mindset is one that influences behaviors that are consistent with feeling undeserving and hypercritical of themselves, being distracted, and overly focused on their insufficient resources (Shafir, 2017). This cycle of imposter syndrome would continue as I moved at least two more times from Illinois to Northwest Indiana throughout my educational journey.

Abdelaal (2020) explained, “Imposter syndrome is defined as feeling like a fraud among equally skilled colleagues and the denial of one’s accomplishments” (p. 62). The predominantly White elementary school did not have any mentorship programs for the youth. I did not feel that I could relate to anyone at my school because we had nothing in common, since I came from a

working-class family and most of the students at my new school were from a middle and upper class family. Once again, those feelings of imposter syndrome and my poverty mindset created challenges for me regarding my education.

As a teenager, I attended two different high schools. For my freshman and sophomore year of high school (HS), I attended a predominantly Black HS in an Illinois suburb. For my junior and senior year of high school, I attended a predominantly White HS in Northwest Indiana. During those four years of high school, I began to see the differences in curriculum and academic assistance regarding the two high schools.

At the predominantly Black HS I felt that the school was invested in the success of their Black students. They had several clubs that encouraged academic achievement and student wellness for Black students and opportunities for students to gain college credit at a local community college. I instantly felt a sense of belonging as I began to develop my self-identity, but at the end of my sophomore year my family again relocated from Illinois to Northwest Indiana. The move from Illinois to Indiana resulted in me having to transfer to a new high school.

In just one month, I transitioned from being the majority at the predominantly Black HS to becoming a minority at my new predominantly White HS. The difference in curriculum and academic investment instantly became painfully evident as I learned to transition to the new high school. Making friends was not the issue as I moved back to Indiana, where I had previously spent two years of grade school and two years of middle school. Nevertheless, everything changed academically. I went from making the honor roll to receiving failing grades on my report card.

In Illinois, we were not required to pass a standardized test in order to graduate from high school, but Indiana required that all students pass the ISTEP standardized test in order to graduate high school. Being an honor roll student was not the only factor to graduate from high school; if a student did not pass the ISTEP, they could not graduate.

The curriculum covered in class at the predominantly White HS was more advanced than at the school in Illinois. The curriculum difference was noticeable and greatly impacted my success at the Indiana HS. There were only about ten Black students in my grade level when I started my junior year. Being a minority in the school population, I began to feel that I lacked intelligence to attend this high school, which contributed to my feelings of imposter syndrome and low self-esteem.

At the predominantly White HS, I began to notice that they invested a lot of their resources on their honor students. Most of the honors students were White students who had the financial means to ensure that they received the best educational opportunities. My new academic advisor was uneducated on how to help working- and middle-class Black students receive the academic resources that they needed to successfully navigate high school. It became my responsibility to ensure that I advocated for my education.

At the predominantly White HS, I found that there were no clubs or activities that gave Black students a sense of belonging. Instead, the Black students were integrated into the traditional practices of the high school that catered to White students. There were no mentors or mentorship programs offered to Black students, especially Black adolescent female students. The Black adolescent male students were able to easily adjust to the environment at the predominantly White HS better than the Black adolescent female students because they had

sports to rely on and playing sports could turn into scholarship opportunities for them if they were talented enough.

The Black adolescent female students were the unseen population at the predominantly White HS. My hometown in Northwest Indiana also lacked community programs or resources to help their Black residents. I never knew that Black mentorship programs existed for Black adolescent females until my close friend joined "Onyx," a mentorship program created by a prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization. "Onyx" was not offered in our hometown; instead, my friend had to travel to a nearby city to join this particular organization.

My friend invited me to a few events hosted by "Onyx," and it seemed that this HS mentoring program was dedicated to mentoring Black adolescent females. This mentorship program was created to help young women receive the resources and the support that they needed to navigate to college successfully. They focused especially on helping Black adolescent females grow into community leaders while building their self-esteem.

Mentorship is a relationship between a person with more experience and person with less experience in which the more experienced individual empowers the less experienced individual to see the potential within themselves by coaching and guiding them as they obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be successful (Rocco et al., 2020). Tait (2003) defined the word mentor as a trusted counselor or guide. Mentors help their mentees strategize and implement a plan for success. Tait (2003) explained,

> At various points in our lives, we all identify and seek to learn from, and often emulate, our mentors. They become models for the development of proper problem solving and decision-making techniques, the demonstration of technical skills, developing interpersonal abilities, and providing personal guidance. (p. 758)

Often, HS academic advisors assume the role of a mentor as they help students create an academic plan to reach the next grade level and or graduate. According to Slicker and Palmer (1993), "The mentor serves as teacher, advisor, and sponsor who encourages, praises, and prods bolstering the mentee's sense of competence and self-concept" (p. 327). Beyond school counselors, there are community mentorship programs to help assist adolescents as well. Some of these organizations include Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Black Greek Letter Organizations, Jack and Jill of America, Inc., The Links, and many others.

Background of the Problem

"A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside of yourself." -Oprah Winfrey

Mentors are essential for adolescents to be successful in school at all levels. Early mentorship programs support an academic orientation and success for elementary and middle school students, but especially for high school students as they progress to college (Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Fruiht and Wray-Lake (2013) explained "Among high school students, mentoring positively predicts academic success and college attendance" (p. 1460). High school is where adolescents learn, prepare for college, and strategize their plans for the future with the assistance of teachers and other mentors. Adolescence is a pivotal stage of development regarding young women and young men (Leath et al., 2019).

At the adolescent stage, young women and men are developing a sense of self-identity and morality that guides them into adulthood. The adolescents begin to discover what type of person they are and what type of person they wish to be (Leath et al., 2019). This is a very influential time in their lives and having a mentor can help them transition into adulthood with ease. According to Leath et al. (2019),

> Adolescence is a critical period for identity development. Youth are developing a sense of their personal identities in relation to their social contexts and their interactions within them—often becoming more conscious of how their social identities relate to the ways they are viewed and treated by others. For many African American adolescents, racial identity becomes increasingly salient as youth consider the implications of their racial group membership in their daily lives and in the broader society. (p. 1319)

Mentorship is crucial to the success of adolescents, yet Black adolescent females who come from working-class backgrounds may struggle within their school systems and need assistance with obtaining the educational resources that they need to overcome the challenges of intersectionality. Bryant (2015) observed that "Deficit thinking dominates the discussion about college readiness for African American students. Lack of academic achievement for African American students is often attributed to environmental and cultural differences that impact school performance, families, and communities" (p. 1).

Ideally, mentorship should consist of the mentor identifying the specific needs of the mentee and helping them find the resources that they need within their communities to navigate to overcome the challenges of intersectionality. However, Black women are overlooked and plagued by racialized discrimination and high rates of racially biased treatment (Wittrup et al., 2016). Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) concluded, "Because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., African American girls are in multiple jeopardy of race, class and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions" (p. 13). Overcoming the intersectional bias continues to be a challenge for Black women regarding their academic success.

Black adolescent females can benefit from mentorship programs that address the unique challenges of intersectionality that challenge their ability to be successful academically and

economically. The school resources for Black adolescent females who come from working-class backgrounds do not account for their needs as a student with respect to their home life (Bryant, 2015). Their home life is significant as it impacts their academic performance. If mentors do not acknowledge their unique needs, Black adolescent females will continue to underperform academically in school and be subjected to the challenges associated with the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

“Ruby” Mentorship Program

“Ruby” is another mentorship program created by another prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization. They provide mentorship to Black adolescent females within their communities who come from working-class backgrounds to help ensure that they have the knowledge and resources to transition effectively into adulthood and by obtaining the necessary academic resources that promote the education and career advancement of Black adolescent females. “Ruby” promotes academic excellence and personal development. “Ruby” believes in building their communities and improving the holistic well-being of their mentees (Ruby, 2019).

The ”Ruby” mentorship program was developed in the 1970’s by a prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization who believed in assisting Black adolescent females from working-class backgrounds with finding the strength within themselves. This program connects mentors with Black adolescent females between the ages of 14 to 18 years old. The “Ruby” mentorship program educates Black adolescent females with the use of their state approved educational curriculum. This curriculum includes college and career preparation, mental and physical health education, social responsibility, personal development, leadership, and information literacy (Ruby, 2019).

The topics covered in these mentorship sessions are presented in a group setting to promote peer interaction and positive interpersonal skill development. The peers and mentors engage in open discussions regarding the presented material to encourage critical thinking and problem solving skills. The curriculum for the "Ruby" mentorship program is reviewed and approved by the risk management team. The risk management team then trains the mentors on how to present the curriculum to the mentees and how to ensure that they are following the organization handbook regarding mentor-mentee social interactions (Ruby, 2019).

The mentees are recruited by members of the Black female Greek Letter Organization through social media, flyers, and by word of mouth. The parents and guardians of the prospective mentees must attend an information session to learn more about the mentorship program and provide verbal and written consent for their adolescent to participate in the program. The prospective mentors are not required to be a member of the Black female Greek Letter Organization (Ruby, 2019).

The mentors must be at least 18 years or older and they must undergo a city and state level background check to ensure that they do not have any prior offenses regarding violent offenses or violence towards children. Anyone who is found with any prior violent convictions are not permitted to serve as a mentor to the 'Ruby" mentees (Ruby, 2019). All mentors must attend the required mentorship training sessions, or they will not be permitted to be a mentor within the program. In the past mentorship training sessions were done in person on a weekly basis, but since the development of Covid-19 the program has shifted to weekly online mentorship sessions (Ruby, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Black women encounter unique challenges regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status that negatively affect their access to educational resources (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The challenges of intersectionality negatively affect Black women in various aspects of their lives (Nash, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Black women experience lower earnings and limited job opportunities as a result of their encounters with intersectionality (Patton et al., 2016).

Black adolescent females from working-class backgrounds are not receiving the academic resources that they need for college preparation (Jeffrey & Jimenez, 2021). They also may not have access to community resources or programs that encourage Black adolescent females to go to college and encourage character development as they are transitioning into adulthood. Jeffrey and Jimenez (2021) explained,

> When it comes to readying students for the jobs of the future, America's K-12 education system too often does not sufficiently prepare Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students. Research has shown that this negatively affects these students' life outcomes, specifically in terms of their long-term career prospects and economic security. (p. 1)

The school system does not provide much support to Black adolescent females who want to pursue and obtain a higher education degree. Gaining a college degree can help bridge the gap of academic inequality regarding people of color and access to a quality education (Bryant, 2015). The main issues impacting preparing students for future workforce jobs is the lack of funding for K-12 college preparation programs and communication gaps between K-12 education, higher education, and the workforce (Jeffrey & Jimenez, 2021). College and career readiness is a huge challenge for low-income subgroups, as well as first generation college

students. As a result, Black students are less likely to be prepared for college, especially students who live in impoverished neighborhoods (Bryant, 2015).

Urban minority youth from working-class backgrounds are more susceptible to drugs, violence, and dropping out of school (Somers et al., 2016). Unmarried Black families from a working-class background have a higher risk of living in poverty and experiencing unfavorable outcomes (Assari et al., 2018; Johnson 2010). Black adolescent females have low high school completion rates. Dropping out of high school is a huge problem for the youth, especially Black females (Timberlake, 1982). Black adolescent students are dropping out of high school more frequently than White students. Davis et al. (2002) explained,

> Dropping out of school has particularly negative consequences for members of ethnic or racial minorities. Although the high school graduation rate of African Americans has increased significantly over the past 30 years, it still lags behind that of White Americans. At present, 79% of African Americans aged 25 and over are high school graduates, which is double the percentage in 1970. However, as a group, African Americans continue to earn lower grades and to drop out of school in larger numbers than their White peers. (p. 810)

This is a problem that affects many Black adolescent females who come from working-class backgrounds. Black adolescent females do not have equal access to educational resources, and they trail behind White students regarding high school completion rates. Clark and Shi (2020) explained,

> It is well established that Black students graduate at lower rates, with only a subset of studies documenting graduation and dropout for finer-grained subgroups such as by

> gender and race. Similarly, event dropout rates show subgroups such as Black or low-income students as leaving school at higher rates over a given period. (p. 2)

Educators need to know that this problem exists so that they can address the lack of Black women being represented in the workforce and in positions of power. Doing so would encourage policymakers to identify the gaps within the educational system that prevent students of color from graduating from high school as well as navigating to college and through college successfully. Equitable access to educational resources creates hope and promotes academic success in young Black women. Educators need to understand the importance of mentorship programs and how they impact Black adolescent females academically with successfully navigating to college and transitioning into adulthood.

Community outreach programs include support groups that help Black adolescent females overcome the unique challenges of intersectionality regarding race, gender, and class that negatively affect Black women; "Ruby" is one such group. "Ruby" was created by the chapters of a prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization for Black, at-risk, adolescent females who are currently attending high school. "Ruby" assists Black adolescent females with college and career planning that help assist them with personal and professional growth. This program seeks to help build the next generation of scholars. The intersectionality of race and gender create many obstacles for Black women who desire career advancement, but mentorship and guidance can assist Black women with obtaining success despite these barriers (Breakfield, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Due to the unique

challenges that Black adolescent females face, they are in need of safe spaces to express themselves and develop their self-identities so that they are able to cope with the realities related to their current life situations and environments. Black feminist scholars believe that mentorship programs are important resources that can be used by community organizations and schools to help Black adolescent females cope with their realities while strengthening their resiliency (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

Theoretical Basis for the Study

For this study, I conducted a qualitative, narrative study in which I utilized the Critical Race Feminist Theory. My study contained literature surrounding Black women, education, oppression, socioeconomic status, intersectionality, and mentorship. Youth development is highly influenced by their environment which impacts their well-being as citizens within their communities and academic success. Addressing the issues within their environment can improve their academic achievement and better prepare the youth for navigating to college (Bryant, 2015).

The theoretical framework used in this narrative study is the Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT). The Critical Race Feminist Theory is an extension of the Black Feminist Theory and the Critical Race Theory, which focuses solely on the experiences of women of color. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explained,

> The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes

> economics, history, context, group, and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. (pp. 2-3)

The Critical Race Theory seeks to understand racial power while advocating for racial justice where colorblindness takes precedence over confronting racial injustices that directly affect people of color. Crenshaw (2010) explained,

> CRT is not so much an intellectual unit filled with natural stuff-theories, themes, practices, and the like-but one that is dynamically constituted by a series of contestations and convergences pertaining to the ways that racial power is understood and articulated in the post-civil rights era. (p. 1261)

The Critical Race Feminist Theory also seeks to promote awareness and change in the lives of women of color. CRFT was designed to create social change that will help improve the lives and opportunities for Black women. CRFT also seeks to bring awareness to the social and political injustices that impact the women of color. Regarding this study, CRFT helped me gain insight on how the lack of mentorship opportunities have been plaguing Black women in academia who are pursuing higher education degrees. Few (2007) explained,

> The basic tenets of critical race theory that are pertinent to understanding the genesis of critical race feminism are: (a) (racial and/or ethnic) identity is a product of social thought and is not objective, inherent, fixed, or necessarily biological; (b) individuals have potentially conflicting overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances; (c) racial and/or ethnic individuals and groups negotiate intersectionality simultaneously in their lives in relation to other groups and within the groups with which individuals are affiliated; and (d) minority status presumes a competence for minority writers and theorists to speak

about race and the experiences of multiple oppressions without essentializing those experiences. (p. 456)

CRFT focuses specifically on the oppressive experiences of Black women. This theory acknowledges the historic struggle of Black women against many oppressors and how they navigate the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, empowerment, and consciousness regarding the lives of Black women (Few, 2007). CRFT also seeks to bring awareness to White privilege and gender privileges that counteract equal opportunities for Black women.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?
3. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program prepare Black adolescent females for higher education?
4. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program support Black adolescent females as they transition into adulthood?

Significance of the Study

Black adolescent females encounter many challenges pertaining to the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on their journey to adulthood and higher education. In order to create equitable academic opportunities for Black adolescent females, community leaders should provide and create access to educational resources that create essential pathways

to higher education for Black adolescent females. Black adolescent females need mentors to help them overcome the challenges of intersectionality regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status. When Black women receive mentoring and guidance, they can be successful academically and in their careers (Breakfield, 2010).

Slicker and Palmer (1993) conducted a study on mentoring at-risk high school students by evaluating a school-based mentorship program. This study analyzed 86 at-risk youth in the 10th grade from a high school in Texas. Each of these students were identified as being highly at-risk for leaving high school before graduation.

The students were identified as at-risk for leaving high school based on the criteria from the Texas Educational Assessment: the students fail two or more courses in the current semester, failing to move on to the next grade, and/or being unlikely to graduate in four years due to the amount of high school credits obtained. Special education students were not factored into this study. The mentors were school personnel that included teachers, principals, counselors, secretaries, and instructional aides (Slicker & Palmer, 1993).

These trainers only received one hour training and were given handouts detailing appropriate mentorship activities. The mentoring took place at least three days a week for a six-month period. They found that all of the students that were effectively mentored returned to school the following school year and that out of the students that were ineffectively mentored only four percent of those students returned the following school year (Slicker & Palmer, 1993).

These results made it clear to the researchers that there was a trend established that favored the effectively mentored students having a lower dropout rate than the ineffectively mentored students (Slicker & Palmer, 1993). The researchers found that effective mentoring can aid in both raising and maintaining academic achievement in at-risk students. They also found

that other adults besides counselors can effectively function in the role of mentors for students. Kelch-Oliver et al. (2013) explained,

> Mentoring has been defined as a relationship in which a more experienced professional guides, teaches, trains, and offers counsel to a less skilled or experienced student or junior professional. Mentorship may be considered as a transfer of the social resources necessary for professional advancement, a view that suggests that mentoring is a process of instilling individuals with social and professional skills essential to developing and navigating the networks needed for career success while also providing career and psychosocial benefits. (p. 30)

Black adolescent females can benefit from mentorship programs since they are at-risk of being overlooked and underrepresented. According to Ricks (2014), "Black females are at risk for school failure, poor test scores, high dropout rates, low achievement gaps, low grades, and high suspension rates" (p. 10). Mentorship empowers Black girls to advocate for themselves by seeking assistance and resources from people that can help them achieve their goals (Kayser et al., 2018).

Researcher Statement (Positionality)

As I reminisce on my adolescent years, I realize that not having a mentor during this stage of my life was a disservice to myself and everything that I could have accomplished. I approached this study as a Black woman with trauma from my educational journey regarding academic excellence. During my adolescent years I felt lost academically especially when it was time to apply for colleges. I did not know it at the time, but I was in desperate need of an academic role model who looked like me. Attending a predominantly White high school left me

with no viable options for mentors who could identify with me and my unique needs as a Black woman.

Black adolescent females need representation; they need to see other Black women in positions of power so that they know that this is obtainable for them. I needed a mentor who didn't see me as an angry, aggressive Black girl. I needed someone to tell me that I mattered. The absence of a Black female mentor followed me all the way to college. I had no vision of what I truly wanted to do with my life, I just chose a major and went to classes like I was told to. I was minimally involved in extracurricular activities, and after a while, I squandered my undergraduate education. I withdrew from college after completing three years and would not return for almost another seven years.

