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## Lifting As We Climb: Giving Voice to Black Female Mentorship Stories and Exploring Factors that Lead to Successful Mentoring Outcomes

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Lifting As We Climb:  
Giving Voice to Black Female Mentorship Stories and Exploring Factors that  
Lead to Successful Mentoring Outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

As researcher-practitioners, we noted that the literature on mentorship has increased dramatically in recent years. However, the literature lacks attention to female paired mentoring relationships, especially relationships between women of color. Although we did not initially set out to fill this gap, our research does bring attention to the power of mentorship relationships between women of color. We explore three critical factors of an effective, female mentor-mentee relationship: social capital development (i.e., expand networks, build relationships), social and emotional learning (i.e., strengthen emotional resilience, increase self-awareness), and awareness of intersectionality (i.e., interact with role models, draw upon one's unique identities). The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore how social capital development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to female intersectionality influence successful outcomes for adult (18 years old and older) female mentors and mentees in the St. Louis region. In our research, we center mentorship stories of female mentors that help illustrate the complexity and interconnectedness of these three critical factors of effective mentorship. We identify six themes that address these critical factors, and within each theme, we also address the pitfalls and challenges noted by participants. Overall, we found that mentoring relationships that address each of these critical factors foster successful mentoring outcomes. The weakest factor we identified in the mentoring relationship was the need for formal mentoring organizations and informal mentors to address all aspects of intersectionality, particularly a mentee's LGBTQ+ identity. By addressing each of these critical factors equally, mentors and their mentees will be best positioned for a successful future. As most mentoring research features participants that fit White, male,

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heterosexual norms, we chose to address a gap in the mentoring research by centering black female mentorship stories and amplifying their lived experiences.

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DAWN INDELICATO-FAW

To quote The Tragically Hip, “It’s been a long, long, long time coming...but well worth the wait.” These last three years have certainly been an educational journey for me. As an educator, I know how important it is to have a desire and excitement for learning and growing in knowledge. The path to where we are now was not easy, but I am so honored to work with two amazing research partners that made this whole process bearable: Maggie and Channon. I could not have done all of this without you both and I am blessed and grateful to work with you both. I also want to thank my husband Tony for being supportive and for being my biggest cheerleader; you gave me room to take on this work and were always there to push me. To Ella, I love you and appreciate all the ways

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mary Church Terrell, an African American feminist and racial justice advocate, in her speech before the 1898 National American Women's Suffrage Association told her audience, "And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long" (Church Terrell, 1898). In our journeys as women who pursued academic and professional goals, each of us had obstacles to overcome. In our own lives, we navigated post-secondary life as Church Terrell advises but often while confused by the process, overwhelmed with where to begin, and unsure of the next steps. For two of us, that process was compounded by being first-generation college students with little background knowledge or adult guidance. Eventually, each of us had positive educational and professional mentoring relationships that put us on the path to both educational and career success.

We have also worked as educational practitioners for a combined total of 45 years, and in this time, we have had a front-row seat to the issues that hinder female students and peers: first-generation students often don't know about college and career resources that are available to them; students find the financial aid process confusing; they may need further development of their social and emotional skills, and may also be trying to navigate their sexual orientation, race, or social class without a support system to guide them. Additionally, once in the workplace, women often lack the example of other women in leadership roles to teach the ropes of their new career or figure out the next step as they climb towards new opportunities. This lack of mentor-allies is especially true for women of color. Women also often bear the burden of difficult family situations,

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the weight of emotional or physical trauma, and the economic pressure of being their family's only wage earner. Having another female to lean on in times of need can often make the difference between surviving and thriving.

Mentors can help mentees address these problems in many ways, and in general, research on mentoring and mentoring relationships is robust; however, there is a real need for investigation of the female mentor/mentee relationship and its processes. We see ourselves reflected in these female mentoring relationships. Our research is an important opportunity to address this research gap and to understand the critical factors that go into mentoring, that can empower women to lift each other and engender success.

As far back as Mentors in *The Odyssey*, there has been a need for individuals to pave the way to leadership, job training, and education; as a result, in some way or form, mentorship has always existed. Students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class (Tierney et al., 1995 as cited in "Mentoring Impact," 2022). In assessing the relationship between high school-aged students and academic success, mentorship emphasizes the critical need for role-modeling behavior. In the workplace, mentees may also learn how to overcome obstacles in addition to developing social capital from engaging in a relationship with their mentor. Mentees can further enhance their social capital as they learn to navigate their environment, access social networks, and tap into various support systems.

Mentors also gain valuable benefits from mentor-mentee relationships: a greater sense of personal satisfaction in passing along their life and work knowledge; enjoying

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the success of the person they supported; and building further social networks and social capital (Mondisa, 2018). Both formal and informal mentors provide layers of support and guidance to female mentees in the St. Louis region. For school-aged females, having a positive mentoring relationship is one way that they can make a successful transition from high school to post-secondary success. Girls, in particular, face unique challenges during their adolescent years that provide obstacles to positive futures beyond high school. Adolescent girls may face body image issues, gender or sexual identity issues, rape or sexual trauma, gender, or sexual orientation discrimination that may impact their mental and emotional well-being. Also, as a result of their limited life experiences or limited access to resources, they may not even know about the information that will help them in their current or future career paths. As a result, female mentors in St. Louis have a lot of opportunities to create profound impacts in the lives of their female mentees.

## RESEARCHERS' REFLECTIONS

Each researcher has a personal experience that highlights the critical need for female mentorship in the St. Louis area. The researchers are three professional women who work in educational or nonprofit settings in the St. Louis community and each has a personal interest in the role of mentorship and how it helps mentees achieve success.

[Margaret Brockmeyer]: As an emerging professional, I would not be where I am today without the guidance and social capital provided by various mentors during my college, graduate, and early career years. Time and time again, gratitude, intentionality, and making a difference in my community have been concepts that propel me forward in my personal work setting. Through the help of mentoring relationships, I have

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successfully transitioned into a position that sparks creativity, builds cohesion between community-based organizations, and creates opportunities to impact women's lives for generations to come.

[Dawn Indelicato-Faw]: In my experience, while I had good relationships with adults, I lacked a knowledgeable mentor to navigate the path to college. I missed out on what Levinson et al (1978) describes as “a guide, teacher, counselor, and developer of skills who facilitates the realization of the ‘Dream,’ the vision that one has about the sort of life one wants as an adult” (p. 98). Without that facilitator, I was left on my own to stumble my way through tracking down college loan information, writing effective college application essays, and applying for college. Considering how much I did not know, my outcome was positive despite my struggles: I earned my undergrad and masters' degree and became an English teacher. My story has a happy ending, but how many girls just like me do not get the outcomes they want?

[Channon Peoples]: As a first-generation college student and teenage mother who grew up in the inner city of St. Louis, I learned very early the importance of getting the right people on your team. While there was an expectation of academic excellence and upward mobility in my family, there was no real guidance provided for the college access or career planning process. Although I graduated from high school with honors, my college journey started out uncertain. I had access to college, but lacked the social-emotional capacity and social network to truly thrive and rise to the expectations of a collegiate environment. Fortunately, I became involved on campus and with organizations such as INROADS. I developed student and faculty allies and mentor-

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relationships and these strengthened my resolve to graduate from college with honors and commence my career journey. Without those relationships and a sense of community, my story could have been much different. My choices had to align with my steadily evolving college and career goals. I am grateful to do purposeful work as the Director of the Office of Precollegiate Student Services-Bridge Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. This program I oversee provides college access services to thousands of St. Louis area students and families annually.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reports that women comprise almost 50% of the United States workforce. In the day-to-day working world, women are faced with challenges in pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities in the workplace (Yellen, 2020). As a result, there is a great need for mentoring relationships that can address the post-secondary professional and career aspirations of female mentees (Schippers, 2008). In school or in the workforce, young women often need support from a mentor to further foster their success through personal growth and academic or professional opportunities (Burke et al., 1990) (Zirkel, 2002). The St. Louis area has over 100 organizations that promote formal “mentoring” or “positive role models,” and countless informal mentoring relationships that exist between mentors and mentees. However, few, if any, specify how they build strong mentor-mentee relationships, and whether their programs nurture the critical factors that females need for achieving their personal goals: social capital development, social and emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to the intersectionality of the mentees.



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Addressing the mental health of a mentee is an important consideration as mentoring decreases symptoms of depression in students and elevates social acceptance and academic readiness (Preston & Raposa, 2020). Instead of considering the mental health needs of mentees, many SEL-based programs focus mainly on school-based curriculum and instructional methods, ignoring the importance of holistic approach to a student's emotional development within the mentoring relationship (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). The development of SEL, also known as soft skills, are essential factors in successful student outcomes (Dymnicki et al., 2013). These mentoring relationships hold the key to unlocking a mentee's potential by encouraging positive self-perception, instilling resilience, and showing them how to build and cross bridges to their success, especially when a positive example is missing from the home (Johnson & Wiener, 2017).

Females, especially females of color, face marginalization in society and often grapple with obstacles that are informed by this intersectionality of race and gender. Liang et al. (2014) found that mentoring relationships are more effective when considerations such as "individual differences and contextual factors, such as gender" (p. 159) in the mentor/mentee pairing are considered. The traditional mentoring model is based on White, heterosexual, male, middle-class norms, and females and their specific needs are often ignored (Kalbfleisch & Keyton, 1995; Liang et al., 2002). Additionally, females that are part of the LGBTQ+ communities are often at a greater risk for mental health challenges as a result of unsupportive environments like home, school, and society

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(Sarna et al., 2021) As a result, the stakes for successful female mentoring relationships are especially high.

Not addressing the gaps in females mentoring female mentees can have many negative consequences. Without the right guidance, females will be unprepared to face the career, social, or personal challenges of their future. To address this problem, community mentoring organizations need to prioritize female paired mentoring relationships that increase social capital development, SEL, and sensitivity to intersectionality.

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore how social capital development, social emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to female intersectionality influence successful outcomes for adult (18 years old and older) female mentors and mentees in the St. Louis region. The National Mentoring Resource Center (2022) defines mentoring as an action that “takes place between young persons (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons who are acting in an informal helping capacity to provide the support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee’s development” (Mentoring Defined). Ragins and Cotton (1999) define mentors as “influential individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support to their protégés’ careers” (as cited in Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985a, p. 529). Levinson et al. (1978) further describes the mentor’s function as a guide,

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counselor, and sponsor. Still another definition from MENTOR (2022) outlines, “ultimately, mentoring connects a young person to personal growth and development, and social and economic opportunity” (Why Become a Mentor). Although many facets of mentorship exist, one thing is certain: gaining an understanding of mentors and their relationships with their mentees would benefit all mentorship stakeholders. Our research adds to the overall understanding of effective female-centered mentoring practices and addresses the gap that exists in the literature.

This study will examine three critical factors to mentoring in the St. Louis area: the development of social capital, support of SEL, and sensitivity to the intersectionality of mentees. There must be a more intentional focus on understanding the role of the mentor and how to develop the mentee as a whole person to build a strong foundation for long-term personal success. Meeting mentees where they are is essential in identifying and eliminating those barriers that may be a hindrance to their success and research. Johnson and Wiener (2017) show the practice of mentorship allows mentees to develop the variety of tools necessary for mentees to gain positive self-perception, create and attain life goals, and improve resiliency.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Creswell (2014) advises qualitative researchers to ask at least one central question and several sub-questions. Qualitative researchers begin questions with words such as

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*how* or *what* and use exploratory verbs, such as *explore*, *understand*, or *discover*. They pose broad, general questions to allow the participants to explain their ideas. To guide their exploration of mentorship approaches, the researchers examined one central research question: How do mentor/mentee relationships facilitate social capital development, social and emotional learning (SEL), and intersectionality awareness to support mentee outcomes? Key terms and definitions are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Key Terms and Definitions*

<b>Terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
1. Success	The accomplishment of an aim or purpose.
2. Social Capital	Dekker & Uslaner (2001) define social capital as “the value of social networks, bonding similar people, and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity” (p. 224). At a basic level, social capital is the culmination of real or potential resources related to a network of relationships (Bourdieu, 2006).
3. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	CASEL (2022) defines SEL as “the processes through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Fundamentals of SEL).
4. Intersectionality	Crenshaw (1991) established a definition of intersectionality that examines how race, class, gender and other characteristics overlap and “intersect” with one another and how these can often combine to negatively impact women and minorities.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will explore mentoring through the following approaches that can support mentee outcomes: social capital development, social and emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to a mentee’s intersectionality. The best practices in mentorship will add the value of social networks, create bonds between similar people, build bridges between diverse people, and honor the norms of reciprocity to prepare students for a successful life (Dekker & Uslander, 2001).

### *Connecting Mentorship and Lifelong Success*

Many students have big dreams for the future and want to accomplish their postsecondary goals, and succeed in their life thereafter. The factors that deter these dreams are similar for many students: first-generation student woes, a history of academic challenges that lead to an expectation of failure, a lack of knowledge of the best post-secondary fit for them, fear of not belonging, and lack of financial resources and affordability (Imagine America, 2017; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2003). Success for students seeking higher education is directly tied to their level of academic readiness, which can be a direct reflection of a student’s family demographics, social environment, and the resources available to a school, including quality instructional staff (Kazis, 2006; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Soutter & Seider, 2013).

Establishing a “college-going identity,” or at least viable postsecondary plans, whether it be the traditional college route, trade, or apprenticeship, are essential in promoting success in the next phase of their lives (Hill, 2008; USA Funds, 2013). Part of finding a student’s identity requires a deep dive into who they are as an individual, their value system and personal beliefs, life goals, strengths and weaknesses, motivating

factors, and parental/social influence (Perna, 2000a; Perna, 2000b; USA Funds, 2013). In addition, part of this identification is exploring the connections between caring adults that provide guidance and mentorship in a student's life (Liang et. al., 2002; Ogbu, 1990; Rhodes, 2020). As many mentoring relationships take place between an adult and a school-aged person, being sensitive to the student's identity is an important aspect of being an effective mentor.

### *Common Mentorship Definitions*

The National Mentoring Resource Center (2022) defines mentoring as an action that “takes place between young persons (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons who are acting in a non-professional helping capacity to provide the support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's development” (Mentoring Defined). Overall, definitions of mentoring highlight a mutually beneficial relationship between two people: a mentee and a mentor (DuBois & Karcher, 2014; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). This research will explore how stakeholders in the mentoring process can best incorporate social capital development, foster SEL, and awareness of intersectionality to assist in a female mentee's attainment of their personal goals.

### *Social Capital*

One of the most significant benefits of the mentor relationship is the idea of increased social capital through career development. Although there are many ways to define it, Dekker and Uslaner (2001) define social capital as “the value of social networks, bonding similar people, and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity” (p. 6). At a basic level, social capital is the culmination of actual or potential resources related to a network of relationships

(Bourdieu, 2006). It is necessary to note, though, as Dolfsma and Dannreuther (2003) and Foley and Edwards (1996) do, that the reason for the range of interpretation is because social capital is a subjective matter. Despite this, social capital and career development tend to lean more as an objective matter that has a clear relationship to mentoring.

Long and Crisp (2010) assert that “Career development is the opportunity to develop skills that will aid an individual in knowledge, understanding, and functionality to complete a job” (p. 57). The ability to plan one’s future career including goal-setting and strategic planning (Gould, 1979) are career development components that transcend the test of time since they are still practical components that a mentor can teach a mentee. During the career research process, high school students experience psychological and behavioral processing related to pursuing employment (Boswell, 2006), which can be provided by a mentor, who is usually older than the mentee by some number of years.

