The Impact of Participation in a Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program on Urban Females After High School Graduation

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THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL-BASED
MENTORING PROGRAM ON URBAN FEMALES
AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING PROGRAM ON URBAN FEMALES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

By
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December 2012

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Karen Levitt

As thoughts of the future weigh heavily on many adolescents’ minds, the at-risk urban adolescent female are at an especially critical point; every decision she makes on a daily basis has the potential to affects the rest of her life (Way, 1995). However, secondary school-based mentoring programs can provide the modality to intervene with at-risk urban adolescent females to increase the likelihood of success both while in high school and after high school graduation.

This study is a phenomenologically-oriented qualitative study that asks the question: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation. The results illustrate the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program upon the lives of six urban females after graduation from high school. The primary theory that framed this study was Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human
development. Data were obtained from the responses of the six participants to a guided individual interview. Two repeated themes emerged from the data. These themes were: 1) the relationships between the Pearl and others and 2) the continued impact of a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation. These themes created the concepts that were used to report the results of the study. The following findings surfaced as elements of a mentoring program that impacted the lives of these six urban females after high school graduation: 1) the mentor in a secondary school-based mentoring program is critical, 2) schools should work cooperatively with parents/guardians throughout high school and college and work to profoundly support the urban female, 3) long term connections to the mentor and other members of the mentoring group help urban adolescent females achieve continued success, 4) the mentoring program should include multiple strategies for engaging urban adolescent females and providing these young women with the opportunities to develop essential skills for academic and social success in high school, college and work, and 5) mentored urban females who are linked by positive social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint activities create a community.

The outcomes of this study offer an insightful understanding of the impact of specific factors of participating in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the success of urban adolescent females. This understanding provides the Pittsburgh Public Schools and other school districts with information that can be utilized to develop and direct secondary school-based mentoring programs, specifically those for the at-risk, urban female.
DEDICATION TO MY SUPERHEROES

To the Pearls, whose capacity for laughter and chaos has brought joy and amazement to my life, to my son, Jeff who keeps my heart beating and brings laughter to my soul, and to the memory of my father, Robert H. Lewis, Sr. who always believed in the power of unconditional love for a child.
Any project of this significance necessitates the involvement of numerous individuals that come forward to assist the researcher, enthusiastically, willingly, knowingly – or not. I could never begin to thank each and every one of you enough however; this is my humble attempt to try.

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garden path to understanding what a mentoring program truly means to an urban female.
They provided me with countless hours of background information and details which
guided me to discover the strong sense of sisterhood that a group of young females
voluntarily forged together supporting each other’s growth with a little direction and
advice. They have enlightened me with the wisdom they gained from this mentoring
experience as they move past poverty to their own educational, career, and personal
success. The zeal that sparkled through as they worked with each other in the light of
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Overall, I say that this adventure has played a significant part in shaping the face
you see before you and the life I now lead. I would not change a single moment of it
because I am stronger and wiser for it.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Poor and working class women in many ethnic and cultural groups within the United States have long been wage earners (Collins, 2000). However, demands that young, poor, and working class women become economically independent are not necessarily supported by institutional changes that would make this possible (e.g., access to high-paying careers, college educations, and work-based or school-based day care). Urban poverty is blamed on early childbearing and young mothers’ lack of commitment to education, careers, or marriage, rather than on the educational institutions that fail to retain or inspire the urban adolescent female, and the employers who refuse to hire them (Leadbeater & Way, 2007). While affluent young women are able to negotiate the conflicts of obtaining a college education and becoming working mothers, poor and economically disadvantaged young women commonly lack the informational and/or financial resources that make these steps possible (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

Frustrations with the apparent intractability of intergenerational poverty fuel a wish to simplify and localize the problem (Payne, 2008). Broad policy statements directed at the prevention of teen pregnancy have repeatedly emphasized the need to encourage the urban adolescent female to invest in her own future (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

As thoughts of the future weigh heavily on most adolescents’ minds, the economically disadvantaged urban adolescent female is at a critical point when decisions she makes affect the rest of her life (Way, 1995). A sizable percentage of economically disadvantaged urban adolescent females feel that it is too late for them to change (Payne,
2008). Some do not think of the future at all, while others are focused intently on the future, but feel powerless to control their destiny (Way, 1995). It is difficult to determine how urban adolescent females become aware of enhanced life options and understand the impact that their choices have on their future.

Prior to work conducted by Lynn Brown and Carol Gilligan in 1992, research focused specifically on female adolescent development was rare. Brown and Gilligan (1993), of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, have enriched the understanding of this field by pointing out that classic psychological models, such as Erickson’s view of identity formation, have been based solely on studies of males. Gilligan’s groundbreaking studies of female development illustrate the importance of relationships with women in girls’ lives. As Acoca (1995) asserts in support of Gilligan, the formation of a girl’s mature identity cannot be based solely on separation from her parents, but should also be based upon her enduring relationships with female adults. A parent, teacher, counselor, probation officer, or other female adult who demonstrates ongoing commitment and caring plays an essential role in a girl’s development. Conversely, the lack of a close, caring female adult during adolescence could interrupt or delay a girl’s development (Acoca, 1995). Without a close relationship with an adult female, and without confidence in her development or abilities, the urban adolescent female is more likely to turn to her peers for support and validation, which may result in repetition of the intergenerational poverty cycle (Payne, 2008).

Accordingly, mentoring has been promoted as a strategy to reduce these problem behaviors and foster healthy development among adolescents (Styles & Morrow, 1995). The urgency to provide support for at-risk youth is evident, as recent statistics indicate
that the number of high school dropouts has increased and has had an economical and
social impact on our society. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed
and/or work for lower wages and are more likely to need governmental assistance than
high school graduates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). However, results
from research conducted by Luthar and Zigler (2003) suggested that factors such as a
student’s school engagement, the quality of his/her grades, school behavior, and
relationships with their teachers, a coach, and/or a mentor can be predictors of school
success.

Therefore, when youth from unfavorable circumstances develop a mentor-type
relationship with a nonparent adult they tend to succeed, despite their circumstances
(Werner, 1987). Numerous longitudinal studies have followed large cohorts of children
from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to identify the children who succeed beyond
expectations and to determine retrospectively what differentiated their childhoods from
those of the children who did not succeed (Luthar & Zigler, 2003). One of the most
reliable findings has been that children who tend to have a supportive relationship with a
prosocial non-parental adult succeed in school (Bridgeland, Diluio, & Morrison, 2006).

A possible explanation for this finding is that the nonparent adult: 1) provides
courage to achieve in school and resist peer pressure to get into trouble; 2) provides guidance in decision making, assertiveness, problem-solving, and goal-setting;
3) provides experiences with a caring adult that can lead to trust in other authority
figures, and feeling a sense of belonging in conventional institutions, such as schools; and
4) provides specific training in academic and social skills areas (Sullivan, 1996).
A research study emerged regarding the investigation of the effects of mentoring by a nonparent adult described by Sullivan (1996) as she conducted qualitative interviews with eighth grade urban females. The data she analyzed defended their claims that these relationships are quite beneficial. Sullivan asserts that the nonparent adult supports the urban adolescent female by providing resources for the young woman to participate in creating their own futures. She continued her study of mentoring programs and found similar data supporting positive alterations in the lives of urban females by intentionally placing a nonparent adult in a child’s life through a mentoring program and guiding the mentor to recast her role moving toward becoming a muse (Sullivan, 1996).