Throughout this time, I still had no mentor or anyone who was invested in my academic future. I believe that if I had a mentor, especially one who could identify with my struggles, I would have been successful. Instead, I had to learn to advocate for my education on my own. It was not until I began my doctoral journey that I began to see the true importance of having a mentor. When I began the doctoral program at Ball State, I developed a relationship with Dr. Ruby Cain and Dr. Michelle Glowacki-Dudka. These women showed me what the power of what mentorship and empowerment could do for a Black woman.

Prior to developing a relationship with them I did not believe that obtaining a doctoral degree was possible. They helped me to see the strength within myself, which turned into confidence and execution. My purpose for doing this study is to make sure that other Black adolescent females know and understand the importance of mentorship and representation.

I want Black adolescent females to know that they are not too complicated or aggressive. I want them to know that they deserve to be seen and they deserve the best academic resources

necessary for their optimal survival. My hope for this study is that more Black women step forward and began mentoring the next generation of scholars so that they are molded with the confidence to achieve their dreams and represent for other Black women navigating towards higher education.

Definition of Terms

Adolescents: Also referred to as young Black women and "*Black adolescent females*" in this study. Refers to Black adolescent females between the ages of 14 to 18 years old. The adolescent stage is a critical period for identity development. Youth are developing a sense of their personal identities in relation to their social contexts and their interactions within them often becoming more conscious of how their social identities relate to the ways they are viewed and treated by others. (Leath et al., 2019, p. 1319).

Black Feminist Theory: Black feminism is a standpoint theory that focuses on Black women and their historic struggle as it is experienced in the present. This theory transcends the arguments of identity politics and actively examines the politics of location in the lives of Black women and their community associations. The theory also helps to "navigate the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, empowerment, and consciousness regarding the lives of Black women" (Few, 2007, p. 454)

Black Greek Letter Organization: Refers to African American US college fraternities and sororities, associated with the National Pan-Hellenic Council which is also known as the Divine Nine (Hughey, 2007).

Black: "Black" refers to dark-skinned people of African descent, no matter their nationality. "African American" refers to people who were born in the United States and have African ancestry. Young Black activists in the United States started using "Black" in the 1960s when

referring to descendants of slaves as a way to leave the term "Negro" and the Jim Crow era behind. (Chavez, 2020)

Critical Race Feminist Theory: The basic tenets of CRFT were created as an extension of CRT in that (a) racial/ethnic identity has been formed, (b) individuals have many identities and beliefs, (c) racial and or ethnic individuals encounter intersectionality in several areas of their lives, and that (d) being a minority presumably speaks to the experiences and competence of being able to accurately report and educate others on multiple oppressions of people of color (Few, 2007).

Critical Race Theory: "The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 2-3)

Feminist Theory: The feminist theory centers around bringing awareness to diverse women's issues. The feminist theory is a standpoint theory that highlights the injustices of all women, despite their race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and job occupation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Marginalized Youth: Refers to at-risk youth and youth from under-resourced urban areas who often live in poverty and are from a working-class family (this term is used interchangeably with urban minority youth) (Sapiro & Ward, 2020).

Mentor: Has been defined as "a relationship in which a more experienced professional guides, teaches, trains, and offers counsel to a less skilled or experienced student or junior professional" (Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013, p. 30). The mentor serves as "teacher, advisor, and sponsor who

encourages, praises, and prods bolstering the mentee's sense of competence and self-concept" (Slicker & Palmer, 2003, p. 327).

Mentorship: Mentoring has been described as a "form of professional support that leads to knowledge generation" *(i.e., "Onyx" and "Ruby" mentorship programs)* (Rocco et al., 2021, p. 107).

Socioeconomic status: (also referred to as class)"Socioeconomic status is the position of an individual or group on the socioeconomic scale, which is determined by a combination of social and economic factors such as income, amount and kind of education, type and prestige of occupation, place of residence, and—in some societies or parts of society—ethnic origin or religious background" (APA, 2010).

Values Coding: Refers to recording the emerging themes from participant responses by recording the participant's beliefs, values, and attitudes about their life experiences (Saldaña, 2014).

White: "White" refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Working Class: (also referred to as lower class) Refers to individuals who are classified as having a low socioeconomic status and or income (Rubin et al., 2014). "Lower class is defined as the bottom 20% of earners. Those in the lower class have an income of at or below $28,007" (Bieber, 2023).

Summary of the Chapter

In Chapter One, I introduced my research topic regarding exploring the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. I then stated the problem and its significance to my research. I explained my purpose

statement and my research questions. I provided a list of key terms and definitions utilized throughout this first chapter. In the Chapter two literature review, I review scholarly articles that further support this study with exploring the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I reviewed literature that highlighted the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females who come from working-class backgrounds. I explored literature related to the historic challenges of intersectionality regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status that have negatively impacted Black women in their careers and academically. In this chapter, I also acknowledged the importance of mentorship programs and representation for Black adolescent females.

For this literature review, I reviewed over 120 articles from the Sage, Eric, ProQuest, Jstor, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar databases. I searched these databases by utilizing the following keywords to access the journal articles: Black women, young Black women, intersectionality, critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, Black feminism, mentorship, mentorship for Black women, Black women and poverty, feminist theory, Black women stereotypes, and impoverished communities. I reviewed each article by first reading the abstract to ensure that the literature was relevant to my research topic.

After reading the abstract of the relevant literature I then read the articles. After reading the articles I made notes, highlighted the pdf document, and saved the document in a file folder on my personal computer. My notes included short summaries about the article and how it related to my research topic. I then saved each journal article citation and doi number in the same file folder in a Microsoft word document to organize my literature and add it to my dissertation. After reviewing over 120 articles, I began to see parallels in the relevant literature that supported my research.

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. As previously mentioned, adolescence is a pivotal stage of development for young women and young men (Leath et al., 2019). This is especially true for Black adolescent females who come from working-class backgrounds. Black adolescent males and females who come from working-class backgrounds are often categorized as marginalized youth.

The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?
3. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program prepare Black adolescent females for higher education?
4. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program support Black adolescent females as they transition into adulthood?

Marginalized Youth

The term "marginalized youth" is associated with young people who live in poverty and are possibly classified as juveniles who are court involved with child welfare, and/or the criminal justice system regarding criminal mischief. Marginalized youth can also be classified as youth with disabilities, minorities regarding sexual status, and immigration status. Marginalized youth are also classified as youth who come from working-class backgrounds and or urban areas and have behavioral challenges. This population is more likely to abruptly transition to adulthood

based on their circumstances and life experiences (Sapiro & Ward, 2020). Sapiro and Ward (2020) explained,

> The extended transition between adolescence and adulthood has been identified as a significant developmental period, providing a unique opportunity to impact adult physical and emotional health and well-being. While most descriptions of these young people highlight their difficulties achieving self-sufficiency, the ability to form connections with others is an equally significant marker of adult maturity. (p. 343)

Since this is a pivotal stage of development for adolescent youth their health, well-being, and relational experiences greatly affect their mental health. Negative relational experiences associated with trauma, marginalization, and public aid can cause them to have difficulty with forming appropriate interpersonal relationships (Sapiro & Ward, 2020). Marginalized youth have a greater chance of experiencing mental health issues as a result of their environment and circumstances.

Marginalized youth need mentorship and community educational programs to help assist them with the challenges that they encounter, especially in the Black community. Community engagement and mentorship can help build community resources and public engagement that promote social justice for marginalized youth. Community engagement empowers the youth through teachings that encourage skill building and sustainable communities for marginalized youth (Craig, 2016).

Black adolescent females need assistance from mentors to overcome the challenges of race, gender, and class (Breakfield, 2010). Historically, women in general have been viewed as inferior to men (Johnson, 2015; Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). The intersectionality of race and gender pose a great challenge for women of color receiving the assistance that they need to

navigate to and through college (Bryant, 2015; Byrd, 2021). This is one of the main reasons that Black women need mentors because, with the guidance of a mentor, Black women have a chance to be successful despite the challenges that intersectionality pose for them.

Critical Race Feminist Theory

"*The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman" – Malcolm X*

Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT) is an extension of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Theory. These theories seek to acknowledge the oppressive struggles endured by Black women as it pertains to the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Some Black Feminists argue that Black Feminism began during the civil rights movement, but others believe that this movement began during slavery, long before it had the name Black Feminism. Many Black women believed that slavery went against their rights as women (Johnson, 2015). These women were forced into motherhood as a result of rape from their slave masters. These women were denied the right to be mothers to their children and wives to their husbands due to being separated from their families. Black women were active participants of the Underground Railroad and fought vigorously for anti-slavery rights (Johnson, 2015).

The intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status has negatively affected Black women academically and in their careers while trying to obtain positions of power (Breakfield, 2010). The educational needs of young Black women have historically been ignored (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Young Black women encounter unique challenges regarding their school systems, race, class, and gender (Isaac et al., 2010). Many school and government

officials have stereotypical views of Black women that include being loud, aggressive, and lacking femininity. Many young Black women have adopted the stereotypical views of their oppressors to ensure that they are heard and seen in their schools and communities (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Black women in general have had to fight to be seen in this male-dominated society. Many Black women have adopted a tough masculine persona because they have to advocate for themselves (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). They have turned those negative stereotypes into tools that will help ensure that they are no longer overlooked and ignored within their school systems.

CRFT advocates for the experiences of Black women in an educational setting (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). CRFT seeks to create a social justice centered change in schools for Black women to ensure that they are no longer overlooked in a school setting. With the use of educational research CRFT continues to advocate for Black women while dismantling inequality in a school setting. (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Childers-McKee and Hytten (2015) explained,

> CRFT builds on CRT, yet it centers the ‘‘roles, experiences, and narratives of women of color’’ in analyzing systems, structures, and institutions. More specifically, CRF draws upon both CRT and feminism in exploring social phenomena from the perspective of people doubly marginalized by both race and gender. (p. 395)

CRFT is important for Black women because it ensures that the experiences of Black women in general are being considered and acknowledged (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). As previously stated, the unique challenges associated with intersectionality cause Black women to be at risk of multiple forms of discrimination. CRFT exists because of the differences in

oppression experienced by Black women versus the oppression experienced by Black men. Black women and men are both minorities, but Black women have in many cases experienced more challenges regarding discrimination and the intersectionality of race, gender, and social class (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015).

CRFT is also used to fight against the negative stereotypes regarding young Black women who come from a working-class background. These stereotypes encourage young Black women to continue to exhibit negative behaviors and allow them to continue to be exploited sexually (Carter, 2012).

The basic tenets of CRFT were created as an extension of CRT in that (a) racial/ethnic identity has been formed, (b) individuals have many identities and beliefs, (c) racial and or ethnic individuals encounter intersectionality in several areas of their lives, and that (d) being a minority presumably speaks to the experiences and competence of being able to accurately report and educate others on multiple oppressions of people of color (Few, 2007). Because the legacy of struggle for Black women includes racism, Black feminist thought encompasses all of the tenets of CRT: colorblindness, interest convergence, social construction of race, and unique voice of color (Wing, 1997; Johnson, 2015, p. 239). hooks (2000) explained,

> Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beat down, mentally, physically, and spiritually women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority. A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage. (p. 1)

In Mikki Kendall's (2021) book, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* (2021), she spoke about the forgotten population in the world of feminism; the

Black woman. Kendall (2021) explained how feminism has historically been beneficial to White women at the expense of Black women being ignored and left out of the conversations about how feminism impacts women of color. Kendall (2021) explained the difference between feminism and "hood feminism" which details the feminine struggles of Black women who come from working-class backgrounds. She believed that even though all women are oppressed, White women have more rights than Black women.

Kendall (2021) expressed her frustration with Black women from the "hood" (urban/impoverished areas) being forgotten. She explained the struggle of poor Black women living in impoverished areas. Kendall believed that those who hold feminist beliefs should be working to better understand how social issues impact all women who come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, instead of displaying disdain for the types of decisions that Black women must make because they are the minority and have limited choices based on the resources that they have. Kendall (2021) explained,

> We can't let respectability politics (that is an attempt by marginalized groups to internally police members so that they fall in line with the dominant culture's norms) create an idea that only some women are worthy of respect or protection. Respectability narratives discourage us from addressing the needs of sex workers, incarcerated women, or anyone else who has had to face hard life choices. No woman has to be respectable to be valuable. We can't demand that people work in order to live, then demand that they be respected only if they do work that doesn't challenge outdated ideas around women's right to control their bodies. (pp. 3-4)

According to Kendall (2021) and Isaac et al. (2010), Black women are the forgotten population when discussing issues pertaining to feminism. This is why CRFT was created to give

a voice to Black women while acknowledging their unique struggles and sharing their experiences with oppression and discrimination. We cannot say that feminism is for every woman if it only highlights the struggles for one race. The advancements in feminism need to consider all women and not just the "respectable" women. Black women have unique challenges to navigate regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Feminism was designed to fight for the rights of women, but Black women and their unique struggles have been overlooked. CRFT seeks to bring awareness to this very issue to ensure that Black women are no longer the forgotten women of the Feminist movement (Isaac et al., 2010; Kendall, 2021).

Mentorship

Mentorship is a close relationship that involves nurturing, advising, and instructing. Mentorship also involves mentors who serve as advocates for their mentees. The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is one that is goal-oriented and promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). The general agreement exists that, in a mentoring relationship, the mentor is a more experienced and more knowledgeable individual who provides some form of guidance, advice, support, and/or feedback to a novice about a task or job in order to assist the novice in reaching some level of competency (West, 2016; Rocco et al., 2020; Tait 2003).

Mentoring programs often include youth being paired with adults. Such mentoring programs promote at-risk youth engagement and positive development skills for this population. Studies show that supportive mentor-youth relationships can have a positive impact on their academic performance and behavioral development (Raposa et al., 2019). "The philosophy of mentoring it is that we humans are great, that we are all discovering what we really want, and

that we can get what we want faster and more easily by having a coach who has been there and who can help others" (Abiddin, 2012, p. 74).

Mentorship programs are great community resources that assist youth from working-class backgrounds. Youth from urban backgrounds are more susceptible to community violence, aggression, criminalization, and higher dropout rates due to the stressors that they encounter in their communities (Somers, 2016). Mentorship is important to help this at risk population with developing coping skills to navigate through the stressors of high crime, low income, and poverty. Raposa et al. (2019) explained,

> Youth mentoring programs show great promise as a low cost intervention for youth at risk for developing a range of psychological, social, and behavioral problems. Recent research has highlighted the positive impact of one-on-one mentoring relationships for children and adolescents showing externalizing behaviors such as aggression, substance use, and other delinquent behaviors. (p. 423)

Mentors can assist children and or adolescents with overcoming difficult life situations to help them become successful. Many sociologists stress the importance of youth interacting with professional caregivers, also known as mentors. These mentor/mentee relationships can help the youth be successful despite their homelife and environment. Strong supportive relationships are necessary for positive youth attainment (Rhodes, 2005).

Mentoring is an essential resource for youth that promotes the enhancement of interpersonal skills and personal development. Mentoring allows the youth the opportunity to learn new skills and how to demonstrate positive social behaviors while being acquainted to a new set of values and social norms. The most important role of a mentor is to provide support and guidance to the youth to help assist them with facilitating their dreams (Crawford & Smith,

2005). Youth community mentorship programs focus on pairing the youth with adult mentors to expose them to transformative learning, which allows the youth to grow with their mentors. The mentor helps the mentee become a critical thinker to challenge their previous beliefs and new perspectives (Broadbent & Papadopoulos, 2009).

Young Black women who come from working-class backgrounds are in need of mentors who help them with personal growth and development. Black female adolescents have higher high school dropout rates, and lower academic achievement rates than White students (Davis et al., 2002; Clark & Shi, 2020; Ricks, 2014; Timberlake, 1982). Mentorship empowers Black girls to advocate for themselves by seeking assistance and resources from people who can help them achieve their goals (Kayser et al., 2018).

These young women need help challenging their beliefs about life and their futures. Young Black women need to know that their current situation does not dictate their future and that with mentors they can overcome their current challenges pertaining to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Lindsay-Dennis et al., (2011) explained,

> Gender and culturally responsive mentoring and intervention programs are a critical means of addressing the challenges of African American girls. Yet we know little about how the needs of African American girls are considered in program development or implementation. The process of building and implementing an appropriate program for African American girls may yield an improved understanding of how best to create spaces that effectively support this persistently vulnerable population. (p. 66)

Black female adolescents can greatly benefit from Africentric based mentorship and cultural orientation. The incorporation of African values and culturation enhance the social identity of young Black women. Incorporating these values positively impacts youth

development. Youth development is centered around the 5 C's of positive youth development, which include competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Grills et al., 2016). Grills et al. (2016) explained,

> Cultural orientation has been associated with ethnic identity exploration, advanced stages of identity development, positive group attitudes, increased persistence and performance, and group-oriented ethnic behaviors among African American adolescents. The presence of an Africentric cultural orientation has been identified as a critical protective factor in the psychological well-being of African American youth. (p. 346)

Adolescent development is a critical transformation period for the youth. This stage of development includes social development, physical development, and risk taking (Leath et al, 2019). Researchers believe that exposing the youth to positive internal and external assets can increase the chances of them having a healthy and positive life that will encourage them to overcome the stressors in their environment to ensure a positive future outcome for the youth (Curran & Wexler, 2017). Curran and Wexler (2017) explained,

> There are many factors, both internal to a person and related to his or her environment, that influence development. For instance, internal protective factors such as hope for the future, self-control, and decision-making abilities, greatly increase an adolescent's substance use refusal skills and reduce related risky behavior. In addition, youth who report hopes for the future and professional aspirations are more likely to abstain from sexual relationships. Many youth development programs focus on and cultivate these internal protective factors. (p. 71)

Mentoring youth helps improve mental health, academics, drug and alcohol prevention, violence prevention, social and emotional development, and interpersonal skills. Mentorship is

essential for the academic success of minority students. Minority students need mentors to help them increase social and emotional development. Most youth mentorship programs are community and/or school based (King et al., 2018).

Race and ethnicity are important factors to consider when analyzing the relationship between mentors and the families of Black youth. Black youth and families have had to deal with racism, oppression, police brutality, and more which make them more susceptible to engaging in dysfunctional behaviors that lead to crime to help them cope with their internal and external stressors. Racism, discrimination, and prejudice are common themes that impact Black youth in urban areas (Jones et al., 2022).