Through career and social capital development, mentorship propels individuals forward in the direction of their future. For many high school students, the benefits of mentorship can play a significant role in their transition to the workforce or a higher education institution for continued study (Graham et al., 2015). Research shows that mentorships especially benefit individuals who are low-income, a racial or ethnic minority, and/or first-generation college students (Long & Crisp, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Even if the mentoring relationship doesn’t lead to a career path *per se*, mentees can be empowered to capitalize on their strengths. This can ultimately increase their social and emotional capacity inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). Mentors can encourage



mentees to find their life's path and to develop an unwavering belief that they can achieve whatever they set out to do (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). Success is where belief in one's self, preparation, and opportunity collide.

When these social factors are considered, females can identify, recruit, and maintain the support of adults whom they believe would advance their academic and career goals through mentorship (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001). In addition, they may begin to understand the principle of paying "mentorship" forward and seek to be a resource for their peers (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995; DuBois & Karcher, 2014). No matter the frame or lens for mentorship, the relationship dynamic can be mutually beneficial. The career development approach to mentorship not only increases an individual's supply of social capital but also facilitates dialogue surrounding goal-setting and career pathways. Mentorship has also been cited as a strategy for positive development and a deterrent of risky behavior in students and young professionals (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). Liu et al (2010) assert that young professionals were more likely to gain employment and receive higher salaries as a result of working with a mentor through high school and college. The gains that mentees make can be the result of connections and resources gained through the mentor or from newfound confidence and awakening within themselves (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

Despite the benefits of mentorship, barriers to mentorship are prevalent for high school students in solidifying relationships. Bandura (1997) suggests that students who lack knowledge and the corresponding confidence regarding their career path may have difficulty making career choices and sticking with career plans, as well as advocating their need for a mentor relationship. According to Filippin and Paccagnella (2012), self-confidence is a non-cognitive skill defined as

“the beliefs over one’s unknown level of cognitive ability” (p. 827) and is deemed as a key factor in social mobility. As a student’s social and emotional capacity increases, so do their self-confidence and other non-cognitive skills that will lead to future success (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

Based on the benefits and drawbacks of mentorship, a consistent set of norms in the mentorship process could be beneficial to all invested stakeholders in the mentorship process: mentees, mentors, and organizational leaders. Shea (1997) highlights the need for well-developed and carefully outlined mentorship guidelines. Elements such as finding the right mentors, selecting the right trainees, structuring the mentorship program, and evaluating relationships, and monitoring the mentoring progress seem to make all of the difference when it comes to successful mentoring relationships. Based on Struchen and Porta’s (1997) work with youth, we believe that with more caution paid to program efforts, quality of pairing and relationships, and guidelines of boundaries and realistic expectations, mentorship will continue to play a key role in the development of St. Louis area youth.

#### *Social and Emotional Learning*

The development of an individual’s social and emotional learning (SEL) skills play a critical role in their overall success. Durlak et al. (2011) state, “SEL involves the processes through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (p. 407). It can be deduced that at the center of failure and underachievement, one will find an individual who grapples with

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low social and emotional development. Research has shown that SEL skills are just as important, if not more, than core academics (Dymnicki et. al, 2013; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). The absence of social and emotional skills results in a breakdown of SEL core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

Studies reveal that consistent development of SEL core competencies will provide tools that build emotional success and resiliency (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). From this research we find the involvement of mentors plays a critical role in the development of a student's emotional well-being. In addition, it is important to note the mentors must be intentional in continuing to develop their own SEL skills in order to be beneficial to their mentees.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, formed in 1994, is an organization that focuses on developing “children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just world” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2022). Within the SEL CASEL Wheel (Figure 1), two elements are illustrated that demonstrate the importance and value of mentorship; authentic partnerships and aligned learning opportunities. Community settings and partnerships provide aligned learning opportunities that set the stage for opportunities such as mentorship and student coaching. Within these programs, students are also encouraged to practice their SEL skills. Mentors also fall within the Authentic

Partnerships with Families and Caregivers section. When these partnerships are formed and nurtured, even stronger connections can be solidified to reinforce young women's social-emotional development long-term.

**Figure 1**

*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework (2015)*



Most individuals can express the idea or action of mentorship quite simply, but defining it is much more complex (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995). Mentorship can be divided into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary mentoring relationships require *intense connections, special dedication* to the mentee, and emotional openness. The mentor and mentee become like family. Secondary mentoring relationships are not as closely knit, but are *welcoming, caring, and resourceful* (Freeman, 1998). Both of these types of mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial and can hold the key to the growth and development of a mentee's overall social-emotional health (Freeman, 1998; Struchen & Porta, 1997). Whether in a one-on-one or group setting, the support received from primary and secondary interactions can provide students with much-needed academic and career direction, and assurance they are not alone, all while increasing their self-awareness (DuBois & Karcher, 2014; Freeman, 1998; Struchen & Porta, 1997). The development of social capital, SEL, and intersectionality awareness in the mentor pairing dynamic is critical and can mean the difference between successful and unsuccessful outcomes of the relationship.

### *Intersectionality*

Successful pairing in a mentoring relationship is crucial to positive outcomes. In considering race and gender in these relationships, the theory of intersectionality is an important component of our research. Crenshaw (1991) established a definition of intersectionality that describes how race, class, gender, sexual identity and other characteristics overlap and “intersect” with one another and how these can often combine

to negatively impact women and minorities (Figure 2). Examining how mentoring relationships address intersectionality is an important aspect to our mentorship research.

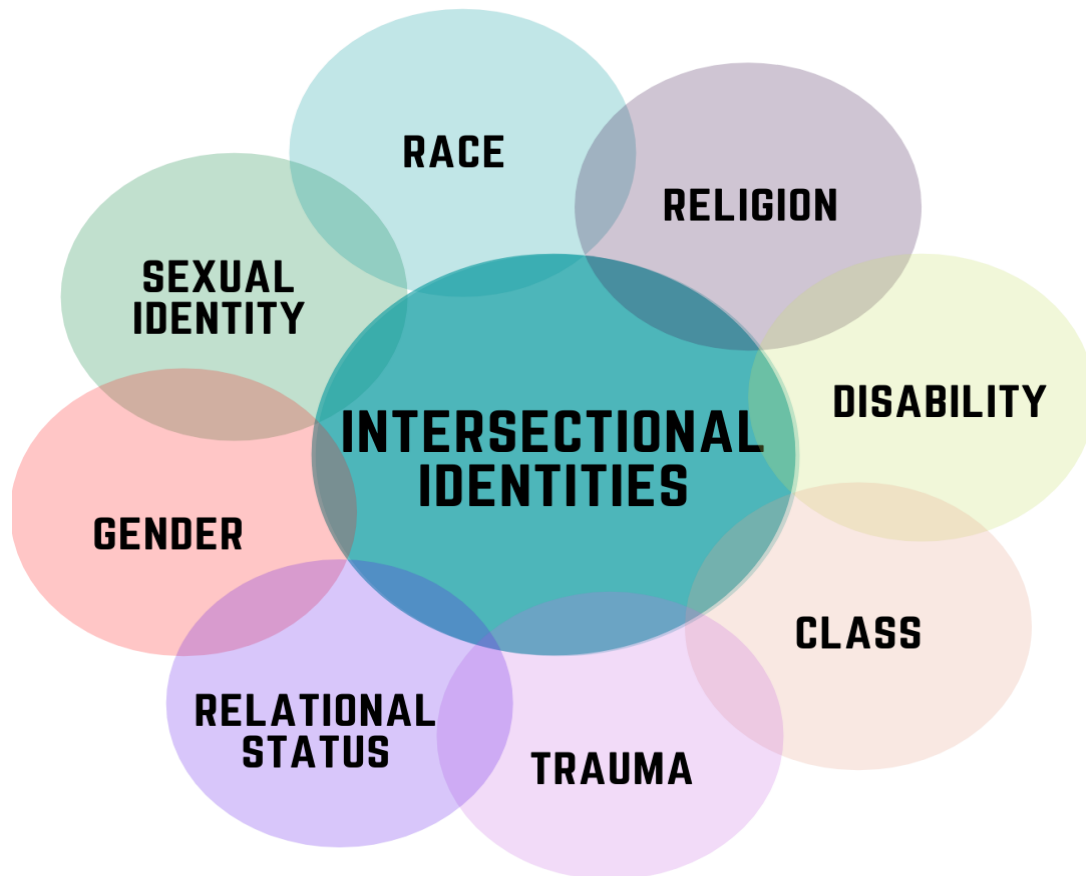
Research shows that when a relationship is successful, the mentor and mentee both reap benefits professionally and/or personally (Wilson & Elman, 1990). In general, mentors provide two types of support for their mentees, either instrumental or psychosocial, which are key aspects of mutually beneficial mentoring relationships (Gibb & Megginson, 1993; Wilson & Elman, 1990). With instrumental guidance, mentors provide specific goals and challenges for mentees to accomplish. Psychosocial guidance is about counseling, friendship, coaching, and other emotionally connecting activities that build the mentee and mentor's personal relationship (Gibb & Megginson, 1993). In addition to psychosocial support, relational qualities such as being empowering, kind, engaged, and authentic can have a strong influence on the lives of young people as they transition into adulthood (DuBois & Karcher, 2014; Liang et al., 2002).

Although there isn't a prescribed way to match mentors with mentees, often pairing is based on the similarity of interests, backgrounds, and geographical proximity (Allen & Eby, 2004; Furano et al., 1993). Additionally, research has suggested that similarities in race and gender are also important factors in matching mentors and their mentees (Allen & Eby, 2004; Bogat & Liang, 2005; Burke, 1984; Darling et al., 2006; O'Brien et al., 2010). For our research, understanding how intersectionality is used to support an inclusive space within the mentoring relationship is an important component of what we studied as we are interested in how this dimension informs the mentor/mentee

dynamic. Figure 2 (Hassler, 2021) below demonstrates the variety of identities that may be included when considering a mentee’s intersectionality.

**Figure 2**

*Overlapping bubbles showing various intersectional identities*



Relationships that have either real or perceived similarities could affect the overall outcomes of mentoring relationships. The similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1997) proposes that the more alike, or similar, one thinks a person is to them, then the more that another person is liked. This “liked” method can have an unintentional

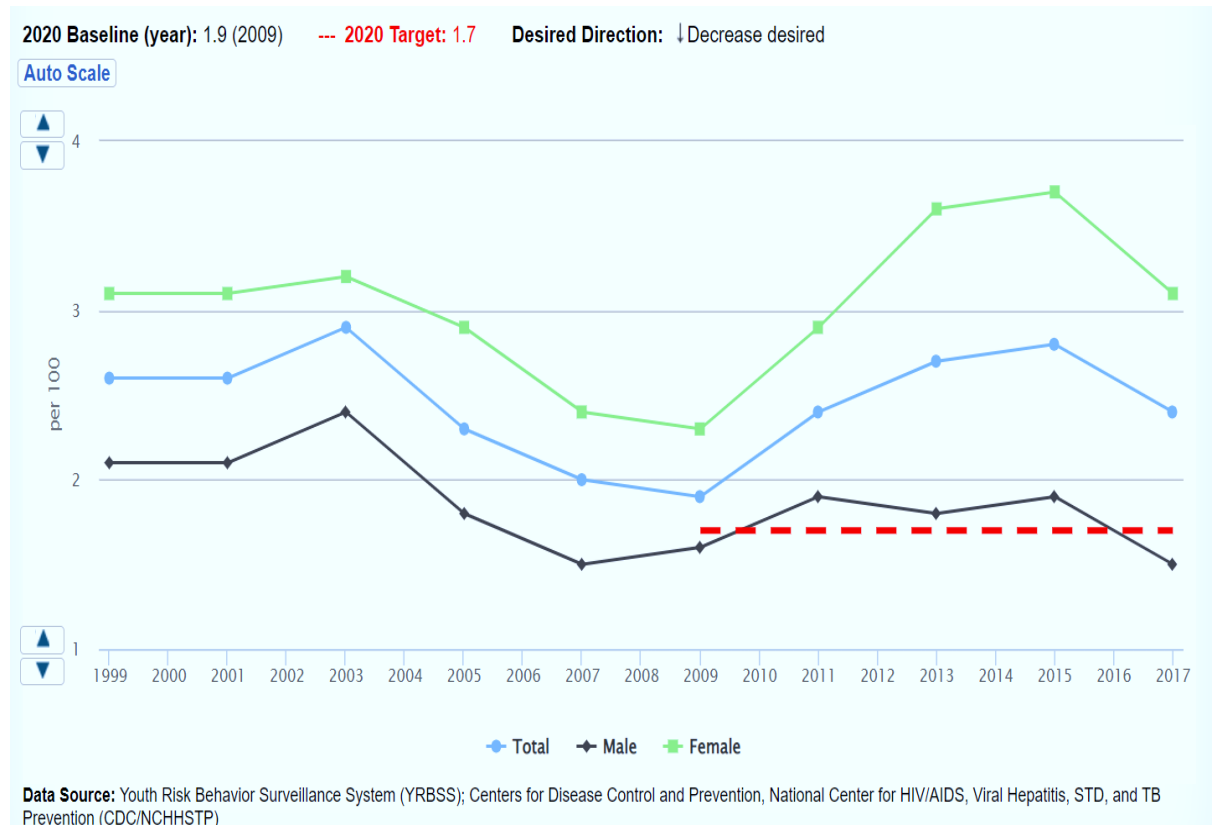
## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

occurrence of implicit bias in the mentoring dynamic (DuBois & Karcher, 2014; O'Brien et al., 2010). Gender matching, or creating mentorship relationships based on binary male/female pairings, is one way that this similarity-attraction paradigm is posited. One study by Kalbfliesch and Keyton (1995) created a framework for the growth of female mentorships and found that a female-to-female mentoring dyad was similar to the development of female friendships. They also posited that females and males may differ in their approach to mentoring which then questions the traditional mentoring model in relation to binary gender. Ensher and Murphy (1997) also found that when proteges had high perceptions of similarity to their mentors, they demonstrated higher rates of satisfaction, liked their mentors more, and had more contact time with them. Helping female teen mentees can also fight suicide rates in females. Figure 3 demonstrates that females are more likely to attempt suicide than boys (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2022); this demonstrates how important the right mentor can be for a female mentee.



**Figure 3**

*Suicide Attempts by Adolescents That Require Medical Attention (% , grades 9-12)*



In a 1990 study, Burke et al. found that females provided other females with more psychosocial and career development than their male counterparts. A later study by Allen and Eby (2004) also found differences between male and female mentors and showed that females provided more social support, which has also been corroborated by a meta-analysis that examined gender differences in mentoring (O'Brien et al., 2010). Counter to the potential benefits of female-to-female mentoring relationships, some researchers have pointed out that women are often not in powerful positions in organizations, so they may not be as beneficial to their mentees as a male mentor (Allen & Eby, 2004; Ragins, 1997). Without the same power as men in these organizations, they also may have less

access to information, resources, and important people (Ragins, 1997). Despite these challenges, women may be better suited to aid other women in navigating these obstacles than men, and thus prove to be more effective role models (Allen & Eby, 2004; O'Brien et al., 2010; Ragins, 1989). Also, female mentors that also identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community can also be a part of the similarity fit between a mentor and mentee. In regards to LGBTQ+ students, research supports that having LGBTQ+ mentors, mentorship, and other social supports is important in supporting positive mental health (Sarna et al., 2021). Representation matters and having someone with multiple overlapping similarities can create a strong mentorship bond.

