ABSTRACT

"Iron Sharpens Iron" The Impact of Culturally Responsive Mentoring on At-Risk
Minority Female Students

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For the last thirty years, the national high school completion rate has remained the same. Once leading the world in the number of students completing high school, the United States now ranks 17th globally (National Center for Education Statistics , 2019). High school completion rates are lower for minority and low-income female students as these students are far more likely to leave before completing high school than children from affluent families. At-risk minority female students struggle to balance meeting family expectations and the expectations society places on them. Societal and family expectations take a toll on girl's well-being and aspirations, and these girls struggle to find their place in society. Female students often feel disconnected from the learning environment when there is no genuine connection to an adult. The lack of engagement leads to disciplinary concerns resulting in a disproportionate amount of out-of-school suspension for risk-minority girls; thus, contributing to the achievement gap and low graduation rates.

This multiple qualitative case study design highlighted the significant impact of a culturally responsive mentoring program, Creating Honest and Respectful Role Models (CHARRM), had on four at-risk minority female students seven years after completing the mentorship. Former CHAARM participants provided insight into their experiences in the mentorship through one-on-one interviews. The researcher analyzed themes that emerged related to the impact of CHAARM to determine how culturally responsive mentoring helped empower participants to complete high school, become productive members of society, attain and strengthen internal and external assets for at-risk minority female students.

Exposing at-risk minority female students to meaningful experiences and authentic relationships proved beneficial to their self-image and resilience. Culturally responsive mentoring programs met the socio-emotional and cultural needs of the participants. Findings from the current study demonstrated the need for schools to implement culturally responsive mentorships to improve graduation rates for at-risk minority females and helped them become productive members of society.

Keywords: At-risk girls, Culturally responsive mentoring, Minority girls, Developmental assets,

"Iron Sharpens Iron" The Impact of Culturally Responsive Mentoring on At-Risk
Minority Female Students

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AKA: Alpha Kappa Alpha

CDC: Centers for Disease Control

CIS: Communities in School

CHARRM: Creating Honest and Respectable Role Models

CRM: culturally responsive mentoring

GED: General Education Development

LMS: Lufkin Middle School

PYD: Positive Youth Development

SFA: Stephen F. Austin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To my sister in heaven, Xranda Shelise, and my family.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

The high school attrition rate for minority female students is of great concern. A significant issue with attrition for minority students is their socio-emotional state as they navigate their adolescent years. The *Texas Tribune* reported that in 2018–2019, the dropout rates for African American and Hispanic students were 3 and 2.3 %, respectively, out of a total of 5,479,173 students (Morath, 2019). In 2019-2020, one out of every four students lost out of a class of 86,789 were either Black or Latino (R. Johnson, 2021). These statistics identify a need to focus on retaining African American and Hispanic students and equipping them to persist through high school and beyond. The factors contributing to the high dropout rate among students of color include a lack of resources, dangerous neighborhood environments, and family issues, which causes schools to identify them as "at-risk." At-risk students drop out of school at higher rates than students without the at-risk label, which leads to a higher unemployment rate and increased public assistance (Rumberger, 2013). Students of color often need additional tools to support their academics and socio-emotional growth. Schools can meet the needs of at-risk students of color and decrease the dropout rate of minority students by implementing mentoring programs that are culturally responsive and focus on building solid and meaningful relationships (Lindt & Blair, 2017). Mentoring offers the opportunity to help students of color navigate their socio-emotional needs, make better decisions, and hopefully stay focused on their academics.

Statement of the Problem

A substantial number of students do not complete high school, which is a problem that is more pronounced among minority students. Minority female students are at an emotional and academic disadvantage compared to their white counterparts. Johnson (2021) states that "while the attrition rate for female students has decreased drastically over the last 35 years by 41 percent", the rates for students of color are still higher. The attrition rates for males are higher than those of females, with a 1.3 times likelihood of leaving school before graduation than females (R. Johnson, 2021). More specifically, in 2019, female students graduated at 92.1%, and the males were at 87.8 % (TEA, 2020). Black and Latino students dropped out at 24% and 25% rates, respectively, for the 2019 academic year (R. Johnson, 2021), while their White counterparts had a much lower dropout rate of only 12%. These statistics show the need to implement culturally responsive and relevant practices to address the needs of minority students.

Female minority students struggle to balance meeting family expectations and the expectations society places on them. Research and society often focus on minority men and boys but often overlook the struggles female students of color experience finding their place in society and their need for emotional support (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016). Because girls fare better than their male counterparts academically and socially, society perceives them as being "okay" (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016). Female students of color must find their ethnic identity, which is a crucial component of their adolescent development (Thijs, Jochem, & Verkuyten, 2019). Ethnic identity refers to how female students relate to and accept a particular race's norms (Thijs, Jochem, & Verkuyten, 2019). Societal and family expectations begin to take a toll on girl's well-being and aspirations, and they struggle to find their place in society.

Gaining a better understanding of their cultural assets and how these assets contribute to their identity is vital.

Female students often feel disconnected from the learning environment when there is no genuine connection to an adult. Tillery et al. attest that mentoring relationships increase female students' academic performance, self-efficacy, and attendance (2013). The likelihood of female students of color continuing their educational careers and leveling the playing field increases when they have established environments and relationships that inspire and push them to succeed (Gates, 2005). Unfortunately, most types of training offered at schools do not equip staff with the flexibility, time, or resources to form mentoring programs for female students. Schools need additional support personnel outside of the classroom to help meet female students' personal, emotional, and social needs. Moreover, these support programs and personnel can increase self-efficacy and resilience among female students in the program.

Research highlights the impact mentorship has on adolescents and their identity development (Mithell & Stewart, 2012). Participation in mentoring programs allows female students to learn about themselves and build relationships with non-parental adults (Pryce & Keller, 2013). Female students' relationships with mentors become an extension of these girls' connections they may not have with family at home. As mentors address at-risk female students' needs, it will allow them to function in an environment where a barrier does not stand between them and learning.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study explores the influence of culturally responsive mentoring for academically at-risk female minority students. More specifically, this

research aimed to determine the long-term effects of Creative Honest and Respectful Role Models (CHARRM), a mentoring program, on four middle school female minority students. CHARRM was established in 2013 to provide culturally responsive mentorship to female students at Lufkin Middle School. The goal of CHARRM was to increase female student attendance and improve the educational outcomes of at-risk female minority students by providing these girls with the same mentor for grades sixth, seventh and eighth.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What experiences from the CHARRM mentoring program do participants identify as impactful for their lives?

2. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of internal developmental assets in the participants?

3. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of external developmental assets in the participants?

The results identify the long-term influence of mentoring for middle school female students throughout high school and beyond (Mizell, 2010). This study provides insight into the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on female minority students' academic performance, self-efficacy skills, and resilience in their home environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the developmental assets framework from the Search Institute. This framework focuses on developing internal (intrinsic) and external (outside resources) assets needed for positive self-efficacy and socio-emotional development (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Researchers state that providing students with meaningful relationships and experiences increases students' self-efficacy and school

success (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Search Institute, 2021). The developmental asset framework is used internationally in research because it brings awareness to emotional issues commonly faced by youth and has easily attainable and accessible actions to build schools and school programs for youth anywhere (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Developmental assets look beyond identifying and preventing factors that negatively affect at-risk youth and provide students with tools and qualities for success in school and beyond (Scales et al., 2006). These assets also focus on developing social-emotional skills and motivating students to do well in school and plan for their future. Benson et al. state that "developmental assets reduce risk behaviors and expand culturally accepted results, including physical performance, leadership, and elasticity" (2011, p. 197). This framework has 40 identified internal and external assets that focus on skills related to providing service to others, youth being motivated to achieve in school, and youth developing a sense of purpose for their lives. The framework design focuses on students aged 12–18. The goal is to expose them to as many assets as possible to increase positive outcomes and decrease chances of involvement in high-risk behaviors (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The framework divides the assets into eight categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Each category lists assets that are related to that specific skill that youth develop or internalize. Youth develop skills in these categories based on opportunities and exposure provided by the adults they encounter. For this study, the researcher chose six of the eight categories to determine the long-term impact of the experiences and relationships participants had in

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the mentoring program. The researcher chose these categories due to the experiences provided to participants that allowed them an opportunity to develop these assets. The eight selected assets from the framework develop socio-emotional skills for minority female students specifically. All assets are essential for positive youth development, but the eight chosen seemed to be most salient for this research. Figure 1.1 identifies the six categories and eight assets as described.
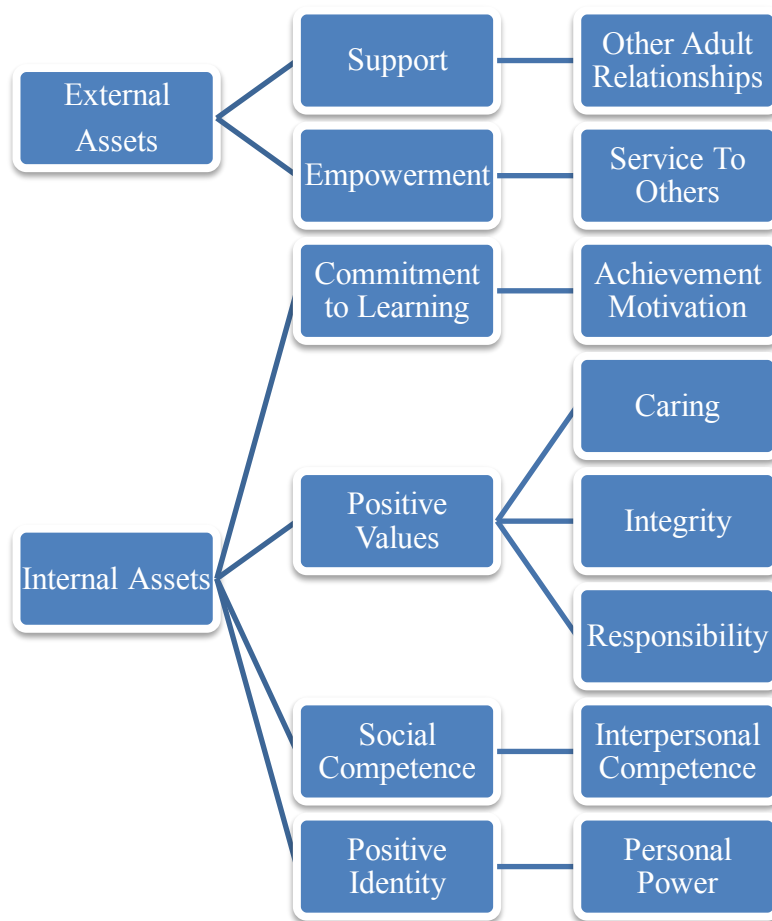
Figure 1.1. CRM developmental assets.

The first half of the framework includes external assets which focus on relationships and opportunities provided to the youth to promote positive development.

These opportunities establish connections within families, communities, and schools through environmental, contextual, and relational socialization systems (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). The support category focused on youth developing meaningful relationships with adults and receive support from them in their personal and academic lives (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). When students have support from three or more non-parental adults and parents to provide a caring environment to help them succeed, they experience these relationships (Search Institute, 2021). Students develop these relationships when adults listen, give answers to questions, or collaborate with the youth to find one and acknowledge the need for others while also affirming independence (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). When youth have opportunities to serve others, they are empowered to make more meaningful contributions in the future. Youth begin to see themselves as a resource and network with adults in the community (Search Institute, 2021; Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). To develop this asset, adults should encourage participants to volunteer in their communities and prepare a reflection of their experiences to share. They should also ensure youth feel safe by talking with them about safety and work with the child to feel safer (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). These assets focus specifically on self-efficacy skills needed for positive development.

The second half of this framework centers on socio-emotional attributes intrinsically established through skills, competencies, and values. Youth are motivated to achieve in school when adults invest in their goals and aspirations. Youth strengthen their focus on education when caring adults encourage youth to focus on school, stay motivated, take ownership of their learning, and care about the school (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Search Institute, 2021). Adults can help foster this growth by finding

creative ways to connect student interests to school content and having students teach them new skills (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006).

Youth become caring, responsible, and act with integrity when provided opportunities to self-reflect on their identity and purpose. These assets empower students to stand up for their beliefs, take personal responsibility for their actions, and abstain from sex, alcohol, and drugs (Benson et al., 2001; Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Search Institute, 2006). Youth's development of these assets strengthens when interactions with people of all ages exhibit and discuss positive characteristics of role models they are familiar with (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). You also benefit from discussions on their stance on sex, drugs, gender identity if allowed within district guidelines (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). How youth see themselves and others plays an integral part in their development. The seventh asset highlighted in this study is the "interpersonal competence" asset within the social competence category. This asset involves developing empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills in youth (Search Institute, 2021). When adults model coping skills, respond with compassion to youth's emotional states and provide conflict resolution strategies, children can strengthen or develop their interpersonal competence (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006).

Youth use these skills in difficult situations or during their emotional times and resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. The last asset, "personal power," within the category, Positive Identity, encourages students to have a confident perception of themselves by focusing on personal power skills. Youth understand that they control what happens to them (Search Institute, 2021). Adults help strengthen this asset by understanding that youth have peaks and valleys in their self-esteem, intensifying as they

get older (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Adults must also be intentional in not comparing students to their peers (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The researcher chose this framework because the middle school years are when teens experience emotional, physical, and cognitive changes at various times (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Determining how the mentoring program helped cultivate developmental assets in young people is essential. Determining if and how the mentoring program helped the girls acquire these assets will help develop a platform for future mentoring programs for female minority students.

Research Design

This qualitative, multiple case study explores the long-term influence of a middle school mentoring program for at-risk female students by assessing their present career and socio-emotional health five years after participating in the program. This study explored the design of CHARRM, mentoring program, and its influence on the former participant's academic achievement, future aspirations, and social-emotional well-being. This study utilizes data collected through interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to determine if common themes emerge among the program participants' experiences. The CHARRM program provided participants with counseling, validation, and motivation throughout their years at Lufkin Middle School in identified areas of need based on home life experiences, traumatic events, and academic achievement. Participants gathered for weekly mentoring sessions facilitated by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. from Stephen F. Austin University. During the sessions, female students worked on team-building activities and participated in round-table discussions to reflect on the meeting and their

mindset. The sessions focused on team building, building trust, and conflict resolution strategies.

The researcher used convenience sampling to recruit participants who were available and willing to participate in the study (Yin, 2018). Data collection included a brief survey to establish participants' educational status, current occupation, and children. The researcher compared the purpose of the CHARRM mentoring program with where the participants were career-wise, emotionally, and educationally to determine the influence the mentoring program had on their decision-making, self-efficacy, and resilience. One-on-one interviews with participants allowed their stories to be told in their own words and a better picture of their home life and describe their home life. Follow-up interviews with participants then helped the researcher gain insight into their status and what, if any, impact CHARRM made in their lives and why. These questions assessed participants' utilization of developmental assets and how they impacted participants' decision-making. The questions also evaluated the influence of participants' experiences in the CHARRM mentoring program and their ability to develop or strengthen internal and external assets needed for positive development.

Definition of Key Terms

A*chievement Gap:* the gap in academics associated with low SES female students (Mabin, 2016).

At-risk. At-risk female students are characterized by their inability to function successfully in a traditional school setting. They may have academic, emotional, or social challenges that impair their ability to complete school requirements. National Dropout Prevention Center as cited by (Camak, 2007).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): identifies the everyday racism and systematic customs in

    the education system (Stockslager, 2013).

Culture: family origin or ethnicity (Chol, Tan, Yasul, & Pekelnicky, 2014).

Cultural competence: enabling female students to be aware of and embrace their culture

    (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Developmental Assets: components of youth's experiences that affect their development

    through internal and external assets.

Ethnic minority: African American or Latino female students.

Mentoring: an adult is paired with an at-risk female student to offer opportunities that

    otherwise would not be available (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Self-efficacy: "a belief about what a person can do rather than a personal judgment about

    one's physical or personality attributes" (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006, p. 47).

Conclusion

    This study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate the long-term effects of culturally responsive mentoring on academically at-risk female students. Study participants were all in different phases of their lives as college students, full-time employees, and stay-at-home moms. This study explored the influence that mentorship had on helping young minority girls establish developmental assets that contributed to their success. The researcher gathered information by assessing the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on participants and how they were encouraged in and out of the school setting. The information gathered served as a blueprint for creating mentoring programs to serve at-risk minority female students. Culturally responsive mentoring programs such as CHARRM encourage minority female students to build relationships

with adults, improve their behavior, and transform their mindsets during their middle

school years, impacting their becoming adults.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the positive effects of culturally responsive mentoring with at-risk minority female students. Minority girls face many challenges, such as balancing cultural norms and conforming to the expectations of the school environment. The lack of support given to these girls causes them to enter adolescence and transition into the latter part of their educational careers at a disadvantage. The following literature review contends that implementing culturally relevant and responsive mentoring to at-risk minority female students will provide them with the tools needed for positive development.

This chapter reviews scholarly literature on the challenges female minority students encounter in their home environment and school. First, this literature review explores challenges that minority female students face that can negatively impact their academic performance and emotional well-being. This literature review also highlighted the importance of meaningful relationships and the long-term impact of these experiences on a female student's socio-emotional health and academics. Lastly, the literature review examined the positive effects of culturally responsive mentoring.

