Inside the Black Box of Mentoring: African-American Adolescents, Youth Mentoring, and Stereotype Threat Conditions

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Inside the Black Box of Mentoring: African-American Adolescents, Youth Mentoring, and Stereotype Threat Conditions

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration

by

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May, 2019
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, David Eli LaViscount, and to my grandmother, Frances Marshall. Son, I hope that all that this dissertation personally represents for me – perseverance, responsibility to your community, empathy, and love for oneself – are things that you will always find to be abundantly present in yourself. I love you, son! Grandma, the memory of us reading summer-reading books together while sitting on your lap in 2G will never leave me. I love you!
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Family is everything. This wouldn’t be possible without my mom who earned her college degree while working full-time and raising two boys in East Harlem and the Bronx. Love you ma! Nor would this be possible without my dad who impressed upon me that I could have more than what was around me. “Read, son!” Those were short but incredibly impactful words! I love you, Andrew! You sparked deep thought in our home. You’re the best brother and friend.

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PEACE and LOVE to ALL!!

#idefystereotypes #bloodybutunbowed
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Abstract

Despite a narrowing trend over the past forty years, the racial academic performance gap between non-Asian-American minority students and European-American students remains an overarching issue in K-12 schooling according to the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis (2017). Du Bois’s (1903) theory of double consciousness is implicated in the performance gap phenomenon. Though not explicitly connected, Steele and Aronson’s 1995 study revealed stereotype threat (STT) to be an empirical explanation of the negative impact of double consciousness. Steele et al.’s study revealed a psycho-social contributor to the racial academic performance gap, STT. STT is characterized by performance suppression caused by the fear of fulfilling a negative stereotype or the fear of being judged based on a negative stereotype attributed to one’s social identity group. The activation of this phenomenon is related to identity threatening cues, a systemic issue laden in the academic environment (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). To date, over 300 studies have been conducted on STT according to a meta-analysis conducted by Pennington, Heim, Levy, and Larkin (2016). Though certain experimental studies featuring mentoring as a vehicle for shifting stereotype narratives have yielded useful practices for STT reduction (Good et al., 2003), qualitative design, which is seldomly employed in the STT field, may produce an understanding of the phenomenon that is not possible through a deductive approach (Ezzy, 2002; van Kaam, 1966). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore African-American adolescent student perceptions of the impact that mentoring has on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions. The findings of this study demonstrated that African-American adolescents perceived mentoring to positively impact their schooling experiences and helped them to cope with STT activating cues in the environment. The participants discussed structural aspects of the
relationships, personality attributes of the mentor, and specific mentor guidance. Participants also discussed a documented STT intervention that fell outside of the parameters of their mentoring relationships that positively impacted their schooling experiences and abilities to cope with STT cues – affirmations (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Walton et al., 2012). Recommendations for practice and future research are presented.

Keywords: African-American adolescents, K-12, stereotypes, stereotype threat, racial identity, youth mentoring, interpretive phenomenology
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 1903, p 9).” The “twoness” in Du Bois’s writing speaks to an African-American experience that persists today. Du Bois named this experience, *double consciousness*. The impact of double consciousness on academic performance has been empirically evidenced through stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The current study, adding to the lineage of literature on the double consciousness experience, begins here with what is often referred to as the “academic performance gap.”

**Problem Statement**

Despite a narrowing trend over the past 40 years, what is frequently referred to as the “academic performance gap” between non-Asian-American minority students and European-American students remains an overarching issue in K-12 schooling according to the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis (2017). The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading report shows that African-American eighth graders scored, on average, 26 points lower than their European-American counterparts. Eighth-grade Hispanic students scored an average of 21 points lower than European-American students, while eighth grade American Indian/Alaskan Native students averaged 22 points lower than their European-American peers. The NAEP report also shows similar gaps in mathematics and across other grade levels that participate in standardized testing. Interestingly, Asian-American students have historically scored on par or better than their European-American peers according to the NAEP report; this peculiarity may be due in part to the rather positive social status this group maintains.
in academic settings (Lee & Zhou, 2014). However, this discussion around racial academic performance gaps, particularly the gap between African-American students, and European-American and Asian-American students, has been criticized when referred to as the achievement gap as it is presented in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015). The achievement gap discussion has placed undue blame on individuals and fails to acknowledge systemic shortcomings in creating opportunity and equity for all students (da Silva, Huguley, Kakli, & Rao, 2007). The discourse on the achievement gap has also been an untenable treatment of the issue as it has focused on year-to-year solutions to the performance disparity ignoring the larger systemic issue (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The shift that acknowledges systemic contributions to academic performance gap has been referred to as the opportunity gap (da Silva et al., 2007; Verstegen, 2015), however. The opportunity gap may be considered a sub-issue of systemic oppression. It is characterized in this study as a larger social issue extending beyond the walls of schools (Saltman, 2014). The opportunity gap discussion concerns the way minority groups are suppressed through the inequitable distribution of resources, for example. However, the current study also advances the argument that the opportunity gap is also manifested through dominant ideologies and beliefs embedded in policy design, policy enforcement, and accepted customs and norms in society to the extent that they marginalize non-dominant ideologies and beliefs.

Much of the literature on the racial academic performance gap has been oversimplified, contributing to a false narrative that African-American, Hispanic, and Native American groups are either intellectually inferior to European-American and Asian-American students (Jensen, 1972; Murray, 1984; Terman, 1916) or that these racial minority groups have a culture that does not support educational achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne, 2005). Seminal studies, such
as the Coleman Report, advanced statistical support that would lead one to infer that schools have a far smaller ability to impact student outcomes than do family inputs. However, such work has been criticized for inadequate consideration of impactful factors, including a narrow definition of academic achievement, largely informed by deficit worldviews (Delpit, 2012; King, 2015; Murrell, 2008; Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2002; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Despite the notion that resources do not impact student achievement outcomes (Coleman et al., 1966), more recent studies continue to find this systemic issue to be problematic in schools. For instance, the unequal distribution of resources due to inequitable school funding (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Biddle & Berliner, 2002) and the staffing of impoverished schools with highly effective teachers (Jacob, 2007) persist. In addition, disparate disciplinary action taken against racial minorities (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), and other systemic issues that relate to the perception of these groups persist. Among others, these issues, taken together, are conceptualized as the educational opportunity gap (Verstegen, 2015). The opportunity gap is characterized by a shift in focus from deficit perceptions of African-Americans, and other minority groups, to a discussion on the systemic issues and academic environment surrounding African-American K-12 students; this shift provides an understanding of how systems and schools may exacerbate damaging social issues such as stereotyping and stigma (Gorski, 2008).

The opportunity gap literature, a discussion focusing on systems rather than individuals, recognizes that the academic environment is a construction of the educational system. Research in the educational psychology and social psychology fields address environmental cues, a particular systemic issue that may potentially damage the student identities of certain racial groups, resulting in the suppression of academic engagement and performance (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). The literature has also advanced recommendations
to address these particular gap contributors, such as the reshaping of academic environments to replace identity-threatening cues with identity-affirming cues (Murphy & Jones Taylor, 2012).

As it relates to environmental cues that negatively impact academic performance, an understanding of Steele and Aronson’s (1995) stereotype threat theory (STT) provides insight into the role that stereotypes have in damaging the student identity of racial minorities. STT is a theory explaining a phenomenon characterized by the suppression of performance due to a fear of fulfilling negative stereotypes related to one’s identity group or a fear of being judged based on these stereotypes when one’s identity is made salient as a result of the presence of particular cues in the environment. To date, over 300 studies have been conducted on STT according to a meta-analysis conducted by Pennington, Heim, Levy, and Larkin (2016). From the theory’s conception, STT researchers aimed and succeeded in illuminating a predicament that suppressed African-American undergraduates’ and female undergraduates’ academic achievement (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). African-American and female students’ academic performance was undermined by the prospect of fulfilling stereotypes or by the fear of being judged based on stereotypes regarding their academic capabilities, respectively. Since its origin, the theory has explained educational performance gaps for many identity groups under many performance circumstances: African-American elementary students’ academic performance (Wasserberg, 2014), the academic performance of students of low socio-economic status (Croizet & Claire, 1998), women performing mathematical tasks (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005), and White male students when their math abilities are framed as inferior to Asian students’ abilities (Aronson et al., 1999). Importantly, none of these examples of performance gaps represent inherent differences in these groups capabilities, but rather are the results of a systemic element of the cultural environment activated by cues in the environment.
Though STT affects virtually all identity groups, since a negative stereotype can be identified for almost any identity group, African-American adolescent students are at particular risk for succumbing to the adverse academic performance outcomes associated with STT. This is due in part to students’ awareness of the stereotypes that are associated with their racial identity in academic spaces (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Wasserberg, 2014). It is well known that African-Americans have been subject to widely-disseminated negative stereotypes held by many in American society (Gibbs, 1988; Ferguson, 2001). In the academic environment, African-American adolescent students are doubly negatively stereotyped in relation to their academic ability (Steele, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Tatum, 2003) and social comportment (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Specifically, these students are often stereotyped as unequipped to perform at the academic level of their European-American and Asian-American peers, and they are also viewed as behaviorally disruptive and even prone to violence. Stereotype threat literature has documented the impact of these stereotypes, illuminating their deleterious effects on African-American school-age students’ academic performance (Arbuthnot, 2009; Nasir, McKinney de Royston, O’Connor, & Wischnia, 2016; Wasserberg, 2014). Such studies provide evidence that the racial academic performance gap is indeed impacted by STT, which is a matter stemming from systemic oppression given the manner in which it may be activated through environmental cues.

With the exception of Asian-American minority adolescents, other racial minorities have exhibited results consistent with those found in STT studies focused on African-American students: Latino adolescents (Aronson & Good, 2002; Mello, Mallett, Andretta, & Worrell, 2012), Latino college students (Aronson & Salinas, 2001), and Native American adolescents (Jaramillo, Mello, & Worrell, 2015; Mello et al., 2012). It is important to note that Asian-
American minorities tend to perform on par or slightly outperform European-American students (NAEP, 2015). It would be an overstatement to suggest that one particular factor is contributing to the drastic difference in outcomes between Asian-American minorities and other racial minority groups mentioned above. However, stereotype boost, a phenomenon characterized by positive performance outcomes for groups to which a positive stereotype has been assigned in a particular situation (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ho, 2012; Shih, Pittinsky, & Trahan, 2006), may in part explain this disparity as Asian-American minorities are typically positively stereotyped in academics in the United States.

Many studies focused on stereotypes and Black identity have contributed to a discussion centered on the experience of African-American undergraduate students (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Glenn & Johnson, 2012). As it relates to the K-12 racial performance gap, fewer studies focus on and acknowledge the experiences of African-American K-12 students who attend school under STT conditions. However, research shows that children become more aware of racial stereotypes, a key aspect of STT activation, between the ages of 5 and 10 (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). It is reasonable then to conclude that students older than 10 years of age may be more likely to be fully aware of stereotypes related to different groups. Therefore, K-12 adolescents, ages 11-18, may constitute a K-12 sub-group that is at a greater risk of facing the challenge of STT.

STT has multi-layered consequences for African-American students as it impugns academic performance (Steele, 1997) and one’s sense of belonging in an academic setting (Mello et al., 2012; Walton & Carr, 2012). Compounding the issue is the potential for African-American students to completely disengage from academics due to extended time functioning under STT conditions (Aronson & Dee, 2012; Steele, 2010). Understanding the degree to which
STT conditions impact student performance and contributes to the racial academic performance gap is an important consideration. Prior to the emergence of STT theory and the abundance of literature covering its impact, the racial and ethnic performance gap was largely debated in relation to biological factors (Jensen, 1972; Murray, 1984; Terman, 1916), an idea that has also been debunked from a biological perspective (Frankenberg & Dodds, 1967; Geber, 1956). Other theories have blamed African-American culture, characterizing it as a culture of poverty that causes academic underperformance (Bereiter & Engleman, 1966; Hess & Shipman, 1965; Lewis, 1966/1995; Payne, 2005). This theory has been refuted, as well (Clark, 1989; Delpit, 2012). For instance, in directly refuting Payne’s culture of poverty assertion, Delpit advances several cogent points. In a particularly strong counter-argument, Delpit states, “What Payne is labeling culture is actually the response to oppression. True culture supports its people; it doesn’t destroy them” (p. 7).

It may be argued that the “oppression” that Delpit (2012, p. 7) refers to includes environmental cues that activate STT effects and the “response” that Delpit refers to includes academic performance suppression, avoidance, and complete disengagement. STT seems to have largely gone unnoticed prior to its introduction due to the “unseen” nature of the phenomenon. Because the activation of STT involves an interaction between an individual and threatening environmental cues relevant to that individual’s identity, the reaction is typically internal and may not be visible to observers. The reactions leading to performance suppression, which are discussed more thoroughly in the literature review of this paper, can include the onset of stress arousal, vigilance, loss of working memory, and self-regulation, to name a few (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Because these underlying processes of STT are normally only apparent to the person experiencing them or may be attributed to something other than the fear of
fulfilling or being judged based on a negative stereotype, the impact of STT on the racial academic performance gap may not appear to be substantial to those who are unfamiliar with the depths of the literature. Steele (2010) conceptualizes the underlying processes of STT as “unseen costs” and also alluded to the invisible nature of STT as he characterized it as “A threat in the air…” in the title of his seminal article in 1997. Despite the “unseen” nature of STT, over 300 studies have been conducted in the area and show a significant impact on performance (Pennington et al., 2016).

Many interventions have been developed to combat STT (Dorvil, 2011). Some STT interventions for the classroom are the replacement of negative environmental identity cues with identity-affirming cues (Murphy et al., 2012), self-value affirmation exercises (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Walton et al., 2012), insistence on high-performance expectations and increasing students’ sense of belonging and self-integrity (Cohen, Purdie-Vaughns, & Garcia, 2012). The involved personnel and structure of the delivery of these interventions are discussed less, however.

Formal youth mentoring is a potential delivery method as it is a widely utilized means of facilitating intervention for a variety of purposes: psychological, academic, social, and behavioral areas (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Informal youth mentoring has also evidenced its positive impact on youth’s educational attainment (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, Jr., 2009). Mentoring may be a promising intervention for STT reduction as it may be conceptualized as a vehicle for “bundling” several interventions due to its ability to positively impact the multiple domains listed above from DuBois et al.’s study. In more specific terms, mentoring was explored in this study due to its potential to include the STT interventions discussed above and perhaps novel interventions that will possibly be developed based on the
findings of this study as the subjects explained the intersection of their academic and mentoring experiences. In addition, a compelling argument is being made in this research project as to the appropriateness of studying mentoring’s role in STT reduction. As formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring already exist as familiar and well-known intervention vehicles for many K-12 youth (Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois, 2010), the exploration of the relationship between mentoring and STT reduction could lead to the discovery of new interventions or nuanced understandings of currently accepted intervention approaches. For these reasons, studying mentoring’s role in STT reduction is a worthwhile endeavor because these interventions could then be integrated into formal, school-based or non-school-based mentoring models.

Mentoring has also emerged in the STT literature in several instances as a method for attenuating STT effects by employing narrative-shifting interventions. Narrative-shifting is defined in this study as the changing of one’s belief in a widely disseminated assertion. In this study, this definition of narrative-shifting is specifically applied to African-American adolescents beliefs about stereotypes regarding their own racial identity group. Cohen, Steele, and Ross’s (1999) and Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht’s (2003) studies provide two examples of effective narrative-shifting interventions delivered through a mentoring relationship. Both studies provided empirical evidence that mentors directly and positively impact academic performance by providing a narrative that counters the negative stereotype relevant to the participants’ identities. However, as both studies employed deductive designs featuring interventions created by the researchers, both leave room for exploration of practices, behaviors, and other aspects of the youth mentoring relationship that may diminish STT effects in an authentic, non-experimental context.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore African-American adolescent student perceptions of the impact that mentoring has on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions. This is an approach that may reveal new information for future STT intervention research and may have implications for schools and other organizations wishing to address the negative effects of STT on African-American adolescents.

Research Questions

While a small number of quantitative studies have advanced viable mentoring interventions for diminishing STT (Cohen et al., 1999; Good et al., 2003), the qualitative approach proposed in this study is valuable because it offers the benefit of an inductive design which may produce novel mentoring practices for future research or nuanced understandings of established STT intervention approaches. The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to explore African-American adolescent students’ perceptions of the impact that mentoring has on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. What are African-American students' perceptions of the impact their mentoring relationship has had on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their academic experience in school?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their behavioral experience in school?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their social experience in school?
- What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their emotional experience in school?

2. What elements outside of mentoring do African-American students perceive to impact their schooling experiences?

The term *schooling experiences* represents several domains of the youth experience targeted by various mentoring programs according to Dubois et al. (2011): (a) behavioral, (b) social, (c) emotional, and (d) academic. It was important to explore these domains as STT conditions may impact all of these domains (Steele, 2011). The four sub-questions seek to uncover the how mentoring may have impacted the way the participants experienced these domains during times of potential STT activation and mediation. The last sub-question guides the study in a way that allows for participants share potential STT interventions that may not have been connected to their mentoring experiences.

**Significance of the Study**

Wasserberg (2014) acknowledges that there have been relatively few STT studies that focus on children. Much of the work on STT effects and interventions has focused on undergraduate college students. Therefore, the focus on an 11-18-year-old population in this proposal will assist in filling this gap in the literature, adding to the relatively few STT studies that have included K-12 students (Arbuthnot, 2009; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Mello et al., 2012; Wasserberg, 2014). Moreover, the overwhelming majority of STT studies have been conducted through quantitative designs (Pennington et al., 2016). These studies provide extremely valuable data regarding the impact of STT on various identity groups. However, the less-frequently employed qualitative methodology in this particular field of study may reveal new knowledge that the quantitative
studies are not designed to examine. Nasir et al. (2016) advanced a cogent argument in their mixed-methods study regarding the significance of the qualitative approach in STT literature. They suggest that understanding how students make sense of coping with stereotypes and how they are relevant to their identities can only be accomplished through qualitative methods. The naturalistic approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the different experiences of participants that may otherwise appear “equal” in a quantitative study that categorizes subjects using surveys. Such an understanding has implications for schools and programs seeking to implement mentoring programs that target STT reduction. Qualitative data may more clearly contextualize a setting such as a school, which will allow for a greater degree of tailoring for interventions integrated into a school-based mentoring program that seeks to mitigate the effects of STT. As the knowledge base on the lived experiences of students under STT grows, recommendations for policy and practice may begin to inform the work of mentors as they support youth in their development.

In addition, to the author’s knowledge, Dorvil’s (2011) study is the only work that has examined the effectiveness of STT interventions from the perspective of students who have experienced STT. A search of electronic, scholarly databases using combinations of the keywords *stereotype threat, interviews, interventions,* and *qualitative* yielded no other relevant results. Dorvil’s action research dissertation examined the effectiveness of a manualized STT school-based study skills class. At the conclusion of her study, she gathered students’ reflections on the program to examine how much they learned about STT and to measure the degree to which students perceived the program to be effective in reducing their STT related challenges. The study yielded positive results. The current dissertation study had a similar but nuanced objective in comparison to the final stage of Dorvil’s study.
Definition of Terms

Adolescent Student

While the World Health Organization (1986) defines adolescent as an age range between 10 and 19 years old, an adolescent student in this study will range from ages of 11 years to 18 years old. The rationale behind the selection of students in this age range is based on literature that suggests that students become stereotype aware between the ages of five and ten (Nasir et al., 2016). Selecting youth who are older than ten years old increases the probability that the students are stereotype aware, which is an important aspect of STT activation.

African-American/Black

The use of the term African-American is used throughout the study to refer to Black students who were born in the United States. However, the term Black is also used for the same group when citing authors who have elected to use the term, Black. The fact that Black may describe peoples of nationalities other than those of the United States is understood by the author. Where these cases occurred in the current study, they were described as such.

Environmental Cues

Environmental cues are signals presented in a situation that make one’s identity/identities salient to oneself (Steele, 2010). Environmental cues that cause vigilance based on a stereotype are an important aspect of STT activation. An example of an environmental cue that could possibly activate STT for an African-American student in an academic environment is the lack of racial and/or ethnic critical mass (Steele, 2010). The lack of critical mass may cause the student to feel that his race or ethnicity is not valued in the setting or that the student may be pushed to the margins because of his race or ethnicity.
Opportunity Gap

The opportunity gap (da Silva, Huguley, Kakli, & Rao, 2007; Verstegen, 2015) is a term used to explain the gap in performance between African-American students and their European-American and Asian-American peers. While the achievement gap is a term that is often used to discuss differences in the performances of these racial groups, the discussion on the opportunity gap is used to highlight the systemic issues that not only contribute to this gap, but also bring attention to the limited scope of what is considered to be evidence of achievement. This study contributes to the opportunity gap discourse by exploring how youth mentoring may impact students’ ability to cope with systemic issues in the form of STT activating environmental cues.

Stereotype Threat

Steele (2010) defines STT as performance suppression, task avoidance, and/or academic disengagement resulting from physiological disruptions caused by stereotype awareness, high-domain identification, and high-performance demands. The current study uses this definition and other STT related concepts to contextualize the study and guide the data collection and analysis processes.