In addition to gender, race may also be an important factor in mentor-mentee relationships (Allen & Eby, 2004; Burke et al., 1990). The United States has a long and rich history of minority oppression and racism, thus proponents of racial matching assume that an adult mentor of a different race and ethnicity less likely to be able to teach a mentee to overcome his or her obstacles in life and society if he or she doesn't have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to live as a minority are counterintuitive (Allen & Eby, 2004; Sánchez et al., 2019). A mentor of the same racial and ethnic background may be better equipped to understand the social and psychological issues that a mentee faces and can provide solutions that make sense for the mentee (Liang, et al., 2002, Sánchez et al., 2019).

Some research also suggests that cross-race mentoring may put minority identity at risk (Nobles, 1985). Ogbu (1990) observed cross-race matching and found that the mentor and mentee have different goals from the start of the relationship and that mentors

wanted “to save at-risk youth from the hazards of their environments by engaging them in ‘legitimate mainstream activities’” (p. 8). This can lead to lower levels of multicultural learning and exchange in the mentor relationship (Ogbu, 1990; Sanchez et al., 2019). Also, white European culture is seen as individualistic, whereas Latino and Black culture is seen as a collective, and this difference between the mentor and mentee may create barriers to effective mentoring (Sanchez et al., 2019).

As a result, it is possible for cross-race paired mentees to feel lower levels of self-worth when comparing themselves to the standards of the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1990; Sanchez et al., 2012). Sanchez et al. (2019) found that a stronger youth-reported cultural mistrust of Whites was one predictor of female mentees having low satisfaction in their mentor relationships. Related to this low satisfaction was the perception of mentors having low cultural competence. Mentors with higher cultural competence are more likely to have a better relationship with their mentees (Sanchez et al., 2012). Cultural competence is defined as the extent to which individuals have the capacity to effectively work with individuals of a cultural group (Sue, 2006). Some research shows that the best relationship outcomes are ones where the mentor has high cultural competence (Sanchez et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2012; Sue, 2006). However, while race is a compelling factor in considering the overall effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, this research also explores how addressing the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexual orientation and gender identity that mentees often experience can create positive outcomes.

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### THEORY OF CHANGE MODEL

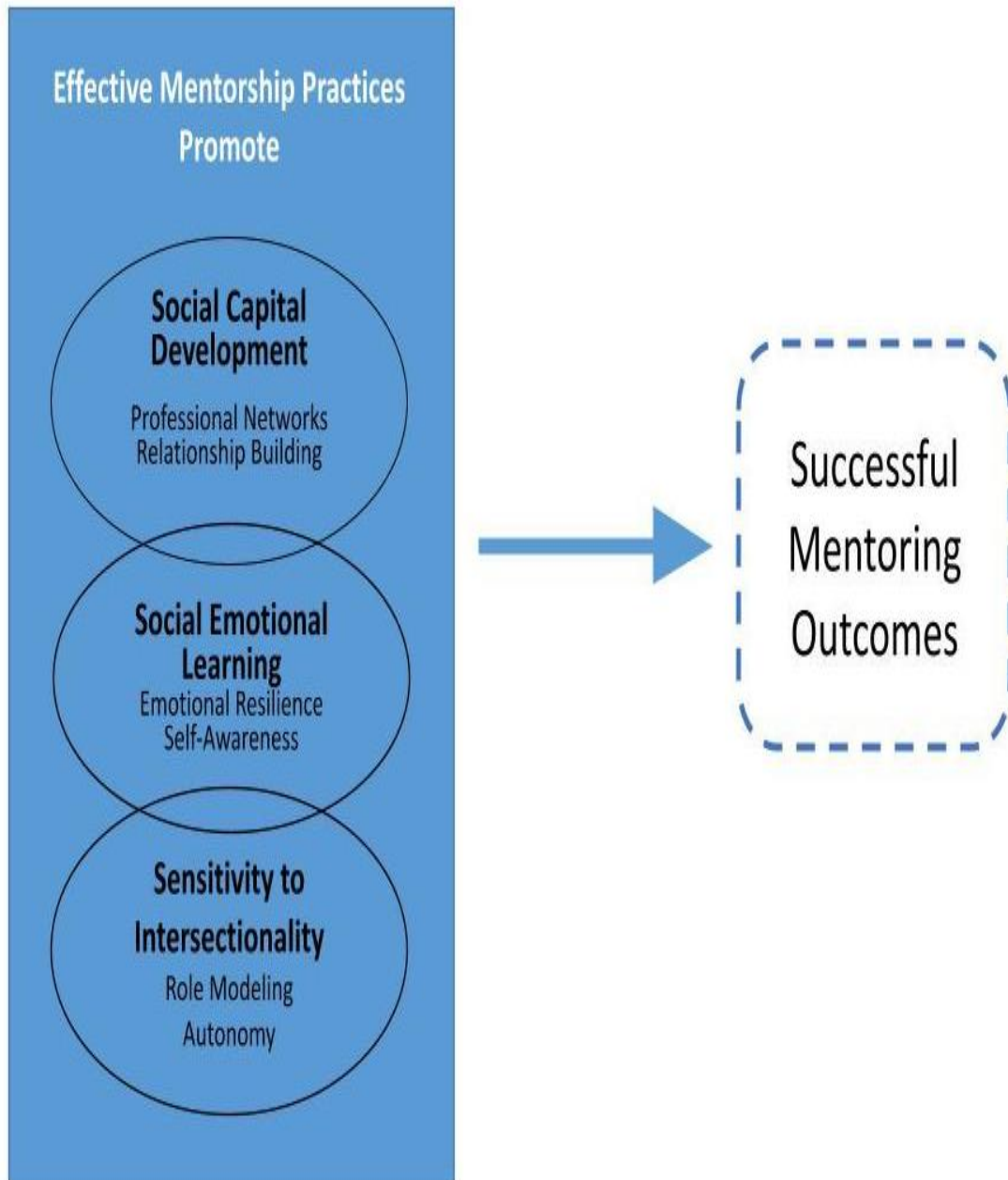
Our Theory of Change (Figure 4) model depicts social capital development, social and emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to intersectionality as the essential elements necessary to build successful mentoring outcomes. The Theory of Change model represents visually each element of the research (social capital, SEL, and intersectionality). Each element interacts and contributes to the overall goal of successful mentoring outcomes.

The model outlines components within the three elements of mentorship practice. The social capital dimension includes professional networks and relationship-building. The SEL element includes emotional resilience and self-awareness. Intersectionality includes the elements of role modeling and autonomy through an approach that draws on all of an individual's unique identities. The model examines these three critical factors as necessary for successful mentoring outcomes.

The model (Figure 4) defines social capital, SEL, and intersectionality as interconnected and dependent on each other to produce successful mentorship outcomes. The concepts captured within this model can assist community leaders who facilitate mentorship programs to consider the incorporation of activities that build understanding and engagement with social capital, SEL, and intersectionality into their mentorship programs to produce successful mentorship outcomes. The model would also be of interest to mentors who are interested in exploring ways to best support their mentees in goal attainment.

**Figure 4**

*A Theory of Change Model that Emphasizes Social Capital Development, Social Emotional Learning, and Sensitivity to Intersectionality as Essential to Successful Mentoring Outcomes.*



CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

*Overview*

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore how social capital development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and female intersectionality influence successful outcomes for adult (18 years old and older) female mentors and mentees in the St. Louis region. Creswell notes that qualitative methods rely on the importance of conveying the complexities of a situation, and this is precisely what researchers hoped to identify through the differing perspectives shared on mentorship by their participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Percy et al. (2015) specify that generic data collection is intended to draw real information from real-world events and processes, which the researchers anticipated being shared by participants in their interviews.

One strength of qualitative research is that it allowed the stories of the participants to be lifted in a way that was not possible through quantitative research (Kahlke, 2014). Creswell and Creswell (2014) state that this kind of research “focuses on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (p. 22). As each participant had their own individual mentorship story, the need to honor each participant’s meaning was paramount. The social constructivist perspective tells us that individuals seek to understand the world around them and that their meanings are subjective in nature (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Research is conducted through open-ended questions that participants answer; these individual perspectives communicate their particular views. Creswell and Creswell (2014) also identified that qualitative researchers look to understand the participant’s setting by having personal interaction with the participant (as cited in Crotty, 1998). This social aspect illustrates the importance of the

community of humans that shape meaning and underscores another important aspect of qualitative research.

This study views social capital development, SEL, and intersectionality as critical factors in the mentorship journey and mentorship relationship dynamics. For the purpose of this study, mentorship is viewed as transformative in nature. Mertens (2007) notes that transformative paradigms lend themselves to culturally competent, qualitative strategies, which provide a framework for addressing inequality and injustice. Since the work focuses on female minority participants involved in mentorship programs in the St. Louis area, the researchers have adopted a generic qualitative design as their methodology. Researchers began by collecting archival data by reviewing public data sets in the form of websites, brochures, and social media of non-profit organizations that maintain a mentorship curriculum within their program.

#### *Research Location*

This research took place in the St. Louis metropolitan area. From a structural standpoint, there are nearly 25 organizations that highlight “mentorship” as an intended benefit of their program efforts, so the researchers conducted archival research to narrow the organizations to three organizations that focus specifically on female-paired mentorship. After completing a document scrape of the websites, brochures, and social media accounts of the three organizations, researchers used social media posts to generate interest in the targeted population. These posts targeted a diverse population of female current and former mentors and mentees who would be willing to participate in interviews over Zoom about their experiences.

*Research Sample*

The researchers focused their target population on female participants of various ages (18 years and older) who have participated in a mentoring relationship either as a mentor or mentee. Originally, the researchers planned to work with adolescents (14 years - 18 years of age) because of the interest in studying the high school to college pipeline; however, after deeper consideration, the researchers chose to examine the adult population for the collective experience that they would bring as mentors and mentees. The researchers felt that an adult population brought a comprehensive body of experience in the field of mentorship to the research that would not exist otherwise. Researchers also met with organizational leaders from multiple mentoring organizations in order to gain access to potential research participants. Researchers also met with organizational leaders from multiple mentoring organizations in order to gain access to potential research participants. Researchers also explored a variety of mentoring curriculums and guides available online, and also generated a catalog of mentoring program attributes, who they recruited as mentors, and the mentees they served.

Participants were purposively chosen based on meeting the selection criteria: that they identified as an adult (18 years or older) female minority that participated in an informal or formal mentoring relationship and agreed to participate in research questionnaires and interviews. Since the research aims to fill the gap in mentorship research highlighting women of color, the researchers used purposive sampling to identify women of color in an effort to focus on their stories.



*Data Collection*

Researchers reviewed samples of mentoring questionnaires from a variety of national organizations to understand the kind of questions these organizations asked their stakeholders about mentoring before, during and after the mentorship ended. Researchers worked together to create the Pre-Screen Questionnaire (Appendix D) to identify potential participants. Researchers also co-wrote and edited the interview protocol and participant interview questions; there was a dry run of these interview materials with a person not connected to the research. This practice provided a necessary understanding of what edits were needed for the final draft of both the interview protocol and participant interview questions. From the results of the pre-screening questionnaire, the researchers selected 14 total participants from a pool of respondents. The characteristics of the sample population are detailed in Table 2. After the participants were selected, they received an email with pre-participation work including signing the researchers' informed consent form and reviewing the researchers' research question, purpose statement, and problem statement. Participants were able to schedule their thirty-minute Zoom interview through Calendly, a calendar software system that linked to the individual calendars of the researchers. During the interview, the researchers followed the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C), and they began by introducing themselves and the research they were conducting followed by retrieving informed consent from each participant before beginning the interview.

Within the interview, participants were asked a series of questions to gauge their experience with mentorship through the Interview Protocol (See Appendix C). Interview

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questions gauged how female mentorship relationships engage in social capital development, social-emotional learning, and sensitivity to intersectionality along with other reflective questions about their mentoring experiences.

**Table 2**

## Characteristics of Female Study Participants

Participants' ID	Race	Age	Mentorship Status			Mentoring Experience (in years)
			<i>Mentor</i>	<i>Mentee</i>	<i>Both</i>	
Participant 01	AA	32-38			X	0-3
Participant 02	C	46-52	X			20+
Participant 03	C	25-31			X	4-7
Participant 04	AA	32-38	X			20+
Participant 05	AA	32-38	X			4-7
Participant 06	AA	46-52			X	4-7
Participant 07	AA	46-52			X	8-11
Participant 08	AA	53-59			X	20+
Participant 09	AA	60+	X			20+
Participant 10	AA	46-52	X			20+
Participant 11	AA	32-38			X	8-11
Participant 12	AA	25-31	X			4-7
Participant 13	AA	46-52		X		8-11
Participant 14	AA	39-45			X	8-11

AA, African American; C, Caucasian

During the interview, the questions ranged from general queries regarding the mentorship journey to questions designed to gauge mentor relationship dynamics. Interview questions were used to measure the participants' understanding of social capital development, social emotional learning, and sensitivity to intersectionality as well as formal and informal preparation in their mentoring relationship.

Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed with permission from the participant. Each of the data points collected through the transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software system.

#### *Data Analysis*

Creswell and Creswell (2014) notes that coding reflects the rich and diverse experiences of the participants in a manner that places the participant's voice at the center of the research. Since the researchers hoped to capture the voices of mentorship from the direct experiences of their participants, they elected to use in vivo coding. This kind of coding allows researchers to understand the stories of participants in their own words and is a form of qualitative data analysis (Manning, 2017; Saldaña, 2013). As a result, the voices and experiences of the participants are the core data that is examined in the research.

Terry and Hayfield's (2021) 6-phase process was also implemented when reviewing and analyzing the data. During Phase 1, researchers started by immersing themselves in the data and reviewing each transcript, carefully reading each interview. Researchers made familiarization notes throughout the interviews as a way of capturing

ideas and reflections as the researchers engaged with the data. Once familiarization was achieved, researchers moved to Phase 2 and began to work with the data to generate codes. As the researchers began reviewing the transcriptions of their interviews, common phrases began to emerge such as “benefits of mentorship,” “preparation and training,” “iron sharpens iron,” and “social connection.” The researchers prepared a list of over 99 unique codes with over 1,325 codes applied to interview transcript excerpts (See Appendix A); while working through the coding section, the researchers worked collaboratively to generate intercoder agreement (Saldaña, 2013). Phase 3 is where researchers began initial theme generation. After analyzing the data fully and ranking the codes with the most code applications, the researchers identified emergent themes through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a process that is used to conduct an analysis of qualitative data (Percy et al., 2015). The codes initially garnered over ten different prototype themes; these prototype themes were then discussed and some were clustered and some codes were promoted. The first round of themes was “bucket themes” (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). By Phase 4, researchers were able to meet in person to organize the data into workable categories that reflect the various mentorship focus areas including: “the why of mentoring,” “mentorship journey,” “mentoring relationship dynamics,” “social capital,” “social-emotional learning,” and “intersectionality.” This led to Phase 5 where researchers met with an advisor to name and fine-tune the definitions of the themes. The previous “buckety” theme categories were revised to capture the essence of the theme and give a clearer signpost to the data’s story. In Phase 6 researchers began to write up the results of the findings about how social capital development, social and

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emotional learning, and sensitivity to intersectionality created successful mentoring outcomes.