Unfortunately, when urban adolescent females are introduced to possible mentors, settings are often structured in ways that discourage this connection, particularly for young women of color (Acoca, 1995). Many school-based professionals who work with urban adolescent females are burdened with excessive classroom sizes or caseloads, leaving the adults with little time to develop meaningful individual relationships. A particular problem emerges when young girls believe that their mentors are out of touch with the urban adolescent female’s experiences and predicaments. This dilemma transpires from the social distance that exists between upper and middle class volunteers and urban adolescent females (Payne, 2008). Ideally, adult females who live or work in urban communities, and who are familiar with the circumstances confronting youth, are more likely to be able to listen and to give advice that is consistent with the cultural norms, options, and constraints of a particular environmental setting (Styles & Morrow, 1995).
During this time of adolescence, an intense mix of physical and psychological changes, emotional and social development, and struggles toward autonomy increases the complexity of experiences encountered by adolescents as they seek independence and self-sufficiency. The urban adolescent female, in particular, faces unique predicaments during this life stage. Significant progress in the pursuit of equal rights for women has broadened the range of choices girls have in their lives (Leadbeater & Way, 2007). The economically disadvantaged urban female, however, often lacks precise rules, guidelines, and expectations as she faces the variety of roles now open to her. Along with the typical developmental struggles experienced while making the transition from childhood to adulthood, social, educational, and cultural barriers often prevent success in this minority segment of the population. Traditional institutions such as the family no longer hold the power to adequately deal with the risks of this new modernity.

In the past two decades, social scientist Janis Bohan (1992) has decried the absence of high quality research that addresses the psychological health and development of females. She discovered studies focused on suburban young women who ignore a large segment of the population, the poor urban adolescent, and in particular, the poor urban female. In addition, Bohan (1992) found that girls are seldom seen and rarely heard; their voices are missing in the psychological research. As Brown and Gilligan (1993) discovered, the problem in the research is that it compares females to males and describes the adolescent female as marginalized by conventional methods. In a review of available research literature, Brown and Gilligan (1993) and Garbarino (1999), deem it necessary for schools to provide a same-sex adult who will cultivate a stable, long-term relationship with adolescents. In the urban school setting, this connection with a mature
adult female means an experienced female who listens and assists the poor urban adolescent female with developing decision making skills and avoiding possible life-altering choices. The broad issues raised previously form the foundation of this study of the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after graduation from high school.

**Significance of the Problem**

**Developmental Theory**

**Historical background of the problem.** A significant gap exists in the research literature concerning the phenomenon of the urban adolescent female’s bioecological development. In Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological theory, development is seen as a reciprocal interaction between the individual and the developmental contexts relevant to the individual (e.g., home, school). These developmental contexts are defined on a micro level, where individuals and settings interact directly and are assessed. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) stresses the interaction between an individual and the environment, seeing both of these factors as being of equal importance.

To understand the development of the individual in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological theory, it is important to recognize the roles played by the person and the significant others who interact with him or her. Equally important is an examination of how the individual internalizes these influences, and how this then guides his or her actions in a particular setting. Successful development is dependent upon multiple, and increasingly complex, roles, relationships, and activities. Of great importance to successful development is congruence in the values provided in various settings, and the degree to which there is mutual support among contexts. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004)
emphasizes the crucial role given to individuals and activities which bridge settings. A bioecological perspective requires an understanding and appreciation of the contexts of influence in which children and adolescents participate, and how these interact and vary over the course of an individual’s developmental history.

As early as 1979, Bronfenbrenner was able to foresee the instability and unpredictability of the future for adolescents of lower socioeconomic status in the United States. Low economic status has created one of the single most destructive forces to the poor urban adolescent female’s development (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Due to the changes in the United States’ economy and restrictive welfare guidelines, women living in low socioeconomic environments are finding it more difficult to financially support their children. As Ruby Payne (2008) found, many of these working women were single parents living at poverty levels and working extended hours or more than one job to support the family. These employment schedules leave the parent with very limited time for family or one-on-one interaction with a child. Amy Sullivan (1996) recognized that these same families, living in poverty, expect their adolescent females to take on more responsibility around the house. As a result, the young women are home alone with younger siblings, and they do not always have another adult female to talk to or anyone to monitor their well-being. This is all in addition to the typical family power struggles that occur when adolescents begin their struggle for independence.

James Garbarino (1999), a national expert on youth violence, found that without strong supports, the adolescent can become vulnerable to a dangerous society and infected by a socially toxic environment, resulting in harm to oneself and/or others. The poor population of the inner city faces the greatest number of threats of violence.
Circumstances that lead to violence among urban children and teens include poverty, crime, crowded living quarters, fatherless families, abandonment by mother, depression, and attachment problems.

Garbarino (1999) agrees with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model that the breakdown of relationships in the immediate microsystem is one of the reasons that the poor urban adolescent female is not equipped with the tools to explore other positive pathways found in her environment (O’Neill, Horton, & Crosby, 1999). The presence of a solid mentor, muse, or caring adult female can play a tremendous role in offsetting the impact of these accelerated risk factors (Garbarino, 1999).

**Contemporary application of bioecological model.** Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological theory continues to have useful applications in contemporary teaching and educational research. However, the limited scope of literature and research addressing the problems faced by the urban adolescent female creates difficulties in classroom management for the urban teacher (Payne, 2008). Urban adolescent females bring the negative behavioral effects of poverty to school with them (Payne, 2008). Within the school setting, poor urban females frequently are academically disorganized, do not complete homework, only read part of the information on a page, do part of an assignment, lack procedural self-talk, decide to work or not in a class, and tell stories in casual structure (Payne, 2008). Also, they are physically aggressive, like to entertain their peers, cannot monitor their own behavior, laugh when disciplined, do not use middle class courtesies, dislike authority, and talk back frequently (Payne, 2008).

Is it possible for our educational system to address and remedy these socially unacceptable behaviors? Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) deems it necessary for schools
and teachers to provide stable, long-term relationships with the poor urban adolescent female so he/she may experience academic and social success. His theory suggests that the relationship be with an adult who can provide a caring foundation that will last a lifetime. This relationship is best fostered by a consistent, same-sex person (or people) within the immediate sphere of the poor urban adolescent female’s life (van Manen, 1997). Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 2000), a publication written by a consortium of teaching professionals, reported, “Among youth at risk from health or behavioral problems, family dysfunction, poverty, or other stresses, the most important school factor fostering resilience defined as ‘successful adaptation despite risk and adversity’ may be the availability of at least one caring responsible adult who functions as a role model” (Poliner & Lieber, 2004, p. 84).