Stereotype Threat Conditions

In this study, stereotype threat conditions are defined as the spaces in schools that have the potential to activate STT and lead to related performance suppression, task avoidance, and/or long-term academic disengagement. For African-American youth, these spaces are environments that are characterized by cues that signal that their racial identity may not be valued or less valued than other racial identities that occupy the space.
Stereotype Threat Intervention Sorts: Narrative Shifting v. Environmental Change

STT literature has produced several interventions for combatting the harmful effects of the phenomenon. These interventions tend to fall into one of two distinct categories: (a) environmental change interventions and (b) narrative shifting interventions. Environmental change interventions are characterized by changes in the environments that threaten identities to reduce identity threatening cues and increase identity affirming cues in the environment. For instance, an increase in staff that share the racial/ethnic identities of a minority student group would be considered an environmental change intervention. On the other hand, narrative shifting interventions equip individuals with the skills and the mind frame to cope in identity threatening environments that may trigger STT activation. For example, self-affirmation exercises (Bowen, Wegmann, & Webber, 2013) have been shown to increase coping ability of students under STT conditions.

Youth Mentoring

Formal and informal youth mentoring are defined as a “special relationship with a nonparental adult” (Erickson et al., 2009). In this study, this relationship is also defined as one that has lasted at least one year (12 months). DuBois et al. (2011) found that the greater the length of a mentoring relationship, the better the outcome for the mentee. Dubois and his colleagues also found that a mentoring relationship that lasts less than 3 months may be detrimental to the mentee.

As it relates to mentoring, the participant selection process is guided by Bruce and Bridgeland’s (2014) definitions of formal and informal mentoring. Formal mentoring is characterized by a structured program in which a youth is matched with an adult. Formal mentoring usually occurs through faith-based organizations, schools, community groups, or
organizations specifically purposed for youth mentoring. Informal mentoring is naturally occurring, on the other hand. Informal youth mentoring may be formed with adults that are friends of family, teachers with whom students have a relationship outside of the classroom, and other adults outside of the immediate family.

**Limitations**

Because the participants in this study represented various schools and programs in a southern U.S. state, there was some variation in the school settings represented in terms of demographics, school size, and other factors. Such a range can be beneficial in that various experiences can offer a broader understanding of the settings that students may experience stereotype threat and the types of mentoring that can take place in these settings. The variation in environmental elements experienced by the participants made it difficult to compare the experiences of all the participants. However, similarities between some of the participants’ school settings allowed for comparison among several participants.

In addition, the experiences told by the students advanced potential interventions. It may be difficult, however, to know if these mentoring experiences are truly the overwhelming factor in students’ academic performance; the students may perceive them to be so, which is valuable in itself, especially as it relates to phenomenological research.

**Delimitations**

The study does not intend to offer an exhaustive list of stereotype threat reducing practices for mentoring. Nor does this study include statistical measures of academic performance, as this study’s objective is limited to exploring perceived linkages between mentoring and stereotype threat reduction. Also, mentoring in this study, with no singular definition in terms of a general model (Gándara & Mejorado, 2005), refers to a formal or
informal relationship between participants and individuals that participants identify as mentors. It is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate the quality or extent of the mentoring relationships reported by participants outside of the parameters outlined in the participant selection process.

**Dissertation Organization**

This first chapter of this dissertation presents the problem statement, the study’s purpose, the research questions, the significance, the definition of important terms, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. The second chapter presents the dissertation’s conceptual framework and situates the study within the larger body of relevant research. The third chapter explains the methodology and specific methods employed in this study. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study. The fifth chapter includes a closing discussion and recommendations for educational practitioners and for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This research effort was designed to explore African-American adolescent students’ perceptions of the impact that mentoring has on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions. The overall purpose of this literature review is to present aspects of the African-American student experience that are relevant to the current study. To this end, this chapter provides context by beginning with my conceptual framework. Then, the chapter turns to a review of the related literature after the presentation of the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of qualitative research represents “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39). The current research effort incorporated the existing theories of three areas positioned as the central focus of the study: African-American student identity (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016), stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and mentoring (Gándara et al., 2005). Elements of these theories were integrated into this study as a conceptual framework as they are interrelated within the context of the African-American schooling experience. This section begins with a discussion of Du Bois’s (1903) double consciousness theory. Starting with double consciousness situates the discussion on African-American student identity and the STT experience within the broader discussion of African-American experiences in the United States.

Double Consciousness Roots

The great W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about double consciousness in his seminal text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Though the text was published in 1903, double consciousness is a term that still captures an experience of many African-Americans today, perhaps more in some
life situations than in others. As Du Bois put it, double consciousness is an experience of “twoness” and of “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 9). The idea of double consciousness explains the connection between African-American student identity and stereotype threat experience at once. Two decades later, Carter G. Woodson alluded to this same concept of double consciousness in his most famous text, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933):

> When a Negro has finished his education in our schools… He goes forth to play his part in life, but he must be both social and biosocial at the same time. While he is a part of the body politic, he is in addition to this a member of a particular race to which he must restrict himself in all matters social. (p. 20)

Woodson’s thesis went beyond acknowledging double consciousness; it asserted that American schools institutionalized it and fostered it.

Fanon’s (1967) writings about the double consciousness experience demonstrate that this experience was not uniquely American. The double consciousness that Black peoples experience is an experience resulting from colonization, which of course extends beyond the United States. In explaining her interpretation of Fanon’s (1967) postulations in his text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Wynter (2000) states that:

> …if you went to Africa and you saw the Pygmy in his traditional cultural constellation, there he is the normal human being. And it is impossible for him to experience himself as a Negro because he is the norm, and to be a Negro is to be the opposite of the norm.

Wynter used Fanon’s observation to explain her theory of the biocentric belief system, which she uses to explain the relation between biology and anti-Black ideology (Wynter, 2001). Wynter proposed that anti-Black racism/ideology is born of the “systemic denigration of all things of African origin” (p. 33). The “systemic denigration” to which she refers is a product of European
colonialization. It not only creates a negative image of Black people from an exterior point of view but also a negative image of Black people from Black peoples’ perspective. Fanon (1967) expressed this sentiment as he explained his own mother’s verbal admonishment of him when he disobeyed her: “Stop acting like a Nigger!” (p. 191). The idea of anti-Black culture is an important notion to understand in this study because stereotypes about African-Americans are rooted in anti-Black ideology; they are a part of the deeply embedded schema about African-Americans and all Black peoples. This schema, internalized in African-Americans, creates the double consciousness experiences and related experiences such as stereotype threat. The discussion around anti-Black ideology, double consciousness, and stereotype threat is significant because it provides context for the discussion on African-American student identity below.

The heart of the issue of this research project is double consciousness. The conceptual framework of this study applies an understanding of double consciousness in a K-12 setting using empirical research on African-American student identity and STT. Mentoring, the third component of the conceptual framework of this project, is situated as an intermediary tool. The mentoring component is used to examine what adolescent students perceive about mentoring’s role as an intermediary between their student identity and STT conditions. I now turn to a more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework components.

**African-American Student Identity**

Du Bois’s (1903) double consciousness theory explains African-Americans’ personal struggle to reconcile social identities in broader society. Because this identity group grapples with double consciousness in broader society, it is important to consider how African-American student identity may develop in a positive way. It is important understand to explore African-American student identity because the literature posits that these students’ academic identity is
linked to the health of their racial identity (Tatum, 2003). Zirkel and Johnson (2016) pointed out that a “strong, positive Black identity” (p. 301) is linked with positive academic outcomes. Zirkel and Johnson defined a “strong, positive Black identity” as:

(a) a strong and positive identification with being Black combined with (b) a racial consciousness of the historical, social, and cultural context of being Black in the United States, including a critical consciousness about race and racism. (p. 302)

While there is evidence that a “strong, positive Black identity” is an asset in the classroom (El-Amin et al., 2017), STT studies have shown that the more an individual identifies with a stereotyped identity, the more susceptible that person may be to the adverse effects of STT (Steele, 1997). However, these notions are not contradictory when viewed from both holistic and situational vantage points of African-American student experience. Theoretically, an African-American student with a “strong, positive Black identity” may indeed experience more positive outcomes in school performance when compared to peers who have not internalized this identity construct. These same students may also experience the situational underperformance explained by the STT underperformance phenomenon. The “strong, positive Black identity” concept was integrated into the interview construction, and into the data analysis process as themes emerge from the data.

**Stereotype Threat**

Steele and Aronson’s (1995) stereotype threat theory, which is defined as performance suppression based on the fear of fulfilling a stereotype or being judged based on the stereotype, and the subsequent work of many researchers, shed light on how some of the ideas of the double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) experience have real impacts on students’ academic performance, and overall schooling experiences. STT explains the deleterious effects that negative stereotypes
have on the performance of various identity groups (e.g., African-Americans, women, the disabled, etc.) in various performance situations (e.g., academic testing, athletic performance, etc.). The academic performance of African-American students is of particular focus in this research effort as this identity group carries negative stereotypes that globally threatens their student identity. These stereotypes suggest that the African-American group is intellectually inferior to European-American and Asian-American students, and that the group is behaviorally and socially deviant.

STT literature, discussed further in my literature review, has provided a variety of useful concepts in understanding the ways in which STT may or may not impact the academic experiences of this study’s African-American participants. Stereotype threat literature has provided insight into establishing stereotype threat presence through observation of certain environmental cues (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), students’ awareness of the relevant stereotype (Nasir et al., 2016), and students’ level of domain identification, which Wasserberg (2014) defines as the magnitude of one’s personal level of value placed on achievement in a particular domain. For instance, one is said to be highly domain identified in mathematics if he desires to do well in math, has the skill to do well in math, and maximizes his efforts in math-related tasks. Paradoxically, students with high domain identification are more susceptible to the effects of stereotype threat when they are aware of the stereotype relevant to their identity (Wasserberg, 2014). Stereotype threat theory guided this current project in determining the presence of environmental cues evidenced to activate stereotype threat in students’ academic experiences with reasonable certainty. In addition, the theory guided the data collection process through interview construction, and concepts of the theory were integrated into the data analysis process as themes emerged from the data.
Youth Mentoring Frameworks

As discussed in the literature review that follows, stereotype threat research offers a range of interventions for attenuating its effects on students. Mentoring has appeared in the literature as a delivery system for some of these interventions (Cohen et al., 1999; Good et al., 2003). DuBois et al. (2011) signal that there is a need for research that explains connections between specific mentoring practices and desired mentoring outcomes. As the current study aimed to reveal connections between mentoring practices and stereotype threat reduction, it was useful to examine how participants perceived this relationship between the stereotype threat experience and their mentoring relationships.

Gándara and Mejorado’s (2005) theory offers insight into how mentoring programs engage students. The mentoring theory consists of four frameworks for understanding mentors’ relationships with students: (a) development, (b) identity, (c) guidance, and (d) family support. Two of these frameworks, the development framework, and identity framework are useful in examining mentors’ role in reducing stereotype threat effects. While guidance and family support are important components to Gándara’s and her colleague’s theory, their positive impact on academic performance does not clearly exhibit a theoretical connection to stereotype threat reduction based on the way that Gándara and Mejorado present the frameworks.

As it relates to understanding mentoring’s capacity for stereotype threat reduction, the development framework positions mentors as providers of “emotional support and unconditional acceptance” (p. 95) during students’ adolescent years, which are full of environmental stressors (i.e., stereotype threat). The development framework also explains the mentor’s role as someone who provides self-worth affirmation, which is an important stereotype threat intervention (Walton & Carr, 2012) as it provides a counter-narrative for stigmatized groups. As it relates to
the proposed study, this development framework will be used in the examination of the mentoring practices reported. Specifically, data collection and analysis processes will aim to understand what students communicate about their mentors’ role in acting as a buffer for the hostile environmental stressors (Dumas, 2014) caused by stereotype threat.

The identity framework of Gándara’s and Mejorado’s (2005) mentoring theory is tied to African-American student identity explained above. This framework presents identity development as an important aspect of the mentor’s role. The identity framework positions the mentor as a role model, providing positive examples that the youth may incorporate into their own identities. This element of the theory also informs the data collection and data analysis processes, providing a framework for understanding how a mentor may impact the identities of a mentee.

Beyond the scope of stereotype threat, mentoring has been shown to have a range of developmental impacts on student outcomes in K-12 schools. Depending on the characteristics of the mentoring relationship, the various domains implicated in mentoring practice, such as academic, social competence, problem behavior, emotional, and career readiness (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002) have ranged from significant improvement to having deleterious effects on the youth serviced through these programs (DuBois et al., 2011). While some scholarly work characterizes mentoring as an intervention in itself (Wheeler et al., 2010), I posit that mentoring should be viewed rather as a vehicle for intervention. This redefinition accounts for the wide variety of mentoring models in and outside of the school environment (DuBois et al., 2011; Wheeler et al., 2010). Also, mentoring as a vehicle for intervention allows for a focus on the behaviors, interactions, and policies that characterize the mentoring
relationship, which are elements of particular concern when considering how mentoring may contribute to the development of students and attenuation of stereotype threat.

As it relates to the development framework of mentoring (Gándara et al., 2005), it is necessary to consider participants’ experiences in terms of the hostile environment they may find in academic settings created by stereotype threat and how they perceive the buffering role of their mentors to have mitigated stereotype threat effects. Though literature shows that mentoring is better suited for students with moderate challenges as opposed to students needing more intensive interventions such as psychotherapy, the ability of mentors to positively impact students’ psychological/emotional well-being (DuBois et al., 2011) is important to the stereotype threat reduction role of mentors. In this respect, Dubois et al. pointed out that mentors may act as an agent of youth’s development, such that they may aid youth in transforming their present and future self-perceptions. The development that mentors may facilitate in this regard has implications for two stereotype threat related concepts: stereotype awareness and stereotype endorsement. As mentors facilitate students’ shift in self-perception, this appears to be an important aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship concerning the reduction of stereotype threat (Cohen et al., 1999). The ability for school-based mentoring programs to achieve this outcome faces challenges such as the conflict between the structure of the school calendar and the amount of time required for a successful mentoring relationship to develop (Wheeler et al., 2010).

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the interrelatedness of these concepts and the assumptions that serve as the conceptual framework of this study. The graphic explains that the weakening of African-American adolescents’ student identity is impacted by stereotype threat cues laden in the school environment and the mentoring relationship’s role as an intermediary defense, successful or unsuccessful, against these environmental cues that are hostile to African-
American student identity. The environmental cues presented in this model come from the extant literature on STT (Steele, 2010) and literature on racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010). Racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework
The conceptual framework of this study informed the data collection and analysis processes of this project. Stereotype threat theory (Steele et al., 1995) and African-American student identity theory (Zirkel et al., 2016) helped explore the broad life experience of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in the context of schools. Mentoring theory provided concepts for exploring and understanding how the subjects in this study perceived their mentoring relationships to have impacted schooling experiences under STT conditions.

The chapter now continues with an examination of the extant literature regarding issues that are educationally, socially, and culturally linked to the inquiry of this study. These issues include the hostilities of the K-12 environment for African-American students, African-American student identity, the STT experience and its impact on African-American students’ academic performance, STT interventions, and youth mentoring. Prior to presenting the literature concerning these areas, a rationale for the selection and ordering of these issues is presented in the literature review sub-section below.

**Literature Review**

This literature review begins with a discussion that connects some of the hostilities of the K-12 environment for African-American students to the discussion on environmental cues and their role in STT activation (Steele & Aronson, 1995). It is also necessary to consider what the literature says about African-American student identity, especially as it concerns the development and outcomes of a “strong, positive Black identity” (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016, p. 301), the outcomes related to a diminished Black identity, and how STT may undermine healthy Black identity development. Implicated in the discussion on African-American student identity are the STT experience and its impact on African-American students’ academic performance, particularly those who identify strongly with their racial identity. The logical point of
examination after reviewing the literature on the STT experience and its impact on African-American students would be STT interventions. For the specific purposes of this inquiry, youth mentoring is examined as a STT intervention vehicle. Mentoring as an intervention vehicle is of particular focus in this study due to its ubiquity in education as a form of remediation in multiple areas of student development (Wheeler et al., 2010).

**African-American Stereotypes and Environmental Hostilities in K-12 Schools**

Scholarly texts have long discussed the environmental hostilities and oppression that educational institutions impose on students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Freire, 1970). The literature referenced in this sub-section provides examples of policies, social inequity, and other factors that have created hostile and oppressive school environments for African-American students in particular. These examples demonstrate the link between hostile K-12 environments and stereotypes about African-American students’ intellectual capabilities and behavior.

*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) is an example of an early federal policy that created a hostile educational environment toward African-Americans. The ruling of the case upheld that separate but equal schools did not impinge upon the 13th and 14th amendment rights of non-Whites. However, the contemporary consensus is that the ruling clearly relegated African-Americans to second-class citizenship in public and private sectors of the country, including schools.

It would not be until 1954 in the landmark court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* that *Plessy v. Ferguson* would be reversed. However, this decision would not completely erase the inequities between racial communities in schools such as inequitable school funding (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). It is also important to state that the Brown decision did not completely simplify the complex issue of segregation, as integration has also been argued to be problematic Du Bois (1935). There are scholars who argue that integration did not necessarily have a positive
impact on African-American students’ experiences (Du Bois, 1935; Ladson-Billings, 2004). For instance, Du Bois argued, in his essay *Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?*, that predominantly Black institutions provide African-American students with the nurturing and cultural understanding that predominantly White institutions cannot; he asserted that this occurred mainly through the work of African-American teachers. Ladson-Billings, on the other hand, does not take issue with integration in itself, but with the method of implementation. She reasserted from an earlier study that the implementation of the *Brown* decision was problematic because the court system allowed the ruling to be carried out in “mathematical” way rather than finding a method of implementation appropriate for such a social issue (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). Ladson-Billings also noted that “experts for the plaintiffs argued that Black inferiority that was exacerbated by segregation was the reason to overturn the separate but equal principle” (2004, p. 5). This highlighted the persistent anti-Black ideology used to support the *Brown* decision. This is significant because it demonstrates that even in the efforts to desegregate, African-Americans were, from certain perspectives, still considered inferior.

Segregation continues to be a contentious issue in schools today. As Gándara (2010) noted in her study on the segregation of Latino students, racial segregation, whether it be de jure or de facto, perpetuates stereotypes and the socioeconomic segregation that is often associated with racial segregation creates schools that are poorly equipped to educate students. However, Kotok, Beabout, Nelson, and Rivera (2018) found that achieving diverse schools is a complex task. Kotok et al. examined one school system in the southern United States that experienced increased racial diversity in the system while, at the same time, experiencing increased racial segregation. The authors concluded that the particular school system examined in their study needed a highly coordinated approach to achieving racial diversity across stakeholders.
However, this remains a complex issue because the premise that planned integration benefits African-American students is still an unsettled argument.

Prior research has evidenced that the implementation of integration is linked to increased disciplinary action against African-American students (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Larkin, 1979; Thornton & Trent, 1988). More recent scholarship shows that the trend demonstrating that racial minority students are disproportionately on the receiving end of disciplinary action continues (Billie, 2017; Ferguson, 2001; Grace & Nelson, 2018; Morris, 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba, Michael, Carroll Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). These examples present more clarity on the obstacles African-American students face in American school environments. While there is strong evidence demonstrating that negative stereotypes about African-American students’ intellectual capacity negatively impact these students’ academic performance, stereotypes regarding these students’ behavior in schools may be just as damaging. Okonofua et al.’s study demonstrated a link between stereotyping and disciplinary disparities such as those discussed in the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights report (OCR, 2016). Similarly, Skiba et al.’s study found that African-American students were treated differently than others, receiving disciplinary referrals for violations that were more subjective in nature. The disproportionality in disciplinary action has been evidenced to result in the disproportionate rate at which African-American students enter the prison pipeline (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). Together, these two disproportionalities are often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014; Wald et al., 2003). The literature unfolds further, demonstrating a link between these disciplinary disparities and the racial gap in academic performance (Morris & Perry, 2016).
OCR (2016) reported that Black students in K-12 schools were 3.8 times as likely as their White peers to be suspended out-of-school one or more times in their academic careers. The report showed that this disproportionality in disciplinary action taken against Black students also occurs as early as preschool; Black preschool children constituted 47% of children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions while only having made up 19% of the total preschool population. This discrepancy holds true when gender is considered, as well (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Morris, 2016). OCR’s report also showed that 45% of male preschoolers receiving out-of-school suspensions are Black, while this group only constitutes 19% of the male preschool population. Similarly, Black preschool girls made up only 20% of all female preschoolers but were suspended out-of-school at a rate of 54%. It was asserted in a White House report (2016), *The Continuing Need to Rethink Discipline*, that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, collectively referred to as exclusionary discipline practices, negatively impact student learning, and social and emotional growth. In addition, the implications of this disproportionality reach several connected issues such as racial academic performance gaps and the school-to-prison pipeline.

The long-term outcomes that are associated with the disparity in disciplinary action detailed above are bleak. *The Continuing Need to Rethink Discipline* (2016) report released by the White House showed that Black or African-American students constitute 16% of total enrollment. However, the group accounts for 34% of students with school-related arrests and 26% of referrals to law enforcement. This is troubling because the data showed that students who enter into the juvenile justice system do not have a promising chance of successfully reentering K-12 schools. According to OCR (2016), over 25% of K-12 students entering the justice system drop out of school within a six-month period. The department also reported that a
mere 15% of ninth-graders released from juvenile justice facilities graduate from high school in four years. Yet another staggering statistic was that approximately 50% of students released from juvenile justice facilities were reincarcerated within three years.