### *Researcher Positionality*

The researchers wish to share that they are all professional women who work in various educational or non-profit settings in the St. Louis community.

The researcher is a white, cis-gendered female who has worked in public education and non-profit organizations for six years with middle school through college students as well as professional adults. This researcher has served as an informal mentor. This researcher does have an association with a formal mentoring organization; however it was not an organization that was studied. The researcher does work with five of the research participants and this could introduce potential bias in the researcher or reactivity in the participants (Maxwell, 2008).

The researcher is a black, cis-gendered female who has worked for the University of Missouri system for almost twenty years providing middle and high school-aged youth college preparatory services and has also served as an informal mentor. This researcher does have an association with a formal mentoring program for college students; however it was not an organization that was included in the study. The researcher works at the same university as two of the research participants which could also result in researcher bias or reactivity in the participants (Maxwell, 2008).

The researcher is a white, cis-gendered female who has worked in Missouri public schools and has interacted with youth in a teaching capacity and as an informal mentor. This researcher had no former association with any formal mentoring organization or

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program directors. The researcher does work for the same school district as two of the research participants and this could introduce potential bias in the researcher or reactivity in the participants (Maxwell, 2008).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### *Overview*

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore how social capital development, social-emotional learning (SEL), and female intersectionality influence successful outcomes for adult (18 years old and older) female mentors and mentees in the St. Louis region. The first three chapters introduced gaps in research surrounding female-paired mentorship, examined literature supporting mentoring relationships, and outlined the research methods conducted to achieve the results. Through a review of literature, the team identified social capital, SEL development, and intersectionality as three critical areas that seemed to lack substantive exploration in female-paired mentorship. The researchers created reflective interview questions that addressed these topics and others that centered on the mentoring experience. While mentoring often features traditional models that are White, male, and cis-gendered, our research looked to investigate how female-centered pairings that were sensitive to addressing race, sexual identity, and/or socio-economic status of the mentees positioned for future success.

In this chapter, we present research findings that provide insight into the experiences of both formal and informal mentoring relationships. We present thematic analysis results for 14 interviews with female mentors and mentees.

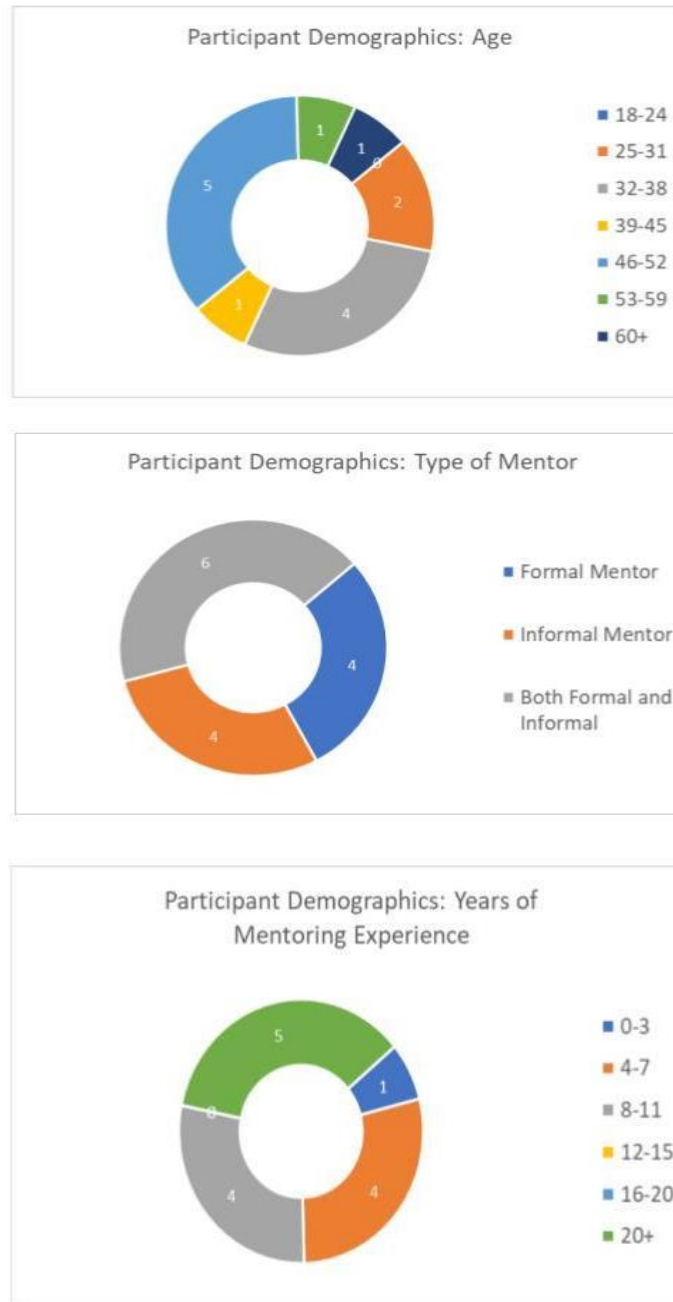
After coding all 14 interview transcripts, the researchers assembled the codes based on similarities between the codes, ultimately matching groups of codes into themes based on mentorship outcomes. The participants in the research were professional women of various ages (Table 5) who had been mentored, either formally or informally in the



past, and were serving as current mentors to female mentees in either a formal or informal capacity (Table 5) and with various years of experience (Table 5). Overall, the interviews garnered 99 total codes that dealt with a variety of aspects of the motivation to be a mentor, the relationship between the mentor and mentee, and what actually goes into the process of mentoring. From these codes, the researchers clustered all the parent codes and child codes and promoted codes to construct prototype themes (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The prototype themes were then discussed, finalized, and paired with illustrative quotes from participant interviews that demonstrated each theme (Ibid.). Six themes were constructed from the researcher's work, which is examined in more in Tables 9 and 10. These themes demonstrate the inherent complexity in being a female mentor and guiding another female through life. Each theme addresses the following research question: How do mentors/mentees engage in social capital development, SEL, and intersectionality to support mentee outcomes?

**Figure 5**

*Participant Demographics: Age, Type of Mentor, Years of Mentoring Experience*



We constructed six themes as outlined below:

**Theme One:** “Am I my sister’s keeper? Yes, I am”: The why of mentoring.”

**Theme Two:** “I keep myself open to opportunities to serve others”: Mentors define and avidly pursue their own mentorship journey.

**Theme Three:** “God sent me coaches that I did not want, did not ask for, but were exactly what I needed”: Mentors connect authentically, provide guidance, and demonstrate appropriate wrap-around support.

**Theme Four:** “It’s rewarding... to build upon [the mentor’s] network, so I have a network of people...[to] count on, depend on, or go to when in need”: Mentors build social capital through community, skill development, and transformative relationships.

**Theme Five:** “Mentorship feeds your ability to [understand] and embrace your individuality...and when you do have something different, that’s your power. Embrace it!”: Mentors are integral to overall human development and self-actualization

**Theme Six:** “That conversation would not have been held if I wasn’t there. [The white, cis-gendered program directors] would not have known how to direct that conversation...so that students understood ‘I can be in alignment. I can be an ally’”: Intersectionality is an essential component of mentoring relationships.

**Table 3***A Thematic Table (Themes 1-3)*

<b>Theme 1:</b> “Am I my sister’s keeper? Yes, I am”: The why of mentoring	<b>Theme 2:</b> “I keep myself open to opportunities to serve others”: Mentors define and avidly pursue their own mentorship journey	<b>Theme 3:</b> “God sent me coaches that I did not want, did not ask for, but were exactly what I needed”: Mentors connect authentically, provide guidance, and demonstrate appropriate wrap around support
Breaking out of your comfort zone	Mentor preparation and training	Mentee relationship with mentor Personal Growth
Challenging the systems	Mentor educational background overlapping mentoring	Impact on Mentee’s future
Feelings of personal responsibility to mentor	Informal mentor training	Mentor setting boundaries Open door policy
Giving back	Mentor-mentee matching	Goal setting
Positive feelings about mentoring	Formalized mentor training	Personal safety Providing a safe space
Questioning why girls are making decisions that they make	Motherhood as informal training	Providing learning opportunities Being authentic being vulnerable
Paying mentor service forward; understanding the fruits	No mentoring training as teacher	Knowing mentee’s background Love and support
Empowerment	Growth through experience	Learning in to relatable personal experiences with empathy Improving family relationships Keeping in touch

*Theme One: “Am I my sister’s keeper? Yes, I am”: The why of mentoring.*

The first theme highlights the many ways in which mentorship is a journey. In general, mentors and their mentees have a clear starting point for their relationship; however, where this relationship ends is often open-ended. The relationship is iterative and this allows for the relationship to wax and wane as needed as each relationship is unique. The recursive character of mentoring relationships helps to highlight the journey nature of this relationship and the many twists and turns it may take over time. This theme captures elements like the pressing need for connection and the driving force for empowering future generations through meaningful one-to-one interaction. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted above in Table 9. This theme captured many

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elements that participants shared around the idea of “lifting as we climb,” which means to pull others up as one climbs the ladder. Participants also cited the desire to achieve an outcome or work towards a goal as a critical force in mentorship. As the interviews progressed, the idea of movement or action was a recurring theme that many participants cited as their intention to mentor or be mentored. Whether it was providing social or emotional movement, the participants agreed that mentorship is a relationship that requires action. There is no such thing as a ‘static’ mentoring partnership.

Within the first theme, participants also highlighted the importance of “iron sharpens iron,” which acknowledges why building a relationship must happen at the right time and in the right space. Participant 1 highlights the idea of the “right” relationship below:

My current mentoring partner, I had her before, almost 20 years ago, and 20 years ago, I wasn't qualified to be mentored by her, but 20 years in the future, iron sharpens iron. Not only am I qualified, but she is qualified.

Participant 1 shares an experience that many participants highlighted as well: the full circle manner in which mentorship can affect one’s life. It is being in the right relationship where two people are mutually giving and taking from each other, or demonstrating an equal partnership. It also requires the right time for both the mentor and mentee to be able to work in partnership toward their intended goals or outcomes.

As the participants shared more experiences, the first theme highlighted a sense of “calling” regarding the necessary need to serve others. Mentorship is one of the most positive gifts that one can give according to our participants. The most successful

mentoring relationships are empowering, evolving, and guiding both members in the direction of their intended goal or outcome. Participant 8 shares the need for mentorship like this: “Am I my sister's keeper? Yes, [I am].” As the researchers asked for follow-up on this phrase, Participant 8 mentioned a higher calling, which was also reflected in Participant 5’s outline of the ‘why’ behind mentoring: “I think that we are put on this Earth to serve, and I feel that mentorship is a way for us to do that in a way where we are empowering younger generations.” The mentorship was commonly described as an opportunity to serve others, specifically future generations, through empowerment practices like sharing stories and advice around personal and professional topics. Participants shared their desire to both be empowered and empower those around them through the exchange of shared learning and shared experiences. Participant 10 maintained that “I feel like I tried to be the [mentor] that I needed [when I was younger]. What would have helped me? What did I need from other people around me in order for me to be successful or what would have helped me during that period of time.” “Giving back” and “paying it forward” were some of the most utilized phrases that participants shared to describe their mentorship experience. Participant 11 described it in the following way: “To whom much is given, much is required” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Luke 12:48).

The idea that a mentor is in a position to pay it forward or give back because they have status or influence draws on another well-cited element: feelings of personal responsibility to mentor those around them. According to our participants, an individual’s position or rank may cause them feelings of guilt if they are not in a mentoring

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relationship. Participant 2 demonstrates the feelings of guilt or helplessness that sometimes affects mentors:

There's only so much we can help with. I think we've all like been to the point of tears like, Oh, I can't fix your world, and so I'm just gonna cry for you. I will sit here and we're gonna cry and it's gonna be okay. So, I guess in my own head I had to reconcile and become okay with that. I can only do what I can do.

Although this theme is focused on the journey of mentoring, it is important to note that mentorship is not intended to be self-seeking, self-fulfilling, or the act of a miracle worker. The participants highlight the need for relationships that are real, authentic, and genuine, and this is only accomplished through a lot of hard emotional work that occurs within both sides of the mentoring relationships.

Despite the positive nature of most mentoring relationships, there are elements that present challenges as shared by the participants. For the participants who spoke from their mentor experience, the sense of guilt to mentor because of their own good fortune was a resounding theme. A few mentor participants shared the difficulty to provide feedback in a context that was not filled with ulterior motives, especially if the mentee was seeking a new job that the mentor could assist with finding. Participant 1 even pointed out some mentors “can be dangerous and toxic and have their own agendas.” A few participants also mentioned the sense of questioning that they received from colleagues or friends once they shared their desire to mentor or shared that they were mentoring. A lack of preparation and experience was also raised as a reason that many

mentors almost did not go through with the mentoring relationship. Participant 8 who worked with student organizations at a university noted this issue when she stated,

I don't think [university administration] really prepared us to serve as a mentor when we were advising student organizations. And so that was one of my concerns. Where's the handbook? I think you could go online and access some information about being a mentor, but at that time, I don't think there was [any] formal training.

Although these challenges were cited many times by the research participants, they were immediately followed up with rationale as to why challenges are part of the mentorship journey. The challenges are a part of 'why' mentorship work is critically needed.

*Theme Two: "I keep myself open to opportunities to serve others": Mentors define and avidly pursue their own mentorship journey.*

The second theme highlighted through the interviews was one that conveyed the many ways in which mentorship is a journey. This theme was titled: "I keep myself open to opportunities to serve others": Mentors define and avidly pursue their own mentorship journey. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted in Table 8. What became clear throughout the interviews was that although mentoring training is often lacking which can be problematic, mentoring itself is derived from a personal passion and enthusiasm that mentors have for helping others, and mentoring is often a way of life. Being a mentor means that you are connected to your mentee in a profound way and often for many months to years at a time. Participant 13, a veteran mentor and a mentoring program coordinator, highlighted this connectivity when she stated:



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We all have a story. We all have this background, but we're still connected in the slightest ways. We're connected. And so we just have to find that thing that connects us [with] humanity as a whole. We're all connected.

As mentors tend to be older than their mentees (by at least five years or more), mentors have a deeper well of experience to draw from in order to guide their younger, less-experienced mentees. This life experience is important, but it is not the only factor. Mentors often remarked that they were both mentees and mentors, and often at the same time. The iterative nature of learning and passing on knowledge is an integral part of the mentorship dynamic. Participant 6 brought this to light when she said:

I like to say I'm always learning. I'm always a work in progress. So I even have someone mentoring me. And I've learned that, hey, sometimes you have to push outside of your normal routine, step outside the box. I like to keep myself open to opportunities to serve others.

The give-and-take nature of mentoring relationships develops strong bonds between the mentee and mentor. Also, having faced many of the same challenges that their mentees are going through allows mentors to bring their whole selves to mentoring. Participant 1 stated, "When mentoring partners meet, it is imperative that all barriers are down." By actively breaking down barriers between themselves and their mentees, the mentee can see themselves in the mentor. The female mentor reflects the mentee that allows the mentee to see the possibility of their own success in the life of the woman who is guiding her.