**Issues Affecting Urban Adolescent Female.**

The rate of urban adolescent female high school dropouts is soaring and portends a bleak future for these young women, and consequently, for society (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Each year, almost one third of all public high school students fail to graduate (Bridgeland et al., 2006). One half of these individuals are African American, Hispanic, or Native American urban adolescent females living in poverty (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

By dropping out of high school, urban adolescent females continue the generational poverty cycle. These young women stay in poverty because they are not always aware of the other choices they can make. The urban adolescent female rarely has anyone to teach her about the resources that exist for her in the United States today (Frady, 1985). Due to the multifaceted dimensions of poverty, many urban adolescent females have not been challenged through vision-changing experiences that would permit
them to think, plan, or organize their thoughts and ideas regarding a future (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The urban adult female experiences tremendous dilemmas and challenges in her life after graduation from high school. The challenges that urban adolescent females face in secondary school, and the relationships fostered within the educational setting, are significant to girls’ cognitive and emotional development. Obstructions to success exist in the educational setting, in the exposure to community violence, and in the limited opportunities that arise from social, economic, and cultural factors (Payne, 2008). Therefore, participation in a school-based mentoring program could enhance the young women’s capacity to build positive relationships with a peer group and a nonparent adult, encourage appreciation of their own social network and support systems, explore solutions to their academic, behavioral and attendance issues, provide connections with professional women, and introduce resources for designing pathways to attain individual personal and career goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on lives of urban females after high school graduation. Identifying the supportive factors and barriers provided by the mentoring program should provide urban secondary schools with information about the design of impactful mentoring programs for young adolescent females.

Conceptual Assumptions
Conceptual assumptions in this research concern the study’s theoretical direction of the lived experience as the urban female transitions from early adolescence to young adulthood. The primary assumption of this study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory that human development is a lifelong process that is “always embedded and expressed through behavior in a particular environmental context” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27). As Bronfenbrenner continues, he states that bioecological transitions occur throughout a lifespan as a result of both instigators and consequences of development. The following propositions based on Bronfenbrenner’s developmental theory are: 1) Urban adolescent females must have an ongoing, long-term mutual interaction with a caring adult who has a stake in their development; 2) This strong connection with its patterns of interpersonal interactions will provide the urban adolescent female with assistance exploring her outside pursuits; 3) Attachments and interactions with a mentor will assist the young woman with more complex relationships with her family and will provide support to the family relationship; 4) The relationships developed between the young woman and her family and mentor will progress with repeated interactions and cooperation; and 5) The relationship between the urban female and the adults in her life require public affirmation and value placed upon these affiliations. Recognizing the breakdown occurring within the young urban females’ families, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) suggests that schools should provide the support for stable, long-term relationships between students and parents, between students and teachers, and between students and mentors.

Research Question
Young women living in low socioeconomic urban environments share similar characteristics that have identified them at an early age as at-risk youth because they are primarily minorities and/or immigrant, and are considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived (Payne, 2008). These at-risk young women are typically perceived as not achieving academically being unequipped to reach their full potential, voicing their opinions inappropriately and loudly, intimidating other young women both covertly and aggressively, using physical violence to resolve conflicts, demonstrating high rate of school absenteeism, and lacking the knowledge of the possible options for her future and the pathways to attain these opportunities. However, a secondary school-based mentoring program can be used as a vehicle for addressing these issues and overcoming these perceptions. To examine the impact of a secondary school-based mentoring programs on the lives of urban adolescent females the specific research question to be addressed is: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation?

Rationale

The scarcity of information on social processes that help or hinder academic achievement is regrettable because it is the type of evidence educators and policy makers need to design effective interventions and learning environments (Barbarin, 1993). Often, research studies predetermine the criteria for adaptive and maladaptive behavior; thereby dismissing the viability of interpreting events based on subjective realities and lived experiences of individuals making decisions (van Manen, 1997). Barbarin (1993) suggests that instead of searching for broadly-based protective factors, the focus should be on protective mechanisms and processes. Barbarin (1993) continues to recommend
asking why and how some individuals manage to maintain high self-esteem and self-efficacy in spite of facing adversities, while others surrender under similar conditions.

Barbarin (1993) has remarked that more research attention needs to be given to minority children who are able to survive and succeed in the face of adversity. Miller and MacIntosh (1999) noted, however, that factors promoting resiliency among racial minorities have only received attention in social science literature.

A more current study completed by Spitler, Kemper, and Parker (2002) focused on the development of a strong sense of connection to parents, families, and other adults, as related to school and community-based establishments and the ability of African American adolescents to make a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. Spitler et al. (2002) study examined protective factors that were revealed through current relationships. Spitler et al. (2002) found that strategies for collaboration between service providers and communities promoted success among at-risk African American youth. However, information regarding these services was not obtained from the African American youth and included in the publication. Spitler et al. (2002) noted, “Those who work with adolescents have called for a better understanding of how minority youth develop ‘buffering activities’ and psychologically protective factors” (p. 38). Even though research studies have attempted to examine protective factors which exist among successful minority adolescents, few have examined how minority students attributed meaning to the protective factors found in their lives.

Zimmerman, Rameriz-Valles, and Maton (1999) conducted a research study that identified psychological risk factors among African American youth, and recommended the utilization of risk reduction strategies by mental health service providers. The authors
advocated for using alternative approaches to address risk factors that could improve protective features as a means to reduce negative results. On the other hand, it is extremely important that the nature of these protective features be discovered. The current research study aspires to explore from the young women’s point of view the protective factors that might be gained from participating in a mentoring program.

**Definition of Terms**

It is critical to define the concepts and terminology used within this study. The definitions present the reader the context in which the researcher has selected to utilize the language of the subject. The explanations of the concepts are:

**A. Adolescence** as described by Muuss (1996) is the period from puberty to adulthood in human beings, which is marked by a multitude of biological, physical, intellectual and emotional changes.

1. Biologically speaking, adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and ends when an individual is ready for sexual reproduction.

2. Emotionally, adolescence marks the beginning of self-conscious detachment from parents and ends with the attainment of a separate sense of identity.

3. Cognitively, adolescence begins with the emergence of more advanced reasoning abilities, and ends with their consolidation in the ability to entertain hypotheses, weigh contingent possibilities, see situations from the perspectives of others, and draw inferences from available evidence.

4. Interpersonally, adolescence deepens a shift in interest from family relations to peer relations, culminating in a capacity for deeper intimacy with peers and commitment to a loved one.
5. Socially, adolescence begins with training for adult work and citizen roles, and ends with full attainment of adult status and privileges.

6. Educationally, adolescence begins with entry into junior high school and ends with a completion of formal schooling.

7. Legally, adolescence begins with the attainment of juvenile status and ends with the attainment of majority status.

8. Culturally, adolescence begins in some societies with training for a ceremonial rite of passage and ends with admission to adulthood upon completion of the rite.

B. At-risk students as defined by Ruby Payne (2008) are primarily children whose appearance, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures do not match those of the dominant white culture that schools were designed to serve and support. These students, primarily minorities, or immigrants, who are also poor, were considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived (Payne, 2008). The following factors were utilized when determining at-risk students for this study:

1. Students who were not performing at grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

2. Minority referred to a small racial or ethnic group that differs from the large group (McLoyd & Steinberg, 1998).

C. Urban adolescent female as defined by Amy Sullivan (1996) and Ruby Payne (2008) and used by the researcher in this study refers to the young women living in the city, of lower socioeconomic status, primarily minorities and/or immigrant, considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived, and at-risk for not graduating from high school and/or not pursuing an informed postsecondary education/work.
Summary

The formation of a girl’s mature identity cannot be based solely on separation from her parents but should also be based upon her enduring relationships with other adult females (Acoca, 1995). A parent, teacher, counselor, probation officer, or other adult female who demonstrates ongoing commitment and caring, plays an essential role in a girl’s development. However, many poor urban adolescent females who look for affirmations from significant adults, often do not receive encouragement from these individuals, and look for attention in inappropriate places. Affiliations with members of inappropriate groups may result in the urban adolescent female’s display of anti-social behavior, lack of self-discipline, inability to provide self-direction, and high school dropout rate (Werner, 1987), all of which affect her sense of empowerment and decision making skills as she becomes a young adult. In the limited research literature, Quarles, Maldonado, Lacey, and Thompson (2008) strongly advise urban educators to provide a secondary school-based mentoring program that cultivates a stable, long-term relationship between a caring same-sex adult and an urban adolescent whereby the urban youths are encouraged to recognize that they are not powerless in changing the direction of their lives. Therefore, this study will ask the question: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the 1990 census as summarized by Greene (1993), 18 million girls living in the United States have passed from adolescence to womanhood without a documented and researched understanding of their developmental, educational, and psychological transitions. Approximately two-thirds of these females are Caucasian American, while the remaining one-third is comprised of Native American, African American, Asian American, or Hispanic American girls.