Defining the At-Risk Label

Schools use the term "at-risk" to refer to underperforming students. The Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2021) guidelines for labeling a student as at-risk include

students under twenty-one. For students in prekindergarten through third grade, the criteria included individuals unsuccessful on readiness assessments. For middle and high school students, the guidelines identified those whose semester grade average was below 70% in two or more subjects in the current or previous school year; students that failed a grade level one or more times; is pregnant or has a child; current or previous placement in alternative education; has been expelled; is a parolee; on probation or deferred adjudication; previously dropped out of school; is homeless, or is an English Learner at at-risk (TEA, 2021). Students who perform below grade level are more likely to drop out of high school (Cooper, 2015). At-risk students require additional time and support and may not get the time, care, and attention they need to complete the school year successfully. In January 2020, TEA expanded the definition of at-risk to include "previous or currently incarcerated students or who have parents that have been incarcerated within the student's lifetime, in a penal institution as defined by Penal Code." The TEA definition of at-risk includes a significant amount of minority students. The at-risk label remains on a student's file until their enrollment in public school ends. According to the Student Program and Special Populations Reports produced by TEA, there are 2,636,849 students labeled at-risk enrolled in Texas schools (PEIMS, 2021). Unfortunately, female students make up a disproportionate percentage of the at-risk student population. Thus, it indicated that females are more likely to drop out of school before meeting high school graduation requirements.

Disciplinary Practices for At-Risk Minority Females

Teachers may have an implicit bias toward minority girls labeled at-risk that result in increased disciplinary actions. Girls receive harsher punishment that further

perpetuates the stigma associated with the at-risk label. Disciplinary records indicate minority girls labeled at-risk have suspension and expulsion rates that exceed those of non-labeled female students (Center, 2010). The number of at-risk minority female students placed in juvenile detention centers or other incarceration also exceeds male students. Davis (2007) conducted a two-year observation of 50 girls ranging between the ages of 23 to 28. Davis observed thirty girls during imprisonment and interviewed seven of the same girls after their release from detainment. The girls discussed feelings of unfair treatment and harsher treatment than non-minority girls. The information presented in Davis' study aligned with data presented by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Snapshot (OCR, 2014), which revealed a 12% higher suspension rate for minority girls of color, more than any other race or ethnicity and most boys. Furthermore, approximately one in five girls of color with disabilities received an out-of-school suspension. Figure 2.1 illustrates the data of students receiving out-of-school suspension by race/ethnicity and gender.

During 2011–2012 African American female students in Texas suspension rates were 10% while of American Indian/Alaska Native 4%; Asian 1% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latino 3% Two or more races 4% and Whites 2% (OCR, 2014). The consequences of suspensions include missed learning opportunities, student disconnect from the school, and a strain on the student-teacher relationship.
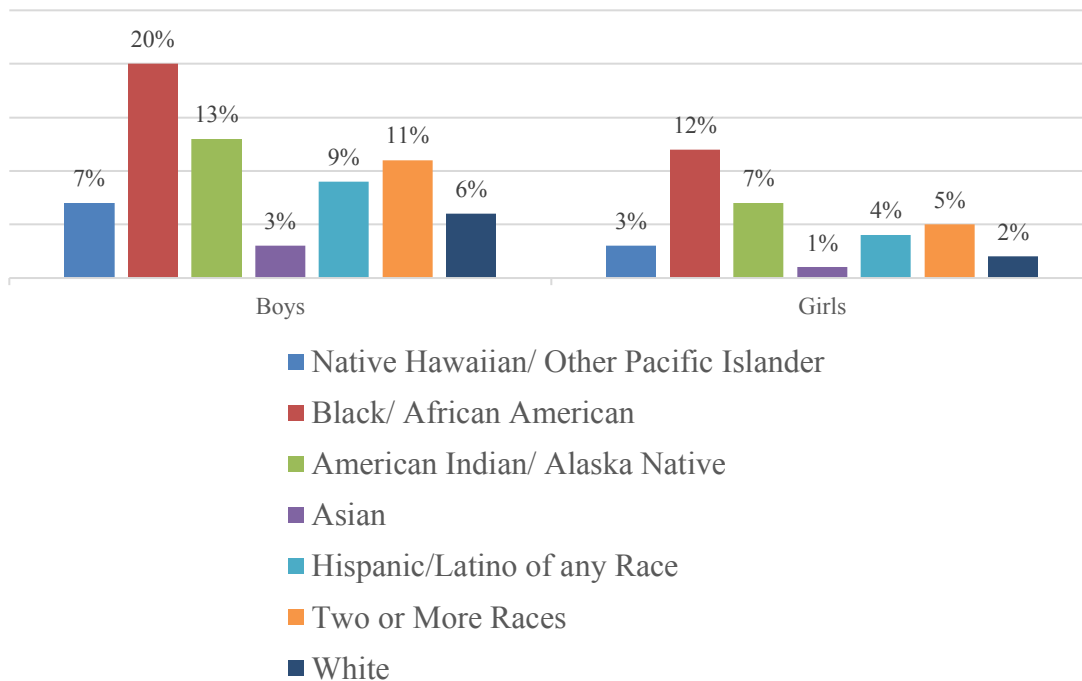
Figure 2.1. Students receiving out-of-school suspension by race/ethnicity and gender. Source. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12.

Teacher Bias

Teachers' perceptions of students often play a critical role in students' academic success. How teachers perceive students and their educational attainment affects their success when interacting with these students. The following section explores how personal beliefs can hinder the student-teacher relationship and students' sense of belonging to the learning environment.

Behavior influenced by culture leads to discrimination in the classroom. Teachers have good intentions but often act in ways affected by their culture and unconsciously discriminate against minority students (Weinstein & Strambler, 2010). This implicit bias has the potential to impact at-risk girls if not addressed and remedied positively. Many teachers are unaware of their biases and assumptions about class instead of race (Cobb,

2017; Walker, 2004). This practice, known as colorblind racism, "explains the achievement gap as the result of cultural differences in commitment to education among different racialized and classed groups" (Cobb, 2017, p. 315). Teachers bring an embedded worldview of how things are as they cross into different cultures (Walker, 2004). Teachers' perceptions are based on their culture and experiences and rarely consider their students' experiences. Therefore, teachers from more affluent backgrounds may not realize the limited support many at-risk students have regarding academics.

On the other hand, female students construct behaviors based on their social environment, but schools do not universally accept them (Milner, 2013). Weinstein et al. commented, "when teachers devalue, censure, and punish the actions of non-mainstream groups, they fail to see that their management practices alienate and marginalize some students while privileging others" (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). This disparity results in harsher disciplinary actions towards ethnic minority students from lower SES backgrounds (Milner, 2013). In a 2005 longitudinal study, data showed that ethnic minority students in poverty represented the most significant percentage of discipline records (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). For many offenses, student reprimands fell under the subjective category based on teacher interpretation (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Teachers may not tolerate dealing with a minority student who is just expressing themselves the only way they know how (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). These biases create a poor sense of belonging to the learning environment and a barrier to the student-teacher relationship.

When teachers become conscious of implicit bias that influences their actions, they are mindful of prejudices that may keep them from responding appropriately (Wilde,

2012). The term prejudice used here is not meant in a derogatory manner but with the recognition that adults typically operate under certain prejudgments that influence their understanding (Wilde, 2012). The transformation of the teacher's worldview is not instantaneous; therefore, working with adults to create a culture and climate conducive to the needs of minority female students can improve academic performance and self-efficacy skills. Challenging teachers to self-reflect on their teaching practices and personal beliefs allow them to better connect with students and make learning meaningful and impactful. The following section details the impact of culture and climate on female students.

Culture and Climate

As female students enter the schools, they should feel a sense of belonging to the learning environment. The culture and climate of a school set the tone for how females begin to view societal norms. The culture and climate created in schools for at-risk female students play an integral part in developing their self-efficacy skills (Evans, Boriello, & Field, 2018). Adults in the school help shape students into productive citizens, not just scholars and future workers (Hargreaves, 1998). Positive school culture and climates create safe places for at-risk minority students.

The commitment teachers make to the school determines the emotional ties and connections they develop with students (Hargreaves, 1998). When students feel no relation to the teacher, their level of effort is often minimal, resulting in low grades and test scores (Stevenson, et al., 2010). Female students are not as motivated to excel in a hostile atmosphere filled with rejection and coldness. Students in poverty need adults that look beyond stereotypes and provide the same opportunity for all students to succeed

(Gorski, 2015). When teachers establish an emotional connection with female students, these girls begin to value the learning and take ownership.

Teaching requires educators to be "emotionally mature and bring passion to the learning environment that gets students excited about learning" (Mabin, 2016, p. 1). In a study done on a group of teachers in an alternative setting, researchers sought to gain insight on practices used to create a positive learning environment for troubled youth (Haggis, 2017). The researcher collected data using a survey to collect baseline data related to the bonding, high expectations, and belief framework (BHB). This theory stated that teachers could build student capacity by "using peers; building social competencies; relationship building; high expectation and fostering student strengths" (Haggis, 2017, p. 3). A selected group of teachers was then interviewed based on principal recommendation, colleague acknowledgment, and alignment of response in the survey to the BHB theory. The researchers asked teachers to write out their teaching philosophy to identify a correlation with the framework. The study showed there is value in teachers using the influence of students in the learning environment and establishing high standards and behavior expectations.

Results also show that teachers must create lessons that reflect students' abilities and interests (Haggis, 2017). At-risk students excel when teachers establish relationships with them and cultivate their academic aspirations (Mabin, 2016). For minority female students, the physical and emotional transitions during adolescence can prove detrimental to their academic careers without adequate support. Providing these students with an environment that is culturally responsive and relevant to these issues helps students feel accepted for who they are and excel in the classroom. In a favorable climate, children

experience warmth and comfort and know that they are loved. Providing these girls with compassion in school builds self-esteem and establishes a sense of purpose.

Internal Factors Putting Youth at Risk

The Texas School Dropout Survey Project conducted by the IDRA in 1986 showed that some of the primary reasons students leave school are grades, absences, marriage and pregnancy, and financial problems at home (TEA, 2020). While many of the factors still contribute to youth becoming or being labeled as "at-risk," factors such as low self-worth, increased rates of teenage pregnancy, and a perceived deficit in academic skills are relevant student-related factors.

Student Related Factors

Racial disparities in school discipline further perpetuate the achievement gap and stereotypes for minority students, resulting in internal challenges that include disengagement, low self-esteem, lack of trust, and lack of motivation (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhadt, 2016). Additionally, high levels of disciplinary action mean learning opportunities are lost, and the students become labeled as a discipline concern, impacting the student-teacher relationship. According to Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt (2016), a recursive process begins. Students and teachers start to react based on each other's actions towards one another. Figure 2.2 depicts the cyclical process that contributes to the further perpetuation of racially disproportionate discipline practices.
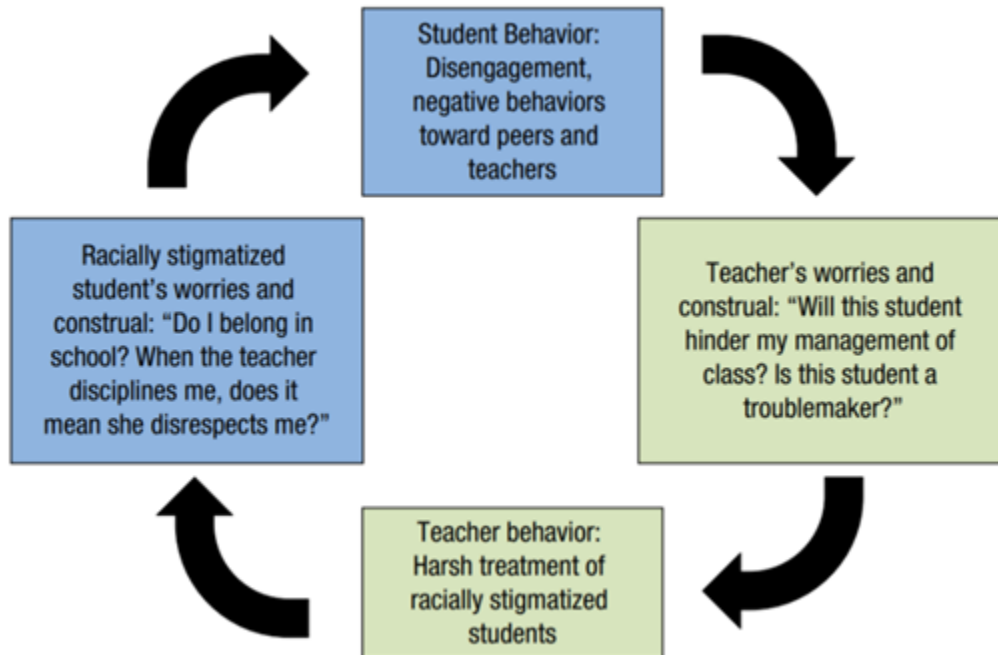
Figure 2.2. Working model of a recursive process that contributes to racially disproportionate discipline.

Note: Figure adapted from Oko (Cooper, 2015)

Low Self-Worth

How students value themselves in the educational realm plays a great deal in how well they do. Many students link their self-worth to how well they do in school because most of their day is spent in the school setting (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to (Covington, 2000), self-worth related to the classroom often focuses on students measuring their worth according to how well they do in the class. Students' grades play a large part in how they measure their self-worth. The self-worth theory suggests that students maintain an image of being competent and knowledgeable even when there is a risk of failure (Covington, 2000). As students go through school, they employ different techniques to protect their self-worth.

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Some of those strategies include only doing the minimum (withholding efforts), creating outs in case of failure, and setting low expectations. To decrease the likelihood of failure, students often withhold their full efforts to provide a reason for failure. Mann, Smith, and Kristjansson (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods study that included 48 girls aged 12–14. This study focused on the REAL Girls three-day intervention program and its impact on minority female students' self-efficacy, school connectedness, and identity. The researchers investigated the effects intervention has on girls' self-efficacy who participated in the program compared to girls who did not. The researchers administered an outcome survey three separate times over two weeks. All participants were given the survey simultaneously, with the variable being that the control group finished interventions before the third administration. The study's findings reveal that the girls' self-efficacy who participated in the REAL program significantly improved. Researchers concluded the REAL girl's program successfully promoted academic self-efficacy and school connectedness with at-risk minority female students. This study suggests value in creating programs specifically tailored to the needs of at-risk minority female students.

The Deficit in Academic Skills

Low-income families may employ less than satisfactory academic skills to help their children in school (Banerjee, 2015). Low-income parents may not have strong academic skills and rely on the schools to educate their children, with very few having the resources to secure supplemental support for their children (Chohan & Jinnah, 2010). Many students defined as academically at-risk have internal forces or external influences that negatively impact them (Larose & Tarabulsy, 2014). These forces could be low self-

esteem and self-worth, and external influences may be family or environmental factors. Internal challenges coupled with environmental factors further complicate the inequitable educational experiences of at-risk minority females. The following sections discuss the environmental factors that contribute to young people being labeled at-risk.

<div align="center">*Environmental Related Factors that*</div>

At-risk students' ability to thrive despite pessimistic predictions is affected by environmental factors. Environmental factors include lack of parental support due to incarceration, limited family financial resources, and the influence of living in unsafe environments. This section will detail these identified factors.

Incarcerated Parents

Some parents are not in the home due to incarceration. Banerjee (2015, p. 5) shared that "children of incarcerated parents are 3.8 times more likely to be raised by a caregiver who had less than a high school education". These students may live with family members who lack minimal educational skills (Banerjee, 2015). As a result, their grades and performance suffer and decline drastically, and they lack a positive attitude towards school and learning (Banerjee, 2015). These circumstances are just some of the factors that limit at-risk female students' academic achievement.

Limited Family Financial Resources

At-risk students also often live in poor households. Due to the limited resources available to youth in these neighborhoods, many develop learning disabilities, have cognitive delays, and exhibit behavioral and emotional problems in school (Hughes, Stenhjem, & Newkirk, 2007). As a result, at-risk students may display behaviors inside

the school setting, like the violent acts seen in their homes and neighborhoods (Smith, 2011). The actions such as bullying, stealing, fighting, and using drugs could mask the students' inadequacies in academics (Banerjee, 2015; Smith, 2011). Female students often develop worldviews based on their experiences in their homes as well as neighborhoods.

Influence of Unsafe Communities

The environment female students grow up in plays a significant role in the development of self-efficacy skills. Many at-risk minority students live in urban communities associated with violence and crime. According to Hughes et al., "many youths in these neighborhoods are more susceptible to a life of academic failure, dropping out of school, drug abuse, and incarceration" (2007, p. 22). As a result, students tend to lack the motivation to succeed in school and become labeled as at-risk of not completing high school (Banerjee, 2015).

In summary, female minority students experience several environmental factors that can negatively impact their ability to do well. These girls do not choose the families given to them or the neighborhoods where they grow up. As educators and adults, we must ensure that we provide these girls with the support needed to succeed in and out of the classroom. Establishing meaningful relationships is critical to this endeavor. The following section discusses the impact of these significant relationships on at-risk minority female students.