These trends are troubling for several reasons. They perpetuate the stereotype that these children are prone to behavioral problems, that they do not value education, and that they are intellectually inferior. This trend also reinforces the tracking of these students into the school-to-prison pipeline (Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Lori, & Bennett-Haron, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald et al., 2003). Meiners (2010) reported links in the physical environment between schools and prisons, which showed the increased use of metal detectors, surveillance, armed officers, and school uniforms. The symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) of such discriminate practices undermines African-American students’ sense of academic identity and almost certainly decreases their potential for a sense of belonging in schools, good mental health, and ultimately self-actualization. Below, this discussion expands as it segues into a review of literature related to African-American student identity.

**African-American Student Identity**

Given the historical and contemporary treatment of African-American students in education, it was important to consider the implications of these facts on African-American youth’s student identity. Tatum (2003) provided an extensive discourse on the significance of African-American racial and ethnic identity in education. Tatum discussed the negative implications of stereotypes on African-American youths’ identity. She spoke specifically about the internalization of negative images imposed upon one’s identity and the negative effect this can have on African-American youths’ belief in their abilities. This point is much in line with the
research on stereotype endorsement (Nasir et al., 2016), a mediator of STT that is characterized by the belief in stereotypes about one’s own identity group.

Tatum’s discussion included a host of social issues, including stereotyping, that negatively impact African-American youths’ identity. She also discussed and highlighted the importance of a healthy academic identity for African-American students. As it relates to education, two opposing concepts concerning the identity development of African-American youth are the raceless strategy and the emissary strategy (Tatum, 2003). Tatum noted that some Black students adopt the raceless strategy, which is characterized by the deemphasizing of African-American youths’ cultural characteristics in order to assimilate with their European-American peers. While this strategy may be of no negative consequence under non-identity-threatening circumstances, some research has shown that individuation, an attempt to behave in a way that deemphasizes one’s stigmatized identity under STT conditions, can negatively impact academic performance (Keller & Sekaquaptewa, 2008).

Tatum described the emissary strategy as one in which African-American students are academically successful but maintain a sense of pride and advocacy for their Black identity. In a similar vein, Zirkel and Johnson (2016) have noted that a “strong, positive Black identity” (p. 301) has been evidenced to be an asset to African-American students as it relates to academic outcomes. Zirkel and Johnson define a “strong, positive Black identity” (p. 301) through two components:

(a) A strong and positive identification with being Black combined with (b) a racial consciousness of the historical, social, and cultural context of being Black in the United States, including a critical consciousness about race and racism. (p. 302)
Of great importance to the current research project is research that has demonstrated the educational benefit of having high-expectations for oneself, which is found more frequently in African-American students who possess a strong Black identity (Wright 2011). Wright’s study pointed out that African-American students are often aware that teachers sometimes have lower expectations for their racial group; though Wright did not expressly connect this to STT theory, the body of work in the STT field clearly shows implications for this issue and has found that this stereotype awareness may be a mediator for STT activation (Nasir et al., 2016). Moreover, the discussion on students’ high-expectations for themselves has strong implications for mentoring practice and its ability to diminish STT effects, which is discussed further below.

**STT Experience: Mechanisms Underpinning Stereotype Threat Effects**

One of the sub-objectives of this proposed research effort was to understand African-American students’ experiences with STT using a naturalistic methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach allowed for an understanding of how STT moderators and mediators established in the quantitative literature are interpreted together, and more holistically, by the students. Understanding how students connected these mediating and moderating processes within the context of their mentoring and schooling experiences was particularly important to the overall objective of this study: the understanding of how students perceive the relationship between their mentoring experiences and schooling experiences while under stereotype threat conditions.

While the current research effort employed a qualitative design, it is important to understand the difference between the quantitative terms mediator variable and moderator variable given the overwhelming amount of STT literature conducted through quantitative methods and their use of such language. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediator
variables explain the connection between two other variables, while moderator variables impact the strength of a connection between two other variables. Moderators are situational elements that determine how impactful stereotype threat is on performance; for example, the degree to which STT impacts academic performance is in part moderated by the degree to which a student identifies with their social identity group (Davies, Aronson, & Salina, 2006). Mediators are processes experienced by an individual as a result of STT introduction; they explain why performance suppression occurs. For instance, STT activation may cause a student to experience performance anxiety, which is the mediator in this case, leading to decreased ability to perform at optimal levels. Pennington et al.’s (2016) meta-analysis of stereotype threat studies pays particular attention to the role of mediators’ contribution to stereotype threat effects; however, the study, which provides great support to the current project’s literature review, also provides information on moderators, as well. A review of STT mediators and moderators provided some understanding as to some of the unique obstacles that African-American students may face in the K-12 school environment. Some of the most salient moderators and mediators in the research literature are presented below.

**Moderators.** Pennington et al.’s (2016) meta-analysis presented the following moderators that have been found to contribute, in part or individually, to stereotype threat effects. (1) Domain identification, which concerns how much one values success in a particular domain (Keller, 2007; Wasserberg, 2014), (2) high difficulty of performance task (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and (3) strong identification with one’s social identity group (Shapiro, 2012; Steele, 2010) are moderating variables that impact the strength of STT effects. Steele (2010) also discusses (4) stereotype awareness as a moderating variable. A similar concept, (5) stereotype endorsement, which is the belief in a stereotype related to one’s group (Schmader, Johns, &
Barquissau, 2004), also moderates STT. Rydell and Boucher (2010) also found that (6) low self-esteem moderates the effects of STT. Finally, (7) an internal locus of control (Cadinu, Maass, Lombardo, & Frigerio, 2006), which concerns one’s belief that they can control life events versus an external locus of control in which a person believes that life’s events are caused by outside factors, moderates STT effects, as well. The moderators discussed here will be important during the data analysis of this study. The emergence, or lack thereof, of these elements in the data will speak to the magnitude to which STT is embedded in the experiences of the participants.

**Mediators.** Similarly, the participants’ experiences with STT mediators illuminated the degree to which STT has impacted participants’ experiences. A review of the mediators known to underpin STT related outcomes is presented, here. Pennington et al.’s (2016) meta-analysis, which served as research-bank for the current literature review, deeply discussed stereotype threat mediators. Pennington and her colleagues identified eighteen mediators and placed them into three mediator categories: affective/subjective (six mediators), cognitive (seven mediators), and motivational (five mediators). The specific STT mediators placed in these three categories are discussed below.

In the affective mediator category, (1) anxiety has both been found to be a mediator, and in other instances, to not have an association with STT activation (Steele, 1997; Wasserberg, 2014). (2) Individuation, or the tendency to disassociate from one’s identity has been shown to have both a negative impact on academic performance (Keller et al., 2008) and a positive impact on academic performance (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004). (3) Evaluation apprehension, which concerns one’s fear of confirming a negative stereotype attributed to one’s group, has been shown to have a negative impact on certain identity groups
under certain circumstances (Steele & Aronson, 1995), but not all groups under all circumstances (Mayer & Hanges, 2003); taken together, these particular findings support the multi-threat framework (Ambady et al., 2004) that states that stereotype threat is not experienced in the same way for all identity groups. (4) Expectations of performance, or one’s personal expectancy for success on tasks where a stereotype has been introduced has also been shown to suppress performance (Cadinu, Maass, Frigerio, Impagliazzo, & Latinotti, 2003). (5) Explicit stereotype threat endorsement in which a stereotype is expressly presented before a performance task (Beaton, Tougas, Rinfret, Huard, & Delisle, 2007; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999) has been documented as a mediator of STT. Finally, (6) self-efficacy has both been demonstrated to be a mediator (Chung, Ehrhart, Ehrhart, Hattrup, & Solamon, 2010) and a non-factor on performance suppression (Mayer et al. 2003; Spencer et al., 1999).

Pennington and colleague’s (2016) discussion on cognitive processes included seven mediators: (7) working memory depletion (Johns, Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2008) and (8) cognitive load (Croizet et al., 2004) are two closely related mediators that may underpin stereotype threat. (9) Thought suppression (Steele & Aronson, 1995), due to consciousness of a stereotype relevant to one’s identity, has also been discussed as a mediator. Although, it is important to note that thought suppression was found to lead to working memory depletion (Johns et al., 2008); therefore, it appears that thought suppression may be a process linked to other mediators of STT, and may not be a mediating process that works in isolation. (10) Mind-wandering, resulting from increased anxiety, has also been linked to stereotype threat effects (Mrazek et al., 2011). Increased occurrences of (11) negative thinking have also appeared in the mediator literature (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005); again, negative thinking appears to be another focus in the STT literature that is likely linked to other mediators such as though suppression and
depletion of working memory. (12) Cognitive appraisal, a process of evaluating a task as being a threat or a surmountable challenge, has been shown to be an asset when students view a task as a challenge rather than as a threat (Berjot, Roland-Levy, & Girault-Lidvahn, 2011), but may suppress performance when a task is perceived as a threat to one’s identity. Lastly, (13) implicit stereotype endorsement, in which stereotype threat activation occurs due to automatic negative associations between identity group, performance task, and ability, has also been found to impair performance (Galdi, Cadinu, & Tomasetto, 2014).

In terms of motivational mechanisms, Pennington et al. (2016) examined the following mediators: (14) efforts to disconfirm a negative stereotype (Jamieson & Harkins, 2012), (15) self-handicapping, in which people create their own barriers to success in order to avoid possible stereotype confirmation (Stone, 2002), and (16) dejection (Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003) all had similar suppressive effects on performance. Interestingly, (17) increased states of vigilance created a speed for accuracy trade-off outcome, causing male-participants to complete the task more slowly but with better accuracy than the control group (Seibt & Förster, 2004); here, the authors advanced the interpretation that stereotype effects were expressed through decreased performance speed and creativity. Finally, (17) performance avoidance (Brodish & Devine, 2009), a motivational consequence of perceiving stereotype threat, has also been documented as a motivational mediator of STT.

Though the mediators presented above may lead one to believe that these are processes that work to underpin STT effects in isolation, it is important to note that many of these processes appear to be linked. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to determine how these mediators may be connected in terms of causal relationships or successive activation; a simple understanding of what the research has found to mediate STT served as an adequate tool
for the data collection and analysis of this particular study. As these mediators emerged in the
data analysis of this study, connections to this literature was made to explain the experiences of
the participants. Also, key to the objective of this research was understanding what aspects of
mentoring the participants perceived to have diminished the impact of these mediators.

**Stereotype Threat Interventions**

After understanding what moderates and mediates the effects of stereotype threat, it is
important to understand what the literature has produced in terms of interventions that reduce
STT effects. Among others, these interventions have included: the reframing of difficulties as
challenges (Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, & Ruble, 2010), the teaching of the malleability
of intelligence (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Good et al., 2003), the use of self-affirmation
exercises (Cohen et al., 2006), and others that either encourage a change in students’ perspective
(Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007) or changes to the environment to increase identity
affirming cues (Inzlicht, Aronson, Good, & McKay, 2006; Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald, &
Lamoureaux, 2010). Adolescent mentoring, a formal or informal relationship between youth and
adults focusing on youth development (Gándara & Mejorado, 2005), may prove to be a valuable
method for STT intervention delivery as mentoring is a widely utilized form of youth outreach
that can be implemented in or outside of school settings (DuBois et al., 2011). Instances of
mentoring used for STT intervention are further discussed below.

**Youth mentoring as a vehicle for stereotype threat intervention.** Herrera, Grossman,
Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken (2007) discuss the impact that mentoring can potentially have on
academic achievement, academic self-efficacy, conduct, and school attendance. When
considering how stereotype threat may impact this study’s participants’ academic experiences, it
is necessary to understand how stereotype threat may impact these elements discussed by Herrera et al.: academic achievement, academic self-efficacy, conduct, and school attendance.

Stereotype threat literature highlights academic performance suppression as the result of various possible mediator and moderator variables; therefore, this definition advanced by Herrera and her colleagues is actually broader in scope than academic self-efficacy, conduct, and school attendance. Moreover, self-efficacy, conduct, and school attendance seem to be factors that contribute to academic performance. When considering how these factors relate to stereotype threat, it may be helpful to understand how certain stereotype threat mediators may be implicated. For instance, self-handicapping (Stone, 2002) may in part explain conduct or misconduct, performance avoidance (Brodish & Devine, 2009) may similarly be linked to attendance problems, and low self-efficacy has been demonstrated to be a result of stereotype threat in some cases (Chung, Ehrhart, Ehrhart, Hattrup, & Solamon, 2010). It is reasonable to suspect that mentors who are able to address these stereotype threat mediators may in turn positively affect overall academic performance and youth development.

Duration of the mentoring relationship is also a significant consideration in this study. DuBois et al.’s (2011) meta-analysis that evaluated youth mentoring program effectiveness found that the longer the mentoring relationship lasted, the more likely desirable outcomes would be realized. In addition, DuBois et al. found mentoring relationships that lasted fewer than 3 months were potentially harmful to the youth. Clarke’s (2009) dissertation suggests the importance of maintaining a relationship between the student and mentor for a minimum of 18 months. This is a particularly difficult obstacle in school-based mentoring settings due to the structure of the school year (Herrera et al., 2007). One recommendation for remedying this
challenge is a mentoring model called “school plus” (Wheeler et al., 2010), in which students and mentors spend time together outside of the normal school setting.

In terms of goals of formal youth mentoring program, DuBois et al. (2011) found that more desirable outcomes are achieved when mentors in the program possess certain attributes: (1) shared interests with their mentee(s), (2) mentors who have a teaching and advocacy role, (3) programs that provide professional development for mentors, (4) screening and training of mentors, (5) established expectations of the mentoring relationship, and (6) a supervision and evaluation process. Interestingly, DuBois et al. (2011) found that matching youth with mentors of the same race led to less desirable effects. This finding appears to counter the narrative in stereotype threat literature that suggests the importance of critical mass, which Steele defines as “the point at which there are enough minorities in a setting, like a school or a workplace, that individual minorities no longer feel uncomfortable there because they are minorities” (2010, p. 135). In other words, though stereotype threat literature points to the importance of sharing racial identity with individuals in powerful roles in a setting, DuBois and his colleagues found no such benefit in mentoring relationships. However, this aspect of the mentoring relationship may be different when the goal of the program specifically aims to reduce stereotype threat effects.

Though informal youth mentoring relationships do not have formalized goals, research shows that this particular sub-category of youth mentoring approaches can be effective in bolstering educational success (Erickson et al., 2009). Erickson and his colleagues found that youth that have many resources tend to have more access to informal mentoring as a resource. The study also showed that students who have fewer resources may benefit more from an informal mentoring relationship than their more privileged peers. Some notes from the Erickson et al.’s study that are relevant to this research study are: (1) there is a paucity of research on
informal youth mentoring, (2) youth who have teachers as mentors experience educational benefits, and (3) youth who have a friend as a mentor do not experience educational benefits. A noteworthy point of alignment between formal and informal mentoring research is that mentors who have a simultaneous teaching role yield more desirable benefits (Erickson et al.; Dubois et al., 2011). These important insights garnered from formal and informal mentoring research were important points of connection in the data analysis of the current study.

Several scholarly works have presented mentoring as a vehicle of intervention for STT reduction (Cohen et al., 1999; Good et al., 2003; Steele, 2010). In Steele’s (2010) career-encompassing volume Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do, he shares a retrospective analysis of a personal account in which he recounts how a mentor “interrupted [his] worried narrative of the setting” (p. 163). As this “narrative” for many students is likely to include certain mediators and moderators discussed above, the data analysis of this study may illuminate fresh approaches or nuanced understandings of STT diminishing practices for shifting the personal narratives of African-American students who may be impacted by STT.

Good et al. (2003) conducted a relevant study to this research proposal. The study featured a mentoring intervention in which college students mentored 138 seventh graders. The seventh graders were separated into three experimental groups and one control group. The mentors of the experimental groups offered one of three encouragements to the junior high school participants: (1) intelligence is malleable and not fixed, (2) any academic hardships should be attributed to the transition to junior high school and not regarded as an internal deficiency in intelligence, and (3) a combination of the two aforementioned encouragements. The control group received mentoring regarding drug-abuse. As all three experimental groups
outperformed the control group, the results of the study demonstrated that changing students’ ideas of the nature of intelligence (i.e. shifting their personal narrative) can decrease stereotype threat effects. This is a promising finding that has implications for mentoring practices aimed at dampening stereotype threat’s impact. However, the delimitation of this study design is that its experimental construction seeks to yield one possible practice that mentors might use for threat reduction. On the other hand, an exploratory approach of a qualitative research design may reveal more information about youth mentoring relationships in regard to STT protection.

Cohen et al.’s (1999) article reported on the use of STT intervention in mentoring. The intervention was described as “wise-mentoring”. This intervention entailed coupling critical feedback with high-expectations and the assurance that students were capable of meeting the high-expectations. African-American students were the experimental group utilized in this study. Similar to Good et al.’s (2003) experimental study discussed above, Cohen et al.’s article provided a viable STT intervention for mentoring practice. These studies are also similar in that their deductive approach does not allow for the revelation of novel practices or nuances of established practices, which are more typical of a qualitative discovery approach. The current study employed the discovery approach for this purpose.

Regarding the literature on STT moderators and mediators, STT interventions, and mentoring as a STT intervention delivery system, there are well-developed ideas important to understanding the STT process and methods for diminishing it. Using a STT framework purposed for building data collection questions, the current research effort extends the field of knowledge on STT by applying a naturalistic approach in an exploration of students’ perceptions of the impact that their mentoring relationships have had on their academic experiences.
This literature provided contextual information for understanding the African-American youths’ schooling experiences from a historical point of view, through the lens of STT theory, and through the lens of African-American students identity. These areas were important to explore when considering how the double consciousness experience occurs within the schooling environment. The literature review also provided important information for understanding the youth mentoring in the ways that it has been deployed and its impact on school-age students. The information presented in the literature review was also important in the data collection and data analysis processes, which adheres to the principles of interpretive phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Ray, 1994), explained more thoroughly in the following chapter on methodology.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a phenomenological approach to understand the essence of the experiences of the study’s participants (Moustakas, 1994). In explaining Hegel’s (n.d.) definition of phenomenology, Moustakas advances that “phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (p. 26). As there is a focus on participants’ perceptions in the phenomenological tradition, this qualitative approach is quite appropriate for pushing forward the purpose of this research project. The examination of identity, which is intimately linked to the three elements of this paper’s conceptual framework, relies heavily on exploring perception. Due to both the nature of this inquiry and the author’s epistemological position, which is presented later in this chapter, the interpretive tradition of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962) was employed in this study.

As STT is an important aspect of this project, it is important to address how this particular study was situated in the larger body of STT literature as it relates to the methodological approach. As mentioned in several preceding sections of this study, the use of STT theory is seldom employed as a core tool of inquiry in qualitative research. Quantitative approaches make up the clear majority of studies examining aspects of STT (Pennington et al., 2016). However, a smaller amount of qualitative and mixed-methods studies have focused on STT and are precedents that demonstrate the appropriateness of qualitative inquiry in answering certain research questions involving STT. For instance, Doan (2008) completed a qualitative research dissertation that employed phenomenological and grounded theory approaches to illuminate factors related to STT mediation. Nasir et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods
study that used qualitative interviews and observations to understand how participants’ student identities and engagement were impacted by stereotype awareness and stereotype endorsement, two concepts rooted in STT research.

Nasir et al. (2016) also advanced a cogent argument in their study regarding the general significance of the qualitative approach in STT literature. They suggest that understanding how students make sense of coping with stereotypes and how they are relevant to their identities can only be accomplished through qualitative methods. The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the different experiences of participants that may normally appear equal in a quantitative study that categorizes subjects using surveys. Such an understanding not only has implications for academic achievement and students’ engagement in school, but also for schools seeking to implement mentoring programs that target STT reduction. Qualitative data may more clearly contextualize a setting such as a school, which may allow for a greater degree of tailoring for a school-based mentoring program that seeks to mitigate the effects of racial and ethnic stigma. Providing extensive depth of detail of the context in this qualitative study may allow interested educational stakeholders to decide how transferable the findings of this study may be in their own local context; this is achieved through a process known as thick description (Geertz, 1973). As the knowledge base on the lived experiences of students under stereotype threat grows, recommendations for policy and practice may begin to inform the work of mentors as they support African-American youth in their academic careers.

**Participants**

This study employed criterion-based sampling to select participants (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Criterion-based sampling is useful when the researcher needs to identify participants who possess specific attributes that align with the purpose of the research and the
research question. The purpose and research question of this study inform the identification of the following attributes for participant selection: (a) students identifying as African-American, (b) adolescent students between (and including) the ages of 11 and 18, and (c) students having a mentor for at least 1 year. It should be noted that adolescent students were of particular focus in this study as prior research demonstrates adolescence to be a period when students are more likely to be aware of and endorse stereotypes (Nasir et al., 2016). In other words, adolescent students are more likely to be aware of and believe in widely disseminated stereotypes, which has implications for stereotype threat related performance suppression, task avoidance, and academic disengagement. The criterion-based sampling was facilitated by a process of self-selection. Prospective participants responded to a flyer that list the above-mentioned qualifications for this study. The recruitment flyer can be found under Appendix E.