Anderson et al. (2018) suggested that poor youth and youth of color experience inequality in educational settings, criminal justice, and in their communities. Researchers suggest that mentors are trained in cultural competence to ensure positive mentoring relationships between marginalized youth and their mentors (Anderson et al., 2018). Mentor perceptions of their mentees can greatly impact the relationship dynamic between the mentor and mentee. The research conducted regarding marginalized youth and mentorship found that mentors and/or teachers who were educated on cultural competence were able to assist their mentees with expanding their cultural identity and sense of belonging in mentees who are minorities from ethnic backgrounds (Anderson et al., 2018). Mentors and mentees benefited from cultural competence and diversity training (Anderson et al., 2018). Anderson et al., (2018) explained,

> Although cultural competence may be an important starting place to understand cultural biases and develop self-awareness, some researchers have stated that adults who work with diverse youth should increase their understanding of the role of systemic factors in the lives of young people. Critical race theorist posit that many cultural competence

> models fail to support the development of systemic understanding of racism and oppression. (p. 1093)

Young Black women tend to be overlooked in conversations regarding the challenges that intersectionality pose for them, despite the fact that the young Black women will eventually become adults in a society that does not value or recognize them. Effective mentoring relationships take into consideration the race, gender, and the unique needs of the mentees. Effective mentorship must consider the population that they serve so that they can design programs and curriculum that best serve the youth in need of mentorship services (Darling et al., 2006).

Adolescence is a pivotal stage of development for youth, especially marginalized youth who live in impoverished areas. Adolescents who live in these areas are highly impacted by their communities and environment. The adolescent stage of development is a time when peer pressure is heightened because the perceptions of their peers matter the most during this time (Leath et al., 2019). This is why adolescents, especially Black female adolescents, need mentors to show them how to cope and navigate through their unique struggles.

Black women have already been taught that they are aggressive, loud, and “ghetto” (Ashley, 2014; Coleman et al., 2020; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). These negative connotations can have detrimental effects on the academic success of young Black women. Young Black women need to be recognized now. Young Black women need mentorship and guidance right now before the enter adulthood so that someone with more life experience can help them overcome the challenges regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Intersectionality and the Black Woman

The term intersectionality reflects the lived experiences of marginalized individuals. The term intersectionality began to surface in the late 1980's as a result of critical race studies. This movement sought to address color blindness, objectivity, and neutrality (Nash, 2008). "Women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged. Women of color occupy positions both physically and culturally marginalized within dominant society" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1250).

Crenshaw (1991) believed that feminist efforts to help women of color navigate through the challenges associated with intersectionality needed to be directed specifically at them to ensure that they receive the assistance that they need. Women of color need to be addressed directly and not hidden under the traditional guise of women's rights for all women, because all women are not treated equally. Women of color are a double minority in that they are Black and that they are women (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015).

Wing (2003) explained that Black women are not a part of the upper echelon of women of European descent. Black women are at a disadvantage economically, politically, socially, and educationally. Wing believed despite the various stereotypes of Black women being "welfare queens, incompetent, sexually submissive, brazen, and powerless they still signify a large portion of the workforce. Despite the struggles associated with intersectionality Black women have continued to persist in a system designed for their failure. Nash (2008) explained,

> From critical race studies, a scholarly movement born in the legal academy committed to problematizing law's purported color-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity. From its inception, intersectionality has had a long-standing interest in one particular intersection:

> the intersection of race and gender in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences. (p. 2)

The race, class, and gender identification of Black women impacted their ability to participate in the Women's Suffrage March. Black women dealt with the negative impact of intersectionality and oppression as it pertained to slavery and the restriction of voting (Terborg-Penn, 1998). Black women had to fight for their rights as not only women, but Black women. This was a time where women were fighting to be heard and seen. Women did not have many opportunities for employment because the White men felt that women belonged at home in the kitchen and in the bedroom. Women had to fight for the right to work, and in doing so men felt that women should only be employed as social workers and teachers, because these occupations were classified as "women jobs" (Giddings, 1988). Black Women had to create organizations that allowed them to continue to fight for women's rights; one organization in particular was the National Black Feminist Organization (Giddings, 1998; Terborg-Penn, 1998).

In 1973, the National Black Feminist Organization's (NBFO) statement of purpose explained how Black women have suffered cruel treatment both racially and sexually. There has been a lack of interest in examining the damage caused to Black women at the hands of their oppressors. The NBFO explained that their purpose is not to minimize the struggles endured by Black men, but that Black women have been used as breeders for White slave owners, shunned and mistreated by their slave owner's wives, and viewed as castrators by their spouses. The Black woman has continued to be despised and mistreated for centuries, yet they still persist despite the challenges of intersectionality. Black women want to be free of fetishes and false, degrading narratives that only see them as sexual beings. Black women want to define their own

self-image (National Black Feminist Organization, 1973; Johnson, 2015). Terborg-Penn (1998) explained,

> African American women persisted despite the many barriers to their political participations in public elections. The changes in the status African American women over the course of the woman suffrage movement – from slave to free, from rural to urban, from illiterate to literate, from unskilled to skilled or to professional workers – can be seen as factors that encouraged Black strategies to achieve women's enfranchisement. (p. 1)

The intersectionality of race, gender, and class serve as large disadvantage for women of color. Black women are judged harshly and are worse off than White women and Black men. The effects of intersectionality on Black women are long lasting (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). The intersectionality of race, gender, and class pose a great challenge for women of color receiving the assistance that they need to navigate to and through college. This is one of the main reasons that Black women need mentors because with the guidance of a mentor Black women have a chance to be successful despite the challenges that intersectionality pose for them. Sesko and Biernat (2010) explained,

> The prominent theory arguing in favor of disadvantage is the "double jeopardy" hypothesis, which posits a "double hit" of racism and sexism. Other relevant research has been descriptive, providing evidence that stereotypes of Black women differ from those of White women and Black men. For example, relative to White women, Black women tend to be viewed as more "masculine". (p. 356)

The experiences of Black women continue to be disregarded. Black women are marginalized, misnamed, and invisible to their oppressors (Patton et al., 2016). These issues are

also true for young Black women regarding their educational experiences. “Black women are the new ‘model minority.’ The major economic and lifelong obstacles that Black women face, such as limited job opportunities, lower earnings, and disproportionate poverty, remain unaddressed” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 195).

The intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status are still prevalent today. Black women are still fighting for equal rights in present time. As previously mentioned, the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status negatively impact Black women, but mentorship can help Black women overcome the challenges associated with intersectionality (Breakfield, 2010). Black women encounter various unique challenges pertaining to intersectionality.

Black women are disregarded, and they are offered fewer opportunities for positions of power than White men and women (Breakfield, 2010). Intersectionality negatively impacts Black women in all facets of their lives, and their struggle must be acknowledged in order for real changes to be made in the world of feminism. Black women are struggling to be seen for their contributions to academia and the workforce due to the stereotypical beliefs of their oppressors. Black women need allies to help them navigate through the challenges of intersectionality pertaining to race, gender, and class.

Race and the Black Woman

In Delgado’s (2003) writings, he explained that there were two ways to think about race. One way pertains to the word “race” and the other pertains to the word race, as a “real-world phenomenon” (p. 136). Race is a real-world phenomenon explored by the Critical Race Theory, in which the word race, as a “real-world” phenomenon, examines the world of power, resources, and privilege (Delgado, 2003).

Power, resources, and privilege are the principles that the U.S. were built upon, which created a disadvantage for people of color. Black people were enslaved, and they had no power, resources, rights, or privileges. The real-world phenomenon of race continues to negatively impact people of color, especially Black women. The phenomenon of race is an integral part of the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status that negatively affect Black women in America today (Delgado, 2003).

Historically, Black women and men have been subjected to systematic racism in education. Systematic racism regarding the education of Black women and men has been a prevalent issue since slavery (Rocco et al., 2020). The education of Black women and men during those times was used as a tool to increase their knowledge and productivity as slaves. The field of adult education has admitted to being complicit in the educational oppression of people of color in the earlier stages of development (Rocco et al., 2020).

After the Civil War, Black Americans were emancipated from their slave owners and the government began to address racial inequities to protect the rights of the freed slaves. This caused a major uproar among White Americans in the South and thus the creation of the Jim Crow laws were formed. White Americans still believed that segregation and equality was necessary in public spaces (Han et al., 2022). Han et al. (2022) explained,

> One of the most infamous Supreme Court rulings that codified state-sanctioned segregation and provided the foundation for institutionalized inequality was Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). The majority opinion effectively declared “separate but equal” public facilities, such as schools and public transportation, as constitutional and not in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. While these Black-only schools may have been denoted as “equal”, in reality they did not receive nearly the same

> amount of funds as white-only schools and lacked adequate resources and facilities for Black children. Teachers at Black schools were paid substantially less and resources at Black schools were often discarded by nearby white schools. (p. 2)

In 1909 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was created. This organization was created to help protect Black Americans from racial discrimination laws and statutes. In the 1930's the NAACP began fighting for equal education rights for people of color, which resulted in the Brown v Board of Education law going into effect in 1954. This law overturned the Plessy v Ferguson law that allowed racial segregation in schools (Han et al., 2022). Warren (1954) explained,

> In 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in the case of Brown v. Board of Education, unanimously struck down as unconstitutional all state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students, holding that they violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the laws. Finding that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," the court overturned its own prior ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) that had upheld segregated schools on the principle of "separate but equal." (p. 1)

Systemic racism has affected people of color for centuries. Laws and policies have been put in place to favor White Americans like the Jim Crow laws and the ruling of Plessy v Ferguson. The economy and government resources have historically favored millions of White Americans (Feagin, 2013). Feagin (2013) explained,

> Today, as in the past, systemic racism encompasses a broad range of white-racist dimensions: the racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions of whites in this society. Thus, systemic racism is far more than a matter of racial prejudice

> and individual bigotry. It is a material, social, and ideological reality that is well-imbedded in major U.S. institutions. (p. 2)

People of color have been fighting for equal educational rights since the 1800's (Feagin, 2013). Black students were not welcome in the same schools as their White peers. Black students did not have the privilege of receiving the same educational resources as their White peers. The educational system was designed to ensure that the White students obtained the best educational experience and resources. Black women in particular had a very difficult time being recognized in the educational system (Byrd, 2021; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Black women and their educational experiences continue to be invisible. Black women continue to be mislabeled and marginalized. This is especially true for young Black women and their schooling experiences. The silence regarding the inequities and injustices as it pertains to Black women is challenging and there is a need for educational practice platforms to advocate on behalf of Black women, social justice, and education (Patton et al., 2016).

Black students encounter more achievement barriers academically than their White peers (Hurd et al., 2015). Black students have lower high school graduation rates and college enrollment than their White peers. "These disparities in educational attainment translate into higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and mental and physical health problems among African Americans compared to Whites" (Hurd et al., 2015, p. 1196).

"As it stands today, women and men of color continue to experience systemic racial discrimination in every major societal institution" (Melaku, 2019, p. 2). Black women are grossly underrepresented in education and positions of power (Crawford & Smith, 2005).

Cogburn et al. (2011) conducted a study that examined racial and gender discrimination for Black adolescent students in a school-based setting. The study contained 204 girls and 209

boys in the 8th grade. During the study the authors found that both male and female students were impacted by racial and gender discrimination in a school setting. The authors found that both were key in understanding the academic and psychological factors experienced by Black adolescent students in a school-based setting. Females experience gender discrimination more frequently than males because gender is devalued associated with low status for all women, especially women of color (Cogburn et al., 2011). Cogburn et al. (2011) explained,

> Racial discrimination is a relevant and important risk factor in African American adolescents' everyday lives. Researchers have established that even infrequent or minor occurrences of racial discrimination may result in diminished psychological wellbeing, lowered self-esteem, and higher depressive symptoms, anger, problem behaviors, and psychiatric symptoms, as well as lower academic motivation and achievement. (p. 2)

The challenges pertaining to the intersectionality of racial discrimination is a common theme regarding oppressive aggressions toward people of color (Cogburn et al., 2011). Racial discrimination is prevalent among young Black women in a school-based setting as well as Black women pursuing careers in the workforce. These oppressive aggressions toward Black women are called microaggressions. Although microaggressions are often subtle it is clear when they are intentionally directed at Black women (Donovan et al., 2013).

Black women have been tirelessly subjected to microaggressions in the workplace and educational system. Microaggressions can be slight or viewed as unintentional, but very impactful to the targeted individual. Microaggression is racial discrimination towards people of color. Nowadays, racial discrimination is covert rather than overt, which makes it more difficult for people of color to address or detect. An example of a microaggression is telling a Black woman that she does not sound Black or that she is pretty for a Black girl (Donovan et al., 2013).

Microaggressions are often so subtle that it makes the person question whether or not they should be offended by an offensive remark disguised as a compliment. Donovan et al. (2013) explained,

> There are three forms of microaggression: micro assaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Although considered a microaggression, racial micro assaults are similar to overt racism and comprise conscious, mean-spirited acts against people of color. Racial microinsults are exchanges that appear neutral or complimentary on the surface but underneath suggest that a person of color or members of their racial group are deficient (p. 186)

Robinson-Wood et al. (2015) defined microaggression as "commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, microaggressions are hostile, whether intentional or unintentional, unconscious, or conscious, and communicate insults and putdowns that have harmful psychological impact on targeted individuals or groups" (p. 222). Racial and cultural microaggressions can cause post-traumatic stress that triggers painful memories of individuals within that racial/ethnic group. This stress can overtime cause the individual to experience depression and physical ailments as a result of the negative encounters with microaggression (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

The intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status has created unique challenges for Black women to navigate through life academically and career wise. As previously stated, intersectionality affects Black women in all aspects of their lives. Black women encounter racial discrimination, educational discrimination, microaggressions, and stereotypes. Society has depicted Black women as loud, aggressive, ghetto, and masculine (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Black women have historically had several negative stereotypes attached to their name. Black women have been labeled as aggressive, uncouth, angry, and unprofessional in the media, workplace, and school setting. Shows like the Bad Girls Club, and Love and Hip Hop further highlight the disparities between Black women and White women. The negative stereotypes associated with Black women including rage and hostility are reflective of the survival skills adapted by Black women regarding oppression which signify a threat to the safety and well-being of Black women (Ashley, 2014). Ashley (2014) explained,

> The "angry Black woman" mythology presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances. The stereotype is well known in informal settings but has a lack of representation in professional literature. Angry Black women are typically described as aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising. Black women described as tart tongued, neck rolling, and loud mouthed are archetypes perpetuated in the media. Several "attitudes" held by Black women, including rage, control, desperation, materialism, shame, and cynicism that reinforce the stereotype. The angry Black woman stereotype is pervasive and parasitic; it affects Black women's self-esteem and how they are viewed by others. (p. 28)

Social media perpetuates the negative stereotypes of Black women. These stereotypes are perceived to be true regarding Black women and this impacts how others view Black women. "Gendered-racial stereotypes combine racial and gender myths to create specific salient misrepresentations of African American women. Mass media continue to stereotype Black women as aggressive, highly sexualized, and strong" (Coleman et al., 2020, p. 185). These stereotypes are damaging to the self-esteem and image of young Black women transitioning into adulthood. Brinkman et al. (2018) explained,

> Unfortunately, because of negative stereotypes about black girls, many adults may interact with these girls in unsupportive, critical, and punitive ways. For many adults, race shapes their perceptions and expectations of femininity for black girls, and they may attempt to mold girls into models of womanhood that are rooted in white, middle class, and heteronormative expectations. Adolescent females can benefit from gender responsive programs that teach leadership, relationship, and social engagement skills and include a component that fosters mentoring relationships with adults. (p. 195)

These stereotypes make it difficult for Black women to obtain positions of power and receive the assistance or mentorship that they need for optimal survival. Black women are painted as these aggressive beings who should be feared, especially if you upset a Black woman. Black women are depicted as individuals who are quick tempered and easily angered to violence. These types of stereotypes make it difficult for Black women to be seen as feminine beings who are just trying to survive with the resources that they have.

Gender and the Black Woman

Mirza (2008) explained how gendered racism has shaped the experiences of young Black women in grade school and higher education. She detailed the challenges encountered by young Black women within their communities and school systems. She explained how gendered human rights violations have contributed to the Black woman's challenges with multiple discrimination. Black women are at a greater risk of being physically and sexually abused, because of the deep historical roots of gendered oppression pertaining to systematic race and gender inequality. Mirza (2008) further explained that the experiences of young Black girls are shaped by racism and sexism, and that it is important to understand the challenges that Black women face regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and class.

Historically, women have been inferior to men. This inferiority makes it difficult for women to advance within their workplace. Leadership in organizations implement and influence the HR practices that further promote gender inequality in the workplace. This gender inequality is also referred to as a glass ceiling. Cotter et al. (2001) concluded, "A glass ceiling is a specific type of gender or racial inequality that can be distinguished from other types of inequality" (p. 656). Stamarski and Hing (2015) explained,

> The workplace has sometimes been referred to as an inhospitable place for women due to the multiple forms of gender inequalities present. Some examples of how workplace discrimination negatively affects women's earnings and opportunities are the gender wage gap, the dearth of women in leadership, and the longer time required for women (vs. men) to advance in their careers. Importantly, such discrimination against women largely can be attributed to human resources (HR) policies and HR-related decision-making. (p.1)

Women are still fighting for equal rights regarding pay and opportunities. Men still earn higher wages than women. A common argument is that men cannot get pregnant and do not need as much time off as women. Women have fewer opportunities for positions of power and career advancement. We live in a society that would rather elect a male president who has jovial views on racism and the sexual assault of women than elect a woman as president (Makela, 2016).

We live in a society that would rather police a woman's body than encourage men to use condoms or get vasectomies (Thusi, 2021). We live in a society where White men are making major health decisions for women when they have no idea what it truly means to be a woman. Instead, women must continue to fight the exhausting battle for equal rights, while focusing on the gender roles and expectations associated with being career women, wives, and mothers

(Politico Magazine, 2019). If these issues are challenging for women to navigate in general, one can only imagine how challenging gender issues are for Black women. Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained,

Black women must continue to fight the exhausting battle for equal rights, while focusing on the gender roles and expectations associated with being career women, wives, and mothers Leadership opportunities for Black women in higher education institutions are limited. Black women have fewer opportunities for leadership roles in higher education. Black women must be twice as good as their White counterparts to obtain and maintain higher education leadership roles. Many Black women who are in leadership roles are the very first ones to obtain this position (Bower & Wolverton, 2009). Perry et al. (2013) explained,

> Recent studies indicate that gender discrimination predicts psychological distress, anxiety, anger, obsessive-compulsivity, somatic symptoms, and depression. Some researchers have examined racism and sexism through an intersectionality lens, arguing that African American women experience a unique form of oppression that is specific to this race-gender subgroup. (p. 28)

As I reflect on the intersectionality of gender discrimination for Black women, I often think about the episode on a popular television show, “Good Times.” This was a television show that aired in the 1970’s that centered around the life of a lower-class Black family who lived in the Chicago projects. One episode in particular was the summation of how women have been historically viewed by men. On the episode “Florida Flips” James Evans, Florida’s husband did not like the idea of her doing anything outside of her wifely duties which included tending to his needs, their children, and the household. He told Florida that women have two places in society and that’s “the kitchen and the bedroom” (Paul et al., 1974). While the episode was intended to

be comical, it revealed how men have traditionally viewed women. Women were supposed to be domestic and docile while tending to their husbands, their children, and the upkeeping of the home.