<center>*The Need for Intervention*</center>

The achievement gap, particularly for at-risk students, has been a concern for many years. According to Slavin and Madden (2006), between 80 and 90 percent of at-

risk students struggle with their academics. The racial disparities in school disciplinary actions contribute to academic deficiencies and warrant immediate action to increase the likelihood of at-risk student success. Students are more successful when they have at least one positive adult relationship.

Mentoring as an Intervention

Guidance from responsible adults is an essential component of the process that builds up young people to be productive members of society (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). However, there are few programs to support such development, particularly for at-risk females. According to Ryan, Whitaker, and Pinckney (2002), mentoring is the intentional building of a long-term relationship that develops between an older individual, the mentor, and a younger person, the mentee. The purpose of the relationship is often to identify and address the needs of the mentee.

Mentoring Programs

At-risk youth require guidance, role models, and support to improve their educational outcomes. Mentoring programs address the social and academic deficiencies present in schools (Malone, 2006). In a study on the mentoring program *Guiding Youth to Careers* through the University of Pennsylvania, researchers wanted to determine the impact of a structured, goal-oriented mentoring program on urban seniors (Malone, 2006). The goal was to determine if specifically outlined goals impact the students they serve. The program was structured, and students met one hour each week for consistency.

Many factors exist today that can contribute to youth dropping out of school before graduation. Still, research suggests that having mentors in place for students before or during those times could effectively curb student dropouts. Programs like the

Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Communities in School, and 21st Century are all programs that offered after-school support to students. Students pair with caring adults and establish personal goals for the students based on their interests and needs for the future (Pryce, 2012). Providing this guidance and support to students enables them to make better decisions and stay focused on their academic careers.

Mentors must be intentional in their attempt to develop an authentic relationship with the mentee. A program like Communities in Schools (CIS) is a way to curtail dropouts and serve students on an individual and a campus-wide level through the support of a caring adult and systematic interventions (Epstein, 2017). The CIS program offers long-term and short-term services geared towards increasing graduation rates (Epstein, 2017). CIS focuses specifically on issues ranging from mental health, careers to family engagement (Epstein, 2017). Mentoring these youth not only gives them a voice but a window of opportunity to make better choices. The following section explores the benefits of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Students are empowered when given opportunities to learn from those in the community who have shared the same challenges they face and can obtain knowledge to help them in their present circumstances and future (Blair & Lindt, 2017). When mentors reach students on the human level, students are seen as a whole child and not a part-object (Merwin, 2002). A two-year study conducted by Lampley and Johnson (2010) at a Northeast Tennessee middle school selected 54 students aged 11-15 who were determined to be at-risk based on three academic indicators: student's GPAs, discipline referrals, and attendance rates. This study focused on determining if partnering

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participating at-risk students with caring, supportive adults was associated with the three academic indicators. The researchers investigated the effects caring and supportive adults have on at-risk students compared to their pre-intervention data. Data collected at the end of each six weeks for each indicator and assembled cumulatively end of the year. The study's findings reveal that the GPA, discipline, and attendance showed a significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention for students in the LISTEN mentoring program. Researchers concluded the LISTEN mentoring program was a successful intervention strategy for at-risk middle school students. This study suggests that the relationships established in mentoring programs positively impact the academic success of at-risk students. The above findings align with the developmental asset's framework support category "other adult relationships" (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Mentors serve as role models, someone students can pattern their own lives after. Students are then able to see that there are options to be resilient regardless of current circumstances. Lindt and Blair confirm that "students provided with role models who made choices to attend the local college believe that they could also go to college, have careers, and live meaningful lives" (2017, p. 35). These role models provided students with guidance on decision-making and held them accountable for their part in school. Mentors also exposed the students to opportunities they may not have experienced otherwise. Most self-reporting survey evaluations on mentoring programs indicate that the students' mentors and teachers agree that the mentoring relationship positively affected them (Carmola, 1993). This next section explores the benefits of using a mentoring program as the catalyst to close the instructional and socio-emotional gaps female minority students face.

Benefits of Mentoring

Students in poverty need adults that look beyond stereotypes and provide the same opportunity for all students to succeed (Gorski, 2015). Low-income students perform increasingly better when teachers are supportive and have positive expectations despite their social background or at-risk status (Gregory & Huang, 2013). Notably, adults who recognize that minority girls have an additional disadvantage because of their gender and race can help level the playing field to succeed.

Family life, economic status, and race do not have to define at-risk youth. With the proper guidance and support, minority girls can develop a new mindset and plan to achieve excellent educational careers. M. Johnson attests that students make lifelong connections and acquire access to help that may not have otherwise been available from supportive, caring, and meaningful relationships with adult mentors (2016). Mentoring shows students they do not have to become what they are accustomed to seeing.

Providing students with an environment that is culturally responsive and relevant to these issues can help at-risk students feel accepted for who they are and allow them to excel in the classroom. Students are prepared for life beyond the classroom when the connection to real-life issues they face, such as racism, poverty, and societal expectations, is flexible, driven by the mentee's needs, and listening-oriented (Blair & Lindt, 2017). Mentors must be self-reflective of their personal beliefs and practices as these may cause a feeling of self-doubt or not belonging among the students. The following section details the need for adults to be intentional and build connections through culturally responsive practices and the impact.

Importance of Culturally Responsive Practices

The use of culturally responsive practices allows for better communication and transparency between adults and students. Culturally responsive practices begin with adults understanding themselves. Adults must identify personal biases and navigate those biases to meet the cultural and emotional needs of at-risk minority female students. The use of strategies or techniques that are responsive to the needs of female minority students and relevant to their interests ensures positive development. Byrd and Chavous (2011) examined three racial climate variables: centrality, private regard, and public regard and the correlation with intrinsic motivation for attending school in a sample of 11th graders. Overall, results support the congruence perspective and demonstrate how feelings of belonging at school mediate the relationship between racial identity—racial climate congruence and school intrinsic motivation.

Culturally Responsive Mentoring

The creation of mentoring programs inclusive of the needs and interests of at-risk minority youth helps supply youth with skills needed for success in and out of the classroom. Culturally responsive practices implemented through mentoring programs are instrumental in addressing minority girls' needs (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011). Lindsay-Dennis et al. state that "the process of building and implementing an appropriate program for African American girls may yield improved understanding on how best to create spaces that effectively support this persistently vulnerable population" (2011, p. 66). A culturally responsive mentoring program allows participants to connect with mentors from the same ethnic background who share common interests (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011). Such programs

consider student interests, needs, education, and experiences to build trust and address pressing issues students face (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). Being culturally responsive to the needs and barriers of minority female students requires intentionality on the part of the adults, from establishing high expectations to mentoring the girls in a specific way to their academic and emotional needs.

Female students should be encouraged to find their authentic selves and stand in their truths. Culturally responsive practices should strive to encourage students to embrace their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Providing culturally responsive content and activities that focus on academic success and cultural competence enables students to critically analyze the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Particularly for female students, culturally responsive and sustaining practices provide them with an outlet to express themselves, make sense of societal issues, and make informed decisions.

Culturally responsive mentoring embraces diversity and strengthens the relationship between students and adults (Samuels, 2018). Students become aware of societal problems that may affect them and participate in crucial conversations with others who may have differing views. These conversations can be uncomfortable but prove beneficial to the students by empowering them to stand in their truths (Samuels, 2018). Culturally responsive mentors create safe learning environments where students acknowledge conflicting cultural beliefs and worldviews they may disagree with and participate in conversations that force them both to think outside their cultural norms and expectations (Samuels, 2018). Culturally responsive mentorship empowers female students to become more vocal and aware of the circumstances and issues impacting their self-perception. Female students should be encouraged to find their authentic selves and

stand in their truths. Culturally responsive practices should strive to encourage students to embrace their cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Providing culturally responsive content and activities that focus on academic success and cultural competence enables students to critically analyze the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Particularly for female students, this practice provides them with an outlet to express themselves, make sense of societal issues, and make informed decisions.

In summary, students spend a minimum of eight hours a day in an educational setting. This time is optimal for creating opportunities and connections on an individual basis and celebrating contributions students bring to the educational environment that celebrates their diversity (Buchoz & Sheffler, 2009). By validating students' interests and building bridges to connect learning, teachers and adults help students experience a sense of belonging to the school community and foster a learning community. As a result, student efforts improve, and they become an active member of the community learning environment (Buchoz & Sheffler, 2009). By taking the time to understand and appreciate what students bring to the table, the teacher becomes more empathetic, and instruction becomes more meaningful for all. This mindset is not natural for some teachers, so adequate training and tremendous effort on their part must take place (Mizell, 2010).

Culturally Responsive Mentors

A mentor is not only there for students physically but also emotionally. Successful mentors are sympathetic to the needs of their mentees. Mentors are intentional in getting to know their mentees, meet with them as needed, and offer them academic and emotional support as needed (Blair & Lindt, 2017). These mentors are also "willing to open themselves up to learning whom they are mentoring and finding ways to be to

respond to the needs of the mentee" (Spencer, 2018, p. 1). Mentors work to build a connection with students based on empathy and understanding.

Adults who build relationships with their mentees begin to understand their needs and access the resources they need for success (Williams, 2013). Mentors also help build confidence, self-esteem, and awareness in young people, allowing young people to make strong ties to their communities and break down barriers they face by providing access to resources that meet their needs (Rogriguez-Planas, 2014). The relationship between a mentor and mentee is essential and solidified when students see they have someone who can and will advocate for them. Afterschool programs can help reach at-risk students and provide a role model through a one-on-one relationship.

At-risk minority students need more role models who look like them to imagine the possibility of going to college and being successful. Mentoring programs are important because they provide academically at-risk students with a positive role model and a positive outlook on an otherwise dismal situation (Ahmed, 2017). Mentors become that opportunity or inspiration for the students to see something or someone different from what they see in their neighborhoods or family dynamics.

Mentors help establish resiliency in youth and guide them in coping with social and emotional difficulties (Rogriguez-Planas, 2014). Teachers can serve as both a mentor and a role model in the classroom when they facilitate conversations among students and help make sense of students' thought processes when they experience different cultural norms (Mendez, Young, Mihalas, Cusumano, & Hoffman, 2006). Mentoring is a common practice where both the mentor and the mentee benefit and learn from each other. Mentors also offer academic support that may not be available at home to students

(Ahmed, 2017). Students who connect with a mentor from similar circumstances and ethnic backgrounds are motivated to rise above their challenges.

When placing students with a mentor, the mentors must establish a meaningful relationship. Mentored youth have shown improved social skills, academic motivation, attitudes toward peers, and self-esteem (Lee & Cramond, 1999). A mentor and a mentee are a lifelong partnership that opens the doors to many avenues and opportunities for students and a more receptive and empathetic heart for the mentor (McLaughlin, 2010). The mentor-mentee relationship is only as effective as the amount of time both parties put in. The mentor's availability and cultural responsiveness are vital to a mentor-mentee relationship.

Culturally responsive practices provide adults with tools to be culturally aware and receptive to each student. As at-risk students transition grade levels or move to new campuses, mentors serve as a support system to help cope with environmental factors they experience in their neighborhoods and offer non-parental support to those who may not have the support at home.

Mentoring programs also support students who may experience difficulties in the classroom environment from teacher bias, lack of compassion, and a classroom culture that is not conducive to their learning and beliefs. Mentor characteristics play a crucial role in the mentor-mentee relationship and the level of support they provide to students. Mentors are more aware of the needs of students and begin to plan measures with students in mind. Students start to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance to the learning environment, establish better relationships with adults, and contribute more to their academic careers. Mentoring allows students to be who they are while setting goals

and expectations for their futures. The learning experience becomes reciprocal between the mentor and mentee. By acknowledging and accepting the different cultural values of students, the environment becomes conducive for all. The findings from the literature confirmed the need for culturally responsive mentorship for at-risk minority females. CHARRM fulfilled this need with four students from Lufkin Middle School.

Creating Honest and Respectful Role Models (CHARRM)

The mission of CHARRM is to empower at-risk minority female students with the socio-emotional and academic skills needed to be successful. The program aims to assist students in building meaningful relationships with adults, improving behavior, and shifting their mindset towards themselves, school, and others. The CHARRM vision is to create an environment that is culturally responsive and relevant to the needs of at-risk minority female students and allow them to be their authentic selves. The mentees were selected based on teacher recommendations and student interest. The criteria for mentees were at-risk, behavior concerns, academic concerns, attendance concerns, socio-emotional concerns. Mentors for the program identify with at-risk minorities due to their personal experiences during their academic years. Mentors should preferably be minority female students in their first or second year of college who are willing to share their experiences from school and stories of resilience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher defined the consequences of the at-risk label, the disciplinary practices for at-risk minority females, the effects of teachers' bias, the importance of campus culture and climate, and the need for culturally relevant mentoring intervention. A review of the literature revealed a lack of research regarding culturally

relevant mentorship for at-risk-minority females. Research detailed mentorship and interventions for male students while creating a void of interventions specifically designed to address the needs of female students. The researcher introduced the mission and vision statements for CHARRM, a culturally responsive mentorship for at-risk minority females. Community-based mentorship that supports the effort to build brighter futures for minority girls is essential in closing the achievement gap. Strong mentorships build developmental assets and positive development for at-risk youth in their relationships, academics, and positive identity, supporting the developmental asset framework.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter Two highlighted the positive impact of a mentor-mentee relationship on minority students. This Problem of Practice examined the impact of CHARRM, a culturally responsive mentoring program, on minority at-risk female students. In this study, the researcher explored the long-term impact the mentoring program had on middle school girls. The findings of the research showed there are positive benefits to in-school mentoring programs.

The literature review findings in Chapter Two indicate the need to implement programs that address minority at-risk youth's social-emotional needs. Culturally responsive mentoring programs can help students build trusting relationships with adults. Mentoring can help female students see themselves in a new light and connect how their decisions today impact their educational careers and future success. Young women who receive access to additional resources, such as mentoring, learn the skills needed for academic success become empowered, productive adults.

This qualitative case study explores the long-term impact mentoring programs in middle school have on female minority students by following up with participants seven years after participating in the program. This study seeks to identify the effects of a culturally responsive mentoring program on participants' academic achievement and social and emotional well-being. This study's research questions focused on the role of

culturally responsive mentoring in socioemotional intelligence development. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences from the CHARRM mentoring program do participants identify as impactful for their lives?

2. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of internal developmental assets in the participants?

3. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of external developmental assets in the participants?

Answers to the questions help determine the long-term influence mentorship has on at-risk minority females as they leave high school and enter adulthood.

Researcher Perspective

During adolescent years in elementary and middle school, the researcher recalled programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and CHICKEN (Cool, Honest, Intelligent, Keen, and Not interested in Drugs). While these clubs did address the prevalent drug epidemic during that time, many schools lacked programs that addressed the specific needs of young minority girls. There was no access to a club or program that focused on empowering students and providing training in developing interpersonal skills. After high school, the researcher went to college without having experienced a non-parental, adult-student relationship. These relationships would have equipped the researcher to communicate more effectively with adults and have confidence in expressing concerns and frustrations. These experiences led to a passion for ensuring minority girls received the support they need during their adolescent academic years to ensure self-confidence and effective communication skills.

The researcher began her mentoring journey by volunteering with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters (BBBS) program during college. The strong relationships formed

between the researcher and the mentees resulted from their meaningful conversations and constant positive interactions. An adult besides a parent proved to empower the students during their adolescent years as there was an increase in academics and behavioral concerns. The researcher's experience with BBBS understood the need for minority students to have a non-parental relationship during the school day.

As an educator in Title I schools, the researcher worked with at-risk minority girls in a wide range of settings. Many of these girls faced academic deficiencies that made school very challenging. Almost all of them needed specific social-emotional support. While the researcher's studies in education administration and reading prepared her to assist students academically, there was still a desire to help them navigate their roles as young women in society. When the researcher began working in curriculum planning, she realized that curriculum often did not adequately address the needs of at-risk minority students who struggle academically. It also failed to allow time for students to connect with teachers on a personal level. The researcher's personal experiences in school helped her understand that students need an outlet to express themselves and share common ideas and activities with adults.

This study aims to understand the impact of culturally responsive mentoring through the at-risk girls' lens and assess how student-mentor programs establish a sense of belonging and motivation at school. While at Lufkin Middle School, the researcher created a program to provide extra support for girls in need. The program, CHARRM, allowed girls to express themselves and have a voice in the school. In addition, the program motivated them to be the best they could be. As a result, the young ladies and mentors developed personal relationships. The mentors listened to them, helped them

work through their problems, and understood how communication could change students' perspectives on life. In addition, the program served as a "safe place," where young ladies could connect with adults and other students who dealt with similar problems and obstacles. As an employee of the school, the researcher interacted with these ladies daily and observed the mentor program's impact daily. She was also able to check in on the participants to ensure things were going well and on the right track. These actions created a lasting bond that is still evident with the mentors and mentees that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

This study explored the influence that a mentorship program had on at-risk minority female students. The data served as the baseline for the implementation of such a program in my current district. The culturally responsive mentor program will improve the educational experiences of minority girls in middle school and provide an outlet for them to express themselves positively and productively. The program will give these young ladies the internal tools needed for success and the external tools necessary to empower them to take ownership of their futures.