The participants in this study were recruited from the Southeastern region of the United States. Recruitment occurred via word-of-mouth and through community references who circulated the recruitment flyer. Through my work as a teacher and school principal in the Southeastern United States area, I have many contacts in the local community. I asked these contacts to pass along my contact information and the recruitment flyer to parents. Parents of prospective participants were asked to contact David LaViscount, the researcher, if interested. David LaViscount did not ask for anyone's contact information, nor were children asked to directly contact David LaViscount. Middle schools and high school aged students were equally appropriate for the purpose of this research. Schools with a lack of critical mass of African-American students are desirable because the literature explains that a lack of critical mass is an environmental condition that may trigger STT activation (Steele, 2010). However, students from schools that are predominantly African-American are also viable participants because these
students may also experience STT given that the academic environment may present other environmental cues that activate STT, such as those included in the conceptual framework model of this study. In addition, Shapiro’s (2012) multi-threat framework explains that STT may be activated due to a fear of confirming a negative stereotype to not only out-group members, but also to ingroup members and to oneself. This is significant in understanding how African-American students experience STT in schools; while the magnitude of the perceived threat may be greater in school settings where there are fewer ingroup members, the prospect of confirming negative stereotypes about African-Americans still exists in the presence of a majority African-American group.

Guidelines and conventions regarding an appropriate number of participants in phenomenological studies vary according to the literature. Writing on methodological approaches have advanced suggestions on the topic. Morse (1994) stated that phenomenology requires a minimum of six subjects, while Creswell (1998) suggested a range of five to twenty-five participants. On the other hand, Moustakas (1994) provides no such guideline; he stated, “there is no inadvance criteria for locating or selecting the research participants” (p. 107). Actual studies in the phenomenological tradition also provided insight into an appropriate number of participants. West’s (2013) phenomenological study on the experiences of African-American urban high school students included five participants, while Doan’s (2008) phenomenological dissertation included eighteen participants that were interviewed. The current study aimed to recruit a minimum of eight subjects.

Eleven candidates responded to the recruitment flyer, but only nine were selected. Two of the eleven candidates did not meet an unlisted criterion, which was that mentoring relationships must have endured for at least one year. This criterion was based on DuBois et al.’s (2011)
finding regarding the minimum duration of a mentoring relationship in order for the relationship to yield positive outcomes for the mentee. The nine students who were interviewed in this study fell into two groups: formally mentored and informally mentored. Six out of nine participants were formally mentored, while the remaining three were mentored informally. It is important to note that eight of the nine mentees were continuously mentored, either formally or informally, during the course of this study. Milton, an informally mentored participant, was not receiving ongoing mentoring at the time of his interview because he had recently graduated from his high school where his mentoring occurred. In addition, Milton identified two mentors whom he chose to discuss. The table below provides a summary of the mentees’ profiles.

Table 1
Summary of Mentee and Mentor Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Formal or Informally</th>
<th>Mentoring Relationship Length</th>
<th>Mentor Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Formal (Camelia Society)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>33 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irielle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Formal (Camelia Society)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>41 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Formal (Camelia Society)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>33 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>40 yrs.; Eur. Am.; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>30 yrs.; Eur. Am.; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Formal (Mile Mentoring)</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>58 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Formal (ASPIRE Mentoring)</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>34 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronny</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Formal (Mile Mentoring)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>58 yrs.; Afr. Am.; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>2 years (both mentors)</td>
<td>40 yrs.; Eur. Am.; Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Milton chose to discuss two mentors

Ethical Concerns

In educational research and other social science research that involves human participants, there is a need to design the research process in a way that does not cause physical or psychological harm to the participants (Sikes, 2004). For this reason, it is necessary for
researchers to engage in ethical practices to protect research participants. This is particularly true when the research subjects are of minor age, such as those participating in this study.

Denscombe’s (2003) three principles for conducting ethical research were observed in this study to protect the study’s subjects. The three principles are: (1) the interests of participants should be protected, (2) researchers should avoid deception and misrepresentation, and (3) participants should give informed consent. Specific measures were taken in adherence to these principles of ethics. In the interest of the participants’ well-being, a post-interview self-affirmation exercise (see Appendix B) was administered as a means of reaffirming the participants’ self-worth after discussing potentially sensitive experiences involving stereotypes. This exercise was adapted from Dorvil’s (2011) Affirmation Worksheet in her action research dissertation that included a manualized program for STT attenuation. In addition, pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Communicating with honesty regarding the various aspects of the research effort was maintained throughout the process. The researcher honestly and thoroughly informed the participants about the research project before and during the process so that they were able to give appropriate informed consent. In addition, ethical guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding the protection of human subjects, and all ethical guidelines set forth by cooperating mentoring organizations were observed. Finally, all confidential information such as names and demographic information is secured on a password-protected computer.

**Data Collection**

Moustakas (1994) stated that the long interview is the primary method of data collection in phenomenological research. The rationale for this approach is to deeply understand the lived experiences of the subjects of the study (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Long, or in-depth interviews,
are the most appropriate form of data collection in achieving this goal. Merriam (2009) described three variations of the long interview: the structured interview, the semi-structured interview, and the unstructured interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted versus the structured and unstructured variations because the core concentrations of the interview protocol are well-defined in the extant literature. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to focus on these core concentration areas while maintaining the flexibility to probe and ask follow-up questions. As this study was informed by the interpretive tradition of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962), it was appropriate to draw on the conceptual framework of the study to create the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interview questions were informed by the concepts found in the STT literature, Zirkel and Johnson’s (2016) “strong, positive Black identity” (p. 301) conception, and of Gándara and Mejorado’s (2005) development framework and identity framework of mentoring in an effort to understand what role these concepts play in the schooling experiences of the participants.

In addition to the first round of interviews described above, I attempted to conduct a second round of follow-up interviews. The separate interview rounds had a distinct purpose in the data collection process. As mentioned above, the first round of interviews included a face to face semi-structured interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) provided a useful analogy for describing the purpose of this initial round of interviewing called the “opening the flood gates” approach (p. 123). This approach is used when the researcher expects that the interviewee knows a great deal about the subject matter. One or two main questions are used to open the conversation, followed by follow-up questions, and probes used to manage the interview. Rubin and Rubin described another interviewing approach as “picking up the twigs”, which was intended as a follow-up to clarify participants’ responses from the first round of interviews (p.
This second round of interviews was to be conducted via telephone and to last 30 minutes or less. However, only two of the nine participants participated in second round interviews. Because I needed to contact parents to coordinate the interviews, scheduling became complicated and some parents were unresponsive for the second round because of availability. It is important to note that the first round of interviews was largely sufficient in answering the research questions, however. In addition, interview transcripts were forwarded to participants to fulfill the member-check measure of trustworthiness (Lincoln et al., 1985). Participants did not request to share any new information, nor did they express the need to clarify any of the information in the transcripts during the member-checking stage of the process.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of the interview transcripts employed a specific tradition of phenomenology: interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology. In delineating the differences between Husserl’s (1970) descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger’s (1962) interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology, Lopez et al. (2004) and Ray (1994) posited that some of the unique values and assumptions underpinning interpretive phenomenology are: the use of a conceptual framework as a tool for inquiry, historical orientation, contextualization, meanings co-constructed by participants and the researcher, and a focus on interpretation of meaning for practice. In sum, the overarching element that differentiates interpretive phenomenology from descriptive phenomenology is a philosophical belief that the essence of human experience cannot be understood without an understanding of the external forces interacting with the experience being examined (Dilthey, 1967). As the elements of interpretive phenomenology inform the data collection process discussed above, these elements also inform data analysis of this study, which is discussed in more specific terms below.
Stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995), African-American student identity (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016), and the development framework and identity framework of Gándara and Mejorado’s (2005) mentor theory served as the conceptual framework. Broader discussions about racial identity, school environments, and historical information serve as contextualization tools. Lopez and Willis (2004) defined coconstitutionality as the blending of participant and researcher communication in the findings. In addition to the conceptual framework and contextualization tools explained above, my own understanding and personal experiences with stereotypes as an African-American are integral to the development of the interview protocols and discussions. The practical implications of the study findings are discussed in the conclusion of the paper. These elements of interpretive phenomenology represent the theoretical underpinning of the analysis to be employed in this study.

**Procedures**

The data analysis procedure treated all interview transcripts in the same manner. The process of data analysis is explained below on two analytical levels: (1) the macro-process of data analysis and (2) its subsumed micro-process of coding data. The conceptualization of the data analysis process on a macro and micro level are helpful in explaining how Hyener’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological analysis and Saldaña’s (2009) set of descriptive, in vivo, and values coding guidelines were applied to the analysis of the data collected in this study. However, as a researcher, I acknowledge and emphasize that these were merely guidelines to the data analysis process. As Okely (1994) stated: “There can be no set formulae, only broad guidelines, sensitive to specific cases” (p. 32). All qualitative data analysis processes vary, as the data and conceptual framework informed analytical decisions. Rationales for employing Hyener’s and Saldaña’s guidelines are also embedded within the explanations of the data.
analysis processes below. I now turn to an explanation of these processes beginning with a step by step description of the macro-process. This explanation is also visually conceptualized in Figure 2 at the conclusion of this section.

**Macro-process of data analysis.** Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection in this study. The interviews of this study were recorded and transcribed as the first step of phenomenological analysis, outlined by Hyener (1985). The transcription includes non-verbal communication; these moments appear in brackets (e.g. [reflecting]) in the transcripts.

The second step of Hyener’s (1985) phenomenological analysis is to undertake the process of suspending presuppositions and biases, a research practice often referred to as bracketing. However, an important point of conflict that causes me to omit the process of attempting to bracket my experiences in this study is the interpretive phenomenological position underpinning the methods of this study (LeVasseur, 2003). Not only is a complete distillation of the researchers’ presuppositions and biases from the data analysis, and data collection for that matter, not possible (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), the process of bracketing is not congruent with the philosophical orientation of interpretive phenomenology (Gadamer, 1979; Geanellos, 2000; LeVasseur, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Ray, 1994; Ricoeur, 1976). In fact, Lopez and Willis submit that interpretive phenomenologists find the expertise and prior knowledge of the researcher to be a valuable resource in exploring the phenomenon. Therefore, the omission of a bracketing process is appropriate in this particular study. Conversely, the process of reflexivity (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Walshaw, 2008) is exercised in the data collection and data analysis processes in order to make my assumptions and biases about various aspects of this project as transparent as possible. This is important to note because I, as the research tool, was an African-American adolescent male and have a son who will soon be an African-American adolescent.
Undoubtedly, these experiences and my sense of advocacy born out of these experiences inform my research design and interpretation. Reflexivity is discussed in more depth below.

Prior to applying codes to a datum, I listened to the interview recordings in their entirety as the third step of the phenomenological analysis outlined by Hyener (1985). The aim of this step is to gain a sense of the whole dialogue between myself and the participants. Gaining a sense of the whole is important to maintaining context in the data analysis process.

Then, in the fourth step, I deconstructed the texts into phrases. Each transcript’s literal phrases were placed on the left side of a document separated into three columns. Preliminary meanings, or codes, of these phrases were placed in the center column and final meanings were entered on the right side of the organizer. The literal phrases and corresponding meanings were numbered in order to further organize the information and to facilitate readability. This phase of the macro-process subsumes the micro-process of coding, which is discussed more thoroughly in the following section below.

In the fifth step of the phenomenological analysis, according to Hyener’s (1985) guidelines, I revisited the research questions in order to identify the phrases and meanings that were not relevant to the research question. These phrases and meanings were removed from the analysis process. In the same vein, Saldaña (2009) suggested keeping the research question nearby at all times during the data analysis process for frequent reference. The purpose of this measure is to keep the trajectory of the project narrowly focused on answering the research question. Therefore, I incorporated both Hyener’s and Saldaña’s approaches of filtering data through the research question.

Hyener suggested that a “judge” be trained to conduct the aforementioned procedures with the same pieces of data in order to verify the validity of the phrases and meanings retained
up to this point in the analysis. This sixth step may also be considered a measure for ensuring
the trustworthiness of the research findings. Lincoln et al. (1985) termed this process as peer
debriefing. There are two points of contention regarding this step, however. The first point of
contention concerns the availability of a second researcher to conduct such an onerous task in
dissertation research. Qualitative data analysis is a process that takes a considerable amount of
time. As this is a dissertation research effort, this may pose a problem when attempting to secure
a colleague to conduct peer debriefing in the manner described by Hyener. Secondly, and more
importantly, is the incompatibility between interpretive phenomenological data analysis and the
process of peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is a process that includes bracketing, the suspension
of the researchers’ presuppositions and biases. However, interpretive phenomenological data
analysis values the expert and prior knowledge of the researcher (LeVasseur, 2003; Lopez &
Willis, 2004). Expert and prior knowledge, or presuppositions and biases, are seen as important
resources for the researcher and are openly discussed in the work. Therefore, as bracketing was
not conducted in this study, neither was peer debriefing a useful measure of trustworthiness.

Steps seven and eight of Hyener’s (1985) guidelines are closely intertwined and will be
explained concurrently here. This phase of Hyener’s data analysis process describes removing
redundant meanings, or codes. Redundant codes were also analyzed for nuanced differences in
meanings in order for them to be assigned to clusters of related phrases, or themes. This process
is discussed more thoroughly in the micro-process of coding in the section below. Finally,
essences, or themes were derived.

In summary, the current research design incorporated steps one, three, four, five, seven,
and eight of Hyener’s (1985) guidelines of phenomenological analysis. Steps two and six,
bracketing and peer-debriefing respectively, are omitted due to their misalignment with the
philosophical underpinnings of interpretive phenomenology. I now turn to an explanation of the micro-process of data analysis that was applied to the data collected in this project.

**Micro-process of data analysis.** For the purpose of this study, the micro-process of data analysis refers to the process of applying codes to the collected data. This process is described as a micro-process because it occurred within the broader, macro-process of phenomenological data analysis explained above. This process occurred within steps three, four, five, seven, and eight of the macro-process.

Codes are defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). As phenomenological research seeks to illuminate the essences of human experience, the process of coding, as defined above, is an appropriate analytical approach. It is important to note that coding data unfolds in cycles. Saldaña offered guidelines for first cycle and second cycle coding. Though the data guide analytical decisions, it was anticipated that the nature of the inquiry necessitated the use of several coding approaches. Descriptive coding and in vivo coding, which are categorized under the elemental methods of first cycle coding, and values coding, which falls under affective coding of the first cycle of coding were be conducted. In the second cycle of coding, pattern coding was conducted (Saldaña, 2009). Explanations of these coding schemes and the rationales for their application in this project are discussed below.

The first cycle of coding occurred during the initial coding of a datum. Saldaña (2009) outlined three coding techniques that aligned with the phenomenological methodology employed in this project: descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and values coding. Saldaña described
Descriptive coding and in vivo coding as techniques of elemental coding methods, while values coding is a technique of affective coding methods.

Saldaña (2009) posited that elemental methods “are foundation approaches to coding qualitative texts” (p. 51-52). Descriptive coding was used as an initial method of identifying topics in the data through labeling. This step provided a manageable inventory that was able to be explored more deeply in the second cycle of coding discussed in the following section.

In vivo coding serves a similar purpose to descriptive coding in that it adds to the inventory of codes to be reorganized and more deeply explored in the second cycle of coding. However, in vivo coding is unique in that it entails preserving the precise words used by the participants (Saldaña, 2009). This step was valuable in the current research effort because it was in alignment with several key aspects of interpretive phenomenology, such as the co-construction of meaning and the focus on the lived experiences of the participants as those experiences were perceived by the participants themselves.

Affective methods of coding “investigate participant emotions, values, and other subjective qualities of human experience” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 52). Values coding, a specific technique within the affective methods category, entails extracting beliefs, attitudes, and values from the participant’s words and phrases. While codes that are produced using this technique may also emerge through descriptive and in vivo coding, it was important that, as the research tool, I consciously used this particular lens to extract the attitudes and beliefs of the participants in this study. Attitudes and beliefs are ostensibly revealing elements of “intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences” (Saldaña, p. 90), which, as it specifically relates to this study, are tied to racial identity and student identity, and mentoring relationships.
Second cycle coding, when necessary, aims to reorganize and condense the codes produced in the first cycle of coding into broader concepts, categories, and/or themes (Saldaña, 2009). This study employs the term themes in the findings section since they represent “the essence of the experience of the participant” (Morse, 2008, p. 727), which is the goal of phenomenological research. Pattern coding, a form of second cycle coding according to Saldaña, serves the purpose described above. Pattern coding, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), are:

Explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis. They are a sort of meta-code. (p. 69)

As commonalities in codes were identified after the first cycle, pattern codes were assigned to groups of similar codes. The result of this process intended to provide a clearer understanding of the participants’ perceptions of their mentoring and schooling experiences while under STT conditions.

In addition to the process of coding the data, Saldaña (2009) suggested that the researcher should employ reflexivity through analytic memos written throughout the data collection and analysis phase. Analytic memos are used to record and reflect on the process of data collection and analysis. Saldaña posited that insights about the data and the process may be revealed through writing analytic memos. He also explained that the analytic memos themselves are a datum that may be coded. Analytic memos were recorded in a journal and recorded on an audio program.
Figure 2. Data analysis procedure

**Trustworthiness**

This study employed credibility and transferability approaches to increase the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln et al., 1985). Lincoln et al. defined credibility as the degree to which the findings of a study can be relied upon. In order to establish credibility, I employed member checks. Following data analysis, my interpretations were shared with the participants of study for verification of meaning in the member checking process. The goal of
this credibility measure was to uncover and preserve the essences of participant interviews as the participants intended to communicate them.

Lincoln et al. (1985) stated that the degree to which a study’s findings are applicable to another context will depend on the quality of the researcher’s data collection and analysis. One of the means for increasing the possibility of transferability is to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description may be defined as extensive depth and breadth of details provided by the researcher and participants of the study. The more clearly and accurately a phenomenon is detailed in a study, the more transferable the findings may be for readers.

**Epistemological Position and Crystallization**

As a qualitative researcher, the inclusion of my positionality in this research project and the process of reflexivity used to explore my positionality are important considerations with epistemological implications. The interpretive tradition of phenomenology underpinning this study places heavy value on the truth found in the subjective reality of research participants. In other words, there is value placed on the perceptions of the participants rather than an objective Truth. My worldview is in line with this brand of phenomenology because I also tend to place more value on the subjective truths of people, and I believe that we must operate from this place because we cannot know the objective Truth, if such a reality exists. I believe the development of my personal worldview, is in part, the result of the double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) experience. The plurality laden in the double consciousness experience of “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” and of the “twoness” (p. 9), has caused me to develop an understanding of the significance of multiple perceptions in the way that human beings make sense of the world. As Moustakas stated, “perception of the reality of an object is dependent on a subject” (p. 27). I now turn to a discussion on identity memos in qualitative research and a
presentation of my personal identity memo in order explain how I believe to have arrived at my epistemological position.

**Identity Memo**

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that the researcher’s race, gender, class, culture, and ethnicity cannot be distilled from a qualitative research effort and, therefore, must be disclosed. This perspective is attributed to the nature of qualitative research that positions the researcher as the tool of investigation (McCaslin et al., 2003). Maxwell (2013), among other qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994), agree that the disclosure and exploration of the author’s personal experiences are an important component of the qualitative research process. Maxwell stated:

Students’ papers and proposals sometimes seem to systematically ignore what their authors know from their own experience about the settings or issues they have studied or plan to study; this can seriously impair their ability to gain a better understanding of the latter, and can threaten a proposal’s credibility. (p. 45)

This process of attempting to expose the subjectivity that is embedded in qualitative research is also termed reflexivity (Guillemin et al., 2004; Walshaw, 2008). This process of reflexivity is accomplished below in this identity memo and during the data collection and data analysis process through written and audio journaling.

Merriam (2009) and Moustakas (1994), who respectively utilized Husserl’s (1970) terms bracketing and epoché, proposed that the author’s process of disclosing personal experiences, assumptions, and viewpoints is important in the attempt at putting these items aside when examining the phenomenon of the study. This process aims to diminish the author’s bias in the research process. However, the concept of bracketing is incongruent with the philosophical
underpinnings of interpretive phenomenology (Geanellos, 2000; LeVasseur, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Ray, 1994). Therefore, the identity memo provided below is not an attempt to bracket my experiences, but to create transparency and to illuminate how my own relation to the focus of the study impacts the study’s design and the co-construction of the findings. I have provided below an account of some of the personal experiences that I understand to have created an interest in me to study stereotype threat from a naturalistic approach (Lincoln et al., 1985). Following this account, I present my epistemological position, which explains my belief in what constitutes knowledge, an essential component for understanding the design of this interpretive phenomenological study, especially in regard to the application of crystallization (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

In 2015, I came across Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do (Steele, 2010). As a doctoral student studying educational administration and as a foreign language teacher, I had been interested in language education and equity for English Language Learners prior to reading this book. Once I began reading Steele’s book and other writings of his, I found something that more deeply resonated with me, something that I had realized to be a subtext in many of my life experiences. Undoubtedly, the stereotype threat experience had been in the background of many of my educational experiences.