These views about gender roles still continue to linger on in present day. However, women especially Black women have proven that they are more than just housekeepers. The women of today are driven to exceed the expectations of the historical societal views about what they should be. Blackstone (2003) explained,

> Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex. Traditionally, many Western societies have believed that women are more nurturing than men. Therefore, the traditional view of the feminine gender role prescribes that women should behave in ways that are nurturing. Men, on the other hand, are presumed by traditional views of gender roles to be leaders. The traditional view of the masculine gender role, therefore, suggests that men should be the heads of their households by providing financially for the family and making important family decisions. (p. 337)

Another adaption of gender challenges and discrimination regarding Black women that comes to mind is Alice Walker's (1982) book "The Color Purple" that also became a movie adaption in 1985. This movie told the story of a young Black woman (Celie), who had an arranged marriage to an older man who already had children of his own. Celie's husband, Mister always reminded her that she was Black and ugly, and that she was only good for sex, cleaning the house, and tending to the children. When Celie began learning how to read it was frowned upon by her husband, Mister (Walker, 1982).

Mister verbally and physically abused Celie throughout the duration of their marriage. He never expected her to rise above the anguish and hardship that she endured from him, but with

some guidance Celie overcame the challenges of intersectionality. Celie got the courage to leave her husband and start her own business because she was empowered to do so. As previously stated with some mentorship, guidance, and empowerment, Black women can overcome the challenges of intersectionality regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status to become successful career women (Breakfield, 2010).

Socioeconomic Status and the Black Woman

Research has shown that low socioeconomic status can have negative effects on Black children and families. Access to resources and quality education are diminished in these urban, impoverished areas because law makers refuse to allocate funding to these communities. These areas have higher crime and gang violence in their communities. Assari et al. (2018) explained that unmarried families in the Black community from a working-class background are at a higher risk of living in poverty and having undesirable outcomes regarding optimal survival. Socioeconomic status greatly contributes to the access of resources and social networks that Black families have access to within their communities. Somers et al. (2016) explained,

> Urban minority youth from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to violence and drugs, live in nonintact families, and have a family member who is a dropout, which all place them at higher risk of dropping out. Black students are one and half times more likely to drop out of high school than their White peers. (p. 201)

Research often blames violence and crime related to minority youth on the tolerance and disorganization of crime related issues in poor communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). However, the lack of funding and resources available in the impoverished communities ultimately lead to the disintegration of the community and families which creates and sustains poverty (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). “Scholars argue that urban youth learn ‘ghetto related’

behaviors, including disrespect for authority, indifference toward educational achievement, and lack of work ethic from other urban residents who have given up on legitimate means for economic security" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007, p. 694)

Somers et al. (2016) further explained that these findings reflect the unique challenges that urban minority youth from working-class backgrounds encounter in their school system and communities. Somers at el. (2016) explained that further research needed to be conducted to better understand how to find solutions to assist Black children and families who come from working-class backgrounds.

Johnson (2010) explained that Black children were more likely to spend most of their formative years in poor segregated neighborhoods. Johnson argued that at least 60% of Black Americans live in high poverty neighborhoods. Johnson further explained that the academic achievement gap between the lower and higher income areas reveal the shocking disparities in test scores. "These disparities are most troubling because test scores are powerful determinants of a child's development, including her or his likelihood to attend college, obtain meaningful employment, and live a healthy life" (Johnson, 2010, p. 528).

Young Black women who come from working-class backgrounds and single parent households are at a higher risk of having sexual relations early on resulting in early childbearing (Winters & Winters, 2012). Winters and Winters (2012) explained,

> Black teens are found to be about twice as likely as White teens to ever get pregnant. SES continues to have a greater effect on teenage pregnancy rates than race, indicating that low-SES teens are almost 4 times as likely to ever have been pregnant compared with not-low-SES teens. (p. 7)

Winters and Winters (2012) suggests that unmarried teenagers who become pregnant will live in poverty, which will likely result in the cycle being repeated by the young mother and her children later on in life. Poverty is a vicious cycle that results in adverse effects that negatively impact young Black women. Research has shown that adolescents who become pregnant are less likely to finish high school or navigate to college (Winters & Winters, 2012).

Teen pregnancy greatly affects the health, educational outcomes, and economic status of the mother and child. The teens who manage to stay in school encounter major challenges throughout their high school and college journey. “Children born to teen mothers are more likely to become teen mothers themselves” (Basch, 2011, p. 614). Young Black women need access to community resources and mentorship programs to help aid in the education prevention of teen pregnancy.

Community outreach can greatly affect the outcome of teen pregnancy and high school completion. Mikki Kendall (2021) mentioned that Black women from the ‘hood” (urban, impoverished areas) have been forgotten and that the challenges that they encounter in their neighborhoods and communities must be considered when trying to find solutions to the intersectionality challenges that plague Black women in the feminist movement. Impoverished neighborhoods can negatively influence a child’s life outcome. Children are at risk for becoming juvenile delinquents if their neighborhoods are surrounded with these types of individuals. People like gang members and drug dealers become criminal mentors to the impressionable children (Steele, 2010). Steele (2010) explained,

> Children who are at risk of victimization, deviant behaviors, poverty, and social failure are not randomly scattered throughout the social landscape. The vast majority of children who are at high risk for “rotten outcomes” live on the social margins of society,

> concentrated in impoverished neighborhoods. Schorr's inventory of rotten outcomes includes "having children too soon, leaving school illiterate and unemployable, and committing violent crimes". Today we might add substance use, chronic health problems, and criminal victimization to the list. (p. 1)

Steele (2010) further explained that these "rotten outcomes" can lead to a life of crime. Having a lack of resources can greatly contribute to criminal behavior. Young Black women who have children at a young age may drop out of school without having a job or resources to help ensure that they can provide for themselves and their children. An example of this would be a young Black woman stealing baby formula from the store to ensure that her child has food because she is without employment. The criminal justice system may not take into account that this young mother is simply trying to provide for her hungry child because stealing is against the law, regardless of the unique situation that the young mother is in regarding obtaining resources for her child. The challenges associated with intersectionality and poverty regarding Black women and motherhood have often led to life involving the criminal justice system.

The percentage of Black women in the criminal justice system has increased, and it is noted that they are given harsher sentences than White women (Moore & Padavic, 2010). White women are given leniency in areas where Black women are treated harshly for crimes. Race and ethnicity influence how harshly the justice system punishes Black women in particular. Some researchers have found that girls are punished more severely than boys, and that the findings are even more complex when they consider the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic factors (Moore & Padavic, 2010).

The American justice system has done very little to protect Black women (Moore & Padavic, 2010). Black women are still affected by the psychological trauma endured from the

institution of slavery. Black people are expected to "just get over' slavery and move on without acknowledging how detrimental it was to their mental and physical health (Broussard, 2013). An important factor to consider while examining the effects of intersectionality on Black women is the mental anguish that they endure as a result of these challenges. Black women are effected by intersectionality in all aspects of their lives which can have detrimental effects on their mental health and self-image.

Perry et al. (2013) conducted a study on 204 Black women who come from a lower-class socioeconomic background to gain more insight into how inequality regarding the intersectionality of race, class, and gender impact the health and well-being of Black women. During the study the authors found that racial and gender discrimination greatly affect the mental health and well-being of Black women. The study also showed that the intersectionality of racial and gender discrimination greatly affect Black women who come from lower-class socioeconomic backgrounds. Perry et al. (2013) explained that for Black women racism related encounters are also coupled with undertones of sexism. These encounters of racism and sexism are directly connected to Black women's mental and physical health. Perry et al. (2013) concluded,

> Recent studies indicate that gender discrimination predicts psychological distress, anxiety, anger, obsessive-compulsivity, somatic symptoms, and depression. Some researchers have examined racism and sexism through an intersectionality lens, arguing that African American women experience a unique form of oppression that is specific to this race-gender subgroup. (p. 28)

The intersectionality of race, gender, and social class has been a longstanding issue that has caused Black women a lot of mental anguish and despair. The lack of empathy for Black

women and their unique challenges are evident and damaging to the advancement of Black women. Black women have been labeled as angry, aggressive, and unapproachable without regard to their mental health and the generational struggles that they have endured. Hunn and Craig (2009) explained,

> The intersection of race and gender and the experiences of discrimination and prejudice are paramount in defining and understanding the mental health of African American women. Behaviors seen in African American women are adaptations to a complex set of gender, generational, chronic, and extreme life stressors and should be viewed in terms of the psychosocial and cultural factors unique to this population. (p. 83)

Hunn and Craig (2009) further explained that the adaptions of behaviors seen in Black women may be reactionary and adaptive due to the longstanding challenges that they have encountered with the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Craig suggested that Black women may be protecting themselves from the psychological and physical stressors of having to advocate for themselves. Racism impacts the psychological and physical health of African Americans. Black women have reported that racism in the workplace is prevalent, and it causes them to be subjected to poorer health associated with stress (Woods-Giscombe & Lobel, 2008). Woods-Giscombe and Lobel (2008) explained,

> With rare exception, research on gender-related stress in African American women has focused on sexism or gender discrimination. These studies consistently demonstrate that sexism is correlated with racism and with psychological distress for African American women. In one study, lifetime sexist events accounted for more variance in psychological symptoms for women of color compared to European American women. (pp. 2-3)

Black women continue to suffer from the trauma that they endured from slavery and from the societal structures of oppression that they encounter in their daily lives. This social structure has created a culture of Black women suffering in silence because of the lack of empathy and concern for the unique challenges that they encounter daily regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Broussard, 2013). “As a result of this culture of secrecy, Black women, through their silence, have unwittingly enabled and protected those who have abused them for decades” (Broussard, 2013, p. 375).

Some Black women would rather suffer in silence than express how painful their encounters with intersectionality are (Broussard, 2013). Intersectionality is a real challenge for Black women; therefore, it should be important to feminist around the world. Black women need protection and guidance to overcome the overt challenges of the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I introduced literature that provided additional insight on the importance of mentorship for Black women. I introduced literature that reviewed the historic challenges regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status that have negatively affected women of color. In this chapter I also reviewed the Critical Race Feminist Theory and its connection to Black women. In Chapter three, I discussed the methodology for my research, sampling procedures, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?
3. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program prepare Black adolescent females for higher education?
4. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program support Black adolescent females as they transition into adulthood?

Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative study. Qualitative research allows researchers to utilize a research design that supports specific approaches to inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research utilizes both interpretive and theoretical frameworks to address research problems regarding social and human problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I used the qualitative research method to inquire about various experiences and phenomenons by interviewing participants utilizing semi-structured questions; these are open-ended question that are not easily quantified as they pertain to the participant's responses regarding their attitudes and beliefs about a specific topic. Qualitative research provides a rationale for human behavior

patterns and processes (Tenny et al., 2017). Tenny et al. (2017) explained “Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the how’s and whys instead of how many or how much” (p. 2).

Qualitative research seeks to understand the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of their participants. There are five different approaches to qualitative research as defined by John Creswell. These approaches include narrative inquiry, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography (Guetterman, 2015). Qualitative research has multiple areas of focus revolving around taking an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the subject being studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Aspers and Corte (2019) explained,

> Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. (p. 142)

The method that was used for this study is qualitative and the study design is the narrative research method. “Narratives are similar to storytelling, and they involve identifying significant events, placing them in a time-constrained order, and relating the information” (Kruth, 2015, p. 224). The narrative research method allowed me as the researcher to gather personal accounts about the experiences of the former mentees of the “Ruby” mentorship program to better analyze the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. Narrative research expresses the experiences and lived and told stories of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals’ experience but is also an

exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18).

Narrative research helps researchers identify what happened, the outcomes, and or social processes of events. Narrative research is also described as remembered history, which is sometimes elaborated upon, distorted, or omitted. Narrative research is based on what the participant believed happened to the best of their knowledge. This is why researchers interview several participants on the same topic to gain an accurate portrayal of what actually occurred by obtaining different accounts of the event (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Hays and Singh (2012) explained,

> Narratology or narrative analysis seeks to understand what stories or narratives reveal about an individual by examining data sources such as interview transcripts and life history. Individuals communicate their sense of their worlds through stories. Narratives also may illuminate multiple voices for a current or historical event or process and provide information about the temporal nature of human existence by comparing various narratives (p. 57).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was used for this study is the Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT) through the lens of a narrative study. The Black Feminist Theory (BFT) was created as an extension of CRFT in that both CRFT and BFT solely focus on the oppressive experiences pertaining to women of color. These theoretical frameworks were developed as an extension of the basic assumptions of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a movement that consists of activists and scholars who are actively pursuing the social justice efforts of people of

color. CRT focuses on bringing awareness and transformation to issues regarding race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRFT allowed me to focus exclusively on the experiences of women of color, while analyzing any oppression that they may have encountered in academia on their journey to and through college. CRFT seeks to promote social justice and awareness regarding the lives of women of color. Hays and Singh (2012) explained,

> Critical theory is an extension of social constructivism. With these paradigms, researchers not only seek to understand a phenomenon through various lenses, but they also strive to create social and political changes to improve the lives of participants. Thus, they closely examine how social norms are manifested in both positive and negative ways in participants' lives. (p. 41)

Black Feminism represents Black women emerging into the role of educators and self-advocates. Black Feminism recognizes Black women as self-reliant and resilient individuals who are confronting the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Black Feminism acknowledges the importance of empowering people who are oppressed. Black Feminism believes that both consciousness of the challenges that affect Black women and social transformation are essential for social change. Black Feminism also believes that knowledge is essential to the efforts of social justice for Black women (Collins, 1990). "By objectifying African American women and recasting our experiences to serve the interest of elite White men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination" (Collins, 1990, p. 221).

Collins (1990) explained that viewing the world from the perspective of the oppressed people and from a humanistic approach can help further the cause of equal rights for Black women. Collins explained how the historic views of elitist White men have shaped the

oppressive treatment of Black women. CRFT seeks to bring awareness to the social and political injustices that negatively affect women of color. Regarding this study, CRFT helped me gain insight on how the intersectionality of race, gender, and class have plagued Black women who are pursuing bachelor's degrees and their need for mentorship programs.

Critical Race Feminist Theory and Narrative Research

The basic tenets of Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT) were created from the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in that it covers, colorblindness, interest convergence, social construction of race, and unique voice of color (Few, 2007; Wing 1997). An important component of the feminist theory is the incorporation of personal narratives (Wing, 1997). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) explained,

> Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, critical race theorists view this knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables. (p. 26)

Storytelling and counter storytelling is an integral component of CRFT that allows people of color to tell their truths regarding their lived experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Narrative research also seeks to gather stories about lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). CRFT and narrative research are correlated regarding the stories and first-hand accounts given by the participants. Narrative research also allows the researcher to collect multiple forms of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study I also reviewed the curriculum handbook for the "Ruby" mentorship program to gather additional information on how this program prepared Black adolescent females for higher education and how they supported them as they transitioned into

adulthood. Reviewing the "Ruby" mentorship curriculum helped me better understand the importance of mentorship programs for young Black adolescent females, which relates to CRFT and the lived experiences of women of color.

Sample and Population

The sample for this research study consisted of five Black women from a working-class background, with some college education (college attendees for one full year and/or college graduates) between the ages of 23 and 33 years old who were former mentees of the Indiana and Illinois chapters of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Recognizing the challenges regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and class that negatively affect Black women, I interviewed Black women who came from a working-class background to better understand how their socioeconomic status influenced their need for a mentorship program. Their perspectives allowed me to understand the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. The former mentee perspectives also provided me with information on how this program supports and prepares Black adolescent females for higher education and how the program helps them transition into adulthood. Dworkin (2012) explained,

> The sample size used in qualitative research methods is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods. This is because qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meaning (and heterogeneities in meaning) which are often centered on the how and why of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions. (p. 1319)

The "Ruby" mentorship program is facilitated by mostly women of color who are members of a prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization and community volunteers

who have a passion to help the youth with personal and professional development. The former mentees provided me with a narrative of the affect that the “Ruby” mentorship program had on their personal and professional development. This was done by utilizing the life history narrative method to collect stories about their personal experience with the “Ruby” mentorship program to further explain the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females.

I chose the “Ruby” mentorship program for this study because I have been a “Ruby” mentor for two years and I made some connections with some mentors who are former mentees of this program. As a result of having access to my target population for this study I utilized the reverse snowball sampling method. I selected one participant who agreed to participate in the study as an initial point of contact and asked them to forward the information regarding my study to other participants that may be interested in participating in my study. “Snowball sampling is used to recruit samples when members of the desired population are hard to reach or access because they feel disempowered, socially excluded, or vulnerable” (Sedgwick, 2013, p. 1). Berndt (2020) explained,

> Sampling methods are categorized into probability or non-probability methods. Non-probability sampling methods use an approach in which the sample is selected based on the subjective judgment of the researcher instead of using random selection. Common types of non-probability sampling methods include quota sampling, purposive sampling, self-selection sampling, and snowball sampling. (p. 224)

The Ball State University Office of Research Integrity Institutional Review Board (IRB) recommended utilizing reverse snowball sampling. The IRB explained,

> When using “snowball sampling” with already enrolled research participants, the IRB strongly recommends that participants be asked to forward study information to potential

> participants allowing them to contact the researcher directly rather than providing names and contact information of potential participants. (p. 1)

Utilizing the reverse snowball sampling method, I interviewed five Black, female participants from a working-class background, with some college education (college attendees for one full year and/or college graduates) between the ages of 23 and 33 years old who were former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program to ensure that each participant met the criteria for this study to accurately explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. Due to the unique challenges that Black women encounter pertaining to the intersectionality of race, gender, and class I chose Black women who came from working-class backgrounds to better understand how their socioeconomic status influenced their need for mentorship programs and how this program supports and prepares young Black women for higher education as they are transitioning to adulthood. Black adolescent females from working-class backgrounds have a higher risk of teen pregnancy, living in poverty, and being exposed to drugs and violence (Assari et al., 2018; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Johnson, 2010; Somers et al., 2016).

Since Black women have challenges in all aspects of their lives regarding intersectionality I wanted to know about the benefits of mentoring Black adolescent females. I chose the age group of 23 to 33 years old because it represents my age group and is relevant to my positionality as a researcher. The "Ruby" mentorship program as an auxiliary program created by a prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization, which has over 300,000 members worldwide. I chose to protect the identity of the "Ruby" mentorship program due to the legalities associated with utilizing the actual name of the Black Greek Letter Organization. By

law utilizing the actual name associated with the Black Greek Letter Organization without permission allows the unauthorized individual to be subject to legal action.