Theoretical Framework

The developmental asset framework provides opportunities and experiences to promote school success and resiliency for at-risk youth (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). The skills target students aged 12–18 and focus on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect minority students and their SES (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). The CHARRM mentoring program in Lufkin, Texas, served as a platform to implement these positive youth development skills during weekly meetings and community projects with participants.

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The research questions investigate components of developmental assets related to adult-student relationships, student self-image, student perception of others, and the ability to regulate emotions. These components contribute to a student's ability to become self-sufficient in the future. In correlation with the development asset theory, the interview questions also focus on the participant's relationship with non-parental adults and the long-term impact of the mentoring program on their lives (Scales et al., 2005). The researcher used six categories out of the eight to validate the hypothesis that positive non-parental relationships and experiences contribute to positive student behavior trends. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the chosen categories and assets participants can strengthen or develop because of participation in the mentoring program.
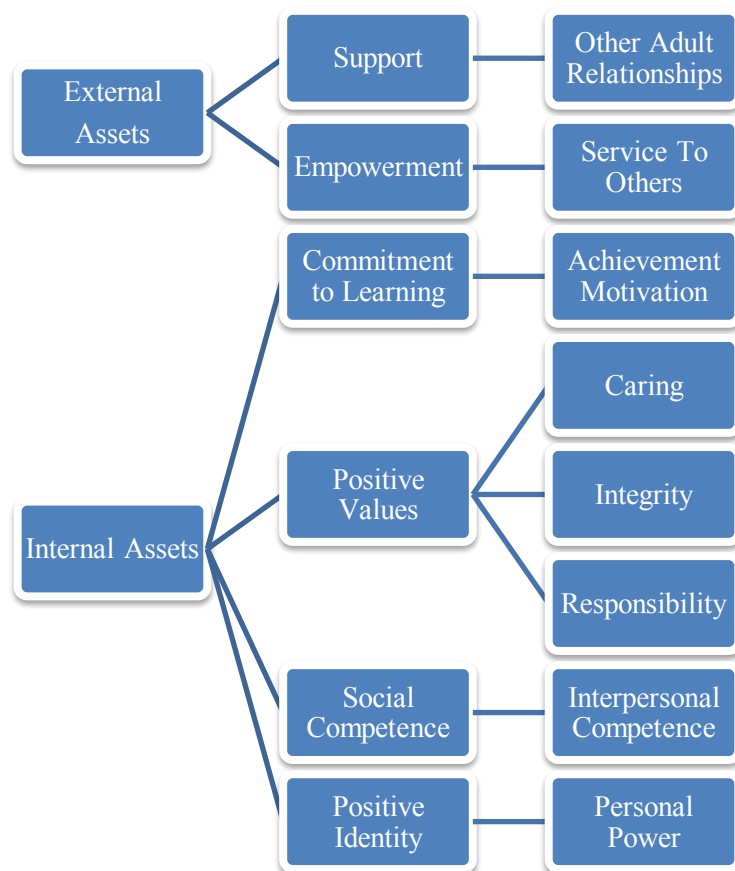
Figure 3.1. CRM developmental assets.

The first three selected categories, support, empowerment, and commitment to learning, focus on building external assets through opportunities extended to youth. All three categories concentrate on building a relationship and connection between the girls and their community and school (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). These categories also encourage the establishment of a sense of identity within the community. Furthermore, as youth serve in local neighborhoods, they begin to feel a sense of ownership. Community involvement is an empowering experience for students. Girls tend to become empowered to speak up when things are not right and feel an increased sense of responsibility to make their community a better place (Scales et al., 2005).

The following three categories of positive values, social competence, and positive identity center around developing internal assets. Adult role models provide opportunities for students to strengthen and build self-efficacy skills, set high expectations, and make plans for their future (Scales et al., 2005). Mentoring programs should motivate students to do well in school and take it more seriously, which helps establish a commitment to learning (Scales et al., 2005). Mentors help mentees develop positive values such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, and restraint (Scales et al., 2005). Lastly, the developmental asset framework shows that mentoring helps students develop a positive identity with high self-esteem and a sense of purpose (Scales et al., 2005). These competencies embody the intent of CHARRM to prepare young ladies for life after school.

The framework's design helped the researcher explore if culturally responsive mentoring helped these at-risk participants develop internal and external assets needed for positive development and resilience. The researcher examined the relationship

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between the mentor and mentee and its impact on developing these asses. In theory, mentoring programs should motivate students to do well in school and take it more seriously, which helps establish a commitment to learning (Scales et al., 2005). With time mentors help mentees develop positive values such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, and restraint (Scales et al., 2005). The semi-structured interview protocol used the long-term internal and external assets to determine if culturally responsive mentoring helped participants develop self-efficacy related to education and becoming productive citizens.

Research Design

This Problem of Practice utilizes a qualitative case study design to explore the long-term impact mentoring has on at-risk minority girls. Qualitative research seeks to gain an in-depth and understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). This case study allowed the researcher to obtain information first-hand from former participants to understand the long-term impact mentoring has on at-risk minority female students.

In this study, the participants shared their experiences regarding the mentoring program and its impact on their lives. The researcher chose a case study to understand if and how the mentoring program helped internalize and utilize the developmental asset framework (Yin, 2018). According to Yin, "Case studies are instrumental in the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within their real-world contexts, especially when the boundaries between trend and circumstances may not be evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 42).

A multiple-case study design was appropriate for this study. The researcher sought to study each participant independently to better understand their experiences and development because of the mentoring program into adulthood. Researchers use multiple

case studies when numerous cases relate to a particular phenomenon (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016). The researcher interviewed four participants of the CHARRM mentoring program to gain insight into the impact the program had on their development of skills related to positive decision-making and resilience.

This multiple case study evaluated the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on minority female students who participated in the program while in middle school and how they utilized the skills and assets attained during the program to guide their decision-making and empower them to be resilient during difficult times. By understanding this phenomenon related to the dropout rates of at-risk minority students, the researcher examined the effectiveness of the mentoring program. The framework selected for this study focuses specifically on developing internal and external skills necessary for success in four participants, supporting the need to utilize a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018). The multiple case study and the developmental asset framework were instrumental in helping me explore the effectiveness of culturally responsive mentoring with at-risk minority female students.

Site of Data Collection

The CHARRM mentoring program was implemented in 2013 at Lufkin Middle School (LMS) in Lufkin, Texas, to address the need for culturally responsive support for at-risk minority female students. The rationale for the CHARRM (Creating Honest and Respectable Role Models) mentoring program resulted from experiences and time spent mentoring and counseling at-risk minority females. While teaching at Lufkin Middle School, the researcher saw the need to provide at-risk minority students with a program that gave them a voice and allowed them to serve in their school and home communities.

Students needed a program that would provide them with the social-emotional skills necessary to express themselves and make better decisions. The program started in collaboration with the Communities in Schools (CIS) liaison and minority college students from Stephen F. Austin State University, who agreed to mentor students in exchange for community service hours. The program was a safe place for students to express themselves and establish relationships with adults other than parents or guardians.

Participants and Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling to identify participants for this study based on their prior experience with the CHARRM mentoring program. All participants were minority female students labeled at-risk and struggled with academic or behavioral issues during middle school. The initial phase of participant selection involved recruiting former participants of the mentoring program via social media. The researcher reached out via Facebook messenger to prospective participants and explained the intent of the research and the need for participants to share their experiences, and the impact the program had on them. The researcher sent invitations out to nine participants, and four agreed to participate. Participants who agreed to participate were then sent a quick survey through Google Forms to determine if they were enrolled in college or had any children. Interviews conducted via Zoom asked participants questions regarding the effects of the mentoring program on their education, career paths, and interpersonal skills that have helped them along the way. The researcher then conducted a within-case analysis of participant responses and compared cases participant responses to see if common themes emerged from their experiences in the mentoring program (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

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themes were then correlated with the six categories of the developmental asset framework to determine what assets any participants developed.

Qualitative Data Collection

The researcher used several data collection methods, including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This study relies heavily on understanding the participants' life experiences and decisions since high school graduation and into early adulthood. Participants' interviews sought to capture experiences and relationships impactful to their positive development of socio-emotional skills and resiliency. M. Patton (2015) states that "qualitative inquiry collects data from in-depth interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions on surveys, postings on social media, direct observations in the field, and analysis of documents. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest these steps for collecting the data during the data collection process: setting boundaries, collecting information, and establishing a protocol for recording data. The researcher must "find a place to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so they will provide good data (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers offered to meet with participants via Zoom conferencing, telephone interviews, or email to ensure their safety and comfort during their interviews.

The Questionnaire

Each participant was given a questionnaire before the semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire gathered information about participants' current professional and personal lives (see Appendix A). The questionnaire included twelve open-ended questions related to their experiences in the mentoring program, such as challenges they experienced, interactions with the mentors, and what impact the mentoring program had

on their decisions to further their education and contribute to their communities. Participants answered a survey to assess their current professional or academic status and if they had children. Participants answered the questions at their leisure to increase the authenticity of their responses. This flexibility helped ensure their answers were as accurate as possible. The participants received the questions via Google Forms and received a two-week turnaround to submit their responses.

The questionnaire focused on former participants' current life and the overall impact the mentor program had on their lives. The questionnaire gathered information about internal and external assets that participants acquired and continued using long-term (Yin, 2016). The questions allowed the participants to elaborate on the impact the mentoring program had on their long-term aspirations. Open-ended questions allowed participants full autonomy in their responses (Yin, 2016). The analysis of participants' responses to the questionnaire pointed to common themes and similar beliefs or viewpoints (Yin, 2016). Because of the established relationship and rapport between the researcher and participant, it is fair to assume that the answers to the questionnaire are accurate and truthful.

The Interviews

Due to Covid-19 and CDC guidelines, face-to-face interviews and open forums were not feasible. Therefore, one-on-one interviews occurred via ZOOM conferencing and Google Meets. These meetings ranged from 30–45 minutes. The researcher hand-transcribed the interviews. Before the interview, the participants received a list of the potential topics for discussion (see Appendix B). Participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences since middle school and how the mentoring program

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influenced their decisions. They were also allowed to provide suggestions to make the mentoring program more effective.

Interview questions aimed to determine participants' current employment, educational status, and socio-emotional status. The interview also evaluated the CHAARM program's impact on developing communication skills and self-efficacy and how participants perceive the program and its effectiveness as adults. When necessary, the researcher asked follow-up questions to shift focus and seek clarity (Yin, 2018). Questions focused on capturing the mentees' views and opinions on the CHARRM (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A timeline detailing the data collection and the significance of each one is provided (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

The following section details the data analysis process used to determine the impact of culturally responsive mentoring in the CHARRM mentoring program on at-risk minority female students.

Managing the Data and Memoing Emergent Ideas

The data organization occurred in three stages: compiling, disassembling, and reassembling the data (Yin, 2018). To organize the data for this study, the researcher began collecting data through a survey and questionnaire sent out to participants via google docs and scheduled one-on-one interviews. Both instruments assisted in determining the impact of the CHARRM mentoring program on the strengthening or development of assets from the Development Asset Theory. The researcher first organized the zoom interviews, questionnaires, and surveys into file folders after the transcription of the interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim as it the

recommended method of Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018). The researcher read the transcripts and responses several times to become immersed in the details. Second, an assessment of the information established general themes among the participants (Yin, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Third, memos or notes were added in the margins of phrases or ideas participants frequently used.

Describing and Classifying Codes into Themes

The next step in the analysis process was to code the data. For this research, the questionnaires and semi-structured interview notes were coded and put into an organized database using the participant's actual language. The researcher used coding to identify common experiences, outcomes, or thoughts the participants all shared. The first reading through the data aimed at developing the coding categories or classification systems based on participant responses (M. Patton, 2015). This convergence process required the researcher to determine categories and what data to place in each category (M. Patton, 2015). Then a new reading is done to start the formal coding systematically. The coding process allowed the researcher to organize and group the data and memos into the following categories: support, empowerment, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. An additional review expanded the data into specific assets related to each category. This process also allowed the researcher to condense the data into smaller, more significant themes based on the assets within each category. These shared assets were other adult relationships, service to others, achievement motivation, caring, integrity, responsibility, and personal power. The more specific codes allowed the researcher to establish meaningful themes used in the final phase of analysis.

The researcher then analyzed the language to identify common themes and categorize them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To identify common themes in the data, the researcher relied on the overarching themes of the developmental asset framework and used each category's assets to narrow the focus. This coding occurred by grouping data based on common themes that emerge from the categories or notes.

Themes in data analysis refer to the common ideas or codes participants provide in their responses. These emergent patterns in the data allowed the researcher to show the relationship between participant's experiences and the impact on their lives as they related to the effects of the mentoring program (Creswell, 2007).

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

The researcher made sense of the data through interpretation, in which the researcher makes judgments and determines what is meaningful (M. Patton, 2015). The researcher interpreted the categories and themes to determine surprises in the data, any dominant interpretations, or anything unusual (M. Patton, 2015). Each participant participated in the CHARRM mentoring program for one academic year. The researcher initially analyzed data from each participant by coding phrases and sentences that aligned to the eight assets pulled from the six categories: relationships with adults, providing service to others, achievement motivation, being caring and responsible, taking ownership of their future, and a developing sense of purpose for their lives. The researcher gained a deeper understanding of the participants and their experiences in the mentoring program through their narratives. The coded responses were then cross analyzed to determine common themes based on the six chosen categories of the developmental asset framework. The first two categories support and empower external

assets, which are skills participants developed because of resources, connections, and experiences acquired in their community. The four internal assets commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity focus on intrinsic skills that participants develop related to decision-making and self-efficacy.

Cross Case Analysis

A cross-case synthesis compared participant responses by identifying within-case patterns related to identified assets within each category (Yin, 2018). The analysis determined how and why participant responses are similar, thus creating emergent themes (Yin, 2018). This analysis across narrative responses provided the researcher with themes related to the commonly developed assets among the participants.

Validation Strategies

Data was validated using three of eight validity procedures recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). The three validity procedures utilized in this study included member checking, thick and rich descriptions, and reflexivity. The use of these three strategies ensured valid results from this study.

Member Checking

Member checking called for follow-up correspondence with the participants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's summary of themes and analysis of their conversation *(Creswell & Creswell, 2018)*. This practice allowed the reader to see data through the participant's lens. To ensure the precision that the participant's voices and experiences were authentic, the researcher shared the participants' narratives with them to ensure the accuracy of their stories via email. Participants were able to provide feedback

if needed to give their story the validity required. The cross-case analysis occurred after the participants verified their information.

Thick-Rich Description

A thick, rich description provides detailed narratives that allow the reader to share in the experience *(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018)*. Thick-rich descriptions ensure the findings are transferable between the researcher and those studied and take the reader into the setting described (Creswell, 2007; M. Patton, 2015). The researcher used direct quotes in the participant narratives to detail their experiences in the mentoring program in their own words. The researcher shared vivid details of the participant's experiences and emotions to give the readers a glimpse into their adolescent years.

Clarifying Researcher Bias or Engaging in Reflexivity

This process involves acknowledging researcher bias and past experiences to the reader that explains their purpose in doing the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher provided a narrative of her academic career related to the support she longed for during those years. She also discussed disparities among minority female students that she witnessed as an educator and how these experiences motivated her to mentor at-risk youth.

Ethical Considerations

Safeguards were put in place to protect participants in this study. Data collection began with an inquiry sent to the Internal Review Board (IRB) to study human subjects. This study did not meet the definition of human subject research because the subject

count is too low to yield results that would be generalizable to a broader population. After the clearance from IRB, the researcher sent an invitation to all participants to ensure equitable representation in the program for all girls who participated in the CHARRM mentoring program. Due to the previous and ongoing relationship with participants, the researcher obtained a verbal agreement for participation in the study. Second, the researcher scheduled a time for a secure and confidential zoom meeting interview at a time agreed on by the participant. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher provided participants with a statement explaining the study's purpose and collected information. Third, the participants received alternative identifiers, ensuring no way to directly expose their identity or link information. Participants received assurance that their data is/was kept confidential and not shared with anyone else. Open dialogue during the interviews enabled the participant and the researcher to communicate freely and ask questions through conversational interactions using their words and ideas to guide the discussion (Yin, 2016). This type of questioning also created a dialogue between the interviewer and the participant.

Limitations and Delimitations

When conducting research, limitations and delimitations must be taken into consideration. Limitations are considered factors outside of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). One limitation of this study is that the study group is a small sample size and may not represent the perspectives of all former mentees. All the former mentees could not participate in this research, meaning that many opinions and data points were unattainable at the time of the study.

Another limitation is that participants may struggle to recall several of the events during the mentoring program seven years ago. While they may verbalize the program's impact, they may have difficulty naming the specific experience that guided them to where they currently are. Participants may also fail to answer questions truthfully regarding their current educational and professional status (Simon, 2011). Due to embarrassment, some participants in this study may have altered their answers to avoid ridicule from peers. Participants might voice opinions in a more positive/negative way to change their narrative. Furthermore, participants described and their own lives. This self-narrative is their perception of success, which might not match the ideal of society's measures.