In Whistling Vivaldi, Steele recounted a story that an African-American college student shared with him. The student talked about a time when he was walking along a sidewalk in Chicago and perceived several White women to show a heightened level of fear or suspicion of him; this was a reaction to which he assumed related to his Black male identity. In an attempt to distance himself from the negative stereotype that Black males
are generally violent or prone to crime, the student began whistling a tune by Vivaldi, a classical composer from the 17th century. He felt that this would disprove the negative stereotype, and it worked according to his recollection. He reported that the White women who passed him on the sidewalk while he would whistle the classical tune would visibly be more relaxed than those in prior encounters. Though the negative stereotype pushed the student to voluntarily change his behavior, much of the stereotype threat literature focuses on involuntary changes within individuals that negatively impact performance (Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Wasserberg, 2014).

After reading this account, I reflected on my own Whistling Vivaldi moments. I reflected on the times that I changed something about my authentic, natural behavior. I thought back to the times that I accentuated one part of myself or even changed one part of my true self in order to disassociate from the negative stereotypes attached to my African-American identity. In many cases, it was making it known that I spoke French.

Subconsciously, I knew that if I had made this a clear attribute of mine that I was less likely to be judged as unintelligent or dangerous. Fanon (1967) said, “The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language (p. 18).” This excerpt not only resonates with me because of my West Indian heritage, but also because of what learning French subconsciously meant to me as a youth growing up in public housing while attending school on the border between the wealthy Upper East Side neighborhood and the impoverished East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, New York. In reflecting on those times when I used French to distance myself from the negative
stereotypes of my racial identity, I also realized the suppression of my authentic self, which I had placed on myself to make others around me more comfortable with my Blackness. I became aware of other times that I had engaged in voluntary behavior changes to make others more comfortable with my racial identity (e.g. slowing my pace when walking behind a White woman as a youth in New York City) and semi-involuntary behaviors (e.g. code-switching in educational and professional settings to mask my natural Black English vernacular) in order to avoid being seen in the light of a negative stereotype about my African-American identity. The recognition of these personal experiences and the body of work on stereotype threat have created a desire in me to engage in research as a form of advocacy for students experiencing similar predicaments in life. While these experiences were not meant to overshadow the data that naturally emerged in this current research, they functioned as a resource for insight (Maxwell, 2013) in the project.

The development of the identity memo above also served as “writing as a method of inquiry” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967). In other words, the process of writing the identity memo provided an opportunity to make discoveries and connections between my life experiences and various concepts in the current research study. These discoveries and connections were born of the writing process itself. In turn, these connections pushed the project further by creating more points of analysis.

In discussing crystallization (Richardson et al., 2005), it is important to examine the approach of triangulation as it is widely employed in qualitative research as means of increasing reliability and validity (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of triangulation is to come closer to the objective Truth through a process of cross-checking data from various data collection methods
such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Ellingson, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The epistemological assumption that there is an objective Truth to which research can gain proximity, if not complete realization of the Truth, is a problematic assumption as it conflicts with the philosophical underpinnings of interpretive phenomenology and my epistemological position as the researcher conducting this study.

Crystallization, on the other hand, originates from the philosophical orientation of post-modernism and is considered a deconstruction of triangulation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) as a means to arrive at objective Truth. Whereas triangulation aims to reveal findings that are most close to the Truth, crystallization reaches beyond the positivist and post-positivist view of Truth as it problematizes the truth by presenting multiple and often conflicting truths (Ellingson, 2009). An important point to make clear is that crystallization may be more appropriate in phenomenological research because phenomenology aims to uncover the experiences of the study’s subjects from the subjects’ perspective, which is different from aiming to gain proximity to an objective Truth that may or may not exist. Though they do not use the term crystallization in their writing, the interpretive researchers Ricoeur (1976) and Gadamer (1979) provide insight that support the notion that crystallization is an appropriate approach for interpretive research. Ricoeur and Gadamer, in their respective writing, note that interpretation of transcription is often incomplete, plural, and subject to change (Geanellos, 2000), a notion that parallels Ellingson’s explanation of crystallization.

It is also important to discuss the use on STT theory, which was developed through positivistic methodology, in the current research study. Though the objective Truth notion asserted in positivistic quantitative methodology is not in alignment with crystallization, consider Ellingson’s note on crystallization:
Crystallization necessitates seeing the field of methodology not as an art/science dichotomy but as existing along a continuum from positivism (i.e. scientific research that claims objectivity) through radical interpretivism (i.e., scholarship as art). Art and science do not oppose on another; they anchor ends of a continuum of methodology… (Ellingson, 2009, p. 3)

This excerpt explains that crystallization does not aim to discredit the findings of positivistic work. Rather, researchers who align themselves with crystallization view the findings of positivistic work as just one facet of the complex truth, and not Truth in itself. The findings of such work should be considered alongside the findings of constructivist and other orientations of the methodological continuum in order to problematize the truth. In problematizing the truth, crystallization:

- provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic.
- Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (Richardson, 2000, p. 934)

While noting that the “status of near orthodoxy” (p.30) that stereotype threat theory receives in teacher education is problematic, King (2005) encourages stakeholders to consider other “interpretations of the ‘disidentification’ hypothesis” (p. 30). This critique of STT is fair in that it takes issue with the assumption that findings of such work are often considered definitive. However, the findings of such work are valuable to a researcher that is philosophically aligned with crystallization since they may view such work as not the objective Truth, but one interpretation of an experience to be considered alongside others. The significance of this understanding of the truth in this study was that, as the research tool of inquiry, I did not seek to reduce the entire body of participants’ experiences down to one Truth about African-American
youth’s schooling and mentoring experiences. Contrarily, I exposed the complexity of shared experiences, which better informs practice and illuminates areas of future research. It is important to note that my own reflexivity, my “thoughtful, conscious self-awareness” (Finlay, 2002, p. 532), also contributes to the problematization of the truth in this process, a principle of crystallization that Ellingson (2009) finds essential.

The execution of crystallization, according to Ellingson (2009), entails multi-genre work. More specifically, Ellingson’s standard for crystallization includes at least one artistic representation and one social science product that “cuts across the artistic/interpretive/social science epistemologies by including both a middle- or right-ground form of social scientific analysis of a data set and an artistic representation in the same project” (p. 13). The purpose of this approach is to analyze data from multiple epistemological vantage points, resulting in findings that represent different ways of knowing. However, Ellingson also argues that crystallization is not an “all or nothing” approach. On the contrary, researchers can and should be thoughtful about how crystallization informs the design of their unique studies. While, the execution of data analysis in this study does not draw upon data analysis genres outside of interpretive phenomenological tradition detailed in this chapter, the researcher came to the data analysis process epistemologically aligned with the core tenants of crystallization discussed above.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the current study. The data analysis process yielded the themes detailed in this section. The themes that emerged from the participant interviews were: (a) mentoring relationship characteristics, (b) mentor attributes, (c) bundled strategies for youth mentoring, and (d) factors unrelated to mentoring. Participants in this study communicated that these themes positively impacted the various aspects of their schooling experiences. The themes presented in this section answer the following research question, which was unpacked into the sub-questions also listed below:

1. What are African-American students' perceptions of the impact their mentoring relationship has had on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their academic experience in school?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their behavioral experience in school?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their social experience in school?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their emotional experience in school?

2. What elements outside of mentoring do African-American students perceive to impact their schooling experiences?

In answering these qualitative research questions, it was important to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description aims to provide the reader with a highly contextualized
account of each participants’ experiences. This allows the reader to draw their own conclusions and apply the research findings where the reader finds the conclusions to be transferrable in other settings. This is unlike quantitative studies that aim to arrive at findings that will be generalizable to the population represented by the study’s sample. In this phenomenological study, it is important to provide thorough participant descriptions as the perceptions of the participants are of primary concern. In considering the transferability of a phenomenological study, it is necessary that these descriptions be considered as they partially fulfill the thick description standard of qualitative research. The following section presents participant descriptions. Then, the chapter presents the major themes that emerged during the data analysis process of the study. Each sub-section of major themes closes with a summary of the findings within the major theme.

**Descriptions of Participants**

The participants self-selected into this study in response to a recruitment flyer (Appendix E) designed using LeCompte and Preissle’s (1993) criterion-based selection approach. The flyer listed criteria that indicated that qualified participants would be between 11-18 years of age, identify as African-American, and have had a mentor. Eleven candidates responded to the flyer, but only nine were selected. Two of the eleven candidates did not meet an unlisted criterion: mentoring relationships must have endured for at least one year. The nine students who were interviewed in this study fell into two groups: formally mentored and informally mentored. Six out of nine participants were formally mentored, while the remaining three were mentored informally. It is important to note that eight of the nine mentees were continuously mentored, either formally or informally, during the course of this study. Milton, an informally mentored participant, was not receiving ongoing mentoring at the time of his interview because he had
recently graduated from his high school where his mentoring occurred. In addition, Milton identified two mentors whom he chose to discuss.

Before moving into the descriptions of the participants, it is important to the aim of this study to note that it assumed that all 9 participants were susceptible to STT in school based on the fact that their African-American identity is globally stereotyped in schooling situations. Additionally, during the course of the interviews, all nine participants presented details about their schooling experiences that would potentially activate STT. Specifically, the nine participants were aware of the negative stereotypes attributed to their racial identity in an academic setting. Participants either characterized this as low-expectations for African-American students or they specifically spoke about the negative stereotypes attributed to African-American students. One participant also expressed some degree of stereotype endorsement, which is not necessary for STT activation, but may moderate the impact of STT (Schmader et al., 2004). Five of the nine participants experienced another environmental cue (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) that potentially activates STT, which was the lack of a critical mass of peers or school staff that share the participants’ racial identity. These participants reported often being in class with only 1 or 2 other African-American persons. Some participants also reported encountering microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) from peers and teachers. Regarding the other four participants, it is also important to note that Shapiro’s (2012) multi-threat framework explains how an individual may be at threat of confirming a negative stereotype not only to outgroup members, but also to oneself and to one’s ingroup members. This further explains how African-American students in predominantly African-American schools are also at risk of succumbing to STT effects based on their racial identity.
While this study aims to explore the potential impacts that mentoring has on students’ ability to cope with STT cues in their schooling experiences, the participants presented individual differences that potentially moderate their ability to cope with STT. Specifically, the participants presented some differences in the strength of their identification with their racial group and other social identity groups, which is important in considering the variation in participants’ perceptions of similar situations across their experiences (Shapiro, 2012; Steele, 2010).

This variation in identity profile is also an important aspect of this study as it relates to crystallization (Richardson et al., 2005). Crystallization is characterized by an acknowledgment of multiple and often conflicting truths (Ellingson, 2009). Though the participants in this study share many attributes in terms of the various layers of their identities and experiences, their overall perceptions of their experiences present some unique and nuanced differences. Since STT literature explains that those who identify strongly with a stereotyped social identity are more susceptible to STT activation in a relevant setting (Shapiro, 2012; Steele, 2010), the degree to which participants identify with the various social identity groups to which they belong is an important point of discussion in considering the impact of STT on their schooling experiences. Because participant identity profiles are important to understanding the findings of the study, they are presented here, in this chapter. The following participant descriptions provide insight into the identities of the African-American youth in the study.

Ashley

Ashley is a 15-year-old sophomore at Combs High School. Her school has a majority African-American student population with a small number of European-American students. There is also a small population of Hispanic students, the majority of whom originate from
Honduras. She has a generally high domain identification with academics as she reports having a high-grade point average, currently a 4.0, and would like to pursue post-secondary education. During the interview, Ashley presented as an outgoing and talkative teenager. She lives in a two-family home with her parents. According to Ashley, her parents socially migrated into a more financially stable lifestyle, which allowed them to purchase a home in a more affluent neighborhood. Ashley stated that she lives in a majority European-American neighborhood.

Ashley has been formally mentored for five years through the Camelia Society. However, she knew her mentor prior to their mentor-mentee relationship because Ashley was once a student in her mentor’s middle school class. Ashley reports having a strong relationship with her mentor. She also stated that her mentor often takes her to do activities outside of the normal programming of the Camelia Society. While Ashley stated that she does not think that being African-American is something she thinks about often, she does express stereotype awareness and some situational stereotype endorsement about her racial group.

**Irielle**

Irielle is also a 15-year-old sophomore at Combs High School, a predominantly African-American school. She expresses a high domain identification when considering academic inclination, in general. Irielle reports having good relationships with the students in her school, regardless of race. Irielle lives in a single-parent home with several siblings and plans to attend a four-year university upon graduating from high school.

Like Ashley, Irielle is a mentee in the Camelia Society program that provides mentoring and other programming for young minority girls across the city in which she lives. Irielle has been in a mentoring relationship for five years. She has a strong relationship with her mentor and
plans to continue her relationship with her mentor after she exits the Camelia Society program. Irielle exhibited stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement about her racial group.

**Asia**

Asia is a 13-year-old freshman at Pinewood High school. In general, she enjoys her school experience and performs well, academically. Asia particularly enjoys theatre and plans to pursue a career in acting. Pinewood High School is a majority African-American high school with a small percentage of students of other races.

She has been formally mentored for four years through the Camelia Society. She is very close with her mentor, often spending time together outside of events organized by the mentoring organization. Asia expressed stereotype awareness about her racial group but no stereotype endorsement.

**Mark**

Mark is a 14-year-old freshman. He attends North Lake High School, a school with a predominantly European-American student population. Mark works hard to maintain good grades. Mark’s identity as an athlete prevailed, unprompted, throughout the interview. While Mark identifies as an African-American male in a predominantly European-American school, he does not perceive race as having an impact on his schooling experiences. Based on what Mark shared during the interview, his identity as an athlete colors his perception of most of his schooling experiences. Interestingly, Mark does not find race to play a role in his experiences at school: It’s like a community. It’s a family. So, like I don’t really think about being African-American as much because there’s not a lot of separation (Mark, personal communication, September 22, 2018). This sentiment was restated in different ways throughout the interview. This may be related to the fact that his athletic identity emerged as more important than his racial
identity to him. While Mark does not report race to be impactful in his academic experiences, his awareness of stereotypes attributed to his racial group and the relatively small number of school peers that share his racial identity put him at risk of STT activation according to STT literature (Steele, 2010).

Mark has been an informal mentee for the last two years. His mentor, Ms. Bean, was also his former teacher. Ms. Bean took an interest in Mark as she was involved in the athletic program at his junior high school. She has been providing encouragement to Mark and in contact with his family ever since.

**Timothy**

Timothy is in his junior year at Crystal Lake High School. He is 17 years old. Crystal Lake High has a predominantly European-American student body. Timothy is a football player but unlike Mark, he perceives race to be very impactful in his experiences at school. Also, his athletic identity appears less important to him than does his racial identity. He reports that his school is notorious for its history of racial division and for its culture of hostility toward African-American students. He called attention to a particularly threatening environmental cue, the school mascot, the Rebel, which is a symbol of the Confederate Army of the United States Civil War:

The mascot was intently supposed to be racist by the way it was made with white men with guns and everything. So, they kind of like had to stop using it because it was like…it would mess with other kids and make them mad, like African Americans… It was like a man with just two guns, and a mustache, a White dude, and a cowboy hat on. (Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)
While Timothy’s athletic identity is less important to him than it is to Mark’s identity, he reports that racial tensions do not exist in athletic spaces at his school. Timothy reported stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement about the relevant African-American stereotypes.

Timothy has been a mentee in the Mile Mentoring program for seven years. He has participated in this program that provides guidance and local travel experiences to African-American male youths since he was in middle school. His mentor, Mr. Coleman, is also the founder of the small organization.

Craig

Craig is a 17-year-old high school senior at Myrtle High School. His high school is predominantly African-American. Craig plays basketball but is not very interested in sports. Craig would like to pursue a career in engineering but is unsure of what his specialty will be once he finds his program. Craig intends to attend a Historically Black College/University. He lives at home with his mother who holds an undergraduate degree. Craig reported stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement of his racial group:

Well, I don’t really like such stereotypes. And like, some stereotypes, some people seem to accept them. And some of them kind of shape our economy. Like they put certain people in group. Their intelligence or what they do on a daily basis. (Craig, personal communication, November 17, 2018).

Craig is formally mentored through the ASPIRE Program, which is a national program led by a National Black Sorority. Craig’s mentor is a 34-year-old African-American woman who is a member of the sorority.
Ronny

Ronny is a 16-year-old junior at Crystal Lake High School. Crystal Lake High School, is a predominantly European-American school. Ronny’s interview was the most brief of the first round of interviews. Ronny responded in mostly very short answers during our interview and was not very responsive to follow-up questions to probe deeper into some of the responses he gave, particularly concerning questions about race and its impact on his schooling experience. However, my interaction with him is reported here for transparency purposes and because what was gleaned from the interview provides more context about the student experience at Crystal Lake High School, the school that Timothy also attended. Mr. Coleman also mentors Ronny. Though Ronny did not share much, he did express stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement about African-American students.

Milton

Milton, an 18-year-old recent high school graduate, attended two high schools: Beaux Champs High School and Lower Creek High School. He attended Beaux Champs High during his freshman and sophomore years, and Lower Creek High during his junior and senior years. Both schools have a majority European-American student population. Milton had two very different experiences at his two high schools. However, the differences that he detailed were less racially-based. Keisha, a participant discussed below, also attended two high schools; there is an important difference to highlight between Keisha’s and Milton’s experiences. Keisha’s two schools were very different from one another in regard to racial demographics of the student body; Milton’s schools were much more similar to one another as it relates to the racial makeup of the students.
Milton has a high domain identification in academics. He would like to attain a doctoral degree in philosophy. Milton identifies less strongly with his racial identity. During the interview, Milton said:

I will say that while [Black students] were always cordial and never negative, my relationships with Black students at that school or at either school, were never particularly strong. Um, I, I suppose I seemed like sort of an outsider and to some extent this is absolutely true (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018).

While Milton identifies as African-American, he stated that he often found that his personal interests were more in line with his European-American peers. However, Milton did express stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement.

Interestingly, Milton identified two mentors, both of which are considered informal mentors because the relationships were not facilitated through a program. Milton’s mentors were formerly his teachers during his junior year. In order to determine if his mentors were indeed mentors and not merely teachers, I asked questions about the frequency of their contact and other questions about their relationship. I determined that they were indeed mentors based on the fact that they provided guidance outside of normal class time and outside of the content area they were assigned to teach.

Keisha

Keisha is a 17-year-old senior at DaSilva High School, a school with a majority African-American student population. Her high school career has been split between two schools, however. She spent her freshman and sophomore year at Lower Creek High School, a school with a majority European-American student population. She reported that her social experiences
at the two schools differ greatly between the school sites. Her informal mentoring relationship, which began at Lower Creek High, has remained a constant in her life since her sophomore year. She performs well in school and, like Asia, loves her theatre class. Keisha expressed stereotype awareness but no stereotype endorsement.

Keisha identifies strongly with her racial identity. During the interview she boasted about having a major role in planning the first Black History Month program in Lower Creek High School’s nine-year history:

Yeah, it was… a different… I know that we did a Black History Month Program that I helped in and it was just… it was different to them because I feel like they never had that before!… when I sung the Black National Anthem, they were like, “What is that!?” “I never knew that was a thing?” “Since when was that a thing?” [laughing] I’m like, “It’s totally a thing!” (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018)

Kiesha wrote the poem below in response to the self-affirmation exercise that participants completed after the interviews. The poem not only expresses self-affirming ideas about her qualities as an individual. It also speaks to the difficulty of being one’s authentic self as an African-American youth.
Appendix B

Post-Interview Self-Affirmation Exercise

What are your most important personal values? Write as much as you can about your personal values. Some examples of personal values are: (1) being a good artist, (2) athleticism, (3) writing, (4) reader, (5) membership in a group, and others. You are not limited to this short list.

There are many personal values.

My most important values would be being a great writer. When I write I can express myself with words on paper that I cannot say verbally. I can change what I say if I feel as if it is offensive. I can hide behind the pen. I can hide behind a pseudonym. And it's not about hiding as if I want to offend people but that I have to dig deep into real issues, I have to address the problems of people and the world, without the fear of being retaliated like I'm just human when I write. I'm not a 17 year old black girl. I'm just human.
The poem captures several important aspects of Keisha’s unique experience: her writer identity and the challenges, or contingencies as Steele (2010) termed it, of the African-American youth identity. Keisha spoke about “fear of retaliation”, which she clarified as a fear of orally expressing her authentic self for an audience of European-American students. In a follow-up interview, Keisha expounded on this by stating that she values her writing because when she is engaged in writing, there is a liberating quality to the experience. Writing allows her to write freely without being identified as “militant”, as she termed it. Keisha continued by explaining that she was attempting to convey that it was difficult to speak freely about racial issues, particularly what she perceives to be racial injustice, when she attended a predominantly European-American school. She stated at the end of the poem, “Like I’m just Human when I write. I’m not a 17-year-old Black girl. I’m just Human” (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018). Therefore, writing became a non-threatening means for expressing her thoughts on racial issues.

Keisha lives in a two-parent household. Her mother is an attorney and her father is a Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps instructor at Lower Creek High School. He holds an undergraduate degree. Keisha also has four siblings. She enjoys school and plans to attend a four-year university upon graduating from high school, which is a family expectation of all her siblings.

Keisha identified an informal mentor during our interview. She met her mentor, Mr. Holland, at school as he was serving as a long-term substitute for her theatre teacher. I asked her similar questions to those that I asked of Milton about his mentors because Keisha’s mentor was also a teacher at the school. In addition, he provided behavioral and social guidance, and
encouragement long after Keisha was no longer enrolled in his class. Mr. Holland has been providing mentorship to Keisha for three years.