By selecting the 23 to 33 year age group, I was able to reach Black women who have attended college for at least one full year and/or graduated from college to understand the significance that this program had on their personal and professional lives as they were navigating through the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Black women can successfully navigate through the challenges of intersectionality with guidance and mentorship (Breakfield, 2010). For this study I also reviewed the "Ruby" mentorship curriculum handbook to better understand the benefits of mentorship for young Black women and how the program supports and prepares them for higher education as they transition into adulthood.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation utilized for this study was semi-structured interviews. I conducted two interviews with each participant. The first interview was used to build rapport and ask the interview questions, while the second interview was used for asking clarifying questions to gain more insight on the participants' perceptions. Semi-structured interviews allowed me the opportunity to further explore where the information received from the participants led me as a researcher. McIntosh and Morse (2015) explained,

> The semi-structured interview (SSI) is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced. It employs a relatively detailed interview guide or schedule and may be used when there is sufficient objective knowledge about an experience or phenomenon, but the subjective knowledge is lacking. Participants are free to respond to these open-ended questions as they wish, and the researcher may probe these responses. (p. 1)

Semi-structured interviews are versatile and flexible and can lead the researcher towards additional information that better informs the study, the purpose, and the research questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Kallio et al. (2016) explained,

> One of the main advantages is that the semi-structured interview method has been found to be successful in enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant, enabling the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on participants' responses and allowing space for participants' individual verbal expressions. (pp. 2959-2960)

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted 60-90 minute semi-structured virtual interviews via Zoom to collect the data for this qualitative, narrative research study utilizing the life history interview approach. The life history interview approach is a type of narrative research utilized to collect lived stories from the individuals entire life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized the life history interview approach with chronology and CRFT to collect the narratives of the former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program from childhood to adulthood to better understand how socioeconomic status has influenced their need for mentorship programs and how the program supports and prepares Black adolescent females for higher education while they are transitioning into adulthood.

CRFT was utilized in the data collection to record the counter-stories of each participant. Each participant shared their stories and reflected on the challenges regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status that they encountered growing up as Black adolescent females. I utilized Zoom for virtual interviews for each participant as the "Ruby" mentorship program is currently an online mentorship program that still follows the Covid-19 social distancing protocol.

The data collected from this study was transcribed by utilizing the "Voice Memos" recording application. The transcriptions were then reviewed for accuracy alongside the voice recordings. After the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy they were then analyzed by utilizing Saldaña's Values coding chart to record the attitudes, beliefs, and values of each participant.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the participant responses were analyzed through the CRFT lens. CRFT allowed the participants to use their voices to share their unique lived experiences through counter-stories as it pertained to the challenges of intersectionality regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status. These counter-stories were then re-storied in chronological order. "Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting them to place them within a chronological sequence" (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 244). Narrative chronology allows researchers to analyze the data from the participant responses by utilizing chronology or restorying the participant responses (Creswell et al., 2007).

Narrative researchers organize the participants' responses into stories about their life experiences and worldviews (Creswell et al., 2007). The participants' responses provided additional insight regarding their self-identities, values, beliefs, and attitudes which directly related to the CRFT tenet that individuals have many identities and beliefs (Few, 2007). Analyzing data utilizing a CRFT lens allowed me to further recognize a direct connection between the tenets of CRFT and how the participants' self-identities were formed as a result of the oppression they encountered as Black adolescent females directly relating to their racial identity, environment, home life, and lived experiences (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

The participants' lived experiences further revealed that Black women are expected to adapt to their oppressive environments (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010) pertaining to the CRFT tenets relating to colorblindness, interest convergence, and the social construct of race despite their circumstances (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Few, 2007; Johnson, 2015; Wing 1997). The data analysis gathered from the participant responses led to the coding process. Elliott (2018) explained,

> Coding is an almost universal process in qualitative research; it is a fundamental aspect of the analytical process and the ways in which researchers break down their data to make something new. Coding is the process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way. (p. 2850)

The type of coding chart that best accommodates this study is the Values Coding chart. This chart allowed me to interpret and observe any patterns within the data gathered from the participants. Saldaña (2014) explained,

> Values coding identifies the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a participant, as shared by the individual and/or interpreted by the analyst. This coding method infers the "heart and mind" of an individual or group's worldview as to what is important, perceived as true, maintained as opinion, and felt strongly. The three constructs are coded separately but are part of a complex interconnected system. (p. 25)

While utilizing the Values coding chart, I reviewed the transcriptions from the participant interviews and organized the participant responses to each question in a Microsoft word table with two columns. In the first column, I listed the interview question and the participants' response, and in the second column, I listed the codes formulated and observed from the

participants' responses which was organized by what was identified as the emerging themes that defined the participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs. Values coding requires the researcher to identify the participants' values, which are defined as what they feel is important; the participants' attitudes, which is how they think and feel about themselves and others; and finally, the participants' beliefs which is what they think or feel based on their life experiences and perceptions (Saldaña, 2014). Doing so allowed me to gain more insight on the participants' lived experiences, values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the importance of mentorship for Black adolescent females.

The participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and attitudes were directly connected to the social construction of race and the unique voices of color tenets of CRFT. I also found that the participants' environment, beliefs, values, and attitudes as Black adolescent females influenced their views about the race, color blindness, and the interest convergence tenets of CRFT. The adolescent stage is a highly influential time in a young person's life as they are forming views about life, their self-identity, and values at this stage (Leath et al., 2019).

The Values coding chart helped me identify the emerging themes from each participant interview. Values coding examines the interpersonal and social constructs. Values coding relates to narrative research and CRFT because it allows the participants to share their life experiences and worldviews through counter-storytelling. I kept digital notes from the virtual interviews to record participant responses throughout the interview so that I could examine and code the data obtained. The digital notes and interview recordings are being kept on a password protected computer in a One Drive folder under pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Table 1

Values Coding Chart Example

Saldaña (2014)'s Value Coding Chart Example	
Participant Response	Emerging themes and ideas from participant response
P: In a way, I've always lived kind of cheap (**belief**). I'm not a big spender, really, so I haven't changed my habits all that much (**value**), but I do notice I'm not putting as much into savings as I used to (**belief**), so that's a sign that I'm spending more because the price of stuff has gone up (**belief**). I heard that peanut butter's gonna go up because of some bad crop, so that's another ding in my wallet (**attitude**).	**1 B:** LIVING CHEAPLY **2 V:** FRUGAL **3 B:** LESS SAVINGS **4 B:** "SPENDING MORE" **5 B:** RISING PRICES **6 A:** ECONOMIC BITTERNESS
Note. B (Beliefs); V(Values); A (Attitudes). The numbers represent the number of codes that emerged from this particular question.	

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the confidentiality of my participants I transcribed the data collected from the participant interviews by labeling them under pseudonyms. I identified the "Ruby" mentorship program under a pseudonym to protect the identity of the prominent Black female Greek Letter Organization who created this mentorship program. The use of pseudonyms in this study ensured that I avoided revealing any pertinent information that allowed someone to identify the true identity of the participants.

In an effort to further ensure confidentiality and professionalism I followed the ethical guidelines and considerations of the Institutional Review Board at Ball State University with

regards to conducting a study. The participants were informed before, during, and after the interview that they could discontinue being a participant in this study at any time and that their participation was voluntary. Taking these steps helped to ensure the participant's anonymity with regard to the ethical considerations of this study.

Assumptions

One assumption of this study is that mentorship is very important to the academic and career success of Black adolescent females. Another assumption is that the "Ruby" mentorship program is very instrumental in assisting Black adolescent females with navigating to college successfully and transitioning into adulthood. An expectation of this study was that "Ruby" is accessible to the at-risk Black adolescent females in impoverished neighborhoods who need assistance with navigating through high school to college.

Limitations to the Study

The findings from this study were not representative of the views of every mentee in the "Ruby" mentorship program in the U.S. and outside of the U.S. and it was not generalizable to other mentorship programs. This study only contained the narratives of five Black women and was only limited to the Indiana and Illinois chapters of the "Ruby" mentorship program due to the accessibility of the participants. The findings and implications were not generalizable but may inform and influence the creation of additional and similar mentorship programs through the themes and responses shared from this study. These findings and implications can inform community leaders like adult educators, government officials, and the board of education on the significance of creating mentorship programs for marginalized youth from under-resourced urban areas and how it positively affects their mental health and life outcomes.

Utilizing the reverse snowball sampling method for this study was another limitation to this study as I had to forward their research information to potential participants for this study with the hope that I would be able to access these participants and gain their interest in participating in this research study. As previously mentioned, I was only able to gain the consent of five participants who were willing to participate in this study opposed to the proposed sample size of five to ten participants. Initially I planned to only interview participants from the Indiana chapter of the "Ruby" mentorship program. However, one participant that expressed interest in participating in the study was a member of the Illinois chapter thus leading me to the decision of opening the study to Indiana and Illinois residents.

Summary of Chapter

In conclusion, I conducted a qualitative study utilizing the narrative research method. The type of narrative study that I utilized for data collection was the life history and chronology narrative method. I used these methods to examine the stories and life experiences from the former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program and the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. Through the use of Critical Race Feminist Theory, I analyzed the data and examined further the oppressive challenges that counteract Black adolescent females being prepared for higher education degrees and transitioning into adulthood. I invited participants for this study utilizing the reverse snowball sampling method, and I collected the data through semi-structured interview questions for the two virtual interviews that took place via Zoom. In chapter four, I provided an introduction to the findings from the data collected in this study.

CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Due to the unique challenges that Black adolescent females face they need safe spaces to express themselves and develop their self-identities so that they are able to cope with the realities related to their current life situations and environments. Black feminist scholars believe that mentorship programs are important resources that can be used by community organizations and schools to help Black adolescent females cope with their realities while strengthening their resiliency (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does the "Ruby" mentorship program support and prepare Black adolescent females for higher education degrees?
3. How does the "Ruby" mentorship program assist Black adolescent females with transitioning into adulthood?
4. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?

Chapter four of this study analyzes the data and findings collected from the study participants. This study was conducted by utilizing the qualitative narrative research method. This study was conducted virtually via Zoom while utilizing semi-structured interviews. I

conducted two interviews with each participant. During the first interview I established rapport with the participants, and in the second interview I asked clarifying questions regarding the responses that they provided during the initial interview to ensure that their responses were accurately recorded.

These findings included the narratives of five Black women who grew up in a working-class family and who were between the ages of 23 and 33 years old. These women were also former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The participants are currently living in Indiana and Illinois and have graduated and/or attended college for at least one full year.

The participants are former mentees of the Indiana and Illinois chapters of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Their identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms. (See Table 2 below for a glance at the participant profiles.)

Table 2

Participant Profiles

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Profession	Age at the start of the program	Time spent in program	Program location	College Graduate	Attended at least one full year of college
Diamond	24	Mental Health Specialist	15 years old	3 years	Indiana	No	Yes
Jade	29	Director of Educational Development	14 years old	4 years	Indiana	Yes	Yes
Amber	32	Social Worker	15 years old	3 years	Indiana	Yes	Yes
Sapphire	30	School Counselor	16 years old	2 years	Indiana	Yes	Yes
Opal	33	Direct Care Manager	14 years old	4 years	Illinois	Yes	Yes

Diamond

Diamond, age 24, is a Black woman who currently works as a mental health specialist for a hospital in West Central Indiana. She grew up in a working-class family in Northwest Indiana with her mother who was a single mother; her father is unknown. Diamond attended Butler University for three years before withdrawing from school due to becoming the full-time caregiver for her mother who suddenly became ill. She was 15 years old when she started the "Ruby" mentorship program. Diamond participated in the program for three years up until the time she left for college.

Diamond regrets not receiving her bachelor's degree in social work, but she plans on enrolling at Butler University next Spring to complete her degree. Diamond's mother sadly passed away two years ago, and she expressed that she is still grieving her loss. Diamond expressed that she promised her mother before she died that she would finish school, and she fully intends on keeping that promise. Diamond expressed her gratitude for being a former mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program because she made connections with the former mentees and mentors that she still remains in contact with presently.

When asked what she believed her life would look like right now if she had not joined the "Ruby" mentorship program Diamond expressed, "I don't believe that I would be as successful as I am today. The program helped me learn how to network with others and so much more. I would probably be another negative statistic if I had not joined".

Jade

Jade, age 29, is a Black woman who is currently employed as the Director of Educational Development in Indiana. She grew up in a working-class background in Northwest Indiana with her mother and her two younger siblings. Her mother was a single mother, and her father was minimally involved in her life. Jade attended Indiana State University where she received a bachelor's degree in elementary education, and she went on to receive her master's degree in student affairs and higher education.

Jade was 14 years old when she began the "Ruby" mentorship program in Indiana. She participated in the program for four years and stated that the program made a positive impact on her life. Jade revealed that she is currently a mentor to Black adolescents in a high school setting. She has a strong faith in God and believes that he is the only reason that she has been able to survive everything that she has been through.

When asked what she believed her life would look like right now if she had not joined the "Ruby" mentorship program Jade expressed, "Had I not joined the program I can tell you right now I would probably still live in the hood and be on government assistance. But God had other plans for me. This program changed my life and gave me a sense of purpose".

Amber

Amber, age 32, is a Black woman from Northwest Indiana. She grew up in a working-class family. She lived with her mother who was a single mother, and her father was not involved in her life. Amber attended Indiana State University where she received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in social work. She began the "Ruby" mentorship program in Indiana at the age of 15 years old and remained a mentee in the program for three years. Amber is currently applying for doctoral programs to pursue a doctorate in social work as well.

Amber believes in giving back to her community and that we were all placed on this earth to be a blessing to others. Amber is currently a mentor in the "Ruby" mentorship program in Indianapolis. She is currently employed as a Family Case Manager Supervisor for the Department of Child Services in Indianapolis. She stated that she has a tough job, but that if she could change just one child's life, she has done her job right.

When asked what she believed her life would look like right now if she had not joined the "Ruby" mentorship program Amber expressed, "I'm not sure what my life would look like, but I know that it wouldn't be positive. This program taught me the importance of advocation and giving back to my community. This program is the reason that I am in the social work field today".

Sapphire

Sapphire, age 30, is a Black woman who grew up in a working-class family in Northwest Indiana. Sapphire grew up with both of her parents in the home, and she has one younger sister and one younger brother. She attended Ball State University where she received her bachelor's degree in psychology. Sapphire received her master's degree in psychology from Indiana State University.

She is currently employed as a school counselor at a high school in Northwest Indiana. Sapphire began the "Ruby" mentorship program in Indiana at the age of 16 years old and remained in the program for two years before going to college. Sapphire expressed that although she had two parents in the home they still struggled financially. She also expressed how the tension between her parents due to finances, alcoholism, and physical abuse made it difficult to live in the home. Sapphire expressed how the "Ruby" mentorship program gave her an escape from her reality at home.

When asked what she believed her life would look like right now if she had not joined the "Ruby" mentorship program Sapphire expressed, "I would've probably followed in my parents footsteps had I not joined the program. Parents are a child's first teacher and the negative patterns that I witnessed between them probably would've manifested in my personal relationships with others. I learned how to develop coping skills and adapt to my surroundings while setting goals for myself in the program. I fought for the life that I felt that I deserved and I'm glad that I betted on myself".

Opal

Opal, age 33, is a Black woman who grew up in a working-class family in Illinois. Opal lived with her grandmother because her mother battled with drug abuse and her father was

unknown. Before moving in with her grandmother at the age of 10 years old, she expressed that her mother was neglectful, and she lacked basic needs like food and clean clothing. Opal expressed that living with her mother made her become more independent. She went to stay with her grandmother after the Department of Child and Family Services intervened and removed her from the home.

Opal became pregnant with a daughter at the age of 16 years old, but her grandmother assisted her with her daughter so that she could finish high school. Opal started the "Ruby" mentorship program at the age of 14 years old and remained in the program for four years. She attended the University of Illinois Chicago where she received her bachelor's degree in educational psychology. Opal plans to further her education an enroll in a master's degree program in the near future. She is currently a Direct Care Manager in Chicago, Illinois.

When asked what she believed her life would look like right now if she had not joined the "Ruby" mentorship program Opal expressed, "Although I had the help and support of my grandmother I needed this program. I was a single teen mom, and I could've easily dropped out of school and ended up on welfare like the people in my neighborhood, but I didn't. The program inspired me to set goals for myself even though I was a teen mom. The mentors and mentees supported me, and my life looks much brighter now because I had the strength and encouragement to persist despite what I was going through at the time".

Themes

From the qualitative interviews with the five participants who were in the "Ruby" mentorship program, three significant themes emerged. They were: hardships, selfi-identity, and perseverance. Under hardships, three sub-themes were found: financial, environmental, and educational. Under self-identity, the sub-theme of empowerment was present. And under the theme of perseverance, the sub-themes of having a support system and a way out were found.

Table 3

Description of Themes

Theme	Description	Sub-theme	CRFT Tenet(s)
Hardships	The participants expressed their challenges growing up as adolescents regarding their socioeconomic status as it pertained to financial hardships, environmental hardships, and the challenges that they encountered in their school settings.	1. Financial 2. Environmental 3. Educational	Voice of color Social construct of race Interest convergence
Self-identity	The participants expressed how the "Ruby" mentorship program affected their self-esteem as they were transitioning into adulthood.	1. Empowerment	Voice of color Social construct of race
Perseverance	The participants expressed their will to overcome despite their circumstances with the help of their mentors, and how education was a way to escape the struggles of their environment and go on to college to have a better life.	1. Support system 2. A way out	Voice of color Social construct of race

Hardships

Transcript analysis and coding revealed the first theme that emerged during the participant interviews was the theme of hardships. The participants discussed the challenges associated with each subtheme and how it affected them growing up as Black adolescent females. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories. The subthemes included financial, environmental, and educational hardships.

Financial Hardships

The sub-theme of financial hardships emerged as the participants began to share their stories about their home life, their caregivers, and their family's involvement with government assistance. Each participant expressed how they felt about their home life and the financial hardships that affected their quality of life. When asked about what their home life was like growing up and who the primary caregiver in their home was each participant provided their reflection. Diamond, age 24, from Indiana expressed,

> I grew up as an only child, where my mother was the primary caregiver. My mom and I lived in a small apartment that often had a lot of electrical issues. In the summer, it was too hot, and in the winter, it was too cold. It seemed like my mother was on the phone with maintenance every other day arguing with them about fixing the air conditioner and the heat. I remember having fans in the window in the summer and small portable heaters in the winter. I did not have any siblings, but I was able to play with my cousins on my mom's side often, so I didn't feel so alone.

Jade, age 29, from Indiana expressed,

> I grew up in Gary, Indiana so if you know the area you can just about imagine the types of things that I went through growing up. I lived with my mother and my two younger sisters. My dad came around every once in a while, but never stayed around long enough to help us. Looking back on my home life, I can honestly say that I didn't really have a childhood. I can't remember a time where I was able to just enjoy myself as a regular kid. My mother worked long hours, so I was in charge of watching my sisters. I cooked for them, bathed them, and helped them with their homework. I had a lot of responsibility at a young age. We lived in a house where paint was peeling from the walls. We had an issue with roaches and rats, but we learned to adapt to it because that's all my mother could afford at the time.