Time is another limitation in this study (Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This qualitative research relied on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to compare the program's past and present impact. The amount of time needed to understand their status and development is limited due to limited interview times and availability. It would be beneficial to observe their daily lives and see how they utilize the program's assets to get a complete picture of how the mentor program impacted their lives.

A delimitation for the study included the intentional selection of participants who were explicitly participants in the CHARRM mentoring program. The researcher set intended parameters for who and what the study focused on, such as at-risk female minority students and developing specific assets from the developmental asset framework (Simon, 2011; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019).

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on at-risk minority female students. To achieve this goal, the researcher began with a multiple case study approach. Participants were purposefully selected based on their participation in the CHARRM mentoring program. In this chapter, a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures outlines the steps taken to determine the long-term influence of culturally responsive mentoring on at-risk minority female students. Despite the Global Pandemic, Covid-19, this qualitative research sought to collect and analyze data from the participants to better understand their experiences with the mentoring program and the long-term impacts on their future. Data collection occurred using questionnaires, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. From these methods, common themes emerged that revealed the mentoring program's impact on minority female students, including support, empowerment, commitment to learning, positive values, self-competence, and positive identity. Chapter Four provides an analysis of these findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to determine the influence of

culturally responsive mentoring on at-risk minority female students. The study focused

specifically on the impact of the CHARRM mentoring program in the development of

eight internal and external assets from the developmental asset framework (Benson,

Scales, & Syversten, 2011) that enabled participants to thrive in the educational setting

and community. Youth who have positive experiences during their adolescent years

should build and develop what the Search Institute refers to as these developmental assets

(Foster, et al., 2005). The developmental asset framework comprises forty internal and

external assets considered the building blocks of youth development (Atkiss, Moyer,

Desai, & Roland, 2011).

The researcher collected data in the form of questionnaires and interviews from

the participants to assist the researcher in answering the following questions:

1. What experiences from the mentoring program do participants identify as
   impactful to their lives?

2. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of internal
   developmental assets in the participants?

3. What role did culturally responsive mentoring play in the attainment of external
   developmental assets in the participants?

As described in Chapter Two, the researcher based the conceptual framework

used in the current study on the Search Institute's development asset theory characterized

by Peter Benson and Peter Scales (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Figure 4.1 explains the characteristics of each category the researcher has selected for the study. The framework consists of 40 assets separated into eight categories; however, the researcher decided on eight assets related to the mentoring program's anticipated outcome. The researcher explored if and how participants developed the selected assets and how the culturally responsive mentoring program might have influenced these assets.
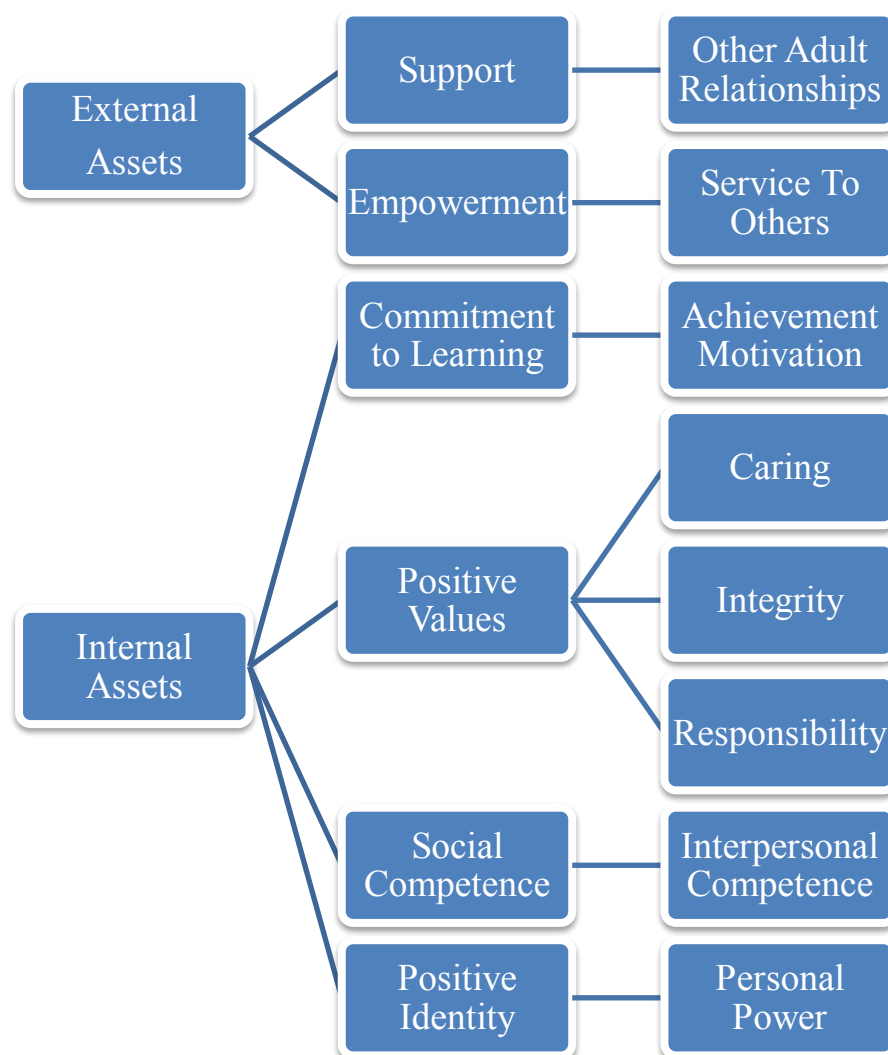
Figure 4.1. CRM developmental assets.

Chapter Four provides an overview of each participant individually, discusses their experiences in the CHARRM mentoring program, and summarizes the impact of their participation on their lives. The developmental asset framework provided a basis on which to review and analyze the interview data. The data presented common themes that emerged from participant interviews and the cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis explains emergent themes that developed collectively from participant responses (M. Patton, 2015). A summary of the participant findings concludes this section.

The Participants

The researcher discussed participant selection and sampling strategies in chapter three. Participant selection used convenience and purposeful sampling based on their previous participation in the CHARRM mentoring program (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This multiple case study focused on determining if participants who were part of a culturally responsive mentoring program developed specific developmental assets due to their experiences. The participants are currently college students, working full-time, or at-home single parents. Table 4.1 provides each participant's attributes, and the headings depict characteristics relevant to their participation in the study. The participants' ethnicity, present age, and ethnicity represent common indicators among minority at-risk female students. Participant's educational level and teen pregnancy are significant to their current situation. The researcher provides a narrative that further describes these attributes.

Table 4.1

Participant Profiles

Participant ID	Age	Dropout	Ethnicity	Teen Pregnancy	At-Risk	College
Paris	20	N	AA	Y	Y	Y
Brynea	19	N	AA/H	N	N	N
Mesha	20	N	AA	N	Y	Y
Kiara	21	Y	AA	Y	Y	N

Participant 1: Paris

Paris is a 20-year-old single mother of a four-year-old and is currently expecting her second child. She was selected to participate in the mentoring program due to her behavior and attendance during her middle school years. As the youngest child in her immediate family, Paris often missed school to care for her nieces and nephews in the home while her older sister worked. As a result, she was frustrated when she returned to school and often got into fights with other students and missed even more school days. Her grades also suffered, and she was in danger of failing seventh grade.

Early years/family/environment. Paris shared some of her family history and what life was like growing up. She grew up in a multi-generational home with her grandmother, mother, three siblings, and three nieces. Paris shared that she was very close with all her siblings and helped her sister with her kids. She expressed that "the house was crowded and loud," but it was a happy home for her. She said, "my childhood was normal, and my family was close, and we did everything together." Paris enjoys spending time with her family. Paris shared that her grandmother was the glue that held the family together and helped them with anything they needed. She said, "I loved having

my grandmother there to talk to and listen to my problems." She expressed that she never experienced being the family's baby because of her nieces, who were younger than her.

Middle school and high school. Paris lost her grandmother during the 7th grade and soon after fell into a dark place. After the loss of her grandmother, she started having a difficult time in school. She shared, "my grades started slipping, I started getting into a lot of fights, and it was so hard for me to trust people." She described how her attendance also suffered as a result. Paris explained that the CHARRM mentorship program came to her rescue. Paris credited her success to the CHARRM program, which she expressed, "I did not know if I was going to make it through the rest of the school year, but they showed me they cared about me and checked on me regularly." She expressed that the CHARRM program also taught her life-long lessons. Mentors often requested Paris do many things that were hard for her. One of her biggest challenges was facing the individuals with whom she often had a conflict.

> Girls always picked on me because I was behind in school, so I defended myself by beating them up. So, when I had to do the "Three Blind Mice" game with them and give the clues on how to get out of the maze, it was hard because I did not want to mess up and make fun of me. One of the hardest pushes for me in the CHARRM program was working with the group of girls that I was constantly getting into fights with. When we had to listen to each other to complete a task, it was hard for me because I did not like them. However, this experience taught me that I do not have to like someone to get a job done. I also learned that I am not always right. I had to stop and listen to what they had to say.

Paris expressed that the CHARRM program was instrumental in her growth and completion of her middle school years. She proclaimed, "CHARRM helped me go through one of the roughest times in my life. They were like a second family to me, especially after my grandmother died". She learned self-regulation skills and began to focus more on controlling her temper. Paris began to shift her focus to coming to school

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and catching up on her work. Her attendance also improved due to her sister finding childcare while she worked.

The void left from the passing of her grandmother continued to be a struggle for Paris throughout high school. She missed having someone to talk with, and Paris felt alone. She shared, "my grandmother was my everything. I had my mom too, but my granny was the rock of the family. Everyone came to her". Without her grandmother's guidance, Paris began to miss quite a bit of school and became pregnant during the 11th grade with her first child. At this time, she wanted to drop out of school and find a job so she would be able to take care of her baby. Paris' mentor, Ms. K, helped to fill the gap left when her grandmother died. Ms. K would not let me drop out. She called me every day to check on me and came by the school to make sure I was there." Paris said that Ms. K did everything she could to support her not to give up and encouraged her through graduation.

Paris explained, "It was a challenge but graduating from high school helped me to come out of that dark place." Her grandmother had such an impact on her and was her biggest supporter. She said, "I know my grandmother wanted me to do better, and my baby motivated me as well." She used the goals her grandmother had for her and her baby as motivation to complete high school. She explained, "My sister did not finish high school when she started having children." She was grateful for the support she had that helped her finish high school.

Impact of the CHARRM mentoring program. When asked about the impact CHARRM had on her, Paris stated, "The program made me want to go to school because they made it fun for us." She also added,

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We did many college-related things, such as touring the campus at SFA, watching the sororities do their strolls, and Lumberjack Day. The AKA's were like the aunties of the school. I could go to them for anything.

Paris considered the mentors like aunts because when she could not go to her mom directly and needed somewhere safe to go to, they made her feel like family. She constantly talked about the support she received when her grandmother died. She said, "the mentors helped me get back on track." Paris shared that college exposure while participating in CHARRM motivated her to go to college. She started at Prairie View A&M University, but the cost of attending did not allow her to stay there. She explained, "I always wanted to go to college, and when I had to leave because of the money, I chose online because it was more convenient for me as a mother and being pregnant." The mentors from CHARRM encouraged her and reminded her that she did not have to become a product of her environment. She discussed how these words motivated her to continue to work hard for a better life for herself and her daughter.

Paris shared that the mentoring program's most significant impact was encouraging the mentees to give back to their communities and become difference makers. She reminisced on one of the most memorable experiences she had in the program:

One of the most memorable moments for me was when we all took a tour of the mentees' neighborhoods to see how we could improve the area. This was very impactful because the CHARRM mentors went to our neighborhoods to show us how to make a difference and improve it. They did not judge where we lived or talk about things that were wrong. I remembered my mentor asking me what I wanted my neighborhood to look like, and I said clean with pretty flowers. We picked up trash and planted flowers at the entrance. Working in my community was special to me and made me feel important and like an adult making a difference.

Parish cherished this experience because of the impact it had on her.

Finally, Paris suggested incorporating after-school programs in all schools to keep the students engaged. She expressed, "many girls do not have anything to after school and could benefit from a mentoring program to help them stay out of trouble." She shared that a mentoring program could teach young ladies many different life skills to benefit from their teens and adulthood. Paris pointed out that providing a safe space after school could give educational support and structure young ladies may need.

Paris's responses to the questionnaire and the data collected from her interview provided evidence of the impact of culturally responsive practices on minority female students. Her responses suggested that the nurturing she received through the mentoring program played a significant role in her decision to go into nursing. Paris shared examples of different experiences with the mentors and other participants in the program who encouraged her. Paris's ability to apply the experiences she encountered during the mentoring program to her personal life improved her decision-making process and has proven to be essential skills that young girls could benefit from learning. The following case chronicles the educational and mentoring experiences of Brynea.

Participant 2: Brynea

Brynea is a 19-year-old biracial young lady currently living with her boyfriend and working full-time. She participated in the CHARRM mentoring program due to her school behavioral issues and lack of social-emotional skills, which is evident by her inability to manage her emotions and develop healthy relationships with her peers. Brynea suffered from adjustive mood disorder (Bipolar) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She often struggled to control her emotions and would often have outbursts in class. Brynea shared, "I would get upset in class, and when I tried to calm

down, people would make fun of me for crying and everything, I was trying to hold in would come out." It was hard for Brynea to make friends because she was often worried about their perception of her.

Early years/family/environment. Brynea was adopted when she was 18 months old. She grew up in a single-parent home with her biological younger sister, two brothers, another sister, and her adopted mom. She expressed that she felt loved, but something was still missing. She shared, "my mom gave me everything I wanted, and we always went on family vacations, but I always wanted to know why my birth mom didn't keep me." She said the struggle with dealing with her birth mom giving her up eventually caused strained relationships with her adopted mother.

Middle school/high school. Brynea shared although she was active in sports and her local church during her middle and high school years, she struggled to find her way. She shared that during her elementary years, she struggled in school and was eventually diagnosed with Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She told me, "I received a formal diagnosis of depression, adjustive mood disorder (Bipolar) in addition to ADHD. My relationship with my mother became even more strained because I did not feel the need to take the medication needed to help me." Brynea said she felt like the medicine was for crazy people, and she was not crazy, so it was a daily struggle with her and her mom. She expressed that this was a very challenging time in her life because she was out of control and that her mom had to call the police on her. Brynea said, "I had so many thoughts and frustration in my head, and I still wanted a relationship with my

biological mother." She said her emotions were all over the place, and she could not control them.

Brynea shared that although she did not want to be medicated, she always wanted someone to talk to about her emotions. She expressed that becoming a part of the CHARRM mentorship program was what she needed. One of her favorite parts of the mentorship program was circle time.

> The 'circle time' was everything to me because I could just let it all out, and I was never judged. That was my time to say whatever I wanted to say, to release all that I had been holding in, and it felt good. I never felt like the teachers in the class understood what I was going through. They were nice and everything, but I never felt like they understood me.

Circle time was when all participants got together with the mentors and passed a ball around, giving the floor to whoever wanted to speak. The girls were free to talk about whatever was on their minds and knew they were in a safe space to express themselves. This time was special to Brynea as she stated it was her time to "release." She needed circle time to talk about how hard it was to fit in and get her teachers to understand her.

> When I would get overwhelmed in the class, I could see the frustration on the teachers' faces. I felt they were frustrated and just wanted me to go. It was hard for me to explain what was going on because I could tell they were tired of me. I just stayed to myself in class.

The mentoring program proved to be a support system and a safe place for Brynea. Although she had issues going on at home, she attributed the mentoring program and mentors to helping her stay focused on her academics and graduate from high school. She said,

> I was more focused and made sure I completed all my work. My grades went up because I did not have any missing assignments. I understood the content better. I also had help from my mentor when I felt frustrated or was struggling. The mentors were also there to help me when I did not understand.

CHARRM proved to be impactful for Brynea and kept her focused on school and getting her work done.

Impact of the mentoring program. Brynea shared that the CHARRM mentoring program gave her a sense of belonging. She explained, "I felt like I could be myself and express what was on my mind. I liked being able to say what was on my mind without being judged". She expressed that it was difficult to speak to her mom because "she always gets upset when I tried to tell her stuff, so I always kept it to myself." Brynea further explained that the mentoring program was her dumping ground because she could share all her problems. She shared, "CHARRM provided me with someone I can comfortably speak with about various things I am going through personally. The mentors made me feel safe and comfortable expressing myself. They were always positive and encouraging."

CHARRM motivated Brynea to focus on a career where she could help others. She aspires to become a nurse like her grandmother or a teacher like her mother and the sponsors from the CHARRM program. CHARRM pushed her to acknowledge and accept what she knew about her culture because that made her who she was. She expressed that the "CHARRM mentoring program highlighted the positive brilliance in my culture and inspired me to become a better person each day." Brynea communicated that her interactions with the mentors were always positive and easy to relate to. She also said that it made it easier for her to share her thoughts because the mentors looked like her. Brynea revealed, "I never had a sense of belonging anywhere, but CHARRM gave me a connection to girls like me who were also struggling but striving to be successful in life."

Brynea also acknowledged that her experience equipped her with the skills to help other young ladies overcome the challenges in their lives.