**Themes**

The themes that emerged through the data analysis process represent the perceptions of the mentees that were interviewed. As codes were identified during the data analysis process, clusters of these codes were grouped based on the core meanings of the codes. Then, these clusters were given theme names, which are presented below. While other codes emerged during the interviews, many of which emerged across participants, only those codes that answered the research questions of the study were grouped together to form the four thematic claims. The first theme was that *the structure of mentoring relationships is important in positively impacting African-American adolescents’ schooling experiences*. The second theme was that *the personality qualities of the mentor play an important role in building strong bonds with African-American adolescents*. The third theme was that *mentors use authentic strategies to support African-American adolescents in their schooling experiences*. The fourth and final theme was *mentees find belonging through other social identity groups*. These four thematic claims represent participants’ perceptions of various aspects of the mentor-mentee relationship. The first theme details the structural components of the mentoring relationship that mentees found impactful in their schooling experiences. The second theme presents the mentors’ personality attributes that mentees perceived to be impactful in their mentoring relationships. The third theme presents the specific mentoring strategies on which participants focused during the interview process. The fourth and final theme presents a factor outside of mentoring that mentees found to positively impacted their schooling experiences and abilities to cope with STT conditions.
Each sub-section that follows begins with an overarching description of the major theme presented, followed by sub-themes that emerged during the interviews and that were grouped under their respective major themes based on commonality. Each section ends with a summary of the major theme of the section. The connection of these themes to the conceptual framework and research questions of this study will follow in chapter five.

**Theme 1: The Structure of Mentoring Relationships is Important in Positively Impacting African-American Adolescents’ Schooling Experiences**

Throughout the interview process, participants discussed various aspects of their mentoring relationships that they perceived to have positively impacted their schooling experiences. This theme presents aspects of the mentoring relationship that may be implemented programmatically. In other words, this theme focuses on aspects of the mentoring relationship in the way that they were structured and purposed. The main aspects that emerged from the data analysis process were: (a) stability of the mentoring relationship, (b) behavior intervention and social skills focus, and (c) the impact of exposure opportunities. It is discussed below that while characteristics a and b of this theme may have had an indirect impact on students’ ability to cope with STT conditions, characteristic c may have direct implications for STT reduction.

**Stability of the mentoring relationship.** In discussing the important aspects of their mentoring relationships, participants often discussed the positive impact of the stability of the relationship. Participants discussed this aspect in two ways: (a) frequency of contact and (b) a sense of “always being there” on the part of their mentor. This stability created trust for the mentees. It was clear that without this element of the relationship, it was unlikely that the other components of the relationship would have been successful. Asia described the bond with her mentor in this way:
She would always want to see what my GPA is. She would make sure I was doing good in school… She’s like a second mom. Pretty much, pretty much I can tell her anything. I can depend on her. And if I need her she’s always there. (Asia, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

For Asia, the presence of her mentor created trust and an authentic appreciation for her mentor’s concern about Asia’s academic performance. While this sense of “always being there” may be considered nebulous, participants, including Asia, also spoke about being in frequent contact with their mentors. For instance, Asia speaks to her mentor on a daily basis and sees her mentor two-three times per month. Irielle, who stated, “anything I need, she is there” (Irielle, personal communication, July 22, 2018), speaks with her mentor on a daily basis and spends time with her at least four times per month. Frequency of communication was consistent across all of the mentees. Mentees spoke with their mentors at least 3 times per week and saw them several times per month. Mentees who had a mentor in their school saw their mentors much more frequently, but all of the mentees reported having strong bonds with their mentors. This frequency in contact strengthened mentees’ conviction that their mentors are “always there”, which in turn strengthened their sense of trust and their overall bond.

Other participants also expressed appreciation for the stability of their mentor-mentee relationship, even when the presence of their mentor was not always during the most enjoyable moments. For instance, Timothy spoke about the impact his mentor’s presence had on his, and others’, academic performance:

Some of us became good kids. Good grades. Me, I keep A’s and B’s. I got like 1 or 2 C’s in my grades. But he helped us…It helped a lot because he was always there. He’d like come and talk to us about things. He’d take us outside of class. Like sometimes if we had
problems, he would [just] be there. (Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)

Underlying Timothy’s statement is not only the importance of stability to Timothy, but also his perception that his academic performance was positively impacted by the behavioral intervention and social skills focus of his mentoring relationship. This is discussed in the section that immediately follows.

**Behavior intervention and social skills focus.** While the interview protocol was designed to include participant discussion of the impacts of mentoring on academic experiences and their ability to cope with STT conditions, the primary focus that emerged across participant interviews was a focus on behavior intervention and social interaction. This was true of both groups of mentees, those who were formally mentored and those who were informally mentored. It is important to mention that the mentees also perceived a concern for their academic success from their mentors; in fact, some mentees reported that mentors provided direct guidance and support for their academic success. However, the students’ behavior and social skills were the primary focus of the mentor-mentee interactions detailed in the interviews. Moreover, behavior intervention and social skills has a clear link to academic performance and emotional well-being for adolescents, which is an assumption laden in Timothy’s quote above.

In another example, Asia recalls moments when her mentor responded to a concern of the behavioral sort. These particular incidents occurred when she first met her mentor, she was unmotivated and, as she worded it, a “bad student”:

I was a bad student. I used to always be out of class and stuff. So, she always would try to figure out what was wrong. (Asia, personal communication, July 22, 2018)
Asia went on to say later in the interview that her mentor helped her to “get better in school over time.”

After the data analysis process, Timothy was the one mentee who focused most on discipline, behavior, and social interaction. He stated:

He always knows when to discipline us when we act up in school. He would come talk to us every time. Because me and my whole crew, we always fought in class. We was bad kids but he helped us to be better. (Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)

Though Ronny’s interview was the most brief of the participants, it was clear that behavior was the main priority of his mentoring relationship, as well. He said, “Yeah I mean he ain’t really help a lot with homework. He talked to our teachers about our problems and making sure we was following the rules” (Ronny, personal communication, October 27, 2018). This was a common thread across interviews in terms of relationship focus.

Again, academic guidance and encouragement were given by mentors, but it was far less important to the relationship than behavioral intervention and social skills guidance. For example, Keisha recalled a specific moment when her mentor gave her encouragement in preparation for a Math test, “Keisha you got this! You studied for this. You know, you’re about to ace this test” (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018). This was clearly impactful for Keisha, but she, and other participants, were clear that academics were mostly indirectly impacted through their mentors’ focus on behavior intervention and social skills. The participants characterized behavioral intervention and social skills by an informal version of a system typical of K-12 education called check-in/check-out. Check-in/check-out is a system in which an adult meets with a student to provide positive attention and support in areas that the student is struggling to successfully perform (Hawken, Sandra MacLeod, & Rawlings, 2007).
**Exposure opportunities.** The formally mentored participants, Craig, Timothy, Ronny, Irielle, Ashley, and Asia spoke in detail about opportunities to travel to various events with their mentors. Some of these events were planned by their respective mentoring organizations and others were planned by the mentors themselves. These events were significant to the mentees for two primary reasons: (a) they were motivating factors for the mentees in the Mile Mentoring program and (b) they had a racial identity affirming quality for the mentees in the Camelia Society program and the ASPIRE Mentoring program.

Timothy’s and Ronny’s mentor, Mr. Coleman of the Mile Mentoring program, used these events as incentives for “good behavior” in school. Interestingly, Timothy saw these opportunities as having an impact on his behavior in school, but also recalled that his mentor used the events themselves to teach social skills, or soft skills. Timothy explains his perception below:

> He disciplined us. He taught us manners and things like that when we went on trips. He helped do things for us like take us fishing and to football games, but if you knew you wasn't good that week or didn't do what you needed to do, he would discipline by not taking us nowhere. And you would know we got to do better to do what we have to do.

*(Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)*

This incentive approach may have had a positive impact on Timothy’s academic performance by extension of the positive impact that this approach had on his behavior in school. Timothy’s perception did not, however, expressly present this connection.

While Timothy and Ronny recalled outings with their mentor as being football games and fishing trips, the outings that Asia, Irielle, Ashley, and Craig experienced were mostly of a different nature. While Timothy’s and Ronny’s trips were educational in a practical-life sense,
since they included social skills learning, the others’ outings were often characterized by a racial identity confirming quality. For instance, Craig and Ashley explained that their mentors have accompanied them on trips to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). As a result, both Craig and Ashley intend to attend an HBCU after graduating high school. Other events that affirmed African-American racial identity were not always educational in the traditional sense. For example, Asia spoke about a summer concert event during our interview:

… we were just at the Essence Fest a couple of weeks ago. I think Walmart sponsored us. So, it was like all of our Black queens and stuff. So… the new generation of kids, they like, “whatever.” [My mentor] was like you supposed to be happy because you’re this and that. So, she just loves the fact that we’re Black. And she just encourages us. (Asia, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

While acknowledging an uninterested attitude of her peers, which is typical of adolescent students, Asia also acknowledged her mentor’s words of affirmation in regard to their racial identity. Asia’s reference to “Black Queens” is an expression of appreciation and value for her African-American identity. It is not possible to determine the long-term impact of such affirmations on the participants’ racial identity, but the immediate results are clear in these examples.

**Summary.** In regard to the structure of the mentor-mentee relationships, the components that emerged during the data analysis process were: stability of the relationships, behavior intervention and social skills focused relationships, and exposure opportunities provided to the mentees. These various components served different purposes. The stability of the relationship was an important aspect of building trust and strengthening the bonds between the mentors and their mentees. Regarding the apparent focus on behavior intervention and social skills, these
appeared to have a positive, albeit indirect, impact on mentees academic performance and emotional well-being. Finally, the exposure opportunities that mentees experienced positively impacted their behavior in school when the exposure opportunity was used as an incentive for “good behavior.” One of the mentors also used these outings as opportunities to teach and practice social skills in the community. These outings also provided opportunities for the affirmation of the youths’ racial identity when the exposure opportunities included events that highlighted positivity about the African-American identity.

Theme 2: The Personality Qualities of the Mentor Play an Important Role in the Building Strong Bonds with African-American Adolescents

When asked to talk about their mentors, participants offered a great deal of information regarding moments they shared with mentors, specific guidance that their mentors gave, and other details about their mentors. However, the participants also offered information about their mentors that was slightly more nebulous, their personality qualities. The participants conveyed three main personality qualities through their examples and descriptions of their mentors: (a) relatability, (b) admirability, and (c) genuineness. These attributes appeared to serve two major purposes in the mentor-mentee relationship: attraction from the mentee toward the mentor and development of a perception of trustworthiness in the mentor.

The relatable mentor. While many of the mentees expressed a strong, parent-like bond with their mentors, the mentees differentiated these two relationship types primarily by adding that the mentor was, in some fashion, relatable in a way that their parent could not be. Ashley, for example, explained the relationship difference from her point of view:
Because an adult that’s not your parent, you can talk to them freely. Because, a parent, I don’t see my mom as a child before. I see her as a parent. I know she was a child before. 

(Ashley, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

Ashley went on to explain that seeing her mentor in this way allowed her to express herself openly to her mentor. This was a common sentiment among the participants, which they found to have strengthened the mentor-mentee relationship. Relatability also appears essential for the mentors to be able to successfully provide guidance and encouragement because the relatability element, along with admirability, served as a way to create the receptivity in mentees needed for mentors’ guidance and encouragement to have any degree of impact.

In expressing the relatability of their mentor, other mentees discussed a level of friendship that they hold with their mentors. Milton for example said that the relationships that he had with his mentors developed into friendships over time. While Keisha deeply respects her mentor as someone who provides valuable advice, she referred to him as “Mike Dawg” [mentor-pseudonym] and said, “That’s my dude!” (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018), when expressing her friendship with her mentor. Irielle said:

We have conversations, like stuff we can talk about and we’ll go places and like do things with each other. It’s just like a best friend, but like an older best friend that you can learn from. (Irielle, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

Friendship between the mentors and mentees was a common result of the mentors’ relatability among several participants. The friendship dynamic was important to strengthening the bond between mentors and their mentees.

Because this study has a particular focus on racial identity, an important point of examination is if and where relatability based on shared racial identity was perceived to be
impactful on participants’ schooling experiences and ability to cope with STT conditions. Though conversations about being African-American were often not an explicit basis of interaction between mentors and mentees, the participants with African-American mentors expressed the significance of sharing racial identity with their mentor. Timothy, for instance stated:

If he were a different race, he probably wouldn’t get everything that we got and understood it. And our culture and his culture would be super different. Because like, understand like, we all African-American males. We know our past and what we did and what we do now and things. So, we understand [each other] more. (Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)

Timothy found that sharing racial identity with his mentor impacted his relationship positively. It gave him the sense that he was understood based on a shared identity with his mentor. Milton also found relatability in relation to his racial identity from his African-American mentor. Milton explained that his African-American mentor imparted insight about the obstacles of being an African-American male from his mentor’s personal life experiences:

…this was only particularly relevant with one mentor who was also African-American and made sure to let me know the sorts of struggles that I might encounter being African American, um, as, regardless of how I might be identified, a large view, but in the school public. I think in terms of that, they gave me lots of advice about what it means to be the race I am and how better to operate being the race I am for the things that I was planning to do both academically and personally (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018).
Milton, having two mentors, one African-American and one European-American, only received this information from his African-American mentor. When asked why he thought his European-American mentor did not offer information or guidance concerning race, Milton explained that he was unsure, but that his European-American mentor may not have been comfortable with providing such information or that the information the mentor provided was not related to race.

This is important when considering how guidance from youth mentors may be received based on the racial-identity of the mentor and mentee. This particular point regarding the personality quality of relatability also has implications for the specific strategies that some mentors employed with their mentees, specifically in relation to the sharing of personal stories as mentor guidance tool. This is discussed under theme three in a section below.

**The admirable mentor.** All nine participants in this study expressed admiration for their mentors in various terms. This is an important aspect of these relationships as admiration functioned as a quality that initially attracted mentees and, in part, helped to sustain the relationships. Ashley said this about her mentor:

…like she went from being my teacher to being my mentor that I look up to. Usually you look up to your teachers but not in that aspect… she’s fire, but also like calm. And she has experience with everything. Everything you can think of, she has experienced it. I don’t know, her personality is just sassy, by the way she walks, the way she talks, yeah.

(Ashley, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

In this excerpt, Ashley found it difficult to find precise words when she was asked to describe her mentor. Several participants had a similar difficulty. Their descriptions were often vaporous, but nonetheless, represented a quality of their mentors’ personalities that the mentees found admirable, even if they could not articulate the descriptions with precision. Similar to the
relatability quality, the admiration expressed in this example seemed to have made mentees available and receptive to their mentors’ guidance and encouragement.

In a different example, Keisha’s admiration for her mentor resulted from a story he told her about his early life and the tribulation he endured to make it out of rural Mississippi to earn a college degree. Keisha said:

He went through a lot. Growing up. He would share his story of how like, you know, his parents never believed in him of going to college, so he never really went to college. So, you know, he stuck with like low-end jobs at fast-food restaurants and stuff like that. He was like, “You know, I love theatre, I’m going to do theatre. I’m going to go get a degree in it.” And he did. He was a substitute and now he’s a professor. (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018)

It is important to note that this example, and perhaps others, are complex in that it represents more than one discreet personality quality of the mentor; it does not solely reflect a quality of admirability but is also clearly an example of relatability, considering Keisha’s love for theatre. Another important note is that while this example includes a mentor’s personal experience story, it was not included in the corresponding sub-heading below because it is not a personal experience story that details account of a mentor providing direct guidance about a specific dilemma, which is at the crux of the aforementioned sub-heading.

**The genuine mentor.** If the mentoring relationship, like any other, is going to be fruitful, the mentor must possess the genuine attribute. The participants identified this genuineness during the interview process. Participants found the guidance of their mentors to be trustworthy because their mentors exhibited a genuine interest in their mentees. As a result, the participants valued the guidance provided by their mentors. Participants identified this
genuineness through the actions of their mentors rather through conversation with their mentors.

Milton said:

…one thing that that was very impactful was the care shown, right. Like the “going out of your way”. The consideration, the thoughtfulness behind it. I think, however, at Lower Creek this relationship came with some interest [on the mentor’s part]. (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

In this excerpt, Milton is describing the genuineness he found in his mentor, which he recognized based on what he perceived to be a genuine interest in himself on the part of his mentors. An important point to highlight is that Milton recognized this genuineness in his mentors’ acts that Milton described as “going out of your way.” The identification of genuineness through action was the common thread throughout the interviews. He later spoke again about the genuineness of his mentor while also expressing the interconnectedness of his mentor’s personality qualities:

I guess you could analyze this as being like this is a person who cares. I don’t want to say that’s the case, but that’s certainly an option. Um, but I think the interest was always genuine and to some extent… well, I found it came from a place of a sort of friendship, but a friendship coupled with the interest, itself. (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

As friendship appears to be a function of relatability in many of the participant experiences, this excerpt demonstrates the interconnectedness of Milton’s mentor’s relatability and genuineness. It should be noted that an argument for causal relationship between relatability and genuineness is not being asserted, but these two aspects of Milton’s mentor’s personality are connected. While Milton did not comment on this directly, this appears to have led to an enhanced bond that
extended beyond mentorship into friendship. I also asked Keisha why this genuineness was an important quality of her mentor and she replied with the following:

It’s just a piece of that relationship that makes the bond stronger. This adult has taken the [pausing to reflect]… interest in you and wants to support you. Like, it’s like you know what they’re giving you is coming from a good place. (Keisha, personal communication, August 2, 2018)

The “good place” that Keisha spoke about speaks to the genuineness of the mentor. The mentees trusted the guidance that they received from their mentors because they knew that their mentors were coming from a good place. This was even true of mentees who were assigned a mentor in a formal mentoring program. In discussing her perception of her mentors’ beliefs about African-American students, Ashley said:

She always… well she works with a lot of Black kids. I think she cares. If she didn’t I wouldn’t be around her. But she always checks up on students that aren’t her students anymore. (Ashley, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

This particular excerpt demonstrates the significance of genuineness in the mentoring relationship. Ashley states that she would not be in the relationship if she felt that her mentor was not genuine. This is an important sentiment expressed by other mentees. It is also an important consideration for stakeholders interested in improving or developing formalized youth mentoring programs.

As mentioned above, mentees identified genuineness through mentors’ actions. Most mentees found that genuineness was demonstrated through acts of care. The participants characterized these acts of care as typically having a sense of gentleness. However, participants identified genuineness in acts of care that were more direct:
And he just gives me the reassurance that I don’t think I can go straight to my parents about because I’m like, “Oh you’re my parent. You gotta give me like a daughter-parent conversation” and I don’t need the comfort, love, discipline. I just need the straight-talk.

(Keisha, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

Keisha communicated that she appreciated her mentor’s genuineness even when she has to receive his care through the filter of his bluntness. The significance of this example is that genuineness appears to be more important than tone. In the same way that Timothy expressed appreciation for the stability of his relationship with his mentor even when the circumstances of their interactions were focused on discipline, Keisha expressed an appreciation of her mentor’s genuineness even when his advice was not expressed with gentleness.

**Summary.** Several qualities of the mentors’ personalities became salient during the analysis of the participant interviews: (a) relatability, (b) admirability, and (c) genuineness. The relatability and admirability of the mentors were significant in that they created an initial connection between the mentors and mentees. These two qualities were also important maintaining the bond in the relationship. Also, participants expressed recognizing the genuineness of their mentors through their actions, and less through understanding communicated through dialogue with their mentors. This quality was also important in sustaining the relationships. These three qualities served as important prerequisites for the behavioral and academic guidance that mentors gave mentees. If the mentees had not perceived these qualities in their mentors, mentees would not have been available and invested in the mentoring relationship, intellectually nor emotionally.
Theme 3: Mentors Use Authentic Strategies to Support African-American Adolescents in Their Schooling Experiences

In addition to describing the structural characteristics of their mentoring relationships and the personal qualities of their mentors, the participants in this study discussed specific strategies that have impacted their schooling experiences. The strategies that emerged were: (a) envisioning future possibilities dialogue, (b) personal qualities development through “personal growth” dialogue, and (c) social lessons in personal stories. An important distinction is made between the first two strategies and the third strategy; while the third strategy was more mentor-centered in its delivery, the first two strategies were conversational in nature, and thus a constructivist approach to youth development. All of these strategies were naturally occurring. In other words, they were not manualized or programmed into the relationship. The organic nature of these interactions is also an important detail about these strategies.

**Envisioning future possibilities.** Several participants discussed the impact that the practice of envisioning the future had on their academic experiences. Milton, Asia, and Timothy shared that strategies of envisioning future possibilities in expounding upon conversations often focused on future college and career aspirations. This practice was presented as an informal exercise regardless of whether the mentees were in a formal or informal mentoring relationship. Asia explained that her mentor used questions to help her to envision possibilities:

> She always asked me what I want to do in life. “Where do I see myself in the future? She always used to ask me if I wanted to pass. Like, “do you see yourself in college?” (Asia, personal communication, July 22, 2018)

These appear to be common questions that any concerned adult would ask students who seem to have demonstrated having difficulty in school. However, Asia explained, talks such as these
helped her to change her outlook on school. As mentioned in an excerpt above, Asia once saw herself as a “bad student”, often missing class and having behavioral issues. She attributes at least part of her improvement in overall school performance to these sorts of talks with her mentor.