Amber, age 32, from Indiana shared,

> I grew up as an only child and my mother was a single mother. I did not have any siblings, but I made friends with the kids in my neighborhood. My mother and I lived alone because my father was not around. I knew who my father was, but he was never around. This bothered me a lot because I wanted to get to know him, but he did not want to get to know me. This hurt me deeply, but my mom was very nurturing and did the best that she could. My mom worked the night shift so I stayed with my grandma most of the time so that I wouldn't be at home alone. My mom and I lived in a small studio apartment, and we shared the bedroom when I wasn't staying the night with my grandma.

Sapphire, age 30, from Indiana reflected,

> I grew up in a two-bedroom apartment with my mom, dad, and my younger brother and sister. My home life was pure hell if I can speak candidly. My mom and dad fought and argued all of the time about money, which led to them drinking heavily and physically

> abusing each other. I was older so I knew when their arguments were going to get physical, so I would make my siblings go to our room and close the door to protect them from all of the violence. At times our parents would get frustrated with us especially regarding our homework, and we would get abused if we did not know the right answers to our homework assignments. It was my responsibility to protect them as their big sister. My dad had a gambling problem and often spent the money for our rent on his gambling habit. Life was tough and our apartment was not big enough for all of the fighting and arguing that happened on a daily basis.

Opal, age 33, from Illinois mentioned,

> I lived with my mother in a small two-bedroom house for the first ten years of my life until I was removed from my home by DCFS (Department of Child and Family Services) and sent to live with my grandmother. I loved staying with my grandmother because I felt safe there. My mom turned to drugs when she met this man who was a known drug dealer in our neighborhood. My mom changed, and there was no food in the home most of the time. I was on my own a lot and I remember feeling afraid and lonely. I did not know my father, and no one had any information on him, so I was allowed to live with my grandmother once someone called in a report about my living conditions and me being home alone a lot. My grandmother took good care of me and if it wasn't for her, I don't know where I would be right now.

When asked what their parent/caregivers did for a living and if they received government assistance each participant provided their reflection. Diamond expressed,

> Before my mother got sick, she worked as a home health aide for individuals with disabilities. My mom worked long hours and most days she would come home and go

> right to sleep. We did receive food stamps because as we all know the health care system does not pay their employees a fair wage. Despite being on government assistance, my mom still struggled to pay the bills and the rent on time. Sometimes my mother sold some of our food stamps just to earn extra money from the people in the neighborhood to make ends meet. When asked how being on government assistance made her feel, Diamond expressed, I didn't think anything of it. It was normal to me and almost everyone in my neighborhood were receiving some type of government assistance whether it was food stamps, TANF (temporary assistance for needy families), or WIC (women infant and child).

Jade expressed,

> My mother worked with janitorial services cleaning business offices at night. My dad was into carpentry doing odd jobs from what I was told because he was not around much, and he did not help take care of us. My mom was exhausted when she came home from work in the morning and was unable to help get my siblings ready for school let alone cook for us. Maintaining the home became my job to help my mom out. We were on government assistance receiving food stamps. I'm not for sure if we received anything other than food stamps.

When asked how being on government assistance made her feel, Jade shared, "looking back on it now that was just a way of life for us. Everyone I knew was on government assistance. We had food and a warm bed, so I was thankful for that."

Amber reflected,

> My mother worked in a factory on the night shift. I stayed with my grandma on the nights that my mom had to work so that I wouldn't be home alone. I'm not sure what my father

> did for a living because he was not involved in my life. My mother was a single mother that had to care for us on her own. We did receive food stamps, but I wasn't embarrassed by it. I was actually happy that we had it because I could pick what I wanted to eat from the grocery store. In my neighborhood it was understood that most if not all of us were on food stamps or some type of government assistance. That's just the way that it was so I didn't feel ashamed about it.

Sapphire remembered,

> My mother worked as a waitress at IHOP. Her schedule was all over the place. She worked mostly mornings and nights. My father worked at McDonalds on the night shift. My parents typically brought us home free food after each shift and that is what we would eat mostly. Our family did receive government assistance. We received food stamps. Sometimes my parents would sell our food stamps for money because we ate a lot of fast food because of where my parents worked.

When asked how being on government assistance made her feel, Sapphire said, "receiving government assistance did not really bother me. I think for us it was normal…just a way of life. Everything else was falling apart around me, but I never missed a meal or worried about being hungry."

Opal expressed,

> For the first 10 years of my life my mother had a hard time holding on to a job and I didn't know my father. My mother struggled with drug addiction which made it difficult for her to keep a job. My mother worked some of everywhere, like Burger King, the health care industry, grocery stores and more. We did receive food stamps, but my mother sold those mostly for money for her drug habit. There were a lot of times that I

> didn't know where my next meal would come from. I looked forward to eating at school because I knew that most of the time that was the only time that I would eat for the day. After a report came in about our living conditions, I was removed from the home from DCFS and permanently placed with my grandmother. By the time I moved in with my grandmother, she was retired from her job at the post office. I can't really remember right now if my grandmother received food stamps while I was living with her.

When asked how being on government assistance made her feel, Opal explained, "receiving government assistance didn't bother me as I didn't know another way of life. That was my life at the time and there was nothing that I could do about it. I was not ashamed or angry about it because we needed it even if my mom did sell most of our food stamps for money for drugs."

The responses from each participant regarding their home life, caregivers, and government assistance led me to the sub-theme of financial hardships. All five of the participants expressed their struggles with financial security, and how their families needed financial assistance. The responses from each participant regarding their parent's occupation and home life further revealed how much financial hardships affected their quality of life.

Environmental Hardships

The next sub-theme that emerged from the interviews is environmental hardships. In this section each participant reflected on their neighborhoods and communities. When asked about their lives growing up in an urban neighborhood ("the hood") and how their mental health was affected by living in this environment, each participant provided their reflection. Diamond shared,

> Growing up in the hood was a different type of struggle. Living in that environment tests you mentally every day. During the warmer months the violence in our neighborhood seemed to be heightened because everyone was outside. There was still violence in the winter, but more so in the summertime. We had a lot of gang violence in our neighborhood, which ultimately led to several shootings daily. This greatly affected my mental health because I had fears of getting shot. No kid should have to live in fear of their life being cut short. Our community leaders did what they could to try to stop the violence in our neighborhoods, but there was only so much that they could do. It was not safe to be a kid in my neighborhood. Growing up in the hood changed me, I don't know if I would call it PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) or what, but as an adult I find myself avoiding areas where there is gang activity and gun violence for my own safety.

Jade expressed,

> I grew up in the hood and looking back on it now I can say that… that was no way for a child to live. There were drug dealers on the corners in my neighborhood and gang violence. Sometimes there were "drive-byes" (shootings that occur while in a moving vehicle). All we could do was get down on the ground and wait for the shooting to finish. Enduring those times were scary, but I was used to it. I was in fear of my life during the shootings and after that I would go back to playing like nothing ever happened. That was just how my neighborhood was. I knew to be home before the streetlights came on and to play away from the windows to avoid stray bullets. In my neighborhood you had to be on guard at all times to protect yourself and that's what I did. My community often had block parties in our neighborhood to provide us with safe fun activities. I miss those days

a lot. My family had a strong faith in God, and I knew that I would always be protected no matter what.

Amber reflected,

I did indeed grow up in an urban neighborhood and there was never a dull moment. I had neighbors that argued and fought in the middle of the street on most days. The police frequented our block for that couple alone several times. I remember a man from my neighborhood who used to collect bottles and cans. He was drunk most of the time and he pushed a cart, which contained the bottles and cans he collected and his belongings. He was always nice and a regular in our neighborhood. I was taught at an early age to not judge people and to speak to everyone. Of course, I grew up around shootings and gang violence as well. The shootings took a toll on my mental health because I lived in fear, but after a while it becomes normal. My mother taught me to plead the blood of Jesus when shootings occurred in my neighborhood and somehow that phrase made me feel completely safe. Aside from the negativity in my neighborhood we all looked out for each other. Our community was supportive and vigilant in reporting any violence or suspicious activity in our neighborhood.

Sapphire expressed,

I did grow up in the hood and let me tell you something, it's not for the weak-hearted. I grew up a lot faster than I should have because of all of the things that I was exposed to in my neighborhood. I lived in a poor community, but everybody knew everybody. We were a family even though most of us were not related to one another. The neighbors looked out for me and my siblings because they knew how crazy it was in my home because of my parents constantly arguing and fighting. I became independent and fear

> became an afterthought because that was just the way that things were. Reflecting back on it I still get nervous or uncomfortable when I hear or see people arguing and fighting. That was a traumatic time in my life. We had a lot of drug dealers and drug addicts in our neighborhood, and it was sad to see. When I was younger, I didn't have much of a reaction to it because I was used to seeing people strung out on drugs. There was gang violence and shootings in my neighborhood as well. I didn't like living like that, but I didn't have a choice. So, I just made the best out of living in that environment.

Opal expressed,

> I did grow up in the hood first when I lived with my mother for the first 10 years of my life and then after that when I moved in with my grandmother. It was challenging in both environments because I witnessed a lot of violence. When I had my daughter she also grew up in the hood because I still lived with my grandmother. In both environments I was exposed to alcoholism, poverty, drugs/drug addicts, and gun violence. I had severe anxiety living in those environments because I never knew what to expect. My mother had people coming in and out of our home when I lived with her and that was extremely unsafe. I still struggle with anxiety now from everything that I went through growing up. I don't feel like I had much of a childhood because I saw so much, and I knew things that a child should not know. I witnessed my mother having sex for drugs in our home. It was all bad, but what can I say…I survived by the grace of God.

Each participant shared their experiences about growing up in an urban neighborhood and their responses revealed several parallels regarding their life stories. All five participants experienced some type of violence or abuse in their environments. These environmental

hardships deeply affected their quality of life and mental health. Thus, forming the emerging sub-theme of environmental hardships.

Educational Hardships

The last sub-theme that emerged in this section is educational hardships. In this section each participant recalls their experiences with hardships in the educational system. When asked to describe their academic experiences in high school Diamond expressed,

> High school was rough for me because I dealt with a lot of friend drama. I had trouble fitting in because I was the "awkward" Black girl. I was into different things like reading, choir, and anime. As far as my school goes, they did not invest a lot of money into my school, so a lot of the desks and computers that they provided were broken and outdated. We had issues with the heat and the air conditioner. It's hard to focus when you are too hot or too cold. We had a lot of behavioral issues in class where students were sent to the principal's office because of them acting out in class. Their behaviors stemmed from wanting attention and the temperature in the classroom. There just wasn't enough money invested in our school. A lot of my schoolbooks did not have a front or back cover because they were so old and worn. In those situations, you just have to make the best out of it. My teachers were mostly Black with some White instructors. The students in my school were mostly Black, with a small percentage of White and Hispanic students. We had gang members in our school from opposing gangs that often got into large brawls in between the class periods. The police and security were usually called to break up these fights. Some of the gang members sold drugs like marijuana and pills to the other students from their lockers. Drug use and distribution were a major issue in my high

school and some of these students were expelled after the school did random drug checks with the police dogs.

Jade, Amber, Sapphire, and Opal also expressed several overlapping issues with the lack of school funding, school fights, and drug distribution. They each provided narratives of struggling with self-esteem and self-image before starting the "Ruby" mentorship program. They each went to predominantly Black high schools with a small percentage of White and Hispanic students. Diamond and Jade attended the same high school while Amber and Sapphire also attended the same high school and provided similar accounts. Opal attended school in Illinois and provided similar accounts as the other participants.

Each participant also revealed that they received free lunch due to their parents financial status. They also received waivers for the ACT (American College Test) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), which were required tests that influenced their admission into college. All five participants revealed that they took the ACT test to help them get admitted into college. All five participants also expressed the challenges that they encountered within their school systems which led to the emerging theme of educational hardships. These hardships affected their outlook on their education, environment, and finances.

Self-Identity

Transcript analysis and coding revealed the second theme that emerged during the participant interviews was the theme of self-identity. The participants discussed how the "Ruby" mentorship program affected their self-esteem when they were Black adolescent females transitioning into adulthood. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories.

The subtheme associated with the main theme of self-identity for this section was empowerment. When asked what the "Ruby" mentorship program did for them as Black adolescent females and what they gained from the program each participant shared their reflections. Diamond shared,

> Wow, this is a great question, and I am ashamed that I had not truly reflected on what the program did for me during that difficult time of my life. I told you before that I was the awkward Black girl that everyone made fun of. It was hard to relate to others because I feared that they would judge me because of how different I was. One of the ushers at my church told my mother about the "Ruby" mentorship program because her granddaughter was in the program. The usher felt that the program would help me become more outgoing. My mother signed me up for the program and I attended mentorship sessions weekly. I had my reservations about starting the program because I just knew that the experience would be just like what I was currently dealing with in high school, but I was wrong. I felt welcomed the very first day and connected with some really nice mentors and mentees. To me it felt like the sisterhood that I had always longed for being an only child. I started the program when I was 15 years old and at that time, I was a sophomore in high school and very depressed. I had no self-confidence and at times I would self-harm by cutting my inner thigh so that I could feel something other than the pain that I felt every day. Once I started the program everything was different. I became more outgoing and confident. I learned so much about myself and how to function in the world as an "awkward" Black girl. I was able to find my strength and I realized that being awkward made me unique and that was empowering. The program taught me about the importance of education and finding my voice as a leader.

Jade shared,

> First off let me just say that this program changed my life in the best ways possible. I learned about the "Ruby" mentorship program from my friend, Pearl and her mom who had recently enrolled her in the program. My friend told me all about the activities that they did and how she loved doing community service with them. Hearing about all of the fun things that they did make me want to sign up as well. I told my mom about it, and she signed me up for the program. I was 14 years old and a freshman in high school when I started the program in Indiana. I always said that I believe that God doesn't make any mistakes and that he placed me in the right spot at the right time. The first year of high school was tough for me. I had bad acne, and I didn't have the best clothes because we could not afford the nicer clothes. Most of my clothes came from church giveaways and the good will because those were easily accessible and affordable. Of course, I was teased about my acne and my clothes, so I did not feel very good about myself. I did not feel pretty or confident in myself. After my first two sessions in the program, I began to open up and share my thoughts about what we were covering on that day. I learned about the world around me and how I could affect change in my community. I made friends in the program and began to feel a sense of belonging. I began to be more self-confident, which was completely different from who I was when I first started the program.

Amber remembered,

> I started the program when I was 15 years old. My mom heard about the program from a friend at her job and decided that it would be a good opportunity for me. I did not like the idea of starting the program initially because I was shy and afraid to meet new people. I wasn't popular in high school, I guess you can say that I was an average looking girl who

> didn't have many friends. The boys that I liked didn't like me and my self-esteem was really low. Being a teenager was one of the toughest times in my life. I remember feeling emotional about everything. I remember crying a lot and wishing that I looked different. I wanted to be popular and fit in with the "cool kids", but popularity isn't what it's cracked up to be. I realized that with popularity came the pressure of being perfect and that's not what I really wanted. I started the program with no expectations, I just knew that it was something that I was being forced to do. After going to the sessions weekly I was able to build a bond with the other girls and the mentors. I finally had girls that were my age to relate to and make friends with. I found myself opening up way more than I thought that I would. I began to become more comfortable in my skin and I didn't feel the need to impress other people by being something that I was not. I was able to be me. I learned to accept myself flaws and all. I also learned that I was enough and developed a self-confidence that I never knew that I had. The program made me want to succeed in all aspects of my life.

Sapphire expressed,

> I was only in the "Ruby" mentorship program for two years, but in that time, I gained so much knowledge. I was 16 years old at the time and life was crazy for me. I had to look out for my siblings because my parents were at odds with each other most of the time and it made living at home very uncomfortable. I needed an outlet and finding out about this program was just what I needed. I needed a break from home and having to wear a cape every day for my sister and brother. It was tiresome and all I really wanted was to be a regular teenager, but I felt more like an adult. I heard about the program from a close friend of mine, and I asked my mother to sign me up. I was very eager to start the

> program because it meant that I could be out of the house for a little while and talk to people that were my age instead of entertaining my brother and sister like I normally did. I finally had something… an activity that I didn't have to share with my siblings. Don't get me wrong, I love my siblings, but the age difference made it difficult for us to relate to one another when we were younger. Now that we are older, we have the best relationship. The program helped me embrace being a leader and a role model. I was already a leader and a role model for my siblings but learning how to be a leader in my community was amazing. I found my strengths within the program and applied them to how I conducted myself as a young woman and how I developed relationships with others.

Opal stated,

> I was fortunate enough to start the program when I was 14 years old, and I remained in the program the whole four years that I was allowed. My grandmother heard about the program and how it benefited young Black girls and felt that I needed positive role models to look up to. My grandmother told me that the Lord intends for me to do something great with my life. Whenever my grandmother prophesied over me I listened, and I believed her, so I knew that starting the program was what I needed to do. I was able to build genuine relationships with my peers and mentors. They were my sisters, which is something that I didn't have being an only child. The program boosted my self-esteem and mental health. I endured a lot of trauma when I lived with my mom and low self-esteem is one that stuck with me. Most importantly, I learned about life skills. People may view life skills as basic common sense, but you don't know what you don't know until you are exposed to something different. I learned about college, current events, and

> how to get involved in my community. I've been able to teach my daughter the same skills because education is very important to me. I learned that my past does not dictate my future. Sure, I was a teen mom, but I was destined for greatness. The program and the help of my grandmother helped me to achieve that greatness despite my upbringing.

During the interviews each participant shared what the "Ruby" mentorship program did for them as Black adolescent females. They each expressed how the program helped them gain a sense of self. They expressed the positive influence that the program had on their self-esteem and willingness to help others. The participants felt that the "Ruby" mentorship program was life changing and affected how they viewed themselves.

Empowerment

The sub-theme of empowerment emerged as the participants began to share their stories about what the program did for them as Black adolescent females, and the values that they gained from being a mentee in the program. Each participant expressed how they ultimately felt empowered to be themselves as a result of being a former mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Each participant expressed their struggle with self-identity and self-esteem prior to starting the "Ruby" mentorship program. Each participant expressed the challenges that they endured in their home life that negatively affected their mental health.

These challenges affected how the participants viewed themselves and how they interacted with others. The "Ruby" mentorship program helped them to identify their strengths within and how to apply those strengths while transitioning into adulthood. Diamond expressed,

> The program taught me a lot about leadership and how to affect change in my community and out in the world. The skills that I was taught in the program helped me feel confident with speaking out and being a leader.

Jade added,

> I felt well prepared for college, and I have the program and God to thank for that. The curriculum that we covered on college preparation and life skills helped me feel confident about becoming a young adult. I took notes during our sessions and asked a lot of questions about the topics that we covered. Each topic that we covered made me feel confident and excited about my future.

Amber recalled,

> I left the program feeling empowered to start my adult life. I found that I was much more prepared for college than most of my friends at the time. I remember sharing the information that I learned from the program with my friends. I encouraged them to join the program and at least two of my friends joined the program because of me. I felt a sense of responsibility for ensuring that my friends had the same opportunities that I had. Education is the truly the key to success.