The first goal of this literature review is to introduce the theoretical background for the current study, by explaining the female life cycle transition from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood. The second objective is to discuss how female development may be compromised when youth are raised in a dysfunctional family environment, perhaps due to poverty, homelessness, divorce, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and/or sexual abuse, the result of which is a deviation from the culturally accepted norm. The third goal is to investigate the contention that if urban adolescent females interact with a nonparent female mentor and engage in planned interactions with other urban females in a safe environment, they will develop prosocial beliefs and values (Brown & Gilligan, 1993) and learn the choices and rules of the middle class (Payne, 2008) permitting them to progress successfully towards young adulthood.

Theoretical Background

In the existing literature, the researchers identified often describe adolescence as a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood. It is the period beginning with puberty and concluding when full adult status has been attained. The exact “end” of the stage varies, with some believing it ends at age eighteen and others asserting that age
twenty-one marks the end of the adolescent years (Muuss, 1996). In our society, a few mentioned psychologists and developmental research specialists consider adolescence a luxury that has been time-honored in America. Actually, the developmental stage of adolescence was established in the United States to delay young individuals from entering the workforce, due to a scarcity of jobs (Muuss, 1996).

Adolescence

**Historical overview.** To begin to understand the theories of growth and development of females during teenage years, a brief literature review of the history of adolescence is a necessity. The first psychologist to identify and study adolescence was G. Stanley Hall. Hall described adolescence as a period of strum und drang, or “storm and stress.” In German literature, the works of Schiller and the early writings of Goethe describe this period of development in a similar manner to Hall’s writings. Hall saw similarities between the objectives of this group of young writers at the turn of the eighteenth century and the psychological characteristics of adolescence that he identified (Hall, 1904). As Hall (1904) continued to compose his theories he described adolescence as a new birth and documented his observations of the emotional life of the adolescent as a wavering between contradictory tendencies. Hall (1904) believed that adolescents exhibited high levels of energy and excitement followed by indifference and lethargy. Hall described the adolescent as wanting solitude while being entangled in crushes and friendships. Never again does the peer group have such a strong influence over the person (Hall, 1904). The adolescent also moves between the displays of several personality traits including intense tenderness at some points in time to cruelty at other times. The show of apathy and inertia also vacillate with enthusiastic curiosity, along
with the urge to discover and explore. According to Hall, during this stage of development, there also is a yearning for idols and authority that does not exclude a revolutionary radicalism directed against any kind of authority (Hall, 1904).

Many renowned psychologists followed G. Stanley Hall and studied adolescent development. Some of these researchers chose to place little emphasis upon this period of development, whereas others spent their entire career delving into this period of progression into adulthood. Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytic theory of adolescent development, paid relatively little attention to adolescence. Freud believed that adolescence was a universal phenomenon and included behavioral, social, and emotional changes relative to the physical changes that occur at this time (Freud, 1969).

Coleman (1961), in his book, *The Adolescent Society*, speaks of the teenager as a subculture of the adolescent society which includes a large segment of the population for a fairly long time. The transitional period is more noticeable if the child and adult groups are well defined, as in the United States today. This transition requires a reevaluation of the adolescent’s relationship to the external world, and to his/her own internal, psychic world (Muuss, 1996).

Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent, and Carnot (1993) summarized the theories of Erickson, Friendberg, and Sherif explaining how each considered adolescence as the crucial period for the formation of the mature ego. Similarly, Canestrari and Marlowe (2006) identified Piaget’s published theories from 1947 on adolescence as a “decisive turning point at which time the individual rejects or at least revises his/her estimate of everything that has been inculcated in him/her, and acquires a personal point of view and a personal place in life” (p. 148). He continued to believe that during adolescence, the
time perspective expands, and the past and future assume greater importance and become clearly differentiated. Piaget stated that “the adolescent can build theories and reflect beyond the present” (p. 149). However, the adolescent finds it reassuring to look for advice from his/her friends, who understand and sympathize with him/her. These friends are in the same position as he/she is. By exploring new values and testing his/her ideas with peers, there is less fear of being ridiculed. According to Piaget, the peer group serves as a resource as adolescents strive to achieve the two primary developmental tasks of this stage. These are identity, finding the answer to the question, “Who am I?” and autonomy, discovering that self is separate and independent from one’s parents (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2006).

**Bronfenbrenner.** The developmental theory addressed here and referred to throughout this study belongs to Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004). Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological Systems Theory, later renamed the Bioecological Model of Human Development, which explains how everything in a child’s environment affects how the child grows and develops. He labeled different aspects or levels of the environment that influence children’s development, including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the small, immediate environment in which the child lives. Children’s microsystems include any immediate relationships or organizations with which they interact, such as immediate family or caregivers and school or daycare. How these groups or organizations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow. Furthermore, how a child acts or reacts to people in the microsystem will
affect how they treat him/her in return. Each child’s special genetic and biologically influenced personality traits, often referred to as temperament, end up affecting how others treat them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Bronfenbrenner’s next level, the mesosystem, describes how the different parts of a child’s microsystem work together for the sake of the child. For example, if a child’s caregivers take an active role in the child’s school environment (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences, watching soccer games), this helps to ensure the child’s overall growth. In contrast, if the child’s set of caretakers are a mother separated from the father or a mother with a step-father or a father with a step-mother, disagreements occur concerning how to best raise the child. These differences give the child conflicting lessons resulting in the hindrance of the child’s growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

The exosystem level includes the other people and places that the child may not interact with, but that still have a large affect on him/her, such as parents’ workplaces, extended family members, and the neighborhood. To illustrate how exosystem influences may operate, if a child’s parent is laid off from work, which may have negative effects on the child if her parents are unable to pay rent or to buy groceries. However, if her parent receives a promotion and a raise at work, this may have a positive effect on the child because her parents will be better able to satisfy her physical needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Bronfenbrenner’s model expands to what he has named as the macrosystem, which is the largest and most remote set of people and things to a child, but still has a great influence on development. The macrosystem includes things such as the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values, and the economy. These
things can affect a child either positively or negatively. To fully understand the way children develop, Bronfenbrenner believes that it is necessary to observe their behavior in natural settings, while they are interacting with familiar adults and peers over prolonged periods of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Bronfenbrenner deems that as a child progresses towards adolescence peer relations begin to occupy a central role in their life. New types and levels of peer relations emerge. Peers replace family as the central focus of the young individual’s socialization and leisure activities. Adolescents have multiple peer relationships, and they confront multiple peer cultures that exhibit different norm and value systems (Muuss, 1996). According to Muuss (1996), these developing systems of norms and values relate to a more definite planning of vocational activities, preparation for marriage, and the establishment of more specific and lasting goals, including the need for achieving emotional and economic independence.