Present status. Brynea is currently living with her boyfriend and working as a shift leader at a local restaurant. Her college track was interrupted when she reunited with her biological father. She explained, "I left college after reuniting with my biological father and believing the many broken promises he made to me, and I messed up, but I am getting it together now." She reflected on her adopted mother stating, "I finally started to see what my mom was protecting me from, and now I just got to find my way back." Brynea reflected on all her life lessons and used the things she learned to reach her future goals.

She realizes that no matter what is going on in her life, she is accountable for her decisions and actions and is ready to get back on track. Brynea's recollection of her experiences in the mentoring program provided evidence of the impact providing emotional support to at-risk minority students has on their social-emotional development.

> CHARRM helped me to keep my head on straight. There were times when I felt like giving up and had nowhere to turn, and the mentors were right there to listen to my problems. That always helped me find my way back.

Her determination to better herself and try to get on the right track validates the development of social competency skills needed to thrive. Brynea's resilience is evident as she continues to get her life back on the right path. The third narrative is about Mesha, who participated in the mentoring program during her middle school years.

Participant 3: Mesha

Mesha is a 20-year-old African American woman who graduated in 2018 from high school. She is the older of two children living in a single-parent home. During her

middle school years, Mesha was active in athletics and cheerleading and maintained good grades. Her defiance of authority in the classroom prompted her participation in the mentoring program. Mesha had a tough time conforming to the expectations of the class environment when she could do what she wanted to do at home. She often went back and forth with teachers in the class and was seen as subordinate and disrespectful. Teachers usually removed Mesha from the class for non-compliance, and her work suffered as a result.

Early years/family/environment. Mesha grew up in a single-family home with her mother and little brother. She recounted, "My brother's dad stepped in as a father figure in the absence of my dad." She also shared that they spent a lot of family time at her grandmother's house. "We all enjoyed going over to my granny's home for family gatherings and being with our cousins," Mesha said. She explained that she always had her mom, grandmother, and aunties to go to in times of need. She shared, "We were all very close and depended on each other for everything." Mesha would meet up with her cousins at her grandmother's house every day when they went to school.

Mesha noted that her grandmother was the "backbone" of the family. She shared that her grandmother had four daughters, three of which became pregnant in high school. Mesha explained that her one aunt, who did not get pregnant in high school, is her role model. She added, "My aunt went on to college and is now a lawyer. I want to follow in her footsteps and graduate from college. I am working on becoming a pharmacy technician."

Middle school/high school. When asked to recall experiences from middle school, Mesha talked about how she was fond of visiting with mentors. Mesha shared,

> School can be tough, and even as a young kid, you have hard days, and being able to talk to the mentors helped. There is so much depression going on that people do not know about it, and they let that stuff build up and do not have anybody to talk to them.

She expressed that having the mentors available and stepping out of class and talking to someone was very impactful in her life. She shared, "This helped me to get out of situations that would have usually resulted in me going to the office on numerous occasions." Mesha said she had good experiences in high school and appreciated the spontaneous check-in by the mentors. She said, "these check-ins helped me and motivated me when I became discouraged."

Impact of the mentoring program. Mesha shared that one of the most significant impacts that the CHARRM mentoring program had on her was teaching her how to handle difficult situations without getting into an argument. "CHARRM taught me how to step back and take a few minutes to internalize stuff before I respond," she recollected. Mesha shared that she is more level-headed and now better responds in difficult and uncomfortable situations. Mesha shared, "having self-control has helped me throughout the last three years of college. I have been able to refocus when I get upset or overwhelmed." She is grateful for these lifelong lessons she learned from the CHARRM program.

Mesha explained that she also learned to be intentional in making others feel good about themselves. She reminisced on volunteering at the Special Olympics.

CHARRM helped me develop an appreciation for all people, and I enjoyed making them happy. It felt good to see the athletes smile and to know that it was because of us spending the day with them and cheering them on in their events.

She shared that this experience also helped her realize how fortunate she was to do so many different things in life. Mesha noted that this experience helped her make it a point to impact someone every day positively.

Mesha said that her desire to pursue college was also due to the motivation and encouragement from the mentors in the CHARRM program. "If it were not for my mentor, I would have never believed that I could go to college," she stated. She shared that she never believed she was the 'college type' before she had a mentor. She acknowledged that she thought about getting a good job, but college was never on her mind. Mesha shared that her mentor made her believe that college was for everyone, even her.

Present status. Mesha is currently completing her third year of college to become a pharmacy technician. She is very motivated to finish college and become the first college graduate in her immediate family. She shared, "CHARRM pushed me to pursue my goals and be the best I can be. I struggled with one of my classes and had to retake the course, but I was determined to finish". The mentors taught me how to create and follow a schedule, and I have incorporated these skills in my college years.

Mesha's interview and responses revealed how authentic relationships and focused planning positively impact program participants' lives. According to Mesha, her resilience and tenacity to pursue her college degree stemmed from the support of mentors in the program. She acknowledged her newfound sense of self-control and self-management resulted from her relationships with the mentors. She focuses on making a

difference and giving back to her community, which also stems from the intentional and authentic experiences encountered during the mentoring program. The last participant, Kiara, shares her experiences and trials since exiting the mentoring program and navigating life as a single parent.

Participant 4: Kiara

Kiara is a single mother who is currently living with her grandmother. She did not finish high school and is currently unemployed. She was selected to participate in the mentoring program due to her constant disruptive behavior in the classroom and defiance of authority figures. Kiara struggled to comply with her teachers due to her mistrust of adults. She recalled, "my whole life was spent doing what adults told me to do, and I was tired of it. I remember just telling teachers no because I finally had control". Kiara's defiance often got her suspended from school due to the verbal disrespect that she displayed also. Her trauma from seeing her mother get abused left her angry, and she often expressed it in the class by lashing out at other adults.

Early years/family/environment. Kiara grew up in a home with both parents but later moved to live with her grandparents because of her abusive home environment. Kiara recalled, "My dad used to beat my mom, and my little sister and I would hide in our rooms until it was over. She never let us tell my grandmother anything, so we had to pretend everything was ok". She shared that her mom left her dad when she was in third grade, and they went to live with her grandparents. She said, "once she decided to leave, my sister and I were so happy. I felt safe once I was back with my grandparents, and life seemed normal again." Kiara saw this move as a new start for her mom, her sister, and herself.

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Middle school/high school. Kiara was in and out of alternative school due to defiance and inability to follow the rules. She shared that she suffered sexual abuse during this time as well.

> I was mad at my family because they told me not to say anything, so I was angry and not in a good place to learn every day at school. I did not understand what I did wrong and why no one was punished for what they did to me. I felt like no one cared about me and what happened to me. I felt like I did something wrong because no one was trying to help me. I did not understand why I could not tell on someone who hurt me.

Kiara shared that middle school and high school were challenging because she was never in a good space to learn. Because she never healed from her abuse, the anger caused her to act out towards authority figures and became a discipline problem. Kiara struggled throughout high school and eventually dropped out. The CHARRM mentoring program served as where Kiara could express herself more and sort through some of the pain and trauma she had endured.

Impact of the mentoring program. When asked about the mentoring program's impact, Kiara shared that the mentoring program gave her a place to let out all she was holding in. She said, "my family always wanted to keep everything quiet and move on as nothing happened, but the mentoring program gave me a place to vent. I could let out all that I was holding in". Kiara said that the mentoring program was her safe space to say what she wanted to say. She said the mentors were her support system and helped her through a dark time in her life. Kiara shared, "I just remember feeling free when I was able to speak my truth without being judged or reprimanded for how I felt." CHARRM allowed her to be transparent and not hold anything back. Kiara noted:

> I became more outgoing and willing to answer questions aloud and have a more positive attitude, especially in group assignments. CHARRM helped me see some

adults care about me, and I did not have to carry all that stuff around I was trying to hide.

Present status. Kiara is currently unemployed and still living with her grandparents, with a 1-year-old daughter. She shared she did not complete high school and explained that she had been trying to go back for her GED. Kiara said, "I understand the importance of completing my degree or obtaining a trade, but it is hard to be motivated." She wants to get her life together soon because she wants a better life for her daughter. She does not want her daughter to experience the challenges she faced. She expressed, "I want my baby to have the best in life and to see her mama do her best in life. My goal is to get my GED and maybe become a Nephrology nurse like my grandmother." Kiara seemed determined to change the narrative of her present state.

Kiara's interview responses highlighted how environmental factors limit the attainment of internal assets needed for developing resilience and having a positive view of one's future. Her toxic home environment and traumatic life experiences served as a barrier to her progress, for which she continues to struggle today at the age of 20. While she plans to obtain her GED and go on to school, the environment in which she lives has presented several obstacles preventing that from happening.

Collective Participant Summaries

All four participants shared experiences from their academic years and time spent in the CHARRM mentoring program. Participants shared experiences and reflections of their time in the mentoring program and key lessons they have internalized and applied to the last few years of their lives. The researcher analyzed participant responses and identified them according to the categories and assets of the developmental asset

framework. In the next section, the researcher cross-referenced individual responses to identify common themes related to the developmental asset framework.

Cross-Case Analysis

As part of the data analysis procedure, the researcher compared all four narratives utilizing cross-case analysis. The researcher used framework analysis to determine if the participants' experiences in the CHARRM mentoring program attributed to the positive development of assets needed for resilience and self-efficacy (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to compare each case to establish themes and commonalities related to the positive development of eight internal and external skills from the developmental asset framework through conscious experiences provided by caring adults (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The cross-case analysis organized results first by examining and comparing the four participant narratives for similarities in responses. These responses were then broken down into common themes and categorized accosting to the six categories from the developmental asset framework.

Participant Narratives

Several similarities emerged from the participant narratives. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the developmental assets categories participants shared. In their narratives, participants referenced various assets that they had developed over time, including assets influenced by their participation in the mentoring program.

Table 4.2

Participant Narratives

Category	Paris	Brynea	Mesha	Kiara
Support	X	X	X	X
Empowerment	X	X	X	X
Commitment to Learning	X	X	X	
Positive Values	X	X	X	X
Social Competencies	X		X	
Positive Identity	X	X	X	X

Framework Categories

      The developmental assets framework suggest that students exposed to meaningful situations and experiences in their communities gain a sense of self-worth and have the potential to develop forty internal and external assets that are essential to positive development during adolescence (Benson et al., 2001; Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The participants recalled significantly impactful experiences and how those experiences helped them develop and strengthen assets in the interviews. The researcher organized the assets into six categories from the framework model: support, empowerment, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. The following section examines each of the six categories in detail.

      Support. All four participants referenced the amount of support they received while participating in the mentoring program. Participants specifically referenced other adult relationships and the caring school climate they experienced. The caring school

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environment and relationships with mentors significantly impacted how they navigated their adolescent years (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). During the interview, Paris often referred to the mentors as her 'aunties and the comfort level she had talking to them. She also recalled at the beginning of the program when she did not get along with some of the other girl mentees and how she got to know them through the team building activities, and they are all still close today because of that. She said, "In our mentoring group, we're all like family, so anytime I have a problem, I can call one of my sisters or mentors in my group." Paris said the loss of her grandmother and the love shown during that time solidified her love for everyone in the group. She also said the mentors made her feel safe. Brynea found support needed at times in the mentoring program. Because of the strained relationship with her mother and inability to express herself freely, having the mentors help navigate her thoughts was the support she needed during that time in her life. Mesha constantly talked about how the mentors being there for her during hard times helped her when she was not in a space to learn. She shared, "I'll never forget the mentors and older girls in our program who were role models to me, and they helped me become a role model to others." Even during her high school years, the random calls from mentors were just the boost she needed to keep going. Kiara had so much going on in her immediate family, and she felt the mentoring program helped her hold it together by just calling, letting her know they cared. She said there was someone there to help her when she reached out. The mentoring program was her safe place, and she knew they would make sure she was okay. Again, the authentic experiences and relationships served as a platform for motivating participants and giving them a sense of ownership in their future decisions.

Empowerment. All four participants referenced elements of becoming empowered when recalling their time in CHARRM. Students become empowered through meaningful experiences in their communities and opportunities to reflect on what they learned from those experiences (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Empowerment is an external asset that includes youth finding their value in the community, providing service to others, and serving as a resource (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Providing youth with opportunities to serve in their local communities gives them a sense of fulfillment and purpose (Benson et al., 2001). Youth see their worth and begin to understand the importance of contributions in society when given opportunities (Benson et al., 2001; Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). All participants seemed invested in giving back to their communities or society after participating in the CHARRM program. For example, Paris shared that she connected with her community by trying to make it better. She mentioned the times they participated in events in her community,

> I connected with my community by trying to make it better. Volunteering was important because my mentors taught me to gain an understanding of my neighborhood. Even though the neighborhood was not fancy, there were so many good things in our community. I felt connected to my culture because it was where I lived. We did events in my neighborhood, visited areas that I went to often. It was a part of my every day. My neighborhood represented who I was then and is part of who I am now. In the beginning, I thought we were going to go to places where rich people lived or areas that would make me feel ashamed of where I lived. I am so glad we did not. It was more meaningful to me to my community look better. It made us feel good about where we lived.

Mesha shared that she wanted to help the younger girls in the community. She currently does community service through her college but plans to return home and give back to her community.

> I am more vested in helping the younger girls in the community receive the support that I did, and I want to show them that it is ok to be proud of where

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they are from and not stay there. I am not ashamed of where I am from, but I want to make the younger girls' experiences better.

She shared that many young adults and children look up to her and sometimes even older adults in her community. Mesha recalled, "CHARRM taught me how to be a role model for others in my community by just making a difference where I live. If it was nothing but picking up trash, I made a difference." These experiences motivated all participants to see their value in their communities and their impact on giving back. Youth begin to see themselves as a resource and network with adults in the community when given opportunities to serve others (Search Institute, 2021; Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). They should also ensure youth feel safe by talking with them about safety and work with the child to feel safer (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The program gave participants the sense that they could accomplish things and make things happen. Their experiences in the program gave them an intrinsic sense of purpose and power. Youth are empowered to become productive members of society when guided by a responsible adult (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). These adults help them find their independence while guiding them along the way with support and suggestions. Youth begin to network with their communities and see themselves as a resource when given meaningful opportunities to interact and serve others (Search Institute, 2021; Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). As young women become more active in their communities, they begin to see the impact of their contributions and feel empowered to do more and make a difference. Mentors providing these opportunities ensure the girls develop in this area.

Commitment to learning. Participants focused on experiences that motivated them to achieve and recalled encounters that pushed them to do better in school. Commitment to learning focuses on a participant's motivation to do well in school and actively engage in their learning (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Participants all talked about their commitment to learning and the experiences that motivated them to further their education. When youth are encouraged to think about their goals and make plans to achieve them, they take a greater interest in their learning (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Students also begin to focus on life-long education beyond high school. The mentoring program exposed participants to college life and supported participants to complete their schoolwork and improve their grades. All participants except for Kiara had a plan to attend college or are currently going. Paris and Mesha both shared that it was the mentors who motivated them to keep going to school. Paris stated that she would have never believed she could go to college if it had not been for the mentors. Her initial goal was to find a good job and make a lot of money, but the mentors showed her that it was possible to go to school.

Although she could not continue at a traditional four-year university, she moved forward and took virtual classes. Brynea shared that the program increased her interest in attending college. She said, "I know that education is the key to success, and I hope to encourage everyone to push themselves to be and do their best." While she is not currently attending college, her goal is to get back in or get certified in a trade. Mesha said that "Quitting is not an option." She is in her third year of college and became frustrated with one class she has retaken four times, but she is determined to get it done to

hire a tutor and reduce her hours at work. All these young ladies attribute the mentoring program with shifting their mindset to education beyond high school.

Mesha stated she is determined to graduate from college and continue going until she receives her doctorate. She shared, "my family does not have many graduates, so I want to be the example for my little cousins and maybe even older family members." Brynea is very committed to learning because of her experiences in the mentoring program. She shared that it is always fun when learning something new. She said, "it's almost as though it's refreshing." Kiara is still committed to making a better future for herself by completing school.

> I know that I am responsible for my learning, and my current situation does not determine my future. I am determined to change my family, so I will finish school and be successful. I know that I want better for myself and my children and the only way is education. I want nothing less than the best for us, and I am determined to learn and elevate.

Helping participants see the value of education or securing a trade is essential to shift low-income neighborhoods' dynamics. This realization of the importance of education happens when youth are shown options outside of their communities and exposed to different thought processes.

Due to environmental factors beyond the mentoring program's control, Kiara did not focus on education as anticipated. Homelife and family issues seemed to shift her mindset to more of a survival mode. Her attendance rate began to decline, and she eventually dropped out of school. She was also unsuccessful in the alternative education program provided by her district. Kiara's situation suggested that not all students are as successful in the mentoring program, and environmental factors and family issues must be considered when setting expectations and goals for students.

Positive values. In the CHARRM program, participants worked with their mentors to develop an intrinsic desire to help others and accept responsibility for their actions (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Positive values are developed in youth when they volunteer and contribute to the community and have discussions and reflective time surrounding how their choices and behaviors guide their lives (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Participants often reflected on their actions during their sessions with mentoring and made goals to do better the next time.