Sapphire shared,

> I looked at the knowledge that I gained from the program as the blueprint to ensure that I did not end up like my parents. I wanted a chance at a fresh start and going to college was just the thing that I needed. I shared what I learned from the program with my siblings to make sure that they had the same opportunities that I had. When my younger sister became a teenager she started the program too. Both of my siblings went to college and are doing very well for themselves.

Opal expressed,

> The program helped me become a responsible adult for my daughter. I wanted to make sure that my daughter had access to the best educational resources. I am very involved

> when it comes to her education. My daughter is now 16 years old, and she has been a mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program since she was 14. My daughter is very mature and responsible for her age and I'm so very proud of her. I was determined to make sure that my child was not another statistic. Being able to lead my daughter by example is the greatest feeling in the world.

Perseverance

Transcript analysis and coding revealed the final theme that emerged during the participant interviews was the theme of perseverance. The participants discussed the factors that influenced their will to overcome despite their financial, environmental, and educational hardships. The sub-themes that emerged during the interviews were a way out and a support system. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and tell their stories.

Support System

The sub-theme of support system emerged as the participants began to share their stories about their views on graduating from high school and the factors that led to their decision to go to college. Each participant shared their reflections on how their support system influenced their decision to graduate from high school and go to college. When asked what their views were about graduating from high school and going to college before starting the "Ruby" mentorship program and if or why those views changed during their time in the program. Each participant provided their reflection. Diamond expressed,

> Before starting the program, I had a small interest in going to college, but I thought that college might be too difficult for me. I felt that college was only for the smart kids, and I didn't feel like I was smart enough to even consider going. My thoughts about college

> began to change when we started covering college and career preparation in the "Ruby" mentorship program. The course material was relatable, and it actually made me want to go to college. Of course, I knew that I had to graduate from high school first before even getting to that point, but it made me excited about my future. Graduating from high school was a goal of mine because my mom didn't finish high school and I knew that I wanted a chance to get a better job so that I could move out of the hood. I ultimately decided to go to college because (1) I didn't want to live in poverty anymore, (2) I was educated on college and career preparation in the mentorship program, and (3) All of my friends that did the program with me decided that they were going to college too, so we began to look at some of the same colleges together.

Jade expressed,

> Graduating from high school was a must. I knew that I at least needed to do that before anything else. I also knew that I wanted to go to college someday, but I was not sure how I was going to do it. Prior to starting the program, I had no guidance on how to even begin the process of trying to go to college. No one in my family had been to college so I was unsure about what to do. When I got in the program they encouraged us to go to college and answered the questions that we needed to know to get the process started. One of my mentors even helped me fill out college applications. If it wasn't for them walking me through the process I'm not sure that I would have been confident enough to apply for college on my own.

Amber expressed,

> I always envisioned myself graduating from high school, but I was unsure about what I was going to do after high school. I figured that I would just try to find a decent job

somewhere and find a place of my own to live in. I had no plans to go to college, nor was I interested in college before I started the program. However, my views changed once I began to see the benefits of going to college to further my education. Most of my mentors were Black college educated women and I wanted to be just like them. They made me feel like I could reach the same level of success as them. The more that they explained the college process the more I became interested. I knew then that I wanted something more than being poor and living in a bad neighborhood. I knew that going to college would be my ticket out of living in poverty. When I look back on it now I know that I made the right decision regarding my future.

Sapphire expressed,

> I struggled a bit academically in high school. I made average grades and for the first two years of high school I wasn't even for sure if my grades would be good enough to graduate high school let alone go to college. I remember feeling lost when I heard the upperclassmen at my school talk about taking the ACT and what colleges they were going to apply for. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life, but I knew that I needed to do something because living with my mom and dad after high school wasn't an option for me. I started the "Ruby" mentorship program when I was 16 years old and starting the program was right on time. Attending those mentorship sessions made me feel empowered to go to college. I knew then that I wanted to help people, so I decided that I wanted to major in social work. I began to work harder to make better grades in school so that I could get accepted into college. The program definitely influenced my decision to go to college and that was the best decision that I could've made to make it out of my situation.

Opal expressed,

> My grandmother was very strict when it came to making good grades in school and she was very adamant that I graduated from high school despite becoming a teen mom. I made good grades in high school, but I wasn't for sure about what I was going to do afterwards. I remember covering the college and career information in the mentorship program and it really made me want to go to college. My mentors helped me identify my interests regarding what I wanted to major in. My grandma felt that education was important because she only had a 5th grade education, so she wanted better for me. I took a psychology course in high school, and I immediately knew that I wanted to do something in that field. I filled out several applications with my mentors and eventually settled on going to school in-state due to the cost of college. It was cheaper for me to stay in Illinois and attend college so that's what I did. My mentors educated us on financial aid and taking out loans, which was something that I was not educated on prior to attending mentorship sessions. The program was really a deciding factor in me going to college. I finally felt like I had a sense of direction about what I wanted to do with my life. I remember when I got accepted into the educational psychology program at UIC (University of Illinois Chicago), I felt so proud of myself. My grandmother hugged me tight, and we both cried. At my next mentorship session, I shared the good news, and everyone was so happy for me. My village in the mentorship program really changed my life. I learned so much and it's the reason why I am such an advocate for education today. My job will pay for me to go back to school to get my master's degree, so I plan on getting my master's degree real soon. Going to college afforded me, my grandmother, and my daughter the opportunity to move out of the hood. My grandmother lives with me

and my daughter in the suburbs. We live in a safe neighborhood that is close to my daughter's school. Everything that I went through was worth the peace and the success that I have now.

A Way Out

The sub-theme of a way out emerged as the participants began to share their stories about why they persisted academically despite the hardships that they encountered as Black adolescent females and what factors influenced their decision to go to college. Each participant also discussed their views on graduating from high school. From their responses I found the underlying theme of education being a way to escape their financial, environmental, and educational hardships.

All five participants also mentioned the "Ruby" mentorship program being a major deciding factor in their decision to go to college. The participants expressed how they were uninformed about how to prepare for college and the benefits of attending college until they attended the "Ruby" mentorship program. All five participants were optimistic and hopeful that graduating from high school and attending college would provide them with a way out of their financial and environmental struggles.

Study Findings

Research Question One

The first research question asked: *What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?* From the study, I found that the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females included finding a sense of self, empowerment, peer and mentor support, hope, and guidance. These perceived benefits derived from each participants' responses

regarding their opinions of the overall effect that the "Ruby" mentorship program had on their lives. The program provided the participants with hope, support, and guidance.

The participants felt that they had found a safe space to learn and grow as Black adolescent females. The participants expressed that they were able to build a community of positive, meaningful, relationships with their peers and mentors in the "Ruby" mentorship program. The participants expressed how they became hopeful about their futures and were empowered to become better versions of themselves with the assistance of the educational resources provided to them through the "Ruby" mentorship program.

The participants mentioned feeling despair, loneliness, and hopelessness regarding their future before beginning the "Ruby" mentorship program. They expressed that the "Ruby" mentorship program provided them with the guidance and encouragement that they needed to navigate through the challenges of their financial, environmental, and educational hardships. Further providing the analysis that some of the most common perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females are finding a sense of self, empowerment, peer and mentor support, hope, and guidance.

Research Question Two

In response to the question, *How does the "Ruby" mentorship program support and prepare Black adolescent females for higher education degrees?* I found that the "Ruby" mentorship program influenced their mentees to graduate from high school and attend college by educating them on the benefits of doing so. The participants referred back to the curriculum that they covered in the "Ruby" mentorship program as being a great influencer for supporting them and preparing them for higher education degrees. Some of the curriculum covered during these

mentorship sessions were college and career preparation, leadership skills, and information literacy.

These lesson plans not only educated them on the importance of pursuing higher education degrees, but it also encouraged the participants to envision themselves as change agents within their communities and organizations. Amber, Jade, and Sapphire are currently mentors to adolescent youth, while Diamond and Opal admit that they empower the youth and young adults in a non-traditional setting within their neighborhoods and organizations. The participants felt that it was their social responsibility to affect change within their communities and organizations, as well as support and prepare the adolescent youth for higher education degrees.

Research Question Three

When considering the third research question: *How does the "Ruby" mentorship program assist Black adolescent females with transitioning into adulthood?*, I found that the "Ruby" mentorship program had a positive effect on the overall mental health of their mentees. The participants expressed that the program assisted them with improving their self-confidence which positively affected their self-identity. The participants reported that they began to envision themselves achieving their goals. This was important because prior to joining the "Ruby" mentorship program the participants felt discouraged and lacked the confidence to find the strengths within themselves.

The participants were educated on life skills like budgeting, character development, information literacy, as well as mental and physical health. These life skills were essential in setting a standard for the mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program to follow. The participants expressed that having Black female mentors also positively contributed to their self-image as

Black adolescent females because they could envision themselves achieving the same success as their mentors. The participants viewed their mentors as positive role models that they strived to become one day.

Research Question Four

The fourth research question asked: *How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?* I found that socioeconomic status does greatly influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. The participants expressed that they felt afraid, lonely, and hopeless living in their urban neighborhoods prior to joining the "Ruby" mentorship program due to their home life, environment, and educational settings. The participants expressed that the hardships that they endured financially, environmentally, and educationally had a negative effect on their mental health and self-confidence.

The participants had limited resources within their communities to help their families, but other mentorship programs were not offered. The participants felt that they were in survival mode in their environments and that the "Ruby" mentorship program offered them the opportunity to be educated on topics that they had not covered or known about prior to joining the program. The "Ruby" mentorship program exposed the participants to educational resources and curriculum that they had not been taught in their home and school environments.

The participants expressed that they learned how to conduct themselves as young women and future businesswomen. One participant expressed that you don't know what you don't know until you are introduced to something different. The participants did not know how much they needed the educational resources from the "Ruby" mentorship program until they began the

program. The participants attributed a lot of their academic and career success to being mentees of the “Ruby” mentorship program.

Urban neighborhoods and communities typically lack the funding to provide adequate resources to their community members. Impoverished neighborhoods and communities are typically overlooked in regard to the funding and resources offered to the members of those communities. Socioeconomic status influences the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females because limited funding in impoverished areas affect the amount of resources allocated to those communities.

The issue of limited funding means that the community has to fund programs that will assist them with generating more income. Mentorship programs do not generate income for the community and is typically overlooked as an important resource for the youth. This is why socioeconomic status influences the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females. Mentorship programs for Black adolescent females are essential to providing them with hope and educational resources to overcome the financial, environmental, and educational hardships associated with living in impoverished neighborhoods and communities.

Summary of Chapter

In conclusion, I conducted a qualitative study utilizing the narrative research method. This method allowed me to examine the counter-stories pertaining to the life experiences of the former mentees of the “Ruby” mentorship program. This chapter contained the narratives and participant profiles of five Black women between the ages of 23 and 33 years old from working-class backgrounds. This chapter identified and discussed the emerging themes and sub-themes that developed from the participant responses. This chapter also answered the research questions.

In chapter five, I will further discuss my findings and how they pertain to the tenets of CRFT, recommendations for future studies, and conclusions for this study.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Due to the unique challenges that Black adolescent females face they are in need of safe spaces to express themselves and develop their self-identities so that they are able to cope with the realities related to their current life situations and environments. Black feminist scholars believe that mentorship programs are important resources that can be used by community organizations and schools to help Black adolescent females cope with their realities while strengthening their resiliency (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does the "Ruby" mentorship program support and prepare Black adolescent females for higher education degrees?
3. How does the "Ruby" mentorship program assist Black adolescent females with transitioning into adulthood?
4. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?

This chapter discusses the data and findings collected from the study participants as it pertains to closing the gap in the literature from the previous chapters and the connections between the emerging themes and the tenets of CRFT. This chapter will also discuss

recommendations and implications for future studies, and a call to action to adult educators. This study was conducted by utilizing the qualitative narrative research method and the Critical Race Feminist Theory theoretical framework. This study was conducted virtually via Zoom while utilizing semi-structured interviews. I conducted two interviews with each participant. During the first interview I established rapport with the participants, and in the second interview I asked clarifying questions regarding the responses that they provided during the initial interview to ensure that their responses were accurately recorded.

These findings included the narratives of five Black women who grew up in a working-class family who were between the ages of 23 and 33 years old. These women were also former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The participants are currently living in Indiana and Illinois and have graduated and/or attended college for at least one full year. The participants are former mentees of the Indiana and Illinois chapters of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Their identities were protected by the use of the pseudonyms (Diamond, Jade, Sapphire, Amber, and Opal).

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Due to the unique challenges that Black adolescent females face, they are in need of safe spaces to express themselves and develop their self-identities so that they are able to cope with the realities related to their current life situations and environments. Black feminist scholars believe that mentorship programs are important resources that can be used by community organizations and schools to help Black adolescent females cope with their realities while strengthening their resiliency (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

For this study, I conducted a qualitative, narrative study in which I utilized the Critical Race Feminist Theory. My study contained literature surrounding Black women, education, oppression, socioeconomic status, intersectionality, and mentorship. Youth development is highly influenced by their environment which impacts their well-being as citizens within their communities and academic success. Addressing the issues within their environment can improve their academic achievement and better prepare the youth for navigating to college (Bryant, 2015).

For this study, I interviewed five Black women between the ages of 23 and 33 years old from working-class families who were former mentees of the "Ruby" mentorship program. These mentees were from the Indiana and Illinois chapters of the "Ruby" mentorship program and the participants attended one full year of college and/or graduated from college. I conducted two virtual semi-structured interviews with each participant. During the first interview I established rapport with the study participants and during the second interview I asked clarifying follow up questions regarding their initial responses.

The research questions for this study sought to provide more insight into the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceived benefits of mentorship for Black adolescent females?
2. How does socioeconomic status influence the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females?
3. In what ways does the "Ruby" mentorship program prepare Black adolescent females for higher education?

4. In what ways does the “Ruby” mentorship program support Black adolescent females as they transition into adulthood?

As the study answered these research questions through a values lens and a lens of Critical Feminist Race Theory, this study identified the importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescent females as providing them with a sense of belonging, hope, guidance, and support as they prepare for higher education and transition into adulthood. The data and literature provided in this study reviewed and sought to explore the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females from working-class backgrounds.

The participants in this study shared their narratives of what it was like to grow up in a working-class family. The participants expressed how living in under-resourced urban areas affected their mental health and self-image. Prior to joining the “Ruby” mentorship program the participants expressed that they had difficulty with self-confidence and making connections with others. After joining the “Ruby” mentorship program the participants found their hidden strengths and set positive goals for themselves.

As a result of being a mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship program, each participant graduated from high school and attended college. While this may not have been the case with every “Ruby” participant, those who participated in this study saw their participation in this program as pivotal to their future education. Mentorship empowered the participants to strive for academic success, as well as personal and professional development. The participants were still greatly affected by their environment, but they had hope that they could have a chance at a better future through mentorship. Breakfield (2010) expressed that Black women could overcome their hardships with the support and guidance of mentors. This study demonstrates that mentorship is beneficial for Black adolescent females from under-resourced urban areas.

Critical Race Feminist Theory

The Critical Race Feminist Theory brings awareness to the injustices encountered by Black women who are marginalized by race, class, and gender (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). In this study, I utilized the narrative research method and the Critical Race Feminist theory to provide a voice for marginalized Black adolescent females. These women provided their accounts of their experiences growing up as Black adolescent females in under-resourced urban areas. The participants expressed that the "Ruby" mentorship program provided them with a sense of purpose and belonging and empowered them to find the strength within themselves.

This section will further discuss the relationship between the emerging themes, the tenets of CRFT, current literature, and the participant responses. The three themes that emerged from the participant interviews included hardships, self-identity, and perseverance. From these three main themes emerged six sub-themes that included financial, environmental, educational, empowerment, support system, and a way out. (Please reference Table 3 in Chapter four for the description of themes).

CRFT and Hardships

Sapiro and Ward (2020) explained that marginalized youth from lower-class socioeconomic backgrounds have difficulty forming appropriate interpersonal connections with others and achieving self-sufficiency. Negative experiences with trauma and poverty can result in the youth experiencing mental health issues (Sapiro & Ward, 2020). My participants expressed their struggles with their self-esteem and making friends as Black adolescent females. Opal directly expressed that she still struggles with anxiety today from the trauma that she endured as an adolescent. Diamond, Jade, Sapphire, and Amber did not directly state that they

dealt with mental health issues, but they each alluded to struggling with some type of mental health issues during the interview. Lynch et al. (2023) expressed,

> The relation between low income and poor health is well established. Groups whose incomes are low are disproportionately exposed to social and psychological conditions that may have negative effects, while also possessing fewer economic resources to manage these circumstances. Low income may affect health directly through inadequate housing and sanitation or indirectly through threatening, socially disrupted neighborhoods and the promotion of behavior and psychosocial characteristics that are deleterious to health. (p. 1889).

The CRFT tenets that related to the emerging theme of hardships included voice of color, the social construct of race, and interest convergence. The voice of color tenet of CRFT suggests that minorities have the competence and experiences to speak about their oppressive experiences through counter-storytelling (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Few, 2007; Johnson, 2015; Wing, 1997). Each participant shared their direct experiences with oppression relating to their financial, environmental, and educational hardships. These hardships had a negative impact on their quality of life, mental health, and self-image.

Their counter-stories provided a clear representation of the CRFT tenet of voice of color. These women were the experts on the financial, environmental, and educational hardships that they endured. CRFT seeks to bring awareness to the oppressive experiences of women of color (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Marginalized youth from under-resourced urban areas and single parent households are at a greater risk of financial, environmental, and educational hardships (Assari et al., 2018).

Diamond, Jade, Amber, and Opal each lived in single parent households and reported experiencing financial, environmental, and educational hardships. Although Sapphire lived in a two-parent household these same hardships applied to her and her family. The participants' lived experiences supported the narratives provided regarding the CRFT tenet of voice of color. Marginalized youth are also at a greater risk of being exposed to violence and drugs in their environments due to the lack of funding and resources allocated to these under-resourced urban areas which contribute and sustain poverty in these communities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Johnson 2010; Somers et al., 2016).

The next CRFT tenet that connected to the theme of hardships was the social construct of race, which affects how individuals form views about race and gender directly relating to their environments and upbringing (Few, 2007). Each participant reported feeling indifferent about their families receiving government assistance. The participants believed that being on government assistance was normal and that mostly everyone that they knew in their neighborhoods and families were on welfare. These beliefs emerged from what they were exposed to in their environments and in their home life, which directly connected to the CRFT tenet of the social construct of race. More than 50% of Black children from working-class families spend their adolescent years in under-resourced urban areas that have high crime and poverty rates (Johnson, 2010; Steele, 2010).