If prior to or during the period of adolescent development, an individual’s growth is compromised by a severely dysfunctional family (e.g., due to poverty, homelessness, divorce, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and/or sexual abuse), this may create a deviation from the culturally accepted norm. Consequently, the young person may become involved in numerous harmful, disruptive, and illegal activities, sometimes alone but most often within either a tightly or loosely woven group or gang (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The fifth and last system of Bronfenbrenner’s model is known as the chronosystem. This system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child’s environments. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a
parent’s death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child. As children get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to determine how that change will influence them. Bronfenbrenner believes that it is not just environmental types of changes that affect a child’s development. “Since children select, modify, and create many of their own settings and experiences...children are both products and producers of their own development.” (Berk, 2000, p.30).

How do nature and nurture interact in this theory? According to Bronfenbrenner, there are two environmental conditions that are necessary for human development: loving a child unconditionally and spending time with the child. If these two things don’t happen, the ecology breaks down causing adults to attack and destroy their young. This is already happening in today’s American society: school shootings, gang violence, mothers who use drugs while they are pregnant, juvenile delinquency, and teenage pregnancy.

Bronfenbrenner suggests some causes to this breakdown of ecology:

1) Many American families don’t live close enough to rely on one another for the necessary support needed to nurture a family. There is a need to help support children even after they reach the age of 18. Families must stay together. This is important for teaching children values and culture and also provides support for the young parents.

2) Many neighborhoods are not safe and a need exists to have extended families living together again and a community where everyone knows their neighbors.

3) Many families are experiencing stress trying to balance work and family.

4) All families do not benefit from certain laws that are presently in effect.
5) It is society’s responsibility to make changes that help parents support their children.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) has stated that it is a burden to put the responsibility on children, for instance, when programs such as drug prevention are presented too early. It is too much for the children to understand. They cannot really change the conditions in society. This ends up being unfair and ineffective for children. Children need to be around people who will help them.

**Female Adolescence**

The developmental stage of adolescence is a difficult passage for girls, even those who have a strong safety net of support at home and in school. The physical changes of puberty coincide with enormous emotional and psychological challenges (Bridgeland et al., 2006). During the teen years, girls begin to separate from their families, assert their own identity, identify with their sexuality, develop their own moral and ethical sense, and prepare for the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood. It is seldom a smooth or easy metamorphosis.

During this transition phase, persistent sexism makes adolescence particularly confusing for girls by projecting mixed messages about the worth and role of women in society. Girls may measure their own physical appearance against media images of “perfect” female beauty. Lack of female role models makes girls’ dreams of future careers in male-dominated fields seems unrealistic. The culture of adolescence “demands that while young women may achieve, they should be careful not to appear too smart or they will not get a boyfriend” (Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice, 1995). Girls may react by silencing their own feelings and turning to others for validation (Brown,
Only in the past twenty years have researchers focused specifically on female adolescent development. Dr. Carol Gilligan has enriched the understanding of this field by pointing out that classic psychological models, such as Erickson’s view of identity formation, were based solely on studies of males. Gilligan’s groundbreaking studies of female development illustrate the importance of relationships in girls’ lives. She asserts that the formation of a girl’s mature identity cannot be based solely on separation from her parents, but also upon her enduring relationships with adults (Acoca, 1995), such as a teacher, counselor, probation officer, or other adult who demonstrates ongoing commitment and caring, and plays an essential role in a girl’s development. The lack of a close, caring adult during adolescence could interrupt or delay a girl’s development. Without a close adult, and without confidence in her development or abilities, a girl may be more likely to turn to peers for support and validation.

Moreover, the urban female adolescent learns trust, love, respect, and validation from caring adults who foster healthy emotional development and positive relationships. Urban females are frequently challenged by abandonment, family dysfunction, and poor communication, which make the development of such relationships more challenging than among their more advantaged peers. Any positive female role model needs to develop a healthy identity as a woman because she is consistently challenged by sexist, racist, homophobic messages and lack of community support. Safety to explore sexuality
at their own pace for healthy sexual development is challenged by sexual abuse, exploitation, and negative messages about female sexuality (Acoca, 1995).

Generally speaking, a lack of a sense of belonging, competency, and worthiness exists due to weakened family ties, negative peer influences, academic failure, and low self-esteem. Several specific factors put girls at greater risk of becoming juvenile delinquents. Seldom, however, do these factors occur in isolation. More typically, risk factors are interconnected with both cause and consequence (Acoca, 1995).

**Problems Faced by Female Adolescents**

In light of the problems faced by girls and young women, many pieces can be viewed as part of a developmental continuum linking early problems such as family dysfunction, abuse, loss of primary caregiver, and other traumas to behavioral tribulations (Oregon Commission on Children and Youth Services, 1990). During the teen years, when girls are transitioning to adulthood, unresolved issues from earlier stages of their development may come to the forefront. Incomplete bonding in infancy, sexual abuse in childhood, failed relationships with adults, and other dilemmas can result in the adolescent female’s inability to form positive relationships, lack of self-respect, and ignorance of physical health and sexuality issues (Oregon Commission on Children and Youth Services, 1990). The problems faced by urban female adolescents will be examined more thoroughly as the literature review unfolds.

**Sexual and/or Physical Abuse**

Davis, Schoen, Greenberg, Desroches, and Abrams (1997) identified girls as being three times more likely to have been sexually abused than are boys. Among female delinquents, an estimated 70% have a history of sexual abuse (Davis et al., 1997). In
some detention facilities, the incidence of girls who have been abused is closer to 90%. Most often, abuse is perpetrated by family members or close family friends who are perceived as trusted adults (Davis et al., 1997). Sexual abuse can have a profound impact on a girl during adolescence, resulting in lessened self-esteem, inability to trust, academic failure, eating disorders, teen pregnancy, and other serious concerns. If sexual abuse is not addressed, girls may run away or turn to alcohol or other drugs to numb their emotional pain (Acoca, 1995). A few lash out violently at their perpetrators.

**Substance Abuse**

Many girls, for instance, report being intoxicated or under the influence of illegal substances while committing criminal acts (Sommers, Baskins, & Fagan, 1994). Substance abuse exacerbates the other problems that might put a girl at risk of delinquency. Moreover, if a girl runs away from an abusive or dysfunctional family and ends up on the streets, she is more likely to become involved in drug use and/or drug trafficking. Alcohol and other drugs may lessen her inhibitions, leading her to take risks that may result in unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Research shows that among female populations, substance abuse coexists with other problems, such as mental illness and academic failure, at a significantly higher rate than among males (Sommers et al., 1994).

Substance abuse at an early age can also interrupt a female’s psychosocial development. As one researcher observed,“It is not unusual to have a sixteen year old admitted to a residential drug treatment program with both her Oworks’ (needle and syringe) and a well worn stuffed animal hidden in her backpack” (Acoca, 1995, p.34).

**Teen Pregnancy**
For many young women, teen pregnancy is a virtual guarantee of poverty and long-term reliance on welfare. Most teen mothers drop out of high school and remain single most of their adult life. They earn $5,600 annually, less than half the poverty level income (Robin Hood Foundation, 1996). More than 60% of African American and one-half of all Hispanic teen mothers are concentrated in poor, racially segregated neighborhoods that have substandard housing, high crime rates, and underachieving, inadequate schools. Many teen mothers have been victims of sexual abuse (Robin Hood Foundation, 1996). By the same token many of these female high school dropouts engage in delinquent behaviors (Robin Hood Foundation, 1996). These female juvenile offenders often engage in sexual activity at an earlier age than non-offenders, putting them at higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy. As a result of their involvement in crime these adolescent mothers are more likely to go to prison (Robin Hood Foundation, 1996).