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Learning how to become a mentor is not a “one size fits all” approach. Mentors may or may not have formal training because they may not be involved in a specific mentoring program that serves the community. As with many of the mentors we interviewed, they were getting their training through informal means like “on-the-job training” that came with working one on one with their mentee over time. Also, many mentors drew upon their own life experiences such as being a parent, using their leadership knowledge from other roles they play in life (such as being an educator or coach), or their own experiences having to navigate difficult life situations or problems. Others did receive mentorship training as part of their participation in a formal mentoring program that served young women or as part of their jobs working in community organizations. The formal mentorship training for those with experience, varied in the kind of training (i.e. workshops, direct instruction) and length of training (from a few hours to yearly training sessions). Most often, mentors drew heavily from their personal experiences in order to not only be empathetic to their mentees but also advise them to success based on what they felt they knew worked or didn’t work. Participant 14 noted, “Mindset was a foundation that I learned from mentorship.” This “mentoring mindset” was essential in the mentoring relationship dynamic and demonstrated the importance of mentors being self-reflexive throughout their role as a mentor. In general, this second theme highlighted that being an effective mentor meant that the mentor had to be flexible to the needs of the mentee and go beyond just a “common sense” approach to navigating challenges and that this relationship was a constant work in progress for both.

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Although this second theme demonstrates the most positive aspects of the mentoring process, this journey is not without its challenges. Participants were often frustrated with their role as a mentor and did not know if they were giving the right advice or guidance. Participant 3 reflected on this challenge when she stated:

The negative part of being a mentor is that weight and that responsibility that you feel when you're mentoring someone else. So you just feel really responsible for whatever failures there may be because you feel like you've shown them everything that you've got. And so if they're not doing well, then it's your fault. You led them astray, maybe you're not as good at this as you think you are, and then that kind of goes back to forgetting your strength and that you are good at this.

It is often hard as a mentor to not internalize feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt about what kind of impact you are having as a mentor. When a mentee slips or doesn't succeed right away in overcoming a challenge, this can be hard for the mentor as well. As mentoring involves a large personal commitment to another person, the weight of that commitment is one that mentors take very seriously. In an informal mentoring relationship, the feelings of helplessness or frustration can be especially hard when the mentor does not really have an organization to lean on for more training or even just a pep talk to work through difficult moments. Learning how to deal with these feelings is one that takes time and is part of the growth of the mentor as they develop. Also, the mentor's reasons for mentoring should be altruistic and align with the kind of goals that

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the mentee envisions for herself, not just what the mentor defines as right and good.

Participant 1 considered this an important point:

I've heard so many of us [mentors] say when we call someone our little sister or it screams that you're trying to make someone be who you are or make them be like you instead of just allowing someone to just be who they are. Why does someone need to be like you?

Participant 1 also addressed that part of a mentor's job is not just to create "mini-me's," because "That's controlled and really manipulative, and that's not what we are designated to do." So there has to be a balance between both the mentor and mentee's vision of success, otherwise, the mentee's development could be put at risk. Although this issue is more about the effect on the mentee, mentors should also spend time reflecting on why and how they are engaged in the mentoring relationship. As the participants detailed throughout their interviews, this mentoring journey is not without its risks, but overwhelmingly, they understood the variety of potential pitfalls in the role of being a mentor but did not let these stop them from actively participating in a role they felt called to do.

*Theme Three: "God sent me coaches that I did not want, did not ask for, but were exactly what I needed": Mentors connect authentically, provide guidance, and demonstrate appropriate wrap-around support.*

The third theme to emerge gets to the heart of the study and highlights the essentials of the mentoring relationship dynamic. Theme three is titled "God sent me coaches that I did not want, did not ask for, but were exactly what I needed": Mentors

connect authentically, provide guidance, and demonstrate appropriate wrap-around support. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted in Table 8.

Being authentic was often cited as an important element of the mentoring relationship. Participant 12 felt the “most important aspect is being real, being able to vulnerable and transparent...and your 100% self.” Participant 1 echoed this sentiment by stating, “[Being] authentic. That’s what makes the most impactful mentoring relationships. When someone can be just their authentic ‘you.’” Without this level of “realness,” mentors would not be able to build the kind of dynamic relationship with their mentees. Even if that means being vulnerable, open and honest dialogue was part of a strong foundation of these relationships.

During the interviews, the participants also expressed gratitude for the mentoring relationship opportunities that they had been afforded during their lifetime. Some described the relationships as “partnerships,” others as “coaching,” some as advisors/advisees, and one remembered it as a “life-changing intersection.” No matter the title used, each of the women recalled their mentorship experiences with an overwhelming sense of gratitude, pride, fondness, smiles, and even tears. A local educator and longtime mentor described mentoring as a family legacy:

It’s just always been something that's been pushed in my family, giving back, somehow, reaching back when you come home from college, participating in a program that focused on mentorship, reading, tutoring, a book club, or some kind of empowerment for students over the summer.

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The nature of the relationship between a mentor and her mentee is one that is constantly changing and adjusting to the needs of the connection. The mentor provides emotional support with stability, guidance, love, and support for their mentee. The mentor also provides opportunities for social, academic, and job growth. The mentor provides wraparound support to further the mentee's path towards internal and external success. The dynamic between the mentor and mentee is bi-directional and aims to be mutually beneficial. The mentoring dynamic is focused on the relationship, not the individual. An important factor in ensuring a successful mentoring relationship can include having an open-door policy; however, setting appropriate boundaries from the beginning is required so that healthy expectations are understood and abided by both parties.

The mentoring relationship does not take the place of parent or guardian obligations or familial support. With the understanding that there are some students with more support and stability than others, the role of the mentor would be to provide encouragement and exposure to opportunities that can enhance their lives. The dynamic [mentoring] also does not remediate or stand in the gap for flaws or under-resourced schools in the educational system. That would place an enormous amount of pressure on the mentor that could strain the relationship and prevent success. Lastly, the relationship does not substitute the mentee's own personal accountability for their life's decisions. The mentor is there to help, to guide, to bridge, but they cannot make decisions for the mentee. That is a personal choice. A long-time mentor and spiritual advisor shared:

My role in their life, as I see it, is assisting them in crossing the bridges that they fear crossing because for each one of us there is some bridge in

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our lives that we are afraid to cross, either because we feel that we are inadequate or we feel that it's too high or the bridge takes too much to cross or don't think we can make it to the other side. I feel that my role...is to let them know that they can cross over. No matter what they face, they can cross over, they can get there. And if they will allow me to help walk them through, we will cross over together. That is my ultimate goal in any situation, that we make it over together.

This was a powerful sentiment, the notion of crossing over together, hand in hand, reminding the mentee that they are not alone. The women of this study echoed sentiments of wanting to have a positive effect on the young women's future by creating opportunities for learning, encouraging personal growth, and setting goals for their personal and professional lives. Mentors expressed the only way to create these bonds and have this impact was by providing a safe space for the young women and seeking to understand their background and experiences. By leaning into their own relatable experiences with empathy and allowing for a sense of vulnerability, mentors found this to be the only way to truly make meaningful connections with their mentees. Most participants cited their spirituality as the motivation behind their commitment to serve.

Another devoted role model and ally conveyed:

One of the biggest things is making sure that the youth that we serve understand that they have value and that their value is not just monetary, that they are worth everything that they put out.

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Mentors play an essential role in providing love, support, and instilling virtues of worthiness that their mentees need and deserve. As referenced by each of the participants, these quality connections are critical in the development of young people. Several of the participants felt a debt of gratitude to their former and current mentors because of the personal growth they experienced, the doors that have been opened for them, and just who they've come to be. A lifelong mentee and faithful mentor shared:

I would recommend mentoring to EVERYONE. As a mentee, it has truly shaped who I am in my career and my personal life. As a mentor, I feel so fortunate to witness where they start and then see how they end up. Knowing that those conversations that you've had, and the seeds you've planted have helped them to grow or that they've actually taken the advice that you gave them, it's an incredibly rewarding experience.

The participants provided first-hand insight into what the research revealed in the way of challenges of the mentorship dynamic. All interviewed wanted so much to be impactful and provide transformative experiences, even if it was just for one person. Some were faced with imposter syndrome, a term used to identify an individual that struggles to believe in their own capability and worthiness and worries that others will reveal them as a fraud or unfit (Benisek, 2022). All the participants are very accomplished, many holding a number of educational degrees and high-level professional titles, but despite this, some mentors did question their efficacy in their role as a guide and role model for their mentees.

Additionally, the mentors expressed that they experienced feelings of frustration and inadequacy because they wanted to do more than what they were capable of or



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permitted to do for the mentee. Some expressed that there were times when they just had to “let things go” because there was nothing more they could do in the situation or perhaps for the mentee. Participant 2 shared that “In my own head I had to reconcile and become okay with [knowing] I can do what I can do, and I don't walk on water. I can't fix certain things and that it's just going to make me sad sometimes.” Sometimes the desire to follow their heart was in direct conflict with maintaining professional boundaries. In these situations, some shared that they referred the young women to other resources, mental health practitioners, or just resolved to “pray for them.” This was especially difficult in the more structured/formal mentoring relationships. They all maintained the essential nature of continuing their own growth and development as mentoring partners as illustrated by a leader in the technology industry:

I'm always learning. I'm always a work in progress. So I even have someone mentoring me. I've learned that sometimes you have to push outside of your normal routine, and step outside the box. Sometimes those opportunities won't just present themselves, you have to look for them.

These feelings were especially true for mentors with minority female mentees in spaces where their minority status contributed to feelings of Otherness. One informal mentor noted this when reflecting on her job promotion that took her out of contact with the black female students she mentored at a majority white high school:

And so what is that going to be like next year when there's no one there for them to see? And so it's just not whether I like it or not, I'm a friendly face. You know what I'm saying? Simply to them, just because of that connection, and it's just gone...But that's just something I think about. There's not going to be any role models or anybody for them that looks like them in that school.

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This burden of being the one person that mentees in those spaces can look up to can be hard to bear when an informal mentor, like a teacher, moves out of that setting and relationship.

**Table 4**

*A Thematic Table (Themes 4-6)*

<p><b>Theme 4:</b>                      “It’s rewarding being able to build upon [the mentor’s] network, so I have a network of people...[to] count on, depend on, or go to when in need”: Mentors build social capital through community, skill development, and transformative relationships</p>	<p><b>Theme 5:</b>                      “Mentorship feeds your ability to [understand] and embrace your individuality...and when you do have something different, that’s your power. Embrace it!”: Mentors are integral to overall human development and self-actualization</p>	<p><b>Theme 6:</b>                      “That conversation would not have been held if I wasn’t there. [The white, cis-gendered program directors] would not have known how to direct that conversation...so that students understood ‘I can be in alignment. I can be an ally: Intersectionality is an essential component of mentoring relationships.</p>
Interviewing Skills Looking and acting professional or work place ready Career outcomes Upward mobility Building unity community, and radical relationships Meeting people right where they are and how they are Mentoring in the hot seat Acceptance Academics Educational motivation Achievement and success	Controlling your feelings Mental health Trauma Suicidal thoughts Perseverance or grit to overcome Conflict management Asking for help Knowledge of self-growth Self-care Mentee issues or needs Embracing your superpower	Turning challenges into strengths Representation matters Respect Seeing yourself in others Mentee age Sexual orientation Conversations about sex Gender identity Safe spaces Being a mirror to others Not feeling alone

*Theme Four: “It’s rewarding... to build upon [the mentor’s] network, so I have a network of people...[to] count on, depend on, or go to when in need”: Mentors build social capital through community, skill development, and transformative relationships.*

The fourth theme highlights the social component of building networks and connections in society. This title is: “It’s rewarding being able to build upon [the

mentor's] network, so I have a network of people...[to] count on, depend on, or go to when in need": Mentors build social capital through community, skill development, and transformative relationships. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted in Table 10. Social capital is a more recent term, but researchers found the definition that best fits their study is: the social currency that individuals carry. Within the interviews, the researchers provided this operational definition to the participants, so that they had a clear understanding of what the researchers were hoping to measure through their conversations. The participants understood social capital as a commodity that could be given away to those around them through networking and social interactions. Social relationships, in the personal and professional sense, are leveraged to build networks for individuals that provide support and guidance. Social capital can exist within the scope of academic, career, professional, and personal relationships as individuals use their connections to build their networks as well as pour into other people's networks, too. As Participant 12 shares: "It's rewarding being able to continue to build that person's network, so that way they have a network of people that they can count on, depend on, or go to when in need of a resource." As individuals navigate the personal and professional components of life, the ability to have resources becomes critical to continued self-growth and development.

Social capital is more than "who you know;" it is how you leverage who you know to help others. Social capital is not climbing the career ladder in a negative way, but rather meeting the right people who will lift you up the ladder as they climb it alongside you. The ability to create upward growth and mobility in mentoring

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relationships was cited in the majority of the interviews. Participant 1 discusses social capital growth in the following manner:

Just being in the same room with someone of the caliber as my mentor was in was a learning experience because it was like, wow, I can get here one day, I can do this one day. It's a reminder to me now to go in there, hold your head up, and you act like you own the room.

Participant 11's statement speaks to the idea that "seeing is believing" or what has been updated in today's society to "you cannot be what you cannot see." This phenomenon was shared by many participants in their mentorship stories, specifically, surrounding the need for mentors that reflect one's self both in the demographic sense as well as the career trajectory sense.

Participant 11 went on to share that her mentor did more than make social connections, but that the two were able to work on critical career-building skills like informational interview preparation, mock interview support, and workplace and professional attire discussions, among others. The actionable pieces of the social capital building were shared by many participants as well. The ability to set goals or outcomes especially as they related to workplace readiness was cited as one of the most necessary components in the mentoring relationships.

The power of collaboration was highlighted in the fourth theme of social capital and the relationship-building capacity that each individual carries. Collaboration is built on shared understanding and mutually beneficial relationships. Participants mentioned the need for mentorship to meet each person in the relationship, both mentee, and mentor,

exactly where they were at in terms of their lives. Participant 1 describes the collaboration in the following way, touching on the ‘meeting people where they are’ theme: “I’m in a new season of this with my mentoring partner, where we are building unity, we’re building community, we’re building radical relationships.” Participant 1 describes social capital in a three-fold manner: (1) unity, (2) community, and (3) radical or transformative relationships. The ability to unite or unify people is what social capital is intended to do. Community brings together commonality in order to achieve something for the greater good or greater benefit of a group. Radical or transformative relationships are what every mentoring relationship should aspire to be: working forward toward the betterment of all parties involved.

A final element that theme four covered was the sense of achievement and success that is unlocked through social capital. Participants shared stories of acceptance and motivation as a result of mentoring or being mentored. In the initial stages of a mentoring relationship, participants shared the practice of goal-setting and preparing agendas to hold themselves accountable for accomplishing tasks within their relationships. Participants also shared an overwhelming sense of achievement when a mentee would share progress or status updates with them as milestones towards the goal or outcome were achieved. The idea that success is shared by the team rather than the individual was a theme that came up for many participants, too. Within the social capital theme, participants highlighted the necessity to have a network of people who could be called on in a moment of need both personally as well as professionally.

Similar to other challenges with mentorship, social capital and connection-building can often carry a negative connotation where people only use it to get ahead rather than to help others. Social capital is also a daunting concept if networking feels too conversational or out of reach, as a few participants shared. Social capital favors socially inclined people, so more introverted people have to work more deliberately to make real and authentic connections. A few participants mentioned an “unequal playing field” in some mentoring relationships. As participants were asked to elaborate on this phrase, they shared the experience that some mentoring relationships require the mentor and mentee to be at similar stages of life as shared by Participant 1. Despite the challenges with the social capital lens of mentorship, the participants shared positive regard for social capital overall.