The inclination to make better choices reflects participants' developing positive values. When discussing these positive values, participants all indicated a desire to help others, take responsibility for their actions and prioritize integrity. All four participants talked about their future for themselves, from college to becoming nurses. Paris shared that she believed in herself and saw the possibility of accomplishing her goals because of motivation from her mentors. She said, "I am more optimistic about things and take every day one at a time. I have learned to accept people and things for what they are and don't allow them to determine my attitude." Mesha talked about how her experiences with the mentors consistently throughout high school and now into college have motivated her to help with the Special Olympics inspired her to want to make others happy. She went on to share, "it felt good to make other people happy, and that is something I want to keep doing." She is also looking forward to giving back to her community and helping young girls stay on the right path and go to college. At-risk minority students must develop and strengthen their interpersonal skills related to caring for others and being responsible for their actions (Benson, et al., 2001). The participants who employed self-reflective behaviors could better see the impact of their actions and make changes that ultimately

lead to positive values. Paris often recalled how CHARRM mentors helped her to see the error of her ways.

> I was handling my problems the only way I knew how and that was to fight, but CHARRM helped me talk through my issues without being physical, and I found that a lot of times, it was a misunderstanding.

These positive values enabled the participants to become more independent and make better decisions that improved their lives.

Social competence. One goal of the mentoring program was to help the participants develop and strengthen three assets within the social competencies category: conflict resolution, decision-making, and establishing relationships. When mentors provide youth freedom to make their own decisions and offer support as they plan their futures, they become more aware of their place in society and its impact on their future (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The development of these skills empowered participants to react and engage within social encounters. Responses from the interviews and questionnaires revealed that participants walked away from the mentorship program with these skills strengthened. Mesha shared that the mentoring program and the mentors helped guide her to determine her career path and stay focused on her future. Paris said that she did not have as many altercations throughout her high school years because she remembered some self-regulation strategies, such as counting down from ten to refocus. She realized that she is responsible for her actions. Paris said, "I try not to give up on situations when I get upset and weigh out my options. I also learned to ask for help." Brynea shared that instead of becoming overwhelmed, she has learned to take a step back, refocus, and handle one problem at a time. Kiara said that she had to remember that she is not responsible for what people do to her, but she is responsible for her response.

Youth must be proactive and plan for their future, and know how to respond in all situations. These self-efficacy skills are vital to becoming productive citizens and build resilience (Benson et al., 2001; Scales et al., 2005). Youth also begin to look at themselves in a more positive light when given time to reflect on their lives and choices.

Positive identity. Providing at-risk youth with opportunities to strengthen and grow their self-esteem is essential for positive development. As youth begin to feel they have control over circumstances and develop a sense of purpose in their lives, their positive identity is strengthened (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011).

Participants in the CHARRM program worked on developing improved interpersonal relationships. Kiara shared that she is learning not to let her circumstances determine her outcome. She realized that circumstances are temporary, and she must keep pushing. Kiara said, "I know that other people will be who they are, and I have to accept them for that. I don't have to be friends with everyone, but we both have to respect one another for who and what we are." Mesha reflected on how the program helped her change her negative mindset and way of thinking. She shared, "I was able to see how prior behaviors and attitudes that I once displayed did not look good, nor will they inspire the young ladies I want to make a difference with today." Brynea's outlook is that she is the master of her fate. She can paint her future in whatever colors she chooses. Paris said, "I may not be where I want to be in life, but I have time to make changes. There is still hope for greatness, and I'm not giving up on my dreams." All participants agreed they must believe in themselves before anyone else will. They must know their worth and their importance in society to develop a positive identity

truly. This positive identity then leads to resilience in the face of adversity and keeps pushing.

In summary, the cross-case analysis of participant narratives revealed common responses to these assets: support, empowerment, and commitment to learning because of participating in the CHAARM program. Participant responses assisted the researcher in answering the research questions. All participants discussed positive values, social competencies, and positive identities they developed because of their time in the mentoring program. The intentional practices of the mentors in providing meaningful experiences and authentic relationships proved impactful to the positive development and application of these skills in the participants' lives. The following section includes information on responses to the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

This case study investigated and answered the following research questions, what experiences from the mentoring program do participants identify with as impacting their lives, and the role of culturally responsive mentoring in attaining internal and external developmental assets. The following section provides answers to both questions.

Research Question 1: What Experiences from the Mentoring Program Do Participants Identify with as Impacting Their Lives?

The participants recalled several experiences during their time in the mentoring program that impacted their lives—some of those included round-table discussions, community service, tutoring Sessions, and team-building activities. A description of each experience and its influence on the participants is below.

Round-table discussions. The mentoring program provided time each week for participants to share feelings, thoughts, or whatever they wanted during round-table meetings. Participants shared that the emotional support during round table discussions substantially impacted them and helped them navigate their middle school years. All participants shared that having an ear during times of grief, isolation, family issues, and frustration helped guide them through some of the most challenging times in their lives. Each participant walked away from the program feeling heard and empowered. The round table discussions and team-building activities also impacted how participants engaged in conflict resolution and built relationships with others. The participants developed skills that helped them avoid conflicts and refocus their thinking. These sessions were instrumental in helping the young ladies navigate some of their most difficult times and make better choices.

Community service. Most participants reflected on time spent cleaning up the local housing projects, toy drives, and food drives as being impactful in their lives. Participants stated that giving back in their community allowed them to see the importance of giving back and working in their communities to make a difference. Seeing the cultural value in their community and cultivating a mindset to make a difference and give back is an important asset that participants seemed to develop. Special Olympics was an annual event where volunteers assist special needs athletes in getting to each of their events and cheering them on as they compete. Participants recalled how the program gave them an appreciation of their health and well-being because they could help people who could not help themselves. Bringing joy to individuals and seeing their smiles helped them see the effect a good deed can have on others.

Tutoring sessions. Some of the participants talked about how the tutoring and

planning sessions helped them stay focused in school and get better grades. Mentees were

required to keep detailed all assignments and were responsible for keeping track of their

grades. Tutoring focused specifically on the areas where students needed help, and they

were required to spend time each week completing assignments to bring their grades up.

Participants shared the sessions helped keep them focused on improving their grades and

becoming accountable for their academic achievement. The academic support from the

check-ins to tutorial sessions and time management plans also helped push participants to

continue their educational careers.

Team building activities. All participants talked about the team-building activities

during the mentoring sessions. Some recalled the "Three Blind Mice" game and how they

had to talk each other through an obstacle course while others on the side tried to distract

them and give them bad directions. The girls still remembered that the activity's goal was

to remember who their real friends are, block out all the distractions, and focus on the

plan. These activities were always competitive but ended with a roundtable discussion to

ensure all participants internalized the message.

*Research Question 2: What is the Role of Culturally Responsive Mentoring in the
Attainment of Internal Developmental Assets?*

During the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, the researcher asked

participants to describe the role CHARRM played in mentoring related to their cultural

needs in attaining developmental assets. All four participants credited their experiences

with developing internal (self-regulation) and external (utilizing resources) needed for

success. Eight assets were selected as part of this study to determine the effectiveness of

mentoring at-risk minority female students. The six internal assets that youth develop intrinsically included being motivated to achieve, caring, having integrity, showing responsibility, knowing who they are, and knowing their self-worth. Participants shared how the mentoring program helped them to build and strengthen these assets within themselves. The section below describes the role CHARRM mentoring program played in enhancing or developing these specific internal and external assets in participants.

The following section details the categories related to internal and external assets that participants developed or strengthened intrinsically and through outside resources because they participated in the CHARRM mentoring program. Internal assets are skills that youth develop intrinsically to guide themselves and decision-making (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). The assets build resilience and self-efficacy in youth. External assets are the opportunities and resources mentors provide to youth to assist in their positive development (Benson & Scales, 2009). Youth are provided opportunities to establish these assets when strengthening relationships within families, communities, and schools through different organizations (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). As a result, youth begin to understand the value they have and their contribution to society.

Internal asset: Commitment to learning. Youth become more invested in their education when they are shown the importance of it. Youth develop a commitment to learning when they are engaged in school and care about schoolwork. (Benson & Scales, 2009). All four participants shared that the emphasis the mentoring program put on their education helped them see the importance of completing school or finding a professional trade. Mesha shared that having someone take the time and show her how to plan effectively has helped her succeed until this point in college. Paris talked about the

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college campuses' tours, and talking with college students with similar backgrounds was instrumental in motivating her to keep going no matter what.

Internal asset: Positive values. A culturally responsive mentoring program aims to help minority female students establish a sense of purpose and find their power through intentional experiences and practices. All four participants talked about how the round table discussions played a significant role in developing positive values towards themselves and others. Brynea said that "having someone there to listen and pour back into me made a difference when I needed it the most." In addition, providing the participants with access to social, emotional support throughout the school day proved beneficial to their overall well-being and how they perceived themselves and their attitude towards future aspirations.

Internal asset: Social competencies. All participants credited the relationships with mentors and the weekly self-reflective activities to focus on their future actions. The four participants all seemed to feel that having a program that focused on helping them in their personal lives (family, school, and their community) and providing them with conflict resolution strategies during weekly sessions helped them become better planners and work out their problems more calmly. Two participants attributed the mentoring program to help them abstain from sex and secure their future. Still, environmental factors hinder the other two from making it through high school without a baby.

Internal asset: Positive identity. Having someone to talk to that related to their struggle and having someone to follow up with and someone they have been through, and Mesha credited the mentors in the program to help her find her purpose. Adults

encourage students to have a confident perception of themselves by focusing on their strengths and understanding they control their future (Search Institute, 2021). In addition, adults strengthen youth's positive identity by supporting them through the highs and lows in their self-esteem, increasing as they get older (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Mesha shared that the follow-up check-ins into her college years motivated her to keep going because she always had someone pouring positive words into her. She shared:

> Mrs. K (her mentor) would come by to check on me throughout high school, and she even sends me encouraging words now. That means so much to me because even as an adult, having someone give me positive words has motivated me and kept me focused.

CHARRM provided these participants with experiences and relationships that motivated them to give back to others and stay focused on their future.

Research Question 3: What is the Role of Culturally Responsive Mentoring in the Attainment of External Developmental Assets?

External asset: support. Support relates to those relationships youth establish with adults other than parents and their impact on their educational careers. Youth need this support to guide their decision-making and their journey through adolescence to independence *(Atkiss, Moyer, Desai, & Roland, 2011)*. In addition, these relationships serve to provide youth with the support they may not have otherwise.

Participant responses revealed the development of solid relationships between the participants and mentors. Each participant explained how having a relationship with the mentors on campus allowed them to manage the emotional shifts during their middle school years and were a consistent support system. Paris shared that CHARRM mentors were caring and kind to her when she needed it more. She recalled, "during the time my grandmother died, I remember always having someone I could turn to." The emotional

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and financial support shown showed that the school could be an encouraging and caring environment and establish relationships. Mesha talked about the support she received from the mentors when she was upset, and the encouragement she received during her high school years was instrumental in her being where she is today. She said, "the mentors made sure I was ok, and never let me quit. They always let me speak my truth and never tried to change my mind". Kiara and Brynea briefly talked about how CHARRM was a safe place for them to express themselves. Brynea said, "the mentors listened to me. I knew they would listen to me and help me make the right decisions for me." Kiara shared, "CHARRM was my safe place. I could talk to them about anything and not worry about it getting back to anyone." All four participants found value in having relationships with mentors in the program. While some participants saw this connection as the motivation needed to finish school, others found value in safety provided.

External asset: Empowerment. The mentoring program sought to provide participants with experiences in their neighborhoods to understand better the values and traditions present in any community, no matter the location. Two participants talked about how they were motivated to mentor the young ladies in their communities and improve the local housing projects' conditions. Mesha and Paris stated that the mentoring program helped them not be ashamed of where they lived and celebrate the rich history and culture. Participants shared that CHARRM helped them see the difference they could make in their communities. The following sections provide a discussion of the findings of the study.

Discussion

This multiple case study provided insight into the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on at-risk minority female students by examining the experiences and perspectives of four participants and their attainment of internal and assets as they relate to their personal and educational careers. Participants in this study participated in the CHARRM mentoring program during their 6th-8th grade academic years. Participants told their stories in a personal interview and various virtual platforms. Through individual and cross-case analyses, common themes emerged across all cases. The following section discusses the study's findings as they relate to the theoretical framework and literature. Following the discussion are the study's implications and recommendations to assist educators in understanding the importance of implementing culturally responsive programs to help at-risk minority female students with positive youth development.

Participants Benefit from Consistent Participation in a program that is relevant to their Cultural, Academic, and Emotional Needs

The CHARRM mentoring program focused on addressing participants' socio-emotional, academic, and cultural needs related to their home life, family issues, or issues in the school. They provided these girls with a space to express themselves, and unpack those feelings proved impactful to their development. Many participants shared that they did not feel valued for what they had to say, but CHARRM provided them the space to share their thoughts and have a voice. Implementing a culturally responsive mentoring program for minority students will provide a platform to effectively support this group of students during a vulnerable time in their development (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011).

For mentors to be influential, they must understand the environmental factors such as home life, family composition, family expectations, and neighborhood influences that shape the understanding and actions of the youth they encounter. Mentors also stepped in to fill the void of absent family members and to be an ear for girls who had personal issues they could not share at home. These actions proved helpful in keeping participants in the classroom and not suspended for different infractions. Mentoring programs are a great way to reduce dropouts and serve students individually and on a campus-wide level by supporting a caring adult and systematic interventions (Epstein, 2017). Mentoring programs provide youth with resources needed for positive development; therefore, focusing on at-risk females is crucial to decrease the dropout rate. Youth with limited resources often develop learning disabilities, cognitive delays and display behavioral and emotional problems in school (Hughes, Stenhjem, & Newkirk, 2007). Mentors help prevent these behaviors from manifesting in the school setting they are used to seeing in their neighborhoods (Smith, 2011).

Participants' self-worth was increased because of their mentors' intentionality to ensure that their mentees excelled academically. Participants talked about the support they received from mentors to ensure their work was done, understood the material, and provided time to work on it. As a result, they did well in school, and their grades increased. Eccles, Wigfield, and Covington (2002; 2000) reinforced the idea that students link their self-worth to how well they do in school; therefore, mentors ensured students were successful and strengthened their confidence in themselves.

Participants developed a sense of purpose in their lives because they participated in community service projects. Mentors going above and beyond helped cultivate this

sense of purpose in the participants. The Special Olympics and neighborhood projects inspired the girls to give back and help others. Many participants have gone on to study to enter the healthcare field as a result. The encounters youth experience within their community directly impacts their emotional health and well-being regarding their plans for their future (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Participants were motivated to become productive members of society and in their communities as well. Providing youth with opportunities to serve in their communities benefits the community, the program, and the participants (Atkiss, Moyer, Desai, & Roland, 2011). Participation in these programs helped the community and guided the mentees in finding their purpose and setting their future goals.

Some participants struggled to remain consistent in achieving their goals but acknowledged that the round table discussions and talking through their issues helped them have a better outlook on life. The mentoring program was the family some participants never had and the connection many girls needed. Mentors who listen to youth's problems and guide them in their decisions establish meaningful relationships and provide the caring environment required for positive development (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006; Search Institute, 2021). Johnson (2016) confirms that students establish relationships and connections to outside resources due to the caring and supportive experiences of the mentors they encounter.

While some participants did flourish because they participated in CHARRM, environmental factors hindered others from achieving their goals. Mental health and family abuse deterred some girls from staying focused and graduating high school or college. Their outcomes do bring into question the diversity hypothesis, which suggests

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that the program must be adapted to meet different student groups (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). This hypothesis says that we must attend to individuals' specific needs in the program and not assume they all have the same conditions. While the mentoring program's goal was to focus on participants' socio-emotional and academic needs and get them involved in the community, this theory states that one must also focus on ensuring individual cultural identities are validated.

Non-Parental Relationships Play a Significant Role in Participants Staying Focused and Motivated

When reflecting on the CHARRM mentoring program, all participants shared examples of how the mentors motivated them and were always there when they needed them. Some participants referred to them as extended family and felt safe sharing information with them when they could not share with family. Relationships with non-parental are instrumental in guiding youth's decision-making as they see these adults model positive social norms and behaviors (Benson & Scales, 2009). Studies show that youth who experience these relationships during middle school years maintain a higher average due to their mentors' experiences and activities (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). Lindt and Blair (2017) found that female students appreciated having attentive female mentors guide them toward positive decision-making. A study conducted on 429 9th–12th-grade students revealed that establishing relationships had the most significant impact on the youth's experiences. Participants with more robust partnerships and relationships felt a higher sense of responsibility, took more interest in their academics, and talked about college due to real-world connections (Foster, et al., 2005). Providing you with a connection to outside resources promotes appropriate development and gives a sense of purpose to their lives.