**Poor Academic Performance**

However, the most significant risk factor relating to early onset of delinquency is poor academic performance (Dryfoos, 1998). Twenty percent of female juvenile offenders have learning disabilities (Dryfoos, 1998). By the time they enter the system, they may be at least a grade behind their peers. They may have developed a negative attitude about learning and lack self-confidence about their own ability to master academic skills (Bergmann, 1994; Girls Inc., 2000).

In a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), researchers identified dropout rates prior to high school and found substantial dropout
rates between 8th and 10th grades, especially among Hispanics and blacks. Evidence to suggest even higher rates among Hispanics, due to dropping out earlier, were also cited.

As this report data was analyzed, it became evident that the gender and race differences in high school completion are significant. Overall, males have higher dropout rates than females; black females, however, exceed black males in dropout rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Whites have higher rates of high school completion than blacks and Hispanics, although black male completion rates are improving (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). In 2008, the proportion of 25 to 29 year olds who were high school graduates was 89.3%, ranging from 73.2% among Hispanic males, 85% among black females to 90.5% among white females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

A plethora of research has continued to critically examine the academic achievement of African American students in kindergarten to twelfth grade urban settings. These critical examinations have been chronicled in journal articles, research briefs, reports, and books detailing the problems African American students face in their pursuits of education (Morgan, 2004). Far too many urban African American students, particularly females, and especially at the elementary and secondary levels, are not making adequate progress in their academic subjects and on various high-stakes standardized tests. As a result, many urban school systems in America are increasingly becoming concerned about meeting yearly student achievement requirements, mandated by state and federal laws that require school systems to improve student achievement. However, many school systems, urban schools in particular, are not meeting these yearly
student achievement requirements. The following risk factors are affecting the academic achievement levels of the urban adolescent female.

**Desire for Young Women to Belong**

Sense of school belonging significantly predicts academic outcomes, including academic motivation, effort, and absenteeism. Urban girls seem to be attracted to gangs out of a desire for safety or power, as well as a sense of belonging (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993). Studies of female gang members show that many have come from homes with a high incidence of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and dysfunctional families (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993). Growing up in poverty, isolated from the economic mainstream and marginalized because of race, class, and academic failure, girls tend to feel hopeless about their future and may affiliate with gangs (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993).

Gang involvement complicates or interferes with an urban girl’s ability to complete the developmental tasks of adolescence (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993). Remaining in a gang requires that a girl tolerate ongoing physical or sexual abuse, and suppress her anger, resentment, humiliation, and shame. This may result in the girl becoming a perpetrator of violence.

Adolescence is also often marked by severe psychological and emotional stresses (Block, 1993). It is during this time that gender identities, values of self-worth, and sexual attitudes become topics of relentless and serious contemplation. As adolescents move from childhood into adulthood, they desire to understand their new roles, their new ideas, and their new feelings. This exploration of self and newfound independence can result in feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. While these changes occur in both males
and females, it has been found that females experience a more difficult time with this transition than males (Block, 1993). Urban adolescent girls are more apt to experience decreased feeling of attractiveness and self-esteem. Girls are more likely to feel ashamed and distressed by the changes in their body and appearance. They become more insecure and self-aware of the changes that occur (Block, 1993). Boys, however, find the progression of adolescence to be a more positive and reassuring time. They tend to experience improved feelings of body satisfaction and self-assurance. While both are increasing in size and changing in shape, boys welcome this change and girls dread it (Connors, 2005). For young women of color, it is even more disturbing because of the effects of a single dominant image of womanhood. This image suggests that those who fail to see themselves reflected in the culture’s representations of “woman” are at risk of achieving their sense of femininity through a process of effacement. It is critical to resist the single construction of womanhood. This can be accomplished if all girls are afforded the opportunity to reach their fullest freedoms, to fulfill their potential, and achieve a satisfying life (Connors, 2005).

**Media and Technology**

**Detrimental influences.** Media is a pervasive and ever present entity in the lives of North Americans. It is a strong influence for constructing meaning in our everyday lives. Social Comparison Theory posits that “people will [at some point in their lives] compare themselves and significant others to people and images whom they perceive to represent realistic goals to attain” (Botta, 1999, p. 26). Because adolescents have not reached a developmental stage where they can analyze and determine practical and *realistic goals*, they are more susceptible to images viewed in the media (Horvat &
Lewis, 2003). Adolescents tend to believe most everything they see; adolescent girls in particular tend to imitate the images they perceive in the media. This age group of young women will attempt to completely immerse themselves into the images they view.

Granello (1997) found that girls at the ages of 12, 17, and 21 looked to the media to help them define social meaning in different ways. All three age groups looked to television programs to help them construct meaning into their lives. How this meaning was created varied at each developmental level. Twelve-year-old girls looked to the media to define how their lives will be. They looked at the characters and situations presented on television and believed that if they modeled themselves in the same manner, they would be able to achieve the same status and rewards as the characters presented (Granello, 1997). Seventeen-year-olds looked to the media as a way to see how their life could have been, given different circumstances (e.g., had they lived in a different geographical location or had a different socioeconomic status). They looked to characters on television as role models and strived to achieve the same experiences. They were, however, cognizant of the fact that there was no guarantee that their lives would turn out exactly like those portrayed; television characters simply exemplified the ultimate goal (Granello, 1997). Twenty one-year-olds were able to distinguish the difference between their real lives and the fantasy lives portrayed on the television shows. They used the circumstances portrayed on television as a way of initiating dialogue with peers. Through this interaction, they were able to collectively construct social and personal meaning (Granello, 1997).
Pipher (1994) contends that pervasive media messages have a strong influence on an adolescent girl’s self-image. Urban adolescent girls, in their search for self-identity and social acceptance, are quick to model themselves on the images and messages presented in the media. Their sense of personal identity and ability to interact socially are not yet developed. They look to the media to help them find meaning in their lives, rules for social interactions, and definitions of self. Urban adolescent girls are particularly heavy consumers of media. The images and messages presented in the media have a strong influence on how an urban adolescent girl views the world and her role in it.

More than anything, adolescents want to feel like they belong to a community that accepts them. This is especially true for urban adolescent females. While adolescent males strive to construct their own sense of individuality and develop their position in the hierarchy of the world around them, adolescent females search for relationships and attempt to build strong networks (Granello, 1997). It is for this reason that urban adolescent females look to the media to define their place in society and help them develop interpersonal skills.

As well as defining societal roles and appropriate interactions, the media also increases urban adolescents’ exposure to violence. Now, while social conditions such as poverty, racial discrimination, substance abuse, and family conflict and dissolution all contribute to an environment that fosters violence, media is responsible for increasing exposure to, and desensitizing empathy towards, violence. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) write that previous exposure to violence is the strongest correlate to subsequent violent acts and carrying of weapons.
Pipher (1994) says, “Girls have strong bodies when they enter puberty. But these bodies often soften and spread out in a way that our culture calls fat. Just at the point that their bodies are becoming rounder, girls are told that thin is beautiful, even imperative” (p.55). So, at the point when girls’ bodies are naturally changing and evolving, the media tells them that their new, fuller bodies are unacceptable. The bombardment of these messages, combined with emotional changes due to hormones, result in a confusing and troubling time for adolescents.