*Theme Five: “Mentorship feeds your ability to [understand] and embrace your individuality...and when you do have something different, that’s your power. Embrace it!”: Mentors are integral to overall human development and self-actualization.*

The fifth theme from this study reflects on the second part of the research question, the social and emotional learning (SEL) component. This theme is titled: “Mentorship feeds your ability to [understand] and embrace your individuality...and when you do have something different, that’s your power. Embrace it!”: Mentors are integral to overall human development and self-actualization. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted in Table 10.

SEL is an integral part of our overall human development designed to manage one’s well-being by making responsible choices. Strengthened SEL skills reinforce the

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need for individuals to grow in self-awareness and accountability. Ultimately, SEL lights the path for navigating our way successfully through the mental and emotional spaces of life.

In addition to SEL, self-actualization is another key element that researchers identified in the research interviews. Self-actualization is defined as a person realizing their fullest capabilities after their other basic needs have been met as illustrated in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1987). Raypole (2020) asserts a more relevant definition of self-actualization from therapist Kim Engel who says its "the ability to become the best version of yourself," but he goes on to add, "there's no script for that" (What Does It Mean). Raypole (2020) also notes that self-actualization can also be seen as: "Everyone has to find their own unique ways to hear the inner wisdom that can help them live a life of truth," (What Does It Mean).

The following codes were examined in the mentoring relationship dynamic theme: emotional control, good mental health, perseverance or grit to overcome, conflict resolution skills, the ability to ask for help/guidance, task focus, knowledge of self-growth, and the ability to exercise self-care. The review of SEL in this study does not include outside factors like living environment, genetics, mental health factors, and other personal traits due to the focus on the mentoring relationship as a whole rather than the individual.

The mentor participants shared that while they were working to expand the mentee's SEL skills, they found their own skills increasing. A career educator and mother expressed:

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I feel like as a mentor, you're learning things about yourself, your own capabilities, your place in that area...this may be a little dramatic, but you're finding your place in this world while shepherding others through their obstacles.

A sense of purpose or self-actualization mentors realized as a result of their commitment to serving in this capacity was a sentiment echoed by many of the participants. A veteran mentor and spiritual advisor recounts how, "they start off like baby birds, just feeding and eating and feeding, and they come back and they've grown and matured into full-grown adult birds able to fend for themselves." Many of the mentors voiced their praise for the mentoring process for this very reason, the ability to watch their mentees elevate from one stage to the next. As one of our self-proclaimed radical mentors vocalized, "chains break when they're supposed to!" This is a key element of the social-emotional learning process leading to the place of self-actualization, empowering young women to understand that everyone's journey is different, everyone's roadmap is unique and if they remain steadfast, they can achieve their goals despite any obstacles. One of our mentors reflected on this commitment to perseverance:

Maya Angelou said that every storm runs out of rain eventually and that you just have to persevere. If you just wait long enough and you ride it out long enough that eventually, the clouds are clear, the rain will stop and it gets better. I think that's the thing because I think a lot of times teenagers don't necessarily see the end of the storm and they're in the middle of whatever it is, and it's just really difficult for them to imagine anything else. I think that



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nothing really is as big as it seems at the time. And if you just cry it out, go home, then dry your tears and then get up, dust yourself off and keep on going, and that's all you can really do. Keep on going.

Being there to cheer mentees on as they persevere and overcome was part of what drew mentors to continue seeking out these kinds of relationships with female mentees.

One mentor spoke of the power that results within the mentees as: “Mentoring is letting young people know that it only takes something really small, just a little bit of spark. So they know that they can do it, that they are powerful, limitless. They are the creators!” As another participant put it, “Mentoring allows us to become a part of their village, their cheering section.” The goal of a mentoring relationship is creating a support network with individuals who increase and build social emotional skills.

Social and emotional learning is a lifelong process that requires daily development and nurturing. There will never be a time in any of our lives where these skills will not be necessary. To close out the section on SEL, one mentor reflected that: “[SEL] is one’s internal essence that courageously allows them to embrace their superpower.” The SEL skills built by the mentee empower mentees to become their best selves and be the person they want to be, with courage and dignity.

*Theme Six: “That conversation would not have been held if I wasn’t there. [The white, cis-gendered program directors] would not have known how to direct that conversation...so that students understood ‘I can be in alignment. I can be an ally: Intersectionality is an essential component of mentoring relationships.*

The sixth and final theme deals with the third part of the research question, intersectionality. “That conversation would not have been held if I wasn’t there...”:

Intersectionality is essential to mentoring relationships. The codes that generated this theme are highlighted in Table 10. This part of the research dealt with perhaps one of the more complex aspects of the mentoring dynamic between female mentors and their female mentees. Intersectionality is a way to define how a person’s gender, race, sexual, identity, and socioeconomic status can intersect and cause challenges as a result.

Intersectionality is of most concern for racial, gender, and sexual identity minorities. By understanding how these factors may cause obstacles in life for the mentee, the mentor can better inform the kind of support their mentee needs. This was addressed or understood in a variety of ways by the mentors as they worked with their mentees.

Mentors addressed intersexuality with their mentee’s race, gender, and sexual orientation.

For black female mentors, helping other black females overcome challenges that come with being a minority is one way they see themselves paying mentorship forward.

Participant 11 felt that “Giving back to someone that looks like me is even more rewarding because it's like I'm now building capacity for the next [generation] that comes behind me.” Young black girls and women need to see themselves reflected in their mentors and having an experienced black woman model success for the mentee can help them turn their challenges into successes. She also stated:

...there's an understanding there of the weight that you carry as a black woman in the workplace, the double standards having to show improvement more because you are African American.

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Having a mentor who understands cultural challenges and can model success while building strategy to address cultural challenges is important for the psychological and professional aspirations of the mentee. The weight of the double standards is burdensome, and having someone to not only empathize with but also strategize with can be invaluable. As a result of these kinds of challenges, many mentors acknowledged that representation mattered. Participant 10 wrestled with this issue in her professional space as a minority teacher in a non-diverse school where the black female students she mentored:

...don't see anybody else who looks like them in that school other than one of the principals. And that's it. And I know how important that is because I was that student. Black people, when you go somewhere, you look for someone who looks like you because it makes you feel safe. It's this instinctual thing.

Black female mentors' awareness of the significance of their example to other black girls and women was one of the major reasons many of the mentors were compelled to mentor. They saw this need for leading the next generation in a way that they did not necessarily have for themselves when they were younger, and they wanted to change that for someone else. This is especially true when it comes to the intersectionality of gender and sexual orientation. For queer minorities, seeing yourself in others takes on a significant role that aids mentee's understanding of themselves but also others. Participant 4, a mentor that identified as a queer black female, saw this in her own experience while

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mentoring queer black females in a high school program when discussing trans actress, Laverne Cox:

They [queer students in after school group] started being disrespectful and saying derogatory terms. And I'm like, wait, no, ma'am. No, sir. Let's talk about this. How is it any different for them [trans people] to be here versus you to be here? You all are together. You all should be on the same playing field, the same level. There's no difference between her and you, and you have to be respectful of other people. And so that conversation was able to be held because I was there. That conversation would not have been held if I wasn't there.

For mentees that are also sexual orientation minorities, having a mentor that identifies as LGBT+ can provide a range of supports that could be otherwise overlooked; however, allyship and empathy are important qualities for mentors to have and can help overcome the fact that the mentor and mentee do not have the same sexual orientation. Overall, a person's sexual orientation is an important core element of their identity and the mentoring relationship is one space where the mentee needs to unquestionably feel the mentor's unconditional support. With limited access to mentoring organizations that specialize in LGBT+ mentoring, the importance of addressing this aspect of intersectionality in an informal mentoring relationship then becomes critical when LGBT+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020). One mentor who works with queer youth spoke of this need when reflecting on her own experiences:

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And I also was going through some personal stuff at the time [as a teenager] where I was dealing with my sexuality. And so around the same time, I tried to commit suicide. And from that experience and then seeing these girls, I was like, I have to do more. I need to help other girls who might be like me. And at this time, when I say other girls who might be like me, I'm talking about possibly being queer and possibly not knowing how to address it.

Helping mentees, especially female teen mentees, deal with this aspect of intersectionality can make the difference between life and death. Mentors are important allies in the lives of their mentees and demonstrate the power of having someone there who supports the mentee in this facet of their journey.

CHAPTER 5 - EXPLANATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Introduction*

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore how social capital development, social and emotional learning (SEL), and sensitivity to female intersectionality influence successful outcomes for adult (18 years old and older) female mentors and mentees in the St. Louis region. This study provides insight into female-centered mentoring practices by giving voice to the village that has led to successful mentoring outcomes. What we unearthed were stories for the ages, magic moments, “mom” moments, triumphs and experiences that deserve to be shared with the masses, and quotes and anecdotes that are unforgettable. The researchers have had their own moments of awakening and epiphanies as a result of this experience.

This chapter will provide explanations of the findings of the study and the critical nature of mentoring relationship dynamic, discuss the limitations and delimitations, and offer recommendations for future research.

*The Voices of the Village*

Many of the participants referred to the practice of mentorship as a “village” mindset. There is an old African proverb that says “It takes a village to raise a child” (Reference, 2020). This means that those in the community both near and far come together to take an active role in the growth and development of the child to set them on the best path for success, to create a safe and nurturing environment wherein they can thrive, and ultimately to be better than they were. There were some who felt it their “duty” to serve or “pay it forward,” whether it be because someone had done the same for

them or deemed it their purpose or calling in life to make a difference in the lives of others. Some of the women were so compelled by the commitment to service that they left other jobs to do the work of mentorship full-time. Each one of the participants we interviewed was inspirational in her own right and continues to say “yes” to lighting the path for future generations to come in both big and small ways. These women want to be remembered for making a difference, for staying the course even when they had their own challenges, for modeling the way, and for propelling their mentees toward a successful future. Their voices have informed this study in significant ways. The use of their quotes throughout this study is our way of paying homage to these incredible women and the important work that they are selflessly committed to.

*What Makes Mentoring Work?*

In general, mentors provide two types of support for their mentees, either instrumental or psychosocial, which are key aspects of mutually beneficial mentoring relationships (Gibb & Megginson, 1993; Wilson & Elman, 1990). With instrumental guidance, mentors provide specific goals and challenges for mentees to accomplish. Psychosocial guidance is about counseling, friendship, coaching, and other emotionally connecting activities that build the mentee and mentor’s personal relationship (Gibb & Megginson, 1993). In addition to psychosocial support, relational qualities such as being empowering, kind, engaged, and authentic can have a strong influence on the lives of young people as they transition into adulthood (DuBois & Karcher, 2014; Liang et al., 2002). Some of the participants shared both the instrumental and psychosocial support lines for their mentees, and others one or the other, but all were equally as impactful.

The successful outcomes that female mentors and mentees are working toward do not happen overnight, nor do its critical factors exist in isolated silos. An effective mentor is able to skillfully weave an understanding of a mentee's whole identity to position her best for emotional and professional growth. Often, mentors will play a critical role in the development of a mentee's emotional well-being for long periods of time and will guide her mentee through important transitions in life. The participants [mentors] reinforced that mentors play an unmatched role in contributing to a mentee's success in the following ways: managing their emotions, establishing perseverance or grit to overcome, conflict management tools, knowing how to ask for help, mental health awareness, and knowledge of self-growth. As a result, going beyond the traditional mentoring model that are based on White, male, heterosexual norms are an important feature of these female to female pairings as they work towards successful female mentee outcomes. Successful pairing in a mentoring relationship is crucial to positive outcomes for both parties, especially the mentee. In considering race, gender identity, and sexual orientation in these relationships, being sensitive to the different dimensions of a mentee's intersectionality overlaps strongly with the whole-person approach of social and emotional learning (SEL). Through these powerful mentoring relationships, mentees are encouraged to love that which makes them different and be proud of what makes them unique. By learning to nurture all of the parts that make up your inner essence, mentees are encouraged to embrace their superpower. This was a significant revelation from the women of this study, the idea that we all have a superpower waiting to be nurtured and exercised. The role of the mentors is to encourage discovery, introspection, authenticity, and self-awareness to build their capacity toward self-actualization (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; Johnson & Wiener, 2017).



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As a student's social and emotional capacity increases, so do their self-confidence and other non-cognitive skills that will lead to future success (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). This confidence and self-actualization are also core drivers of a mentee's ability to build social capital. What we know is that even if the mentoring relationship doesn't help them land their "dream job" per se, a mentee's internal growth can also be empowered to understand where their superpower lies and capitalize on their strengths and abilities, which can ultimately increase their social and emotional capacity inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). Mentors can encourage mentees to find their life's path and develop an unwavering belief that they can achieve whatever they set out to do (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). These gains can be the result of connections and resources gained through the mentor or from newfound confidence awakening within themselves (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

The best practices in mentorship will add the value of social networks, create bonds between similar people, build bridges between diverse people, and honor the norms of reciprocity to prepare students for a successful life (Dekker & Uslander, 2001). In terms of social capital and the theory of networking, it's not about who you know, it's about how you leverage who you know to help others. The women of this study were great examples of demonstrating this "leveraging." While many of them are gatekeepers, they provide their mentees with the knowledge and tools they need to walk through any door, confident and prepared. Research shows that when a relationship is successful, the

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mentor and mentee both reap benefits professionally and/or personally (Wilson & Elman, 1990). These benefits can have a positive impact on how they view themselves as black women in their communities. The questions surrounding intersectionality were approached differently by each participant, depending on their background, their experiences, and how the term resonated with them. They all agreed on the gravity of representation and why and how mentees need to see themselves in others.

Representation in all its forms (gender identity, race, sexual orientation) was a topic that brought tears as some reflected on their experiences of feeling a lack of belonging whether it be in academia, the workplace, or society. For many that become the driving force for the commitment to mentoring. Mentee demographics, as a result, were an important factor in the matching process and could make difference in success or failure.

The safe space that female mentors of color and LGBTQ+ female mentors of color provide for their respective mentees allows them room to nurture their senses of self which is a part of positive mental health. This provides mentees with a sense of confidence and willingness to try new things and make mistakes knowing that their mentor has their back. This study can inform mentors' and mentees' desires to feel respected, feel seen, and not have assumptions made about their needs. Mentors encourage mentees to turn their challenges into strengths and to have a mindset to overcome. Over and over, the mentors vocalized the ideal that “iron sharpens iron.” As they poured into their mentees, they were also strengthened. It forced them to maintain passion for supporting their mentee in whatever capacity was needed. As a result, a different aspect of social capital emerged from this study, the notion of building unity,

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community, and transformative relationships. Meeting people where they are and how they are was a priority of each of the mentors. Mentors took to heart that each mentee runs a different race and comes with varying levels of social capital, emotional capacity and resilience, and sense of identity. Meeting people where they are and how they are is the ultimate level of acceptance which allows us to envision a new realm of mentoring that embraces unity, community, and transformative relationships.