It is important to regard this strategy in the context of the entire relationship as the participants spoke about this strategy in a way that made it inextricable from other elements of the mentoring relationship. In other words, this strategy may not have been positively impactful in the participants’ experiences if the mentors did not display the personality qualities detailed above, nor would this strategy be effective if the mentees did not perceive stability in the relationship. The significance of the interconnectedness of these elements of the relationship is that the effectiveness of some elements appears to be predicated on the presence of others.

While some participants spoke about the impact that envisioning future possibilities had on their attitude toward school, Milton found that envisioning possible futures with his mentors impacted his career aspirations:

I think it makes sure this was particularly strong where I saw mentors telling me I should go and try to do things in academics that I was interested in but had no faith that I can do.

(Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

Milton later discussed having an “amateur philosopher” identity and the desire to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy. While, talk such as these certainly seemed to have positively impacted his academic experience in high school and his sense of self-efficacy, they may also prove to have an impact on his career trajectory. While envisioning future possibilities emerged as an important co-strategy between mentors and mentees in directing the participants toward positive long-term outcomes, embedded in these future oriented conversations was a motivational mechanism that
spoke to the participants’ belief in their abilities. The sub-section that follows moves away from future-oriented mentor-mentee dialogues and into dialogues that targeted “personal growth”, as Milton characterized them.

Youth development through “personal growth” dialogue. Several participants shared that other interactions with their mentors were also conversational in nature and directly focused on developing mentees’ personal qualities. These conversations targeted various “personal growth” areas. Milton used the term “personal growth” as a catch-all phrase for areas that he and his mentor discussed. I have used the term to categorize similar areas that other participants presented. Mark discussed the direct impact that these conversations had on his academic priorities:

But yes. She looked at what drives me [football] and now she sees what my purpose is and what drives me and what I want to do with my life. So, she tries to help me with [school related] things that I seem to put secondary. (Mark, personal communication, September 22, 2018)

In this excerpt, Mark discussed his mentor’s role in helping him to prioritize school while also balancing his obligations to the school’s football team, which she recognizes to be an important career aspiration for Mark. It is important to note the dialogical nature of this example. This is not a one-way communication example. The mentor builds on previous conversations with Mark about his interests and motivations to help guide him on a trajectory that may help him to realize his career aspirations. While this example reflects some mundaneness on the surface, there is an important distinction to make between this sort of adult-to-youth interaction and those interactions in which adults approach advisement without the consideration of the input of the
youth to whom they are giving guidance. Mark’s mentor valorized his career aspirations by investing in him in a way that was supportive of his professional goals.

Milton expounded greatly on this topic. In discussing the role of his mentors in his life and schooling, Milton used the words “personal growth” several times. I asked him to talk more about this term. He responded by saying:

Um, certain skills that come with growing as a person, um, things like forging relationships between new people because I was very shy. Things like staying on top of work and making sure that I'm accounting for things I do, not just well, but things I do wrong and attempting to ameliorate things where they need to be. In terms of recognizing my strengths and weaknesses, but also recognizing that because I have weaknesses, I shouldn't let that hold me back. (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

This particular quote has many layers of qualities that he and his mentors targeted and helped to develop within Milton. Milton found these conversations important to improving areas of weakness, recognizing one’s areas of strength, self-acceptance and affirmation, and prioritization. These are important areas that have implications for positive schooling experience and for coping with STT related obstacles.

**Social lessons in personal stories.** Asia, Ashley, Milton, and Timothy shared that their mentors used social stories from their personal experiences to teach lessons about handling difficult situations and conflict, which were often race related. During the interviews, participants recounted stories and spoke about storytelling as a mentor strategy for giving guidance. Asia said, “she’ll just tell me from her experience and she’ll tell me… like she’ll match it together.” In this example, Asia pointed out that her mentor would draw parallels between her own experiences and Asia’s experiences to give guidance about social situations in
school. Milton and Timothy also spoke about the significance of these stories. Milton asserted, “the stories that [my mentor] shared with me as a fellow Black person helped me to see things I hadn’t before.” When I asked Milton to expand on this sentiment, he stated that he learned:

…what it means to be the race I am and how better to operate being the race I am for the things that I was planning to do, both academically and personally. (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

In these two excerpts, Milton shows an appreciation for the guidance he received from his mentor as it relates to overcoming obstacles based on his racial identity. Milton also clarified that this type of interaction only occurred between himself and his African-American mentor. When asked about such advice from his European-American mentor, Milton initially stated that he was not exactly sure why guidance about being African-American was not a focus in that particular mentoring relationship. However, Milton later said this:

Well, certainly it is a mix of maybe being uncomfortable bringing it up or maybe feeling like it wasn't relevant for the sort of information they were giving me. (Milton, personal communication, October 31, 2018)

Milton believed that his European-American mentor may have been uncomfortable discussing race or that race was not relevant to the particular guidance this mentor was giving. This difference between these two particular mentors is an important observation made by Milton because it raises more questions for future research regarding the racial-identity dynamic between youth mentee and mentor. This particular dynamic in the mentor-mentee relationship emerged as a focal point as Timothy discusses what he believed about the significance of his mentor’s social stories:
If he was a different race...everything, he probably wouldn’t get everything that we got and understood it. And our culture and his would be super different. Because like...understand like we both, we all African American males. We know our past and what we did and what we do now and things. So, we understand more. (Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)

Timothy believed that if his mentor did not share his racial identity, there may have been a disconnect in understanding Timothy’s experiences as an African-American male. In other words, the stories of personal experience that his mentor shared may not have included elements that only an African-American male might encounter. Timothy makes a salient assertion in this excerpt as it illuminates a value that the mentee places on the mentor for sharing his racial identity.

**Summary.** Participants communicated several strategies that have impacted their schooling experiences: (a) envisioning future possibilities, (b) personal qualities development through “personal growth” dialogue, and (c) social lessons in personal stories. The participants’ descriptions of strategies a and b tacitly highlighted the fact these strategies were not mentor-centered. Strategies a and b were communicated as constructivist in nature, dialogical in the manner that they were deployed. In other words, the participants had an important role in implementing the strategy as they were both dialogue based. Strategy c was a more mentor-centered strategy as the mentor recounted personal experiences to teach their mentees lessons about social interaction that were often related to their African-American identity. Strategy c may have also had an affirming quality for the mentees racial identity since the stories were told by an admirable adult who shared the same identity. It was also noted that these strategies were naturally occurring and not forcefully programmed into the relationship.
Theme 4: Mentees Find Belonging through Other Social Identity Groups: A Factor Outside of the Mentoring Relationship

The mentees in this study discussed several interventions delivered by and in collaboration with their mentors. One of these interventions, affirmations, has appeared in STT literature (Cohen et al., 2006). Other mentor delivered interventions have not appeared in the STT literature but possibly warrant exploration in future research to determine if they potentially diminish STT effects, specifically envisioning future possibilities, personal growth dialogue, and social lessons in personal stories. It is important to note that the mentees also discussed another potential STT reducing strategy that they engaged in without the help of a mentor, namely, finding belonging in other social identity groups.

Though social belonging is an important aspect of all youths’ development (Tatum, 03), social belonging emerged as an especially significant factor in the perceptions of the four mentees who attended predominantly European-American schools for at least part of their high school career. Those mentees were Milton, Mark, Timothy, and Keisha.

Before proceeding with a presentation of these four participants’ experiences with social belonging, there are some salient points to advance regarding social belonging for the participants who attended predominantly African-American schools. Firstly, this sub-section does not mean to make the assertion that the students in the African-American schools did not have social belonging in groups outside of their African-American identity group. On the contrary, these students did report feelings of belonging in other social identity groups. For instance, Asia had membership in the theatre club and identified deeply with the thespian
identity, stating “Theatre. I really like theatre” (Asia, personal communication, July 22, 2018). Craig also found belonging with his basketball team. Finding belonging outside of their racial identity is important to all students as it enhances the schooling experience and creates opportunities for growth, personally and potentially professionally. However, based on participant interviews, the identity threatening cue/situation that was ostensibly diminished by social belonging was the lack of other African-American individuals in the environment. A second point is that belonging in a social identity group provides an identity, but that identity is not necessarily contrary to or in conflict with students’ racial identity.

Regarding the four participants attending predominantly European-American schools, finding a sense of belonging in social identity groups outside of their racial identity group was important. This seemed to have provided a respite from this identity threatening situation for Timothy, Milton, and Mark. Keisha, on the other hand, rarely found repose from this situation while attending a predominantly European-American high school. This may be related to her difficulty in finding social belonging outside of the African-American student group. As noted earlier, Keisha, in comparison to other participants also expressed a markedly high degree of identification with being African-American. Similarly, the degree to which social belonging shielded Timothy, Milton, and Mark from these types of situations may be moderated by their respective strengths of identification with their various identities (i.e. African-American, athlete, academic, etc.), such that the more a youth identified with an identity outside of their African-American identity, the greater the dampening of feelings of STT. This notion is based on STT literature and supported by the identity profiles of these participants. The following example draws illuminates how this notion applies to Timothy’s and Mark’s schooling experiences.
An examination of the schooling experiences of Timothy and Mark provides insight into the impact that an individual’s identity verification profile has on their schooling experiences.

There are two important observations to make about Timothy’s and Mark’s experiences, one that draws a comparison between their experiences and one that demonstrates a contrast in their experiences. Both students expressed that athletics were a part of their high school experience. However, there was a marked difference in the degree of their identification with their athletic identities. Mark, having spoken about football at length during the interview, expressed a much stronger athletic identity than did Timothy. Timothy spoke about his football experience to a much lesser degree than did Mark. While Timothy found racial issues and relations to be problematic and negative at his school, Mark did not perceive any negativity in his school originating from racial identity. While, Timothy did express that racial tension pervades the classrooms and hallways of his school, he reported that this is not present in the football facilities. Timothy expressed a sense of equality among his teammates regardless of race. Timothy attributed this sense of equality to having a shared goal:

*I just think like, you and football and you out there in the sun. Y’all start to feel the same way. You out there working as hard as you can. Y’all just want to win and get that trophy in your case. That’s all y’all think about.*  
*(Timothy, personal communication, October 12, 2018)*

A sense of empathy and a revelation of shared experience underlies the sense of equality that Timothy perceived to be uniquely present in the football facilities. This excerpt speaks to the power of revealing a shared identity, which is important to achieving a perception of belonging in a social group (Riek et al., 2010). Riek et al. found that shared identity (i.e. athletic identity of
Timothy’s football team) reduced intergroup threat (i.e. the various racial groups that make up the football team).

The variation in perception explained above appears to be moderated, at least in part, by the strength of identification with their social identity groups, their African-American and athletic identities. While this study is not designed to, nor seeks to quantify the impact that identity identification has on the participants’ overall schooling experiences and ability to cope with STT conditions, this is an important point of exploration for future research.

Mark and Milton provide yet another comparison in social belonging that illuminates the exceedingly complicated role that social identity group identification plays in schooling experiences and STT remediation. As stated above, both Mark and Milton found almost universal protection from racial-identity threats embedded in the school environment despite having a limited number of individuals who shared their racial identity in this space. This protection appears to have been achieved, in part, through their strong identification with social identity groups outside of their own racial identity: (a) Mark’s identification with athletics and (b) Milton’s identification with his European-American peers. Moreover, the identities that they identified with provided opportunities for outcomes universally regarded as positive in American schooling experiences.

Summary. Various factors impacted the degree to which the participants felt threatened in their schools based on their racial identity. Participants who attended majority European-American high schools found that belonging and lack of belonging in social identity groups outside of their racial group impacted their overall sense of well-being while at school.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This interpretive phenomenological study explored the schooling experiences of African-American adolescent mentees while under STT conditions. Chapter V presents a discussion of the findings from the previous chapter and connects these findings to the literature and the conceptual framework of the study. This chapter also discusses implications for practice and future research.

Discussion of Findings

There is an abundance of experimental laboratory evidence of the negative impact that STT has on performance (Pennington et al. 2016). There is also a smaller body of literature that presents real-world evidence that specifically ties STT performance suppression to the academic performance gap between African-American adolescents, and their European-American and Asian-American peers (Kellow & Jones, 2007; Massey & Fischer, 2005). In regard to STT intervention literature, research has also been largely laboratory-based. However, the intervention literature has neglected to give a voice to those who are impacted by STT. This study aimed to capture insights about strategies that African-American youth mentees found to positively impact their academic experiences using a STT conceptual framework to inform the data collection and analysis processes. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are African-American students' perceptions of the impact their mentoring relationship has had on their schooling experiences while under STT conditions?
   - What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their academic experience in school?
What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their behavioral experience in school?

What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their social experience in school?

What aspects of the mentoring relationship do African-American students perceive to impact their emotional experience in school?

2. What elements outside of mentoring do African-American students perceive to impact their schooling experiences?

Four major themes emerged from the participant interview: (1) mentoring relationship characteristics, (2) personal qualities of the mentor, (3) bundled strategies for youth guidance and development, and (4) the sense of belonging, a factor unrelated to mentoring. The following section recapitulates the salient points of Chapter IV and links those findings to the relevant literature. Then, the findings are discussed in relation to the conceptual framework, followed by their relation to the research questions. Next, recommendations for practice and future research are presented. Finally, the study presents concluding thoughts.

**Mentoring Relationship Characteristics**

There were several aspects of the mentor-mentee relationships that became salient in the data analysis process; the actual structure of the relationships was particularly important to the participants. Participants reported that the following structural aspects of their mentoring relationship impacted their academic experiences: (a) stability of the mentoring relationship, (b) a behavioral and social interaction focus, and (c) the impact of exposure opportunities.

Participants spoke about the stability of their mentoring relationships in two ways, frequency of contact with their mentors and a sense that their mentors are “always there.” This is
important because the youth mentoring literature has provided evidence of the importance of stability in the mentoring relationship. For instance, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) conducted a study that showed a positive relationship between duration of mentoring relationship and the desirable outcomes for youth mentees. The same study also found that mentor-mentee relationships that ended in under three months impacted mentees negatively; for example, students showed decreased self-esteem according to the study. The importance of stability of the relationship was echoed across the pool of participants, regardless of whether they were in a formal or informal mentoring relationship. The literature, however, makes an important point about the duration of formal mentoring relationships; youths’ ability to cope with the termination of a formal mentoring relationships may be moderated timelines established by the mentoring program (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Larose, Tarabulsy, & Cyrenne, 2005). This does have implications for informal relationships, as well. Mentoring relationships that end earlier than expected may be more harmful than relationships that endure for as long as they are expected to endure, regardless of the actual duration of the relationship.

The participants also expressed that their mentoring relationships focused more directly on behavioral guidance and social skills development than it did on academic support. Dubois et al.’s (2011) study found that youth mentoring programs are more effective when focusing their resources on youth who display behavior challenges. Several participants in this study were referred to their mentors because of their behavioral challenge in school: Timothy, Ronny, and Asia, specifically. STT literature also draws a clear connection between behavior related problems and negative academic outcomes. In an effort to avoid the threat of being judged based on a negative stereotype about one’s group, individuals may engage in task avoidance (Nussbaum, 2008). This is significant because task avoidance can lead to long-term
disidentification with academics (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002). Davies et al.’s (2002) study provided evidence that women who faced STT activation in quantitative fields turned to other academic domains in which women are not negatively stereotyped. However, the consequences of long-term disidentification may be more dire for African-Americans as a social identity group as the group is negatively stereotyped globally in the academic domains, leaving African-American students with no non-stereotyped place in the entire academic field to turn. This may lead to poorer life outcomes. For instance, students who engage in task avoidance and exhibit long-term academic disengagement by displaying undesirable behaviors may contribute to the disproportionate number of African-American students who are disciplined in schools (Billie, 2017; Ferguson, 2001; Grace et al., 2018; Morris, 2016; Okonofua et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2002). These outcomes highlight the importance of mentors’ behavioral support that helps students to overcome task avoidance and long-term disidentification. In addition, this underscores the importance of environmental change interventions that affirm African-American identity (Murphy et al., 2012).

Several mentees in this study spoke about opportunities to travel with their mentors to various events. These opportunities were used in one of two ways depending on the type of travel opportunity the mentor provided: (1) to provide an incentive for good behavior and teach social skills or (2) to expose students to an event that affirmed their racial identity. The mentor in the Mile Mentoring program used these outings as a reward to motivate his mentees to engage in appropriate behaviors in schools. This mentor also used the outings themselves to teach social skills in a real-world setting. Prior research has evidenced that practicing social skills has a positive impact on mentee outcomes. For instance, in Clarke’s (2009) study, mentors had a positive impact on youth by practicing positive behavior situations such as having successful
conversations with teachers. Dubois et al.’s (2011) meta-analysis also found that mentoring programs are more successful when they require the mentor to teach a skill or provide information relevant to the students’ success in school.

The mentors in the Camelia Society program provided students with opportunities to experience culturally relevant events that affirmed their racial identities. As one participant phrased it, the event had “all of our Black queens”, a sentiment that indicates a sense of pride and affirmation of her racial identity. The STT intervention literature provides several example studies that have found affirmations to be effective in remediating stereotype threat effects. However, these studies that have shown this effect have introduced affirmations within the situation that STT activation was expected to occur. Future experimental research might be useful in determining whether or not racial-identity affirmations received in non-performance situations positively impact performance in situations where STT has the potential to be activated.

**Personal Qualities of the Mentor**

Throughout the interview process, mentees tacitly and explicitly discussed the different personality traits of their mentors. Three sub-themes of personality traits emerged in the data-analysis process: (a) relatability, (b) admirability, and (c) genuineness. These traits were vital for the mentee to be interested in having a meaningful relationship with the mentor and for the establishment of trust in the relationship, which resulted in a strong relationship beyond across the participant sample. Rhodes (2002) model of youth mentoring asserts that it is essential that the youth mentoring relationship begins with a strong connection between mentor and mentee. Other scholarship elucidates the fact that the trust needed to create this strong bond may occur organically if the mentor and mentee are engaged in meaningfully goal-oriented work.
Hamilton, 2010). Hamilton and Hamilton (1992) and Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne (2004) caution that intense efforts to create a strong bond with a mentee may be counterproductive. The experiences of the participants in this study were in line with this previous research regardless of whether they were in a formal or informal mentoring relationship.

As this study concerns African-American identity, it is important to discuss the connections between the participants’ experiences and what the literature has produced in terms of matching mentees and mentors based on race. Some youth mentoring literature has found matching mentees and mentors based on race to be a non-critical factor (Keller, 2005). However, this finding may actually depend on the mission and goals of the mentoring program (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes, Stelter, & Tai, 2015). It is worth considering research that highlights the positive impact of African-American teachers on African-American students (Clewell, Puma, & McKay, 2005; Foster, 1993) as the mentors that mentees identified in the current study also held teacher roles. This line of literature (Clewell et al., 2005; Foster; 1991; Foster 1993) supports the notion that African-American teachers are able to establish strong bonds with African-American students based on shared life experiences. This has important implications for mentoring programs that have a goal of diminishing the impact of STT and racial stigma related challenges. Though relatability and admirability of the mentor might be achieved in ways not related to race, there may be a qualitative difference in the way a mentee benefits from a relationship with a mentor who is relatable and admirable based on shared racial identity. This may have the effect of affirming the racial identity of the mentee.

In addition to the importance of building a strong bond in the mentoring relationship, Gándara (2002) asserts that mentors have a positive impact on student outcomes when they act as a role model. She states that the implicit theory of mentoring programs is that mentors will
“affect aspirations and achievement by causing the student to want to emulate the mentor” (Gándara et al., 2005, p. 97). This assertion aligns with the experiences of the current study’s participants. These participants perceived their mentors to have impacted their aspirations and achievement through establishing strong bonds based on relatability, admiration, genuineness, which created opportunities for the bundle of strategies discussed in the section below.

**Bundled Strategies for Youth Guidance and Development**

The third major theme that emerged in this study represents aspects of the mentoring relationship that the mentor and mentee engaged in that were not programmed into the relationship. Stated differently, the strategies that are included in this theme were organically implemented as they arose as natural responses to the particular needs of the mentees during the mentoring relationship. The strategies that mentees found impactful were: (a) envisioning future possibilities, (b) personal qualities development through “personal growth” dialogue, and (c) social lessons in personal stories. The following connects the existing literature on youth mentoring strategies and the existing STT intervention literature with the above-mentioned strategies.

The participants in this study discussed the positive impact of envisioning possible futures of their academic and professional careers. This finding is line with Clarke’s (2009) study, which examined a mentoring program that focused on academic attainment for a majority African-American youth group, found that mentors positively impacted students’ academic outcomes by discussing long term goals with mentees that included both their academic and professional careers. The mentors in Clarke’s study met with their mentees one time per week for 15-20 minutes each visit. Several participants also expressed that the practice considering future possibilities with their mentor pushed them to believe that they were capable of doing things that
they had not believed without the validation of their mentor. This validation served as an external affirmation. STT intervention literature is abundant in studies that show the positive impact that affirmations have on diminishing the negative performance effects of STT (Cohen et al., 2006; Walton et al., 2012). While the current student does not claim, nor did it seek to demonstrate a causal relationship between this strategy and STT reduction, it does illuminate a new strategy, a nuanced form of affirmation, that mentors may deliver to youth mentees. Future research on the effectiveness of this type of affirmation on STT activation and effects would be might illuminate any relationship between these elements.