**Positive influences.** Another facet of our media demonstrates how technology redefines how individuals interact. As any social fixture, this technological tool remains subject to sex-related differences. Although differences are diminishing, boys tend to use computers more than girls (Collins, 2000). Responsively, more programs are increasing and enhancing girls’ interactions with technology (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). However, reports regarding African American girls and their relationships to technology are narrow. Indeed, software designers rarely consider African American girls as a potential audience (Morgan, 2004). Beyond the technology world, many social scientists also ignore the complex experiences of African American girls and focus on their strangeness (Collins, 2000). The limited research on African American girls does suggest some unique racial and gender patterns of behaviors (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

Exploring the influence of computers girls’ technological preferences essentialize the female experience. Girls seemingly enjoy creating web pages for peer interaction, articulating one’s voice without instant reprisal, communicating with others, presenting a confident self, and receiving information about “embarrassing topics” (Roth, 2003). These communication sites create for African American girls and women a valued female
network that offers a “safe space” (Collins, 2000). Black feminist theorists explain that
safe spaces “constitute one mechanism among many which fosters black women’s
empowerment and enhance our ability to participate in social justice projects” (Roth,
2004, p. 110). In these spaces, black women develop ideas of how to confront
controlling images and daily oppressions. The safe spaces black female networks create
also permit African American women to use their unique language patterns. Among
other trusted members of the network, black women create a space in which their dreams,
hopes, pain, and struggles use a multitude of speech styles.

Hobbs (2004) establishes that African American women’s diverse discourse
practices not only demonstrate their ability to code switch during verbal expressiveness,
but also illustrate their ability to adopt different speech styles in various written contexts.
Although both the print and online versions of the African American female voice,
namely, the magazine *Essence*, reflect the actual life experiences of African American
women, it is in the online magazine where she notes a unique production that combines
spoken and written elements to create one voice (Hobbs, 2004). Free from critical eyes,
these interactive spaces nurture an environment in which black women can continuously
define themselves without recrimination. Self-definition becomes a journey to
understanding the oppressive forces shaping the black female experiences (Collins,
2000).

**Role of culture.** Some scholars argue that when low-income, urban African
American females recognize their disadvantaged positions, the realization can foster an
ideology opposing academic achievement and can equate success with “acting white”
(Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Other work, however, presents a more nuanced explanation,
suggesting that some students from this population inspire to succeed (Horvat & Lewis, 2003)

In her ethnographic study of 46 low-income, African American adolescent females attending two poor Chicago high schools, Connors (2005) outlines many disheartening images of collective disengagement, pessimism, and perceived hopelessness for social mobility. Assuming that their chances to achieve their own aspirations are slim, the majority of her participants put forth little academic effort. However, Connors (2005) identified several participants who were able to achieve. These participants continued to be optimistic about their futures despite their consciousness of structural constraints, and they established a strong black collective identity of struggle. Two of the latter participants were African American girls who recognized not only racial and social class constrictions, but also the interplay of gender as an intersecting influence on their achievements. These two students, like the others, still developed a disposition, a selfhood Connors (2005) describes as resilient.

Among low-income, first grade, African American urban girls who attend a predominantly African American school, Scott (2002) chronicles how a female network of students form an integral part of the peer culture. Even when the most egregious of social infractions occurs (e.g., divulging group secrets to boys), the culprit’s quantity and quality of interactions with the rest of the group do not change. The urban girl in this context develops a culture intolerant of social exclusion (Scott, 2002). Oppositional behavior and attitudes are unique, individual traits. Indeed, promoting one’s individuality within the group becomes an important performance within the network’s space. As unique members of the female cohort articulate distinct talents and gifts, group
interdependency shapes the contours of this collective. Importantly, the same level of inclusiveness among the first grade African American girls in a more affluent, culturally-diverse school was not noted. In this middle-income context, a white female hierarchical peer structure evolves in which the African American girls perpetually occupy a low-status position (Scott, 2002).

**Anger and fighting.** As these girls are left out of discussions about relational aggression, racist assumptions about girls of color and physical aggression remain unchallenged. The view of girl fighting as psychological and relational warfare has challenged sexist or racist stereotypes. Popular books on the issue even seem to have undermined their own attempts to affirm the power of relational aggression to cause girls long-term emotional and psychological damage. Adding labels like “fruit cup girl” to the lengthy list of dismissive terms adolescent girls already have for one another, even with the best of intentions, only reaffirmed girl fighting as trivial (Wiseman, 2002). When rooted out, inevitable girl meanness becomes the singular goal. Neither the literature on relational aggression nor the popular accounts of the ways girls have enacted it on each other addressed the larger issue of power. Little consideration has been given to the fact that a girl’s social context, the options available to her, and the culture in which she lives affect how and why she aggresses. No substantive consideration has been given to the fact that the anger that underlies girl fighting had something to do with oppressive conditions girls experienced in their daily lives, and that social location affected the nature and degree of these injustices (Wiseman, 2002).

There exists a marketable temptation to make girls’ treatment of other girls tantalizing or titillating, or to contribute to a dangerous “girls will be girls” message
Girl fighting grabs attention when it takes extreme forms, as it so often does in the media. Because fighting among girls or their adult counterparts is shocking, shameful, and funny, it frequently becomes the fodder of sitcoms, talk shows, and soap operas. This is the motivation behind women’s prison movies, various forms of female wrestling, stories about cheerleaders or beauty queens who go awry, soap opera back-stabbing, and Jerry Springer-type “bitch-slapping” (Wiseman, 2002). As a white high school girl from rural Maine explains, “Guys see two girls fighting and think they’re getting passionate and maybe the girls might start kissing and maybe the guys can get in on it (Wiseman, 2002, p. 2).” “Guys invent the concept of jello-wrestling,” her friend agrees, “so that they can watch girls fight” (Wiseman, 2002, p. 2).

**Mores and violence.** Furthermore, it is important to appreciate how the culture, from a very early age, sets girls up for such horizontal violence (Friere, 1970). When 15-year-old Bahtya, Jewish and middle class from New York City, was asked about why there’s so much in-fighting in her public high school, she says, simply:

It was the popular thing to do. TV, media, newspapers, it’s like they teach girls you’re supposed to fight. If anybody had any commonsense in their head, they’d know you don’t have to fight with the girls in school…Like I mean, you watch TV, you watch MTV, you watch anything, and there’s always a fight going on between the popular girls at school. A lot of it is, I mean, you get into a fight and the whole school knows about it. Therefore, your popularity goes up. You become more widely known. You’re the girl that’s in the fight with the other girl. It’s like the attention, whether it’s
positive or negative. It’s a constant competition or race for attention
(Wiseman, 2002, p. 64).

It’s this sense of power, this refusal to reduce to the status of object, this desire to
be at the heart of her subjectivity, which so often lies behind both girls’ growing
participation in sports and an increase in physical and relational fighting. Indeed, Natalie
Adams (1999) argues that girl fighting is about being somebody, and finds that both
cheerleaders and girls who get in trouble at school for fighting use similar discourse to
explain their choices. They want to feel powerful, to be visible, and to gain respect
(Adams, 1999). Girls seek that feeling of power within the contexts and possibilities one
offers to them. They wish to live the experience and learn from it.