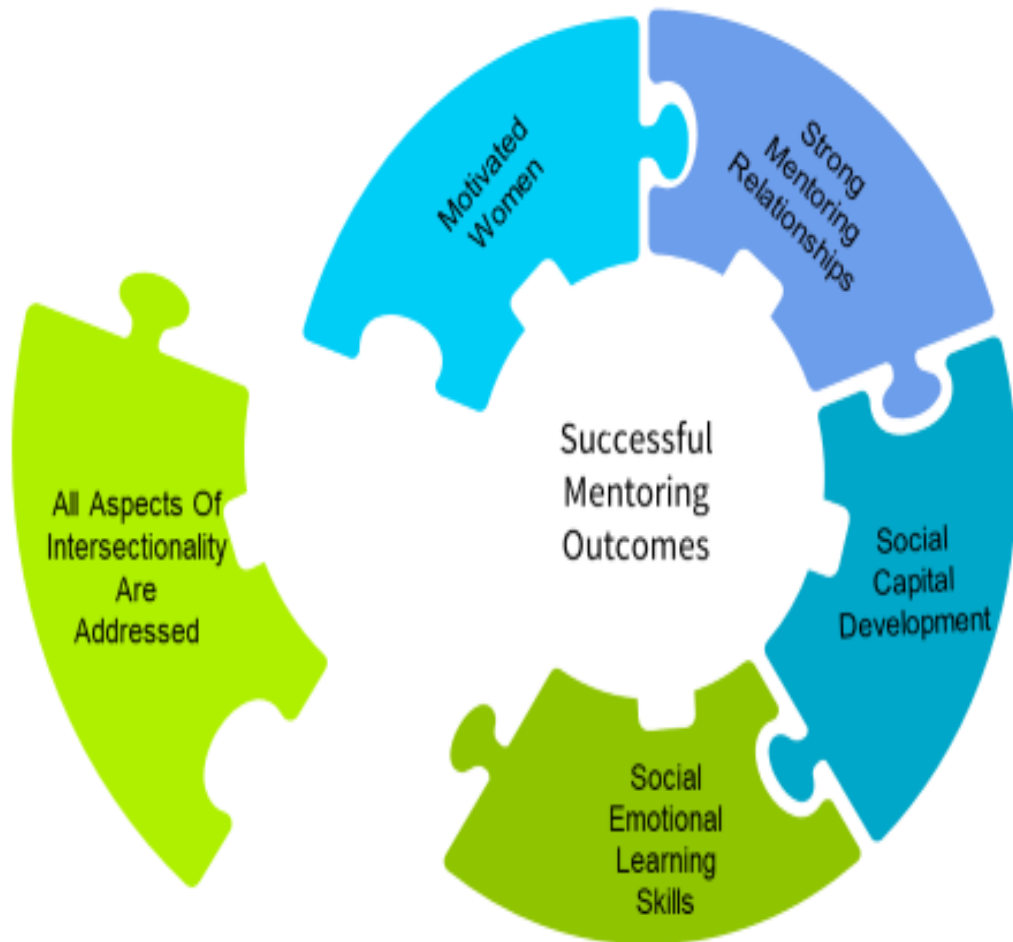
## REVISED THEORY OF CHANGE MODEL

In the creation of the revised model (Figure 6), researchers noted the interconnected nature of successful mentoring outcomes: (1) women motivated to mentor, (2) strong mentoring relationships, (3) social capital development, (4) social-emotional learning skills, and (5) all aspects of intersectionality are addressed. Each of these outcomes is necessary in order to produce a successful mentoring relationship that will help the mentee achieve her personal, professional, and emotional goals which is exemplified by the center of Figure 13. The researchers selected puzzle piece-style graphics to represent the outcomes due to the necessary connection between all five components and the center. Although almost all of the pieces seem to fit together, one piece (All Aspects of Intersectionality Are Addressed) appears ‘broken’ or separate from the rest of the model. This separation shows that although intersectionality in terms of some aspects like race, gender, and socio-economic status are often addressed in informal and formal mentoring relationships, more work needs to be done in supporting LGBTQ+ mentees and the challenges that they may face as a sexual or gender identity minority.

This aspect of mentoring is not addressed widely in formal mentoring programs and is an important area of needed growth, as a result.

**Figure 6**

*Post-Analysis Revised Theory of Change Model*



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A relationship is not expected to only yield positive outcomes, but rather a continuum of experiences is what makes mentorship an authentic element of human interaction. These interactions also need time and space in order to grow and develop; therefore, successful outcomes are not something either the mentor or mentee should expect to happen immediately. The best practices of mentorship are grown through the months, years, and even decades that mentors work with their mentees. Based on our research, the best mentoring outcomes happen on an iterative and on-going basis, which is effectively demonstrated by the graphic model's circular design. The mentoring stories highlighted that mentoring often begins organically and waxes and wanes over time, but once made, the connection between female mentors and their mentees makes a lasting impression on both members of the relationship.

Our initial Theory of Change model suggested social capital, social-emotional learning, and intersectionality as the necessary components to post-secondary attainment for female high school students, but this shifted as more interviews were conducted and the rich data suggested other factors were also important. In its current state, the revised Theory of Change model reflects our research findings which suggests that successful mentoring outcomes are interconnected, and they work in tandem to build upon elements like the call to mentor that motivated women, how they built strong relationships with their mentees, developed mentees' social capital, and nurtured social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. The revised model also notes the lack of well-developed sensitivities to LGBTQ+ mentees' sexual orientation or gender identities that should also be addressed in order to achieve successful mentoring outcomes.

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### RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

#### MAGGIE BROCKMEYER

With a Bachelor's in Psychology, a Master's degree in Educational Administration and Leadership, and careers in various community engagement spaces since 2015, I have a professional and personal interest in community engagement, education, and leadership to help individuals realize their full potential. As I have worked in public education and nonprofit spaces, I see the benefit of community engagement when its capabilities are fully realized.

In order to achieve the most out of a career or educational experience, individuals must be fully engaged in the community around them. This is where the idea of the 'village' is fully actualized. By creating networks and building connections, every individual is taking the steps to build their own village. In a time of need or discomfort, an individual can call upon their village for help. That is the beauty of a mentoring relationship; when two people are actively engaged in a mentoring relationship, they are sharing vital pieces of who they are with each other as well as their own social capital. In my professional work setting, I speak to the benefits of being a 'social capital millionaire,' which literally means taking the time to build meaningful and lasting relationships with all who you come into contact with on a day-to-day basis. Our time here is too short not to take every moment to make the world a better and more positive place, and I believe that is the power of social capital through mentorship.

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### DAWN INDELICATO-FAW

I have been a high school educator for over twenty years. I have worked closely with high school students in and out of the classroom during this time and see the value and importance of building relationships with young people on the verge of adulthood. This time of life is a critical one and with the right guidance, a young person can be set on a successful path; however, I also have seen how aspects of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other elements of intersectionality can create seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I understand that mentoring can have a powerful and lasting impact on mentees and that by addressing all the aspects of a mentee's intersecting identities in that relationship, the mentor and the mentee will grow in profound ways. Our mentoring relationship research helps to underscore the importance of a whole-person approach to mentoring and that all aspects of a mentee are important in making the kind of transformative change that mentees deserve to have. It also serves as an important reminder that young people need safe spaces and trustworthy, caring adults in their lives to guide them to future success.

### CHANNON PEOPLES

I hold a Master's Degree in Public Policy and Administration and Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, and this study has added to my desire and commitment to providing opportunities that transform the lives of the young people who reside in our communities. As a fellow member of the "village," I have witnessed the bountiful harvest that continues to come up from seeds planted in their lives many years ago. There is no greater feeling than knowing you're helping young people find and

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follow their path. The line of work I have been aligned with for almost twenty years has afforded me the ability to see some of the best and brightest students, but despite their academic prowess, they had some commonalities in that they needed support, someone, to believe in them, and to respect them for who they were and hoped to be. The social emotional learning piece has been and will always be critical to our young people's development. It is the key to them embracing all of the intricacies that make them who they are and helping them to become the best version of themselves.

What has emboldened me through this process is that as practitioners, we too are intricate, with multiple roles we fill daily. The growth we promote for those in our “village,” we sometimes forget the necessity of that growth for our own stretching out. You are never too old to dream or make a change. While I had a career mentor as a college student, (he is the reason I found my way to my current career path), I have not had one since then. I intend to continue doing purposeful work that opens doors for young people and model the way.

## SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study offer suggestions for female mentors and female mentoring organizations.

### *Suggestions for Mentors*

1. The impetus for most females to mentor often comes from the positive experience of being a mentee. Mentoring is often seen as a calling to the mentor and requires a complex set of interpersonal and organizational skills that influence the relationship dynamic between mentor and mentee. Mentors need to be prepared both emotionally



and psychologically for all of the potential ups and downs that come along with working closely with a mentee. Although mentors often draw upon the positive motivation to “pay it forward” and provide the next generation of females with the kind of mentoring relationship that they have had, mentors should be prepared for the potential challenges that may come with this role. Informal mentors are often at a disadvantage in this area as they are without the helpful support system or training that comes with being a part of a formal mentoring organization. Informal mentors should consider joining a mentoring community to manage these potential difficulties or to gain access to helpful mentoring resources. Formal mentors in mentoring programs should engage in training and workshops to ensure that their mentoring practices are reflective of the current values and norms in mentoring. Also, although one may have internal motivation to mentor, it is important that this role be given the time and attention that is necessary and that mentors only make commitments they can reasonably keep.

2. Female mentors are often motivated to provide other females a reflection of themselves in terms of gender, race, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. Black female mentors often noted that having representation from mentors allowed mentees to see that they, too, could attain success. Mentors need to be sensitive to the intersectionality of their mentees and make sure they are addressing all of the various components of a mentee’s identity and status. While the gender and socio-economic aspect of intersectionality is often addressed in female mentoring relationships, there is a need for more attention paid to a mentee’s sexual orientation and/or gender

- identity and how that status may provide challenges for the mentee to overcome as a sexual orientation minority. Having a female mentor who understands these struggles and who supports this journey is important and mentoring organizations should do more to address this need. Queer mentees need validation and a variety of emotional and psychological supports that they might not otherwise have. Not addressing this aspect of the mentee can provide obstacles not only in the mentoring relationship but also in the future success of the mentee. Mentors should engage in reflection and introspection to recognize and address any potential biases that may harbor which can provide an obstacle to addressing the whole identity of the mentee.
3. The spirit of collaboration should be central to the mentoring relationship. Mentors who approach their mentoring dynamic with this mindset will find, like many of the participants mentioned, “iron sharpens iron.” The constant give and take nature of the relationship is something that mentors should expect to participate in and be supportive of, as one participant noted, “when they succeed, I succeed” and this kind of attitude is essential for positive social capital outcomes.
  4. Mentors become part of the mentees' village, their community, their resource pool, and their wealth of knowledge. With this mindset, it shifts the role from one of obligation to one of privilege. As gracefully conveyed by one of our mentees, “... it only takes ... just a little bit of spark. So they know...that they are powerful, limitless.” Understanding your role as a mentor and how to effectively empower students to develop their social-emotional learning skills will produce affirmative

outcomes for both the mentor and mentee. The relationship is a work in progress for both parties and produces lifelong rewards.

*Suggestions for Mentoring Organizations*

1. Mentoring organizations bear an important responsibility to their mentors and mentees and should look for creative ways to support both the mentee and mentor throughout this relationship. Training for both mentor and mentees will ensure that mentors and mentees are getting the organizational support they need; additionally, pre- and post-interviews with mentors and mentees will give organizations valuable insights from their stakeholders. Spending time and consideration to ensure a good fit or “match” is an important aspect of this relationship and one that mentoring organizations should prioritize. Without a good fit, mentors and mentees can face difficulties in creating the necessary bonds they need.
2. Mentoring organizations should also consider preparing students for life beyond high school by engaging in social capital development. Providing opportunities for mentees to work on their soft skills and basic job skills will prepare mentees for the workplace and their career aspirations. Mentoring organizations should actively provide access to job opportunities, job skill training, internship opportunities, networking events, and other avenues for mentees to grow their social capital. Organizations should also work closely with mentors in finding ways to support and extend social capital development for mentees.
3. Mentoring organizations should consider providing opportunities that focus on embracing students’ individuality and uniqueness through strength-based interest

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inventories and personal development workshops. Students gain an awareness of the power(s) they possess and the options available to them in life versus viewing life through a narrowly focused lens. Social and emotional learning skills have an intense focus on overall human development, but within the right framework can lead to practices of self-actualization and becoming the best version of themselves.

4. Mentoring organizations in St. Louis serve a variety of populations; however, the small number of organizations that specifically address females speak to the need for such organizations to exist. Females often experience obstacles in life because of their gender, socio-economic status, and/or sexual orientation. Mentoring organizations should tailor their programs to address all of the needs of the female mentees and provide wrap-around services accordingly.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

1. A quantitative measurement of female mentoring relationships within formal mentoring organizations in St. Louis would provide helpful insights into female mentoring relationships.
2. Engage in a longer time period in which to gather data from the formal mentoring programs and informal mentors. Six months or longer would give researchers more time to generate participants and gather and analyze data.
3. Broaden the number of mentoring organizations that are engaged in the research to help diversify the participant demographics.
4. Interview a broader demographic of female mentors to further increase the range of intersectional identities.

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5. Include school-aged female mentees in the participants to understand more about this age group and their perspective of mentoring relationships.
6. Explore the use and benefits of mentor-mentee reflection on successful mentoring outcomes.

## LIMITATIONS

This study has potential limitations. The study's methodological limitations were sample size, lack of available data, and self-reported data. The first limitation was due to a small sample size of 14 participants. None of the researchers work directly in the mentorship organizations that were examined for this research study, which meant a lack of access to current and past mentorship partnerships existed. This contributed to a limited pool of available research participants. With only 14 participants this contributed to the second limitation of lack of available data. While these participants did provide detailed interviews, a more robust number of interviews would have garnered richer data for the researchers. The third methodological limitation was from self-reported data in the form of qualitative interviews. Biases of selective memory, attribution, and exaggeration were possible as participants were often recalling information from months or even years past.

The study also reflects limitations of the researchers in terms of access and longitudinal effects. We did not have direct access to mentors or mentees in formal mentoring organizations, which limited our ability to gather a large number of interview participants. However, we were able to recruit participants through a variety of other channels like social media posts and posts in mentoring organization newsletters. A

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second limitation of the researchers was time to complete the study. We had approximately one month to recruit and conduct enough interviews to draw rich data for their study.

## CONCLUSIONS

As educators and community practitioners, this study has not only informed but fortified the work that we are commissioned to. The charge of strengthening young women's social capital by way of career development, facilitating the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, and making meaningful mentor/mentee connections that have the ability to be transformative in nature are the focal points of this study. This study will contribute to the field of research by not only informing practitioners but community members of the vitality of mentorship execution at all levels of our social structure. For programs with the mission of mentorship, it is necessary to implement more structured and ongoing training opportunities for their mentors to encourage more effective partnerships. For programs that work with youth in general, they should seek ways to include a wide variety of informal mentoring practices for young people that will promote their emotional and professional growth and development. In business, they should incorporate a standard that provides mentorship for new employees and those that wish to take their careers along different paths or to higher heights. There are local and national organizations that need more formal mentors and volunteers to reduce the waiting list of hundreds and hundreds of young people seeking mentorship. With the need being so great not just locally, but globally, there are

many young people that, if given the opportunity, would benefit greatly from a formal or informal mentoring relationship.

There are two major gaps in the literature that have emerged as a result of this study that lend themselves to more research: 1) Intersectionality and the female-centered matching piece that reflects not only the race and gender but the sexual orientation and preferences of the individual. 2) Formalized training for those interested in mentoring that promotes fruitful relationships and reduces barriers.