For the participants in this study, “personal growth” dialogue was about affirming who they were. Prior research has evidenced self-affirmations to diminish STT effects (Cohen et al., 2006; Schimel, Arndt, Banko, & Cook, 2004). While mentors did act as an external source of affirmation for the participants, these interactions were conversational, and thus participants also engaged in self-affirmation in these conversations. Again, it is outside the scope of this study to determine if these types of interactions diminished STT for the participants, but this does provide a compelling argument for further research in to the impact of mentors’ external affirmations on STT remediation.

Participants also found value in the social lessons taught to them through their mentors’ personal stories. Interestingly, this was an experience of mentees with an African-American mentor, but not of those without a mentor who shared their racial identity. However, it must be noted that mentees without an African-American mentor did not report listening to similar stories from their mentors. Gándara et al., (2005) closed a book chapter on mentoring with this inquiry:

… as Steele (1997) has demonstrated, many students of color may not even try to excel in school for fear of confirming the stereotype that they are intellectually inferior if they
fail. Given these realities, we are compelled to question if mentors from the same background as the students might be more adept than others at breaking through the walls of fear and self-doubt. We also wonder if there is not also an added measure of inspiration when a student’s mentor has confronted the same barriers and overcome them.

(p. 108)

The current study sheds some light on this inquiry. It demonstrates that mentors of the same racial background can positively impact the schooling experiences and aspirations of their mentees when they impart experiences that resonate with the lived experiences of their mentees. This does not mean to imply that mentors who do not share the racial identity of their mentees do not help mentees realize positive outcomes. However, these findings do suggest that shared identity can help to create meaningful mentor-mentee relationships that lead to desirable outcomes based on shared experiences related to race.

Factors Unrelated to Mentoring

During the interview process, one participant, Ashley, engaged in a form of stereotype confrontation avoidance. Logel, Peach, and Spencer (2012) posit two forms avoidance behavior in regard to STT, behavioral and psychological. During the interview, Ashley avoided discussing the intellectual stereotype attributed to African-Americans. She expressed that it was a difficult stereotype to discuss. Based on Ashley’s explanation for the avoidance, this would be categorized as psychological avoidance rather than a behavioral form. In explaining behavioral avoidance, Logel et al. stated that “targets may psychologically avoid stereotype threat by distancing themselves from stereotypic traits” (p.161). Ashley exhibited avoidance and disidentification with her racial identity. Chronic disengagement versus situational disengagement (Nussbaum & Steele, 2007)
Prior research indicates that having a sense of belonging may have an indirect, but positive impact on student behavior and academic performance (Goodenow, 1993; Mello et al., 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2007). However, environments may undermine a student’s sense of belonging if there is a lack of peers that share his identity (Inzlicht & Ben Zeev, 2000) or if the physical environment displays cues such as posters or pictures that make one feel that their identity group is not welcomed (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Having a sense of belonging emerged as an important dynamic in the current study for participants who were in predominantly European-American schools. However, the belonging that emerged in this study was separated into two groups, (a) a general sense of belonging and (b) a situational sense of belonging. To the author’s knowledge, the literature does not speak to this dichotomous sense of belonging. This will be an important inquiry for future research. Participants who found social belonging in groups other than their racial group reported having a more agreeable social experience. On the other hand, participants who did not find social belonging outside of their racial identity group reported an experience of tension.

Connection to the Conceptual Framework and Literature

In the current study, the conceptual framework is used to understand how youth mentoring might support African-American adolescents in overcoming STT conditions in school. The conceptual framework is comprised of Steele and Aronson’s (1995) stereotype threat theory, Zirkel and Johnson’s (2016) conception of Black racial identity in education, and Gándara and Mejorado’s (2005) mentoring theory. The findings of the study revealed consistencies, nuances, and contradictions with various components of the theories that comprise the conceptual framework of the study.
Stereotype Threat Theory

STT theory, with over 300 studies conducted (Pennington et al. 2016), covering STT activation, mediation, and intervention, provides a multitude of discreet concepts that, together, provide a holistic view of the phenomenon. However, the current study explored this phenomenon not in a way that would examine discreet concepts of theory, but holistically, using a naturalistic approach (Lincoln et al., 1985). Several concepts from STT literature emerged in the findings of the study: STT activation cues in the environment (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), the role of identity and domain identification strength in STT susceptibility (Steele, 2010; Steele, 1997; Wasserberg, 2014), affirmations as intervention (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006), and social belonging (Mello et al., 2012; Walton et al., 2012) and revelation of shared identity as intervention (Riek et al., 2010).

STT theory suggests that a cascade of negative effects may occur when an individual is placed in a situation in which environmental cues causes the individual to become vigilant about fulfilling a negative stereotype or being judged based on the stereotype tied to one of their identities (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Steele, 2010; Steele, 1997). This study assumes that all African-American students are always, albeit at varying degrees, susceptible to succumbing to STT effects in the school environment because their identities are globally, negatively stereotypes in schooling situations. In this study, participants who attended predominantly European-American schools faced increased susceptibility to STT because of a lack of a critical mass of peers and adults that shared their racial identity in school. These students reported, explicitly and tacitly, interventions documented in STT that aided them in navigating the environment: affirmations, and the closely related interventions of shared identity and social belonging. The participants’ accounts of shared identity and social belonging presented
consistent understandings as those produced in the literature and emerged outside of the mentoring relationships of the participants. Participants discussed implicitly discussed the power of affirmations, as well. Affirmations of mentees’ individual qualities were made externally by mentors, in addition to self-affirmations during conversations with mentors. Certain participants also had the opportunity to attend racial identity affirming events, which events helped to develop an African-American identity that is line with Zirkel et al.’s conception of Black racial identity.

**Black Racial Identity in Education**

In regard to Zirkel et al.’s (2016) conception of a “strong, positive racial identity” (p.301), it is important to understand how the participant profiles aligned with this social identity and how their mentors may have contributed to the internalization of this identity. This is important to consider given the implications for academic performance tied to this identity conception. The theory posits positive academic outcomes in correlation with the following definition of the identity:

(a) a strong and positive identification with being Black combined with (b) a racial consciousness of the historical, social, and cultural context of being Black in the United States, including a critical consciousness about race and racism. (p. 302)

This was an important aspect of the framing of the study because of the evidence that suggests that students perform better academically when they possess the aforementioned identification. This is a theory that speaks to a holistic experience of African-American students. Paradoxically, it is important to consider the negative implications of this identity conception in the context of the situational STT phenomenon. Research in the STT field demonstrates that the more strongly an individual identifies with one of their social identities, the more susceptible that individual
will be to STT when that particular social identity is stereotyped in a relevant situation (Shapiro, 2012). Taken together, these two theories explain the experiences of many African-American students from both a holistic and situational standpoint.

While this study was not designed to measure academic performance outcomes, the protocol was able to illuminate how the participants perceived themselves as African-American students in the context of STT conditions. The participants in the study presented a range of profiles in terms of alignment with the conception of this social identity. The study also revealed the role mentors played in fostering this identity in participants. The study participants who had an African-American mentor did receive guidance and engage in conversations that contributed to the development of this identity. Again, an attempt to connect these findings with academic performance would extend beyond what the current study was designed to explore. However, the findings suggesting that African-American mentors supported the internalization of this identity through guidance and dialogue is an important finding for practitioners and policy makers seeking to bolster African-American student performance through youth mentoring.

**Mentoring Theory**

The conceptual framework of this study incorporated the development and identity frameworks of Gándara et al.’s (2005) mentoring theory. In the development framework of their mentoring theory, Gándara et al. aver that:

…mentors can affirm the self-worth of such marginalized students while interpreting the cultural norms of the dominant society to them and helping them to establish a healthy identity in an otherwise hostile social context. (p. 96)

Participants in the study reported various aspects of their mentoring relationships that support the description of the mentor’s role in Gándara et al.’s framework of development. Specifically, the
participants perceptions that their mentoring relationships were behavior intervention and social skills focused speaks to the mentors’ role as someone who assists the mentee in “interpreting the cultural norms of the dominant society” (p.96). Gándara et al.’s depiction of the environment as “hostile” is also important to note as it speaks to various environmental factors that mentors help adolescents to navigate, including stereotype threat.

In addition, Gándara et al. position the mentor as a person that assists the mentee in exploring and “shaping their identity” (p. 97) in the identity framework of the theory. Gándara et al. position the mentor as an individual that helps adolescents explore their “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Participants reported various examples of their mentors’ impact on their identities that align with the role of the mentor according to Gándara et al.’s theory. For instance, participants reported the exploration of their “possible selves” through the envisioning future possibilities strategy. Mentors were also reported to have engaged mentees in what Milton called “personal growth” dialogue, which included exploration of strengths and weaknesses, self-acceptance, and affirmations. Participants felt that these types of interactions impacted the trajectory of their schooling careers and their professional aspirations. In this way, mentors have helped the participants to shape their identities.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Youth mentoring is a ubiquitous approach to academic, behavioral, social, and emotional intervention (Dubois et al., 2011). The current study explored both informal and formal mentoring relationships. It was assumed that potential strategies and interventions could be gleaned from both sorts of mentoring relationships for implementation in formal programs seeking to diminish STT effects for African-American adolescents. The following section details recommendations for both school-based mentoring programs and independent youth mentoring
programs based on the findings produced from the informal and formal mentoring relationships featured in this study. These recommendations should be integrated in the assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, and feedback processes of the program.

**Recommendations for Schools and Independent Youth Mentoring Programs**

**Recruit mentors and create schedules that establish stability of the relationship.** The current study and previous studies support the notion that a sense of stability will allow for a fruitful mentoring relationship to develop (Dubois et al., 2011). The mentees in the current study communicated a sense that their mentors were “always there”, which was, in part, based on the frequency of contact. Participants in the student had some form of contact with their mentors several days within the week and saw their mentors no less than twice per month. School administrators seeking to establish stability will have an easier time in this regard when compared to independent mentoring programs because there is less difficulty in coordinating schedules between mentors and mentees. This is assuming that the schools could potentially assign mentees to mentors who already work in the school. Assigning mentees to specific mentors is also aspect of programming that school administrators will have to consider. This is discussed below.

**Consider personality when matching mentees and mentors.** Rhodes (2002) asserts that it is imperative for mentors to have a strong bond with their mentees in order for trust to be built. The implicit assumption in this assertion is that trust is necessary for the relationship to be meaningful and for mentees to arrive at desirable outcomes. The participants in the current study discussed certain personality qualities that were important to building a strong bond with their mentor. While research shows that attempting to create a strong bond with youth mentees could be counterproductive (Hamilton et al., 1992; Langhout et al., 2004), this is an important
consideration in the matching of mentors and mentees and the evaluation of these relationships. Program administrators may find it useful to survey or mentees about the relatability, admirability, and genuineness of their mentors, among other research-based measures of mentoring program effectiveness.

**Train mentors on ways to skillfully integrate identity affirming interventions.**

Gándara et al., (2005) position the mentor as playing an important role in helping mentees navigate a hostile environment while building a healthy identity. Mentoring programs that seek to diminish STT effects in schools should incorporate methods of affirming African-American students’ identities. The current demonstrated that opportunities to attend racially affirming events, envisioning future possibilities for one’s career, and engaging in “personal growth” dialogue were effective ways of affirming the participants identities.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future STT intervention research might expand on the body of literature that demonstrates affirmations to be an effective STT reduction tool. Participants in the current study experienced a deepened sense of pride in their racial identity as the result of attending events that were culturally relevant and presented African-Americans in a positive light. However, the current study cannot make the assertion that these affirmations will have a causal effect on academic performance. Future experimental research might be useful in shedding light on this potential inquiry.

Future research might also explore the impact of situational belonging, a concept that differs from a general sense of belonging in which an individual’s membership in a social identity group is transferrable throughout the various areas of an environment. It is possible that having a general sense of belonging versus a situational sense of belonging is moderated by the
degree to which an individual identifies with the group in which she has membership. For instance, Mark exhibited a general sense of belonging that prevailed throughout the many spaces of his high school, while Timothy only exhibited a situational sense of belonging when he was physically with his teammates in football-related situations. The difference in experiences between may be predicated on the fact that Mark expressed a stronger identification with his athletic identity than did Timothy. The current study was not designed to make such a determination, nor did the findings produce adequate evidence to make such an assertion.

However, in future inquiries, researchers might explore this more deeply by identifying several candidates within a social identity group to explore the strength of their identification with the relevant domain and their sense of belonging within the community that houses the social identity group.

The current research effort also has implications for qualitative research methodology. As noted earlier, the researcher is epistemologically aligned with the philosophical underpinnings of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson et al., 2005). I am advancing the argument that researchers embarking on interpretive phenomenology build crystallization approaches into the design of their studies. Crystallization is an appropriate and useful approach as it relates to the interpretive tradition of phenomenology as the philosophical underpinnings of crystallization are in line with interpretive phenomenology. Consider the epistemological underpinnings of both interpretive phenomenology and crystallization; in clarifying the differences between descriptive phenomenology (Husserl, 1970) and interpretive phenomenology, Lopez et al. (2004) stated that:

A question that interpretive inquiry asks is How does the lifeworld inhabited by any particular individual in this group of participants contribute to the commonalities in and differences between their subjective experiences? (p. 729)
This excerpt is significant because it demonstrates the acknowledgement and value that interpretive phenomenology places on the subjective perceptions of a given studies’ subjects. It represents a shift from the assumption that individuals within an identity group have experiences that can be boiled down to a stagnant essence that is generalizable across the identity group. The excerpt asserts that there is room for variation within an overarching shared experience. For instance, in the current study, Timothy and Mark had a shared experience as African-American male student-athletes in predominantly European-American high schools in the southern United States; however, other factors in their lives such as the profiles on their mentors and perhaps the values transmitted to them from their families resulted in different perceptions of their schooling experiences. In acknowledging the complexity of human experiences, the interpretive phenomenologist designs interview protocols that aim to uncover elements of the subjects’ lived experiences that extend beyond the narrow focus of the overarching research question (Lopez et al., 2004). In the same vein, researchers that seek to crystallize research findings aim to reveal:

…a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (Richardson, 2000, p. 934)

Future phenomenological researchers designing studies in the interpretive tradition might consider incorporating crystallization approaches in order to reveal the “commonalities in and differences between their [subjects’] subjective experiences” (Lopez et al., 2004, p. 729). The model below represents the execution of crystallization (Richardson, 2000) through the core tenets of interpretive phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004).
Figure 3. Crystallization through Interpretive Phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004)

Conclusion

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American… (Du Bois, 1903, p 9)

Years before Steele and Aronson (1995) advanced STT, empirically linking performance suppression to stereotypes and stigma, Du Bois (1903) articulated the experience of navigating
African-American racial identity – stereotypes and stigma included – in what he coined double consciousness. The double consciousness experience pervades many African-American life experiences, schooling being of paramount concern. The current study examined youth mentoring as an avenue for supporting African-American youth navigate double consciousness and its related experiences, namely STT.

“The assumption is that something about the mentoring relationship results in improved outcomes in students, but the something is rarely defined” (Gándara et al.’s, 2005, p. 95). This study aimed to learn more about this “something” by peering into the mentoring relationships of African-American adolescents to understand how they impact this groups’ schooling experiences while under STT conditions. Understanding how stereotypes have an impact on the performance gap between African-American adolescents and their European-American and Asian-American peers is to understand how the schooling environment in America can send signals to these youth that their African-American identity is not suited for “success” in school. Prior research has produced several interventions using experimental research designs to diminish STT. However, the current study, using naturalistic methodology (Lincoln et al., 1985), partially illuminates how the students affected by STT perceive their environment and how mentors have helped them navigate its hostilities.

The experiences that the mentees related in this study partially demystified some aspects of the mentoring relationship that have a positive impact on African-American students’ overall schooling experiences and their inner-narratives regarding racial stigma. This was especially true for mentees with African-American mentors. This study is a foundation for future inquiry into the relationships between African-American mentors and mentees in regard to STT reduction and coping with African-American double consciousness.
References


Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), U.S. Supreme Court Case Summary & Oral Argument


Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The miseducation of the Negro*.


Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. What’s your name?
2. What school do you attend?
3. Tell me about yourself.
4. Why don’t you begin by telling me about what being African-American means to you?
5. What is it like being an African-American adolescent for you, personally?
6. Does being an African-American student make your school experience different from others? If so, explain how.
7. Tell me about a person outside of your family that is like a parent.
8. How do you feel about [mentor’s name]?
9. How did you meet [mentor’s name]?

a. Probes
   i. Formal Mentoring Probe: How were you matched with [mentor’s name]?
   ii. Informal Mentoring Probe: What is/was it about [mentor’s name] that makes them a good person to talk to?
10. Would you describe [mentor’s name] for me?

   a. Probes
      i. How old is she/he?
      ii. What race is she/he?
      iii. What’s his/her personality like?
11. How often do you see [mentor’s name] or talk to him/her over the phone or through messaging?

12. What are some stereotypes about African-Americans?

13. What are your feelings about these stereotypes?

14. What do you think other people believe about these stereotypes?
   a. **Probes**
      i. Your teachers?
      ii. Your African-American peers?
      iii. Your non-African-American peers?
      iv. How does that make you feel when you’re at school?
      v. How does that make you feel when you’re doing school work at home?

15. What do you think [mentor’s name] believes about stereotypes about African-Americans?
   a. **Probes**
      i. How does that make you feel when you’re at school?
      ii. How does that make you feel when you’re doing school work at home?


17. What are some things that you and [mentor’s name] talk about?

18. What are some other important things about your relationship with [mentor’s name]?
   a. **Probes**
i. Tell me more about ____________.
Appendix B

Post-Interview Self-Affirmation Exercise

What are your most important personal values? Write as much as you can about your personal values. Some examples of personal values are: (1) being a good artist, (2) athleticism, (3) writing, (4) reader, (5) membership in a group, and others. You are not limited to this short list.

There are many personal values.

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Appendix C

Parental Letter of Consent for Minors

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student at the University of New Orleans. I am studying under Dr. Elizabeth Jeffers in the Educational Leadership program. I am conducting a research study about mentoring of African American students.

Your consent is needed for your child to participate in this study. If you consent, he or she will be asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview will last 45-60 minutes. The second will last a maximum of 30 minutes.

You will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

There may be no direct benefit to your child. Participation may provide him or her the benefit of sharing their own experiences.

Participation is voluntary. Your child does not have to be in this study. If your child or you change your mind, he or she has the right to drop out at any time. He or she may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, he or she will not lose any benefits. Your child's name will not be used in anything published on this study.

Contact Elizabeth K. Jeffers at ekjeffe1@uno.edu or David LaViscount dlavisco@uno.edu if you have any questions, concerns or complaints. If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon at the University of New Orleans at (504)-280-7386.

_________________________  ______________________  __________
Participant Signature    Participant Printed Name    Date

_________________________  ______________________  __________
Researcher Signature     Researcher Printed Name    Date

348J Education Building, University of New Orleans
2000 Lakeshore Drive, New Orleans, LA 70148
Attention: Elizabeth Jeffers (504) 280-7388

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Appendix D

Participant Assent Form

Dear Student:

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate in a study concerning African-American students and mentoring.

I will be asked to have a 45-60 minute conversation. I will also be asked to have a follow-up conversation. This will not last more than 30 minutes.

My participation in this project is voluntary. I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. It will not affect my grades or my mentoring in any way if I choose not to participate.

_________________________________  ___________________________________  __________
Participant Signature                   Participant Printed Name               Date

_________________________________  ___________________________________  __________
Researcher Signature                   Researcher Printed Name               Date

348J Education Building, University of New Orleans
2000 Lakeshore Drive, New Orleans, LA 70148
Attention: Elizabeth Jeffers (504) 280-7388
Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer

Study on Mentoring
Take part in an important research study!

Check if Yes

Is your child between 11 and 18 years old? □

Is your child African-American? □

Has a mentor provided direction to him or her? □

If you answered YES, you may want to participate. Participation will take 75 to 90 minutes of your time.

The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of African-American students with mentors.

David LaViscount is the student investigator for this study. He is working under Dr. Elizabeth Jeffers at the University of New Orleans.

Contact Information:
David LaViscount
(718) 724-9207
VITA

The author was born in New York City and raised in East Harlem and the South Bronx. He moved to New Orleans, LA in 2003 to pursue a degree in French from Dillard University before transferring to Louisiana State University in 2005, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in French. During his time at Louisiana State University, he took an opportunity to teach English at a French lycée for one school year. It was through this experience that he started his career in education, which changed his career aspirations and trajectory from translation and interpretation to teaching.

Shortly after completing his B.A., the author enrolled in a teacher preparation program with TNTP (The New Teacher Project) and earned certification to teach Elementary grades 1-5 and French at all levels in the state of Louisiana. He has taught 4th and 5th grade in a large urban school district and high school French in a large suburban/rural district. He obtained a Master of Arts in Teaching from Louisiana College since beginning his teaching career in the United States. The author began his pursuit of a doctoral degree from the University of New Orleans in 2014. He now serves as the inaugural principal of a bilingual (French and English)/Montessori school in New Orleans, LA.