The last CRFT tenet that connected to the theme of hardships was interest convergence. Interest convergence directly related to the fact that each participant encountered intersectionality in all aspects of their lives (Few, 2007). The lack of funding and resources made accessible in the participants' communities directly contributed to and sustained poverty in their environment (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Johnson 2010; Somers et al., 2016). The

participants reported that they did not have access to many if any community resources in their neighborhoods. The lack of funding and resources directly connects to the CRFT tenet of interest convergence because under-resourced urban areas are typically neglected unless these areas benefit the majority (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Kendall, 2021; Steele, 2010). However, Black families from working-class backgrounds represent the minority.

CRFT and Self-Identity

Kendall (2021) expressed that Black women from under-resourced urban areas are the forgotten population and that their challenges are not widely recognized by men and non-Black feminists. hooks (2000) also expressed that Black women are the silent majority of victimization, sexist oppression, as well as mental and physical torment. The participants expressed feeling hopelessness, despair, and low self-image prior to joining the "Ruby" mentorship program. Breakfield (2010) expressed that Black women can overcome the challenges of intersectionality with the assistance of mentorship. Craig (2016) and Somers (2016) expressed that mentorship programs for marginalized youth empowers the youth through teachings and skill building.

The first CRFT tenet that connected to the theme of self-identity was voice of color. Each participant provided their counter-stories as they reflected on how the "Ruby" mentorship program empowered them and educated them on topics including the importance of character development, information literacy, social responsibility, and college/career preparation. The participants reported an increase in self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-identity as a result of joining the "Ruby" mentorship program.

Another CRFT tenet that connected to the theme of self-identity was the social construct of race. The participants reported feeling a sense of pride and belonging as a result of having Black female mentors that understood their challenges with the intersectionality of race, gender,

and socioeconomic status as well as their financial, environmental, and educational hardships. The participants reported that the curriculum that they covered in their mentorship sessions helped them develop coping skills and life skills to help them navigate through the challenges of intersectionality. Mentorship programs that demonstrate cultural awareness and address the unique needs of Black adolescent females have proven to be very successful with helping them navigate through the challenges of intersectionality (Grills et al., 2016; Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

The participants shared that having Black, positive, female mentors allowed them to see themselves being successful and achieving their goals. The participants shared that the positive representation of Black women in the mentorship program gave them a sense of hope for the future. The participants' feelings about the program and their mentors positively contributed to their social construct of race. The participants saw their mentors as positive Black women that they aspired to be like one day, thus forming their beliefs about Black women being able to overcome and create a better future for themselves (King et al., 2018).

CRFT and Perseverance

Ricks (2014) expressed that Black adolescent females are at risk of higher dropout rates and lower academic achievement than their White peers. The participants expressed that graduating from high school and attending college were goals that they set for themselves due to the influence of their families and the "Ruby" mentorship program. The participants expressed that without the "Ruby" mentorship program they were unsure of what their life would look like today. They expressed that they would not be as successful as they are today without the support and guidance that they received from the "Ruby" mentorship program.

The two CRFT tenets that connected to the theme of perseverance was voice of color and the social construct of race. The participants shared their counter-stories regarding how they had the will to persist academically despite their financial, environmental, and educational hardships with the support and guidance of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The participants viewed education as a way to escape from the challenges of their financial, environmental, and educational hardships. The participants believed that graduating from high school and attending college would afford them the opportunity to make positive, informed decisions regarding their future.

Kayser et al. (2018) expressed that mentorship programs empowers Black adolescent females to advocate for themselves and achieve their goals. Black adolescent females from under-resourced urban areas greatly benefit from mentorship programs that address their gender and cultural challenges. Mentorship programs that address these topics increase the chances of Black adolescent females having a positive outlook on life and identifying healthy ways to overcome the challenges of intersectionality (Curran & Wexler, 2017, Grills et al., 2016, Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011). The "Ruby" mentorship program helped transform the participants' views about themselves as Black adolescent females who were transitioning into adulthood.

The participants initially felt hopelessness prior to joining the program, but their views changed regarding how they felt about themselves and their future. The participants' feelings about themselves before and during the program relate to the development of their social construct of race. The participants began to have hope for a better future and believed that they could achieve their goals despite the hardships that they endured and where they came from.

Implications

Black adolescent females who live in under-resourced urban areas need mentorship programs to instill hope, confidence, support, and guidance in them. This study revealed that hope, guidance, and support are important factors that influence Black adolescent females from under-resourced urban areas and their need for mentorship programs. Mentorship programs should be accessible to Black adolescent males and females.

This study only focused on the adolescent female population, but the information provided from this study is pertinent to both Black adolescent males and females as they encounter some of the same issues in their communities. Hope, support, and guidance are strong factors that can positive affect the future outcomes of Black adolescent youth from under-resourced urban areas. The participants' expressed that the "Ruby" mentorship program changed their lives and gave them a sense of purpose.

The "Ruby" mentorship program helped the participants envision themselves achieving their goals and leaving the hardships of their environment behind. The mentees strongly believed in the phrase, "If you can believe it, you can achieve it." This is what mentorship does for Black adolescent females from under-resourced urban areas.

Black adolescent male and females from under-resourced urban areas should have access to mentorship programs. As previously mentioned, adolescence is an influential and pivotal stage of development for males and females (Leath et al., 2019). Having access to positive role models can greatly affect their life outcome as they are navigating through the challenges of hardships and intersectionality. Adult educators, community leaders, and the board of education need to discuss the disparaging statistics surrounding the high school dropout rate for Black adolescents

and the negative affect that living in impoverished communities have on their mental health and quality of life.

The study findings suggests that there is a great need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females from working-class families due to their unique struggles with the intersectionality of race, gender, and class (Bryant, 2015; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Nash, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Black adolescent females drop out of high school at higher rates than White adolescents and need assistance with navigating to college (Bryant, 2015; Clark & Shi, 2020; Davis et al., 2002; Jeffrey & Jimenez, 2021). The lack of college preparation and mentorship programs in under-resourced urban communities have further contributed to the hardships and the challenges of intersectionality that Black adolescent females encounter (Clark & Shi, 2020; Jeffrey & Jimenez, 2021).

Black adolescent females from working-class families who live in under-resourced urban areas are more likely to experience trauma and violence in their communities which negatively contributes to their mental health and self-identity (Somers et al., 2016; Steele, 2010). Their mental health and self-identity affect how they view themselves and how they apply themselves academically (Bryant, 2015; Fruiht & Wray-Lake, 2013). The study findings suggest that mentorship programs for Black adolescent females help them to feel a sense of belonging, hope, guidance, and support that increases their chances of having a positive life outcome despite the hardships that they encounter (Abidden, 2012; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Mentorship programs help Black adolescent females identify healthy ways to cope and navigate the challenges of intersectionality (Kayser et al., 2018).

The findings also indicate that socioeconomic status influences the need for mentorship programs for Black adolescent females (Darling et al., 2016; Raposa et al., 2019). Black

adolescent females from working-class under-resourced areas are in need of mentorship programs that address their unique challenges with intersectionality (Raposa et al., 2019; Somers, 2016). Mentors should be culturally competent because Black adolescent females encounter unique challenges with intersectionality that affect their quality of life and overall well-being (Anderson et al., 2018; Grills et al., 2016; Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011). The findings suggest that with the assistance of mentorship programs Black adolescent females can positively navigate through the challenges of intersectionality and hardships that have historically plagued women of color (Breakfield, 2010; Nash, 2003; Wing, 2003).

Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

The "Ruby" mentorship program should be accessible in every under-resourced urban area. Per the participants' responses, none of the participants were directly recruited by the "Ruby" mentorship program. Each participant mentioned that they heard about the mentorship program from a third-party. More Black adolescent females could benefit from this program if they had direct access to the program.

These programs should be advertised in under-resourced urban schools and communities by the mentors and mentees to help build their skills in marketing and engagement. The "Ruby" mentorship program should utilize social media outlets like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter for recruitment and advertising purposes. Social media is very popular with adolescents and can be used to educate the community about their program and services. Under-resourced urban communities should fund additional mentorship programs for Black adolescents.

These mentorship programs can provide a safe environment for Black adolescents to engage with their peers while receiving educational resources from their mentors. Community

leaders and government officials should be educated on the positive benefits associated with funding mentorship programs for Black adolescents in under-resourced urban areas and why it is essential for youth development. Parents from under-resourced urban areas should be educated and informed about the benefits of mentorship programs for Black adolescents. These mentorship programs should provide transportation to the mentees involved in the program for the adolescents who need transportation to the mentorship sessions. This would assist the parents of the mentees with ensuring that their adolescent has safe, reliable transportation to the mentorship sessions.

School officials like the board of education should also be educated on the benefits and importance of mentorship programs for Black adolescents to promote the creation and collaboration of additional mentorship programs with assistance from the public school corporations. Collaborating with the public school corporation could provide a meeting place for the newly created mentorship programs as well as bus transportation home from the mentorship sessions for the adolescents. School personnel like guidance counselors and teachers could volunteer to be mentors for the school based mentorship programs. These volunteers would need to be trained on cultural competence and facilitating mentoring relationships.

Lastly, I believe that this study should be extended to Black adolescent males to better understand the importance of mentorship for this population. Black adolescent males also encounter challenges with intersectionality. Black adolescent males encounter negative stereotypes and interactions with law enforcement and peer pressure regarding gang and drug involvement. A similar future study should be done to see how mentorship affects Black adolescent males from under-resourced urban areas.

Call to Action

Black adolescents are unique because of the challenges that they endure regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status along with the financial, environmental, and educational hardships that they encounter. Black adolescents need equitable opportunities to navigate these challenges through culturally competent mentorship. Mentors need to understand the challenges that Black adolescents encounter to better understand how to help them overcome despite their circumstances.

Mentors need to meet Black adolescents where they are mentally and emotionally to help them get to where they want to be. This is why culturally competent mentors are essential to adolescent development. The school corporation and the board of education need to invest the space and resources for the implementation of mentorship programs for Black adolescents.

Communities can also be an advocate for Black adolescents by creating organizations that are dedicated to mentoring and tutoring Black adolescent males and females. These organizations can promote the importance of self-wellness, academics, and building more community resources. There is a need for after school programs and food pantries in the community, because these resources can help Black adolescents who come from working-class families. Parents need the community and their resources to help assist their children with navigating to college successfully and ensuring that their basic survival needs are being met. If communities began to work with the schools to inform families about what resources are available to them Black adolescents would have the opportunity to receive the resources necessary for their optimal survival.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I reintroduced the purpose of the study and the research questions. I then discussed how the emerging themes from the study were connected to the tenets of CRFT with supporting literature. I then discussed the implications of the study and my recommendations for future practice. Lastly, I offered my reflections of the study in my call to action.

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

Maya Angelou (1978)

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Appendix A: Researcher Timeline

Researcher Timeline			
Activity	**Activity Details**	**Timeline**	**Responsibility**
IRB Submission	Researcher will submit research packet to IRB	May-June 2023	Alicia Denton
Recruitment Email	Researcher will email participants who meet the criteria for the study using the reverse snowball sampling method	June-July 2023	Alicia Denton
Interview Scheduling	Researcher will schedule a time to meet in person or via Zoom with participants	June-July 2023	Alicia Denton
Data Transcription	Researcher will convert Voice recordings into transcription document	June-July 2023	Alicia Denton
Data Analysis	Researcher will analyze the transcriptions and code them using Values coding to identify any emerging themes or ideas from the interviews.	June-August 2023	Alicia Denton
Write Dissertation	Researcher will compile data from the interview and complete Chapters 4 and 5 of Dissertation	August-October 2023	Alicia Denton
Turn in Completed Dissertation	Researcher will submit final version of dissertation to Chairperson	October 2023	Alicia Denton
Dissertation Defense	Researcher will defend dissertation in front of committee	October 2023	Alicia Denton

Appendix B: Citi Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 27-Feb-2021
Expiration Date 27-Feb-2024
Record ID 41209382

This is to certify that:

Alicia Denton

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Ball State University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US
www.citiprogram.org

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w9d266c23-6c90-4fde-b669-2c700e3d9e46-41209382

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe what your home life was like growing up? Who was the primary caregiver in your home? Who did you grow up with?
2. What did your parent or caregiver do for a living?
3. Did your family receive government assistance? If so how did that make you feel?
4. Did you grow up in an urban neighborhood, if so what was it like growing up in an urban neighborhood ("The hood")?
5. How was your mental health affected by living in "the hood"?
6. Can you describe your academic experiences in grade school and high school? How did your teachers make you feel in grade school and high school?
7. What type of school resources were offered to you regarding your socioeconomic status? (free or reduced lunch, standardized test waivers, funding for ACT/SAT etc.?)
8. What type of grades did you make in school?
9. Can you explain your views on education and academic achievement while you were attending high school?
10. Did your grade school or high school have any counter spaces (clubs, leadership roles, after school activities etc.) for Black youth? If so please explain. Were you involved in any academic clubs or activities in high school?
11. How did you hear about the "Ruby" mentorship program?
12. What were your thoughts about beginning the "Ruby" mentorship program? How did you learn about the program? Who recommended you to participate?
13. What was the race/ethnicity of your mentors in the "Ruby" mentorship program? How did the race/ethnicity of your mentors in the "Ruby" mentorship program affect you?

14. What type of activities did you do in the “Ruby” mentorship program? What are some memorable activities that you did in the “Ruby” mentorship program? How did these activities make you feel?
15. How did being a mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship affect your mental health?
16. Was graduating from high school important to you? Why or why not?
17. What did the “Ruby” mentorship program do for you as a Black woman? What are the most important values that you gained from being a former mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship program?
18. Would you recommend the “Ruby” mentorship program to other young Black women?
19. As a result of being a former mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship program, did you, yourself become a mentor? Why or why not?
20. What factors led to your decision to go to college?
21. How did the “Ruby” mentorship program influence your college life?
22. In your opinion what do you believe your life would look like right now if you had not been a mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship program?
23. Do you feel that mentorship is important for Black women? Why or why not?

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Email

A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for Young Black Women

IRB: 2064851-1

Participant Recruitment Email

From: Alicia Denton, andenton2@bsu.edu
Email Subject: Research Study Interview Participation Request
Date: June 23, 2023
To: <Potential Participant Email Address>

Message:
Dear Diamond,

My name is Alicia Denton, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Adult and Community Education program in the Department of Educational Studies at Ball State University. I am currently conducting a qualitative study for my dissertation research. This study focuses on exploring the importance of mentorship programs for young Black women.

I am inviting you to participate in this dissertation study because you have been identified as a potential participant who meets the qualifications of this study. If you agree, you will participate in two 60-90 minute Zoom interviews, scheduled within the next two weeks at your convenience. If you agree to participate in this study I will send a separate email that contains the participant consent form that provides you with additional information regarding the details of the study.

I am also looking for additional participants who might be interested in participating in this study. The inclusion criteria for this study is as follows: (1) You must be between the ages of 23 and 33 years old, (2) You must identify as a Black woman, (3) You must have attended at least one full year of college and/or a college graduate, (4) You grew up in a working-class family making under $28,000 a year, and (5) You are a former mentee of the “Ruby” mentorship program.

If you are aware of any additional participants who meet the criteria for this study and might be interested in participating please forward my study information (consent form) which contains my contact information where they can reach me.

Please reply back to this email with an interview time that works best for you.

This study is approved by the Ball State University Institutional Research Board (IRB: 2064851-1) A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for young Black women).

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my research advisory, Dr. Michelle Glowacki-Dudka at mdudka@bsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this email.

Warmly,

Alicia N. Cooper Denton
Doctoral Candidate, A.B.D., Adult and Community Education
Educational Studies Department
Ball State University
812-230-4005
andenton2@bsu.edu
andenton17@gmail.com

Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent

Informed Consent/Participant Form

A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for Young Black Women

IRBNet # 2064851-1

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of mentorship programs for young Black women through the lens of the "Ruby" mentorship program. Due to the unique challenges that young Black women face regarding the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, they are in need of safe spaces to express themselves and develop their self-identities so that they are able to cope with the realities related to their current life situations and environments. The intersectionality of race and gender create many obstacles for Black women who desire career advancement, but mentorship and guidance can assist Black women with obtaining success despite these barriers (Breakfield, 2010). Black feminist scholars believe that mentorship programs are important resources that can be used by community organizations and schools to help young Black women cope with their realities while strengthening their resiliency (Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2011).

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study you must be a Black woman between the ages of 23 and 33 years old who grew up in a working-class background, with some college education (college attendee for at least one year and or a college graduate). You must also be a former mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program from the state of Indiana.

Participation Procedures and Duration

You will be interviewed utilizing semi-structured interviews via Zoom to gain more insight on your life history and experience as a former mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program. The interviews will take 60-90 minutes to complete. For this study, two interviews will be conducted. The first interview will be to build rapport and answer the interview questions. The second interview will be conducted to ask clarifying questions about your initial responses. Participants will be signing the informed consent in addition to collecting the audio of their informed consent.

Audio, Video, or Photography

Audio recordings will be utilized during the interview sessions and converted into audio transcriptions to identify any emerging themes that arise during the interview session. Your audio transcriptions from the interview will be kept for 1-3 years for further analysis and publication opportunities. In case the researcher needs to refer back to notes from the interview. Your audio recordings will not be utilized for any presentations or publications. I will also utilize the voice memo application on my computer device to record the audio from each interview. I will then upload the audio file into a word document so that the audio is uploaded in the document and converted into a transcribed document.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential although there will be audio recordings. Your name and identifying information will not be revealed or appear in any presentations or publications to protect your anonymity.

Data Security, Storage, and Retention Period (How will the researchers protect my information?)

All research data obtained from your interview will be kept in a word document under a password protected One Drive folder on a personal computer only accessible to the student

researcher. The data collected from your interview will be retained for 1-3 years to allow the student researcher to refer back to their notes from this interview session to aid the student researcher toward dissertation completion.

Risks or Discomforts

You may experience an emotional risk for participating in this study as you may disclose an adverse response regarding the interview questions.

Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study

You should contact the Briarwood Clinic for counseling services if you experience any negative effects from participating in this study. The Briarwood Clinic is located at 3645 N. Briarwood Ln, Suite A in Muncie, Indiana. Virtual appointments are available for those who are not Muncie residents. Their phone number is 765-289-5520.

Benefits

There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study, but we hope to learn about the importance of mentorship programs for young Black women. You will not be paid for participating in this study. There is no cost to participate in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study. If you decide to withdraw from the study during the interview stage, simply notify the interviewer and click the “Leave Meeting” button in the lower right-hand corner of the Zoom

platform. If you decide to withdraw from the study following the interview stage, please email the researcher at andenton2@bsu.edu indicating you wish to withdraw from the study.

IRB Contact Information

For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5052 or at orihelp@bsu.edu.

Consent Statement

A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for Young Black Women

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, A Narrative Study Exploring the Importance of Mentorship Programs for Young Black Women. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older
- You are between the ages of 23 and 33 years old
- You have attended some college or are a college graduate
- You identify as a Black woman
- You grew up in a working-class background
- You are a former mentee of the "Ruby" mentorship program

Researcher Contact Information

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