This research will continue to inform professional practice by providing insight into the needs of both the mentor and mentee, thereby improving the relationship dynamic. Cookie-cutter programs that are driven by antiquated matching models and dollar-driven grant criteria are no longer effective. As the needs and mindsets of young people shift, we must be willing to embrace this “new normal” and seek to provide services that meet their needs, as articulated by the mentees and research. Mentorship programs should be mindful of incorporating methodologies that reinforce the voices from the village [mentors] that have breathed new life into this body of literature through the following themes: 1) “Am I my sister’s keeper? Yes, I am”: The why of mentoring. 2) Mentors define and avidly pursue their own mentorship journey. 3) Mentors connect authentically, provide guidance, and demonstrate appropriate wrap-around support. 4) Mentors build social capital through unity, community, and transformative relationships. 5) Mentors are integral to overall human development and self-actualization. 6) As mentors we can and must be allies.

To close, the words of Mary Church Terrell, an African American feminist and

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racial justice advocate remind us, “And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long” (Church Terrell, 1898). The journey to success is often fraught with difficulties and trials, but our research clearly demonstrates that with the right mentoring relationship, females can lift each other up, provide support to overcome obstacles, and achieve their goals.



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## Appendix A

### *IRB Approval Letter*



December 15, 2021

Principal Investigator: Channon D Peoples  
Department: Pre-Collegiate Program

Your IRB Application to project entitled *Lifting As We Climb: Mentoring Female Students to Post-secondary Success* was reviewed and approved by the UMSL Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2071842
IRB Review Number	339891
Initial Application Approval Date	December 15, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	December 15, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii) 45 CFR 46.104d(2)(iii) with limited IRB review
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Approved Documents	This has been updated with the risks included. Advertisement to potential subjects to participate in the research study. This document includes a prescreen QR code. This is our pre-screen questionnaire. Interview protocol for subjects selected to participate in the study following evaluation of the pre-screen questionnaire.

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at <http://www.umsl.edu/recd/compliance/umsl-guidance-covid19-policy-7.2021.pdf>.
2. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the UM Policy: [https://www.umsystem.edu/ums/policies/finance/payments\\_to\\_research\\_study\\_participants](https://www.umsystem.edu/ums/policies/finance/payments_to_research_study_participants)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the UMSL IRB Office at 314-516-5972 or email to [irb@umsl.edu](mailto:irb@umsl.edu).

Thank you,  
UMSL Institutional Review Board



## Appendix B

### *Pre-Screen Questionnaire through Google Documents*

#### Lifting As We Climb: Mentorship Questionnaire

The mentoring community at large has long been rooted in traditional norms and practices and the research of mentorship is a reflection of this issue. By paying specific attention to females of color, this research will help address the research gap that currently exists. The researchers are passionate about social justice and supporting St. Louis female youth; their research will provide mentoring programs and stakeholders insights into understanding how empowering female students today will help them build a better tomorrow. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions with your *\*individual\** experience as a mentee, mentor, or organizational leader who works in mentorship.

**\* Required**

Email\*

Cannot pre-fill email

For the purposes of this research, mentorship is defined as: an action that takes to provide the support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's personal and professional development.

Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview?\*

Yes

No

Maybe

If you answered yes, please provide your email address, so that we can follow-up with you.

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

Your answer

How did you initially get involved in a mentoring relationship?\*

A connection through education/school

A connection through workplace

A connection through a community organization

A connection through 'word-of-mouth'

How many total years have you been involved in mentoring (including serving as a mentor, mentee, or both)?\*

0-2 Years

2-4 Years

4-6 Years

6-8 Years

More than 8 Years

What organization sponsored your mentoring experience?\*

FOCUS St. Louis

Wyman

The Sophia Project

Other:

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

Mentors often introduce mentees to people who can provide school or career help. Have you ever done this or experienced this aspect of mentorship? Please explain.\*

Your answer

In your mentoring experiences, have you given or received help in overcoming challenges associated with your race, social class, gender, sexual orientation or any other aspect of who you are as a person? Please explain.\*

Your answer

Through your mentoring relationships, have you helped someone or been helped to control emotions, maintain positive relationships, or solve problems? Please explain.\*

Your answer

## Appendix C

### *Interview Protocol*

**Researcher:** Thank you so much for joining us for our research today. As a reminder, you are here voluntarily assisting with doctoral research for the Lifting As We Climb Mentorship research project sponsored by the University of Missouri St. Louis.

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** A few days ago, you received a few forms: (1) the Purpose Statement, Problem Statement, and Research Questions, (2) Lifting As We Climb Form, (3) Lifting As We Climb Roadmap, and (4) Consent Form. At this time, please let us know if you have any questions.

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** As long as you know that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, that is truly what our consent form is aiming to provide. Are you okay with moving forward and being interviewed as a subject in our research proposal?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** We are going to go through a series of questions, and we are very much hoping to gather insight on your participation as a mentor or mentee. We want you to answer openly and honestly. By no means will you ever be logged back to your answers. We will be doing an aggregate data poll of all of the qualitative answers to our study and really filtering out for bigger themes. So, yes, your words will be utilized, but they will not be able to be logged back to you. Again, knowing that you are completely voluntary in this interview process, are you good to move forward?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

Researcher: Question #1 - Can you tell us a little bit about yourself as a mentor? What did you do? What did you do and why did you join as a mentor?

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #2 - What we would really love to hear next is if you had to really cite one of the most positive aspects in your experience, both serving in these informal or formal kind of mentorship roles, what would be the most positive aspect.

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #3 - Considering your own experiences with mentorship, how would you recommend mentoring to a friend?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Our next set of questions are designed to measure the elements that our research is truly focused on: social emotional learning, social capital, and intersectionality.

Question #4 - Social capital is defined as building connections, networks, and relationships to reach an increased state of sociability. How do you think you impacted your mentee's social capital?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #5 - Social emotional learning involves the process by which students and adults really acquire and effectively apply knowledge and attitudes and skills for understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, feeling and showing empathy, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and ultimately making responsible decisions. How do you feel that your involvement has really impacted any of the people who you've mentored? How do you feel like you helped play a role in building out those social and emotional learning skills?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #6 - Intersectionality examines how race, class, gender, and other characteristics overlap and intersect with one another and how these can often combine to negatively impact women and minorities, especially. How do you think your mentoring relationships have addressed how to deal with the potential obstacles of intersectionality?

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #7- Based on what you have shared as it relates to mentorship, tell us about the kind of training you received before you began the mentorship experience. You can include both informal and formal training.

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Question #8 - Do you find mentorship empowering? Why or why not?

(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Before we wrap up, please share any final thoughts about mentoring that you think we should be aware of or that you want to include that we haven't really addressed in any of our other questions.

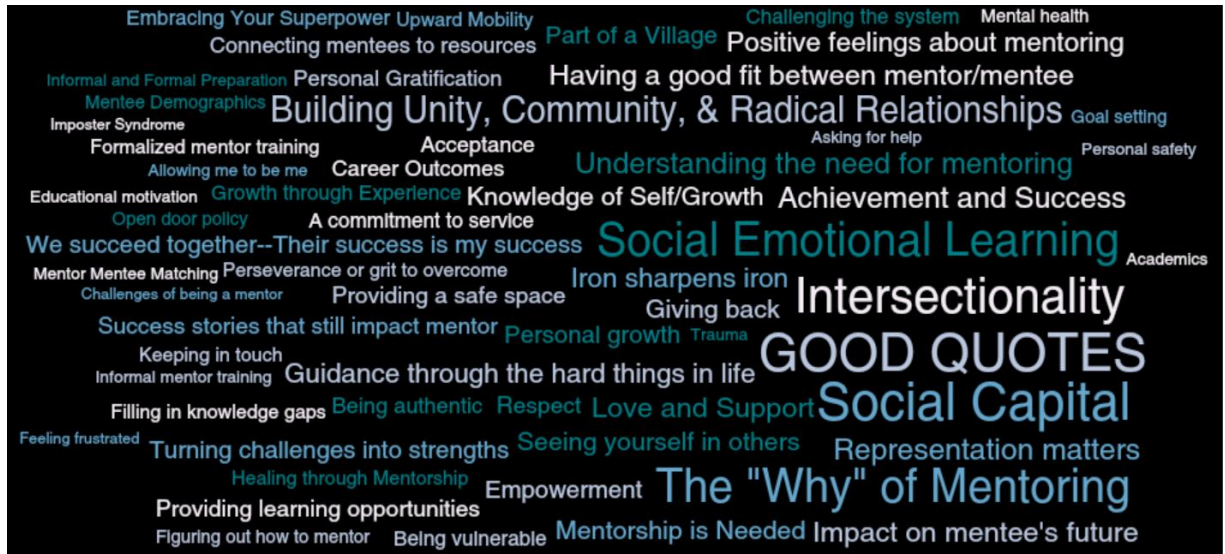
(Wait for response from interview participant.)

**Researcher:** Thank you for sharing that feedback, too. We've done quite a bit of literature review on our dissertation, and we appreciate you providing your insight. Since you completed our interview process, you are going to be entered in a drawing to win one of three \$25 Amazon gift cards. If you have any questions, please email us at:

[liftingasweclimb2022@gmail.com](mailto:liftingasweclimb2022@gmail.com).

Appendix D

Word Cloud of Code Generated in Dedoose



## Appendix E

### **Mentorship in Action: A Practical Resource Guide to Lift the Voices of Mentors and Mentees**

Created by Maggie Brockmeyer, Dawn Indelicato-Faw, and Channon Peoples in August 2022

In order to build a successful mentoring program, there are elements that are necessary to include. The Mentorship Resource Guide is designed to provide guidance about key elements to build a successful mentoring program, including matching mentors and mentees, fostering reflection by both mentors and mentees during the mentoring process, training mentors, and evaluating mentorship outcomes.

#### **1. Matching**

One of the most critical pieces of a mentoring program is ensuring a good match between a mentor and a mentee. A level of similarity or common-ground must exist between mentor and mentee so that they have a foundation to establish their relationship.

There are many ways to create a mentorship match, but some common practices include:

- Conducting interest and/or personality inventories. Consider one of the following:
  - [Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory](#)
  - [Enneagram Personality Test](#)
- Examining career-fit and mentor-mentee similarities
- Implementing an application process with a mentoring organization:
  - [Mentoring.org](#)
  - [Cornerstones of Care](#)
  - [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#)
- Using mentor matching software. Possible software options include:
  - [Graduway](#)
  - [Wisdom Share](#)
  - [Innovative Mentoring](#)

#### **2. Pre-mentoring Reflections**

As you consider a mentoring match, reflecting on the following questions may be helpful.

*Mentor Reflection Questions:*

1. Why do you want to be a mentor?



2. What kind of qualities do you think an effective mentor has?
3. How well do you think you handle personal conflict? What's something that has helped you deal with a personal conflict in the past?
4. What training and/or resources are available to help you become an effective mentor?
5. What makes for an ideal mentee for you?
6. How often do you want to meet with your mentee? How long are you willing to commit to mentoring?
7. What kind of relationship do you want to develop with your mentee?
8. How will you help your mentee develop their social capital?
9. How will you help your mentee develop their Social and Emotional Learning skills?
10. Your mentee may have different intersectional traits that may need supported (i.e. gender, race, sexual identity, class, disability). How will you support your mentee's intersectionality?

*Mentee Reflection Questions:*

1. Why do you want to be mentored?
2. What kind of qualities do you think an effective mentor has?
3. How well do you think you handle personal conflict? What's something that has helped you deal with a personal conflict in the past?
4. What is one thing you want your mentor to help you with?
5. What do you think your role as a mentee is within the mentor-mentee relationship?
6. How often do you want to meet with your mentor? How long are you willing to commit to being a mentee?
7. What kind of relationship do you want to develop with your mentor?
8. How strong are your social capital skills?
9. How strong are your Social and Emotional Learning skills?
10. You may have different intersectional traits that may need supported (i.e. gender, race, sexual identity, class, disability). How important are these traits to you and your identity? How do you want your mentor to support your intersectionality?

**3. During Mentorship Reflections**

During the mentoring process, it's important to take time and consider how the relationship is developing and what is working well and what needs improvement. Taking the time to iteratively reflect on each individual's insights into this relationship is an important and meaningful part of successful mentoring outcomes.

*Mentor Reflection Questions:*

1. So far, how is being a mentor living up to your expectations? How does that make you feel?

2. What improvements do you think would help make you more effective? What resources would be helpful to you to help make these improvements?
3. When there is a conflict, how do you handle it? How well does this work? What's one new strategy you could try?
4. What resources, training, or online communities have been helpful for you as a mentor?
5. What makes you and your mentee a good fit for each other? What differences do you have that you have to work around? How do you handle those differences?
6. How often do you meet with your mentee? How long do you see this mentoring relationship lasting?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?
8. How have you helped your mentee develop their social capital? How is this part of your mentee's strengths or weaknesses?
9. How have you helped your mentee develop their Social and Emotional Learning skills? How is this part of your mentee's strengths or weaknesses?
10. How have you supported your mentee's intersectionality? How has this impacted your relationship with your mentee?
11. What's one thing you would change about this relationship? What's one thing you wouldn't change about it?

*Mentee Reflection Questions:*

1. So far, how is being a mentee living up to your expectations? How does that make you feel?
2. What improvements do you think would help make your relationship with your mentor even stronger or more effective?
3. When there is a conflict, how do you handle it? How well does this work? What's one new strategy you could try?
4. What makes you and your mentor a good fit for each other? What differences do you have that you have to work around? How do you handle those differences?
5. How often do you meet with your mentor? How long do you see this mentoring relationship lasting?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?
7. How has your mentor helped you develop your social capital? In what way is social capital one of your strengths or weaknesses?
8. How has your mentor helped you develop your Social and Emotional Learning skills? In what way is Social and Emotional Learning one of your strengths or weaknesses?
9. How has your mentor supported your intersectionality? How has this impacted your relationship with your mentor?

10. What's one thing you would change about this relationship? What's one thing you wouldn't change about it?

#### **4. Training**

Another important piece of a mentoring program is training, that is, preparing your mentor and mentee to build a relationship together. Whether you decide to host an individual training for mentors and an individual training for mentees, or if you decide to blend the training together, some level of preparation is recommended so that each member of the mentoring relationship understands what to expect.

As you consider a training program for your mentoring program, you may utilize the following resources:

- [Mentoring Ice-Breaker Activity](#)
- [Mentor Training Resources](#)
- [Guiding Principles for Mentorship](#)
- [Ground Rules for Mentorship](#)
- [Mentorship Case Studies](#)
- [Meeting Templates](#)
- [Scheduling Templates](#)

#### **5. Evaluation**

A final piece to consider for a successful mentoring program is a way to evaluate mentorship outcomes. To assess your mentorship program, you must capture data from your mentees and mentors that allows you to assess (1) whether program goals and objectives have been achieved, and (2) what impact the program has had on participants.

- Pre-Mentorship Assessment
- Mid-Mentoring Relationship Check-In
- Post-Mentorship Assessment

Check out [Mentor](#), [National Mentoring Center](#), or the [National Mentoring Resource Center](#) for more comprehensive guidance on mentoring program evaluation.

It is our hope that through the consideration of mentor-mentee reflection, matching, training, and evaluation, you will be set up for success in your mentorship program.

## LIFTING AS WE CLIMB

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