Mentoring Programs Should Be Specific to the Cultural, Emotional, and Academic Needs of the Youth They Serve

Participants in the CHARRM mentoring program talked about how their experiences were meaningful because the mentors seemed to care about who they are and where they come from. Evans et al. state that creating a culture where students feel validated is essential to develop their self-efficacy skills (2018). Today, mentoring programs seek to guide and motivate students without taking the time to understand environmental, family, and social factors that students may face. Providing mentors with same-gender mentors also serve as a tool to ensure mentees receive support specific to their emotional, mental, and physical development. The intentional pairing of mentors and mentees with gender-specific mentors empowers them to receive advice and guidance from someone who shared their experiences guide students toward being productive citizens and their career goals (Hargreaves, 1998). Mentors also offer emotional support for youth as they navigate adolescence and establish self-identity. An effective mentor reflects on themselves to ensure they understand their mentee and finding ways to meet them where they are (Lindt & Blair, 2017). Providing youth with meaningful experiences within the community also fosters a sense of belonging. Youth develop self-confidence and awareness, which empowers them to strengthen their community and break down barriers that hinder their development (Rogriguez-Planas, 2014). There are many benefits to designing a mentoring program to meet the cultural needs of at-risk youth. When mentors provide youth with access to resources in the community and support the youth emotionally and academically in the space they are in, we ensure positive development.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on this study's results, establishing mentoring programs on campuses specific to the identified needs of ethnic minority students will assist in the positive development of internal and external skills during adolescence. Mentoring programs should have activities that address the socio-emotional and cultural needs of students. According to the developmental asset framework and the need for collaboration between schools and communities, this mentoring program is a great platform to establish potential partnerships between schools, the community, and parents. Evidence from this study provided several implications for different groups within the school system to support the implementation of culturally responsive mentoring in Title I schools. These groups include district officials and school leaders, teachers, and community stakeholders. In combination with the impact on these groups, the researcher also provides recommendations to support retention. Implications and recommendations for each of these groups are detailed in the sections below.

District/Campus Leaders

District and campus leaders are the foundation for getting programs and funding into the schools. As the academic year begins, these stakeholders can allocate funding specifically for this program. Implementing a targeted program to address the needs of at-risk minority students may help to decrease many school district's dropout rates. Ensuring that funds are available for students and access to resources provides a greater chance for success. Campus leaders can also establish partnerships with stakeholders in the community providing access to resources that can benefit students during their academic years and provide potential career connections after graduation. Providing teachers with

professional development strategies to implement culturally responsive classroom practices helps make the learning experience more meaningful.

Teachers

Teachers can begin each year in professional development geared towards establishing relationships with students based on their cultural needs. Training will provide teachers with restorative circles and team-building strategies to develop better relationships with students. The goal is for teachers to understand the need to implement strategies and topics relevant and of interest to students to connect during their learning. These actions will possibly shift the school climate towards culturally responsive practices in and out of the classroom, and students begin to have a sense of belonging in the school and their learning.

Implementing culturally responsive classroom practices will strengthen students' connections during the lesson and enhance teacher-student relationships. A recommendation would be to ensure students have access to the mentoring program and all the program's services all year. Many students will have different life experiences throughout the year, so they must have support as needed. Teachers also assist students with establishing non-parental relationships with other adults by recommending them for the mentoring program. Teachers are on the frontline and can identify students who need additional support in and out of the classroom.

Community Stakeholders

Community organizations are instrumental to the mentoring program as this partnership provides participants with access to mentors from different professions and exposure to potential careers. Community stakeholders are also instrumental in providing

mentors to the students on campus with diverse backgrounds who can establish relationships outside of the class. These partners can also offer potential employment for students in the future. A partnership with community members and organizations can prove beneficial to schools for many years to come. While the partnership is meant to develop the teens and prepare them for the future, it also provides the potential to establish jobs for the teens interested in the different professions in the area. It gives them something to look forward to. Community members also begin to see the importance of giving back to the youth and developing them into future leaders and workers that will one day need gainful employment to be successful.

Conclusion

Mentoring serves as a powerful platform for providing students the support and skills needed for positive development. This study focused on determining if a mentoring program that was culturally responsive to the needs of at-risk minority female students was instrumental in the positive development of assets during adolescence and into adulthood (Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). As explained, exposing youth to more opportunities provides them with academic, emotional, and psychological support needed for positive development.

Studying former participants' experiences provided insight into barriers females face even after graduation and how mentoring helped these young ladies become resilient and persevere. The researcher also confirmed the role CHARRM played in fostering internal and external assents' development in participants. All four participants shared experiences that contributed to the strengthening or development of these assets. The

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developmental asset framework (Scales, et al., 2001) proved to be an accurate mechanism to analyze the participants' development.

Participants could rely on many of their experiences as motivation or reminders to guide their personal lives, while others could not overcome the struggles they faced. We cannot assume these girls are okay because we see them every day. Female students need a platform and outlet to express themselves and discover their identity. CHARRM served as a place where these participants could participate in a meaningful way to them and the community. This growth was made possible through participation in a culturally responsive mentoring program that addressed the cultural and emotional needs of the participants. The developmental asset framework (Benson et al., 2001) served as a helpful tool to analyze the participants' development because of their meaningful relationships with adults and their experiences in the program.

Many mentoring programs implemented in schools today focus on establishing mentor-mentee relationships within the school setting. Still, by shifting the focus to creating meaningful relationships based on cultural similarities and experiences, the partnership becomes more meaningful. The impact is more significant in combination with meaningful experiences. Mentoring program that responds to the needs of minority students ensure their positive development and growth (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). Mentoring programs that are culturally responsive allow mentors and mentees to connect based on similarities in cultures and interests (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011). They need to feel heard and accepted proved beneficial for the CHARRM participants due to the environment and space created for them.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

Implementing mentoring programs that are culturally responsive to the needs of minority female students proved impactful to the attainment of internal and external assets needed for successful development. Research revealed that establishing authentic relationships with female students and supporting their areas of interest increases their likelihood of completing high school and making positive contributions to society (Blair & Lindt, 2017). The high school dropout rate is a significant concern facing schools today, as many students lack the emotional and academic support needed to succeed (Lindsay-Dennis, Cummings, & McClendon, 2011). Several factors contribute to at-risk minority students' academic difficulties, including family issues, neighborhood environment, and relationships within the school community. In this multiple case study, the researcher examined the influence of Creating Honest and Respectful Role Models (CHARRM), a mentoring program for middle school girls rooted in culturally responsive practices. Specifically, this research looked at the program's influence on participants seven years after participation in CHARRM.

This study aimed to highlight participant narratives and identify experiences and relationships that contributed to their ability or inability to attain these developmental assets. Therefore, the researcher purposefully chose four participants that met the following criteria: former participants in the CHARRM mentoring program, labeled at-risk, part of an ethnic minority group, and female.

Chapter Four detailed the results from the analysis. Informal recommendations, suggestions for future studies, and a shared conclusion were included. Chapter Five's remaining sections provide an overview of the data collection procedures, a discussion of significant findings, the target audience, distribution proposal/materials, and venue.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researcher collected data via Google Form questionnaires and one-on-one interviews via Zoom. The questionnaire involved twelve open-ended questions that allowed the participants to share their experiences in their own words. In addition, participants described their family background, high school experiences, participation in CHARRM, and current aspirations during one-on-one interviews.

The researcher solicited participants via a Facebook social media platform. The researcher explained the study's intent and the need for their personal experiences, and the impact of the CHARRM program in their lives. I assured participants that their identity was protected and gave each participant a pseudonym. The researcher's assurance established informed consent from each participant. A total of four participants were selected to participate in the current research study. The researcher interviewed the four participants to gather information about their views on the influence of the CHARRM mentoring program on them both at the time and seven years later. The researcher coded participant responses and narratives into themes based on categories from the theoretical framework. The responses were then broken down based on alignment with internal and external assets.

The developmental asset framework served as the framework for data analysis (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). The developmental asset framework focuses on

over 148,000 6th-12th grade students from over 202 schools (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). Researchers contend that the intentional exposure of youth to meaningful relationships, opportunities to succeed, and experiences within the community contribute to the positive development of 40 internal and external assets needed for resilience and self-efficacy during adolescence (Benson, et al., 2001; Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011). The framework consists of eight categories related to positive development in youth (Starkman, Scales, & Roberts, 2006). However, the researcher chose only six of the eight categories for development in the study. The first category, support, is developed when adults provide youth with opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with other adults. Youth see the significance of having support for adults other than their parents. The second category, empowerment, focuses on opportunities provided to youth to feel better about themselves through community service and helping others. The third category, commitment to learning, focuses on youth becoming motivated to do well in school and are engaged in learning. The fourth category, positive values, focuses on youth being caring, responsible, honest, and a person of integrity. These assets are developed internally for youth to guide themselves in decision-making. The fifth category, social competencies, focuses on the youth's ability to plan and make choices, solve problems peacefully, and have empathy and sensitivity for others. The last category, positive identity, focuses on youth realizing they have a purpose in life and controlling what happens.

The researcher followed the five steps for data analysis detailed in the data analysis spiral—organizing, reading, creating memos, classifying codes and themes, interpretations, and representing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A review of the data

determined that meaningful relationships with mentors and community experiences strengthened and developed participants' internal and external assets.

Six common themes emerged among participants' responses—support, empowerment, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. All themes connect to meaningful experiences and authentic relationships developed while participating in the CHARRM mentoring program. Mentors intentionally connected with the mentees personally and academically, extending their rapport beyond the school walls. The impact of these actions was evident in their responses. Participants also referenced their experiences of giving back in the community as impactful and strengthened their self-image by making others feel good.

Summary of Key Findings

An analysis of responses and interviews with the participants revealed three significant findings:

- Participants benefit from consistent participation in a relevant program focused on their cultural, academic, and emotional needs.

- Non-parental relationships played a significant role in helping participants stay focused and motivated.

- Mentoring programs should be specific to the cultural, emotional, or academic needs of the youth they serve.

An explanation of each finding is listed below.

Participants benefit from consistent participation in a relevant program focused on their cultural, academic, and emotional needs. Engaging participants in community activities pertinent to their lifestyles and experiences maximize positive outcomes. Thomas, Davidson, and McAdoo (2008) state that "it is critical to create opportunities

through which ethnic identity can be nurtured and strengthened" (p. 284). As youth

participate and receive roles in their communities, they become a resource and network

with community stakeholders. Gregory and Huang (2013) state that low-income youth

perform better when they receive support from adults who have set high expectations for

them; therefore, providing them with a consistent program and targeting specific needs is

beneficial to their positive development. When youth participate in a program that

focuses on their interests and needs, they build trust with adults and feel comfortable

discussing issues they face (Mitchell & Stewart, 2012). Mentoring programs that take

into consideration the challenges that minority students face create a space for success.

Non-parental relationships play a significant role in helping participants stay

focused and motivated. Positive adult relationships help youth improve their behaviors,

support the change, and strengthen their resilience in high-risk environments (Atkiss,

Moyer, Desai, & Roland, 2011; Foster et al., 2005). Based on the study's key findings,

the researcher concluded that incorporating culturally responsive practices into mentoring

programs is more effective for at-risk minority female students. Exposing at-risk minority

female students to meaningful experiences and authentic relationships proved beneficial

to their self-image and resilience.

Mentoring programs should be specific to the cultural, emotional, and academic

needs of the youth they serve. Many of the current mentoring programs implemented in

schools primarily focus on partnerships in the community and matching students with

mentors. These partnerships are often ineffective if they do not address the socio-

emotional and environmental factors female students face. For example, many girls

struggle to conform to social norms and live up to family and peer expectations. The family dynamics of some students also play a part in how they function in the school environment. Mentoring that is strategic and structured to meet individual students' needs can cultivate meaningful relationships in the community and meet the socioemotional needs of the students, ultimately helping to develop both the internal and external assets students need for success.

Informed Recommendations

The current study and literature review findings highlight the role culturally responsive practices play in attaining and strengthening internal and external assets for at-risk minority female students. Based on the results of the study, there are three recommendations for school district officials. First, district officials should allocate funds to implement training and mentoring programs on middle and high school campuses that focus on culturally responsive practices. This funding would ensure campuses have the resources needed to implement an effective mentoring program for at-risk students.

District officials should also partner with local organizations to expose students to community resources that shift their thinking towards future professions. Community stakeholders can provide youth with exposure to real-world careers and establish relationships with potential prospective employees.

The second recommendation is to provide professional development for teachers/campus staff that focuses on implementing culturally responsive practices to connect with and establish positive relationships with female students. Staff will receive training on identifying barriers to learning in the classroom. Staff members who complete the professional development will identify reasons students disconnect from the school

environment. These proactive measures equip staff to interact with students of all races and backgrounds in the educational setting. Teachers will also benefit from these practices as their worldview and teaching practices shift towards an all-inclusive mindset.

The last recommendation is to establish a platform for parents to collaborate with school staff on prevalent issues with youth and develop a support system for school and home to ensure student success. It is crucial to understand and acknowledge that parental influence significantly impacts female students' self-image and perception of school. When school staff and parents are in alignment, there is a greater possibility for positive student achievement and completion of high school and beyond.

Findings Distribution Proposal

This section details how I plan to share information within the district and identifies the targeted audiences. The distribution proposal is also shared.

Target Audience

The researcher plans to share findings and recommendations with district officials, campus administrators, school staff, community organizations, and families within the community. District officials are crucial to allocating funds for programs within the district; therefore, they must understand its need and impact. Campus administrators and school staff are the essential frontline workers who encounter these students every day. They must be aware of their support and have assistance during the year helping students achieve their goals. Community organizations are vital to beginning partnerships and providing students with experiences in the workforce that hopefully shift students' thinking towards the future. Lastly, families are essential to the collaboration because learning starts at home. The stakeholders can implement the finding to create a

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culture of inclusivity among all stakeholders to ensure all are working towards a common

goal. Children in the school setting should feel a sense of belonging; therefore,

implementing culturally responsive school practices will strengthen relationships and

connections among staff and students.

Proposed Distribution Method and Venue

The best method to distribute this information to all stakeholders would be

through a community forum that provides question and answer sessions. Due to the

Covid-19 pandemic, attendees could participate virtually by logging in, and a recording

of the session would be available for future viewing. In addition, I will distribute

information about the forum with brochures and flyers, the district website, and local

news outlets. The forum's goal is to make all stakeholders aware of the need and impact

of the program. The presentation would also consist of participants' narratives that detail

the effects of the mentoring program on their educational careers so that stakeholders

have some buy-in motivation.

The distribution of information to the community and stakeholders is imperative to

bring awareness to the intent and goals of the mentoring program. The use of different

venues allows for an array of presentations to bring attention to the program. The

distribution of brochures provides a tangible object with information on the mentoring

program, the foci and goals, and an explanation of how students and mentors are selected.

Potential mentors can read about the training offered and survey the timeline that will

guide the program. The brochure provides contact information and can be placed in

different facilities around town or sent home with students.

Flyers are another tool that provides information to potential stakeholders just by placing them around town or posting on the school's social media site. They will contain the name of the mentoring program, the purpose, dates of the forums, and the links to log on if interested.

With the pandemic and many constituents moving towards virtual platforms, infomercials on social media, district websites, and local news stations provide outlets to share information with more stakeholders. These infomercials consist of identifying the need and purpose of the mentoring program, testimonials from participants, and the program's impact.

Conclusion

This multiple case study focused on the impact of culturally responsive mentoring on at-risk minority female students. A significant outcome of this study was that the mentoring program's implementation proved positive and impactful. In addition, the experiences and interactions between the participants and mentors proved beneficial to the self-efficacy and resilience of at-risk minority female students. Geneva Gay's (2010) explanation further supports culturally responsive practices based on the learners' knowledge, experiences, and performance style to make experiences more relevant and meaningful.

Studying former participants' experience in the mentoring program provided valuable information into developing and attaining internal and external assets young ladies need for self-efficacy. The participants identified authentic relationships and meaningful experiences contributing to their motivation to complete school or make better decisions. All four participants provided examples of times when environmental

factors or family issues could have discouraged them, and without the mentors' support, they may have given up. The developmental asset framework proved to be an appropriate model to analyze positive development in these participants.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Questions

Questions were following free-response/multiple-choice questions in the

questionnaire were given to the participants:

1. What are you currently doing?

2. Do you have children?

3. How has the mentoring program helped you?

4. How have you been able to resolve problems since participating in the
    program?

5. How has your perception of self and others been influenced through
    participation in the mentoring program?

6. What are some lasting effects the mentoring program has had on you?

7. How has your participation in CHARRM developed long-term assets?

8. What is one tool that still helps you today?

9. What part of the program helped you get where you are today?

10. What do you remember most about C.H.A.R.R.M.?

The following questions were also presented in the questionnaire:

1. C.H.A.R.R.M. has helped me be successful in my transition to adulthood.
    (Y/N)

2. C.H.A.R.R.M. gave me a sense of belonging while at LMS? (Y/N)

3. I know that I can be successful because of what I learned in C.H.A.R.R.M.
    (Y/N)

I am more aware of my surroundings and community involvement because of C.H.A.R.R.M. (Y/N)

APPENDIX B

Potential Topics

1. What has been most beneficial to you from the CHARRM program?

2. How do you feel about your relationship with peers and authority figures are now?

3. Why/Why not keep programs like CHARRM in schools?

4. Do you think CHARRM helped you get to where you are today?

5. What are three specific takeaways from the program?

APPENDIX C

Data Collection Timeline

When:	What:	Significance
11/2020	Survey	Current qualitative and quantitative data
11/2020	Questionnaire	Current qualitative data
11/2020	Interview w/former participants	Current qualitative data
12/2020	Data Analysis	Findings and conclusions

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