Girls’ anger has a long history of being dismissed (e.g., “she’s just a bitch”, “she
has PMS”) and trivialized (e.g., “you’re beautiful when you’re angry”), and girl fighting
has long been a spectacle, enjoyed for its eroticism as much as its entertainment value.
Girl fighting has been seen as a spectator sport, again (Burton, 1996). As Burton (1996)
wonders, why are people captivated by a story, when boys are identified as the
perpetrators of 80% of serious violence?

The real issue is not anger or aggression, but the disconnection of anger from its
real source. This disconnection, at its core, is about power (Brown, 1998). As Gregory
Maguire (2004) reminds us in his novel Wicked, the so-called “wicked witches” of the
world possess their own story to tell, and it’s by no means a simple tale. Fundamentally,
it’s a political story about battling the colonization of girls’ bodies, minds, and spirits, a
story that varies with social context, race, class, and sexual orientation. It’s a story about
containment, effacement, and dismissal that acts out horizontally on other girls because
this is the safest and easiest outlet for girls’ outrage and frustration. It’s a story about who is serious and who others listen to, a story about rage at the machine which channels through ordinary interactions and performs in the everyday spaces girls occupy. It is a story about justifying anger at a world that devalues girls and encourages them to decontaminate themselves from all things feminine (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

The problem, then, is not girls. It’s a society that denigrates, commodifies, and demoralizes women, and that gets a kick out of the divide-and-conquers consequences. Sharon Lamb (2001) suspects that if girls are given legitimate avenues to power, taught to value their minds as much as their bodies, and encouraged to see their rage as more than “little bits of garbage” (Hey, 1997), they are less likely to go down those nasty, underhanded, or openly hostile roads, and are less likely to take their legitimate rage out on other girls. Lamb (2001) suggests blocking the paths of the usual sexist, racist, and homophobic trash, and joining together in creating counter-public realities that open pathways to power and possibility.

As girls possess a tendency to respond and adjust to external stimuli in their lives, the classic “he said/she said” scenario is very common. Teens may also find themselves responding to an event in a way that opposes their set of ethics. Going along with the crowd allows a sense of community, but may require one to act in a way that one would normally find disagreeable. Without the range of skills to allow them to sift through, compartmentalize, and cope with daily issues, many teens confront undesirable daily dilemmas. Adolescence is a time when teens focus on their internal needs and practice strategies for survival that are with them forever, ultimately enabling them to be strong
adults. However, this is not always the case, as numerous things may get in the way (Hey, 1997).

**Risk Factors Dictating Behavior**

Adolescence can be a confusing and unsettling time for all young females. They question their places in their families, with their friends, with their teachers, and with others around them. Urban adolescent females are trying to discover and solidify their senses of self and their roles in society. However, the urban adolescent female often lacks the knowledge of rules, guidelines, and expectations of the societal roles now open to her, as she considers these dictates in contrast with the more generally accepted prospects for urban women in the past (Payne, 2008). Poverty rates in the United States have surged above those of other industrialized countries, especially for the urban adolescent female (Payne, 2008). Bridgeland et al. (2006) documented that poverty has a detrimental impact on various domains of the urban adolescent female’s well-being, including school preparedness and achievement, behavior, and wellness.

As researchers look for risk factors indicating why adolescents are not able to learn productive coping skills, there are particular ones that top the list: racial issues, family concerns, violence and threats, school pressure, relationships, and the future (Hey, 1997). The last concern, as related to this study, essentially asks the question: how do urban young women deal with the frustration they may experience?

Adolescent girls face slightly different concerns than boys. They tend not to act out their frustrations, but instead turn them inward. As indicated by the results of the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) one in five high school girls report being abused physically or sexually. In that same study conducted by the National Center for
Education Statistics (2010) it was found that 60% of tenth grade girls attempt to diet and loses weight at any given time, which is perhaps not surprising, given that body image is frequently a foremost concern among girls. Nine percent of respondents were likely to try diet pills, laxatives, or vomiting in this attempt (Wiseman, 2002). This obsession with weight and body image begins in girls as early as age five and remains a major element of their thoughts and actions. Statistics also show that of the girls in high school, 35% report feeling sad and hopeless over a period of time. While boys are frequently more successful in taking their own lives, girls attempt suicide twice as often (Wiseman, 2002). These statistics demonstrate how sadness affects our adolescent girls and the emotions that fill them, and how they may be ill-equipped to cope with overwhelming emotions. Below, several factors that influence youth behavior during adolescence, beyond gender, are discussed.

**Literacy**

Throughout history, writing has been used as a means of self-expression. People kept diaries and journals as a channel for emotional turbulence, and as a way to work through and document issues in their lives. There was a reason that many people turned to writing as a coping mechanism. It was an allowable means of emotional outlet. One example of “survival writing” is the collection *Ophelia Speaks*, by Sara Shandler (1999). The author wrote a letter to schools, summer programs, and youth organizations, asking for teenage girls to write expressing their “voice.” Contributors had the opportunity to write on any topic that was important to them. The result was a collection written by adolescent females in journal and poem form, highlighting the important issues they face. Shandler (1999) asked that the contributors write essays and poems that communicate to
and help other girls. Writing as a means of survival incorporates these three functions. The survival feeling came from simply communicating one’s story to a pertinent audience. This communication often helped in the healing process. Then in order to explain one’s story, one examined and understood it. The last part was to feel the strength gained from helping others in a similar situation. Allowing one’s story to offer strength to another was a cathartic experience. The participants experienced these three purposes, through the creation of their own survival stories.

**Discrimination Factors**

Racism, bigotry, prejudice, intolerance, and bias are five words that unfortunately continue to have a place in United States’ society. The urban adolescent female deals with the effects of these behaviors on a daily basis (Taylor et al., 1995). As females of color, they believe that everyone expects them to be carrying weapons, to be dealing drugs, to have sex freely, and to be pregnant. These students learn about the civil rights movement, and although they recognize famous names like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Frederick Douglas, conversations typically stop there. Female students are not given a forum to discuss the different forms of racism that they see today, and the effects that racism has on their lives (Taylor et al., 1995).

**Family**

In addition to racism, there is also the issue of family relationships. The saying “you can’t live with them, you can’t live without them” accurately applies to family. The typical family today is radically changing from a few generations ago. According to Leadbeater and Way (2007) only seven percent of households consist of the traditional “family” (i.e., parents married, only father working, mother home with children). Most
of the youth in the United States live in a house with only one parent, a grandparent, an
aunt, or an older sibling raising them. Most parents work, which means students take on
more responsibility around the house, often times are home alone, and do not always
have someone checking up on them. This is all in addition to the typical family power
struggles that happen when adolescents begin their quest for independence. Despite the
struggles that may erupt, family is often the anchor for many students. They credit their
success to the special person in their family that supports them. “Your momma” jokes
get people riled up for a reason. When “Mom” is the one that sacrificed to raise the
family, frequently there is a very strong bond between mother and child. Good or bad,
family is often the focus of many stories from teen years (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

Friends or Foes

Another major aspect of a student’s day involves time “hanging out” with friends.
For many adolescents, this camaraderie occurs after school on the street, which brings
forth another issue. According to recent statistics, the crime rate is up. Schwab-Stone,
Ayer, Kasprów, Voyce, Barone, Shriver, and Weissberg, (1995) produced results to
suggest that at least 22% of students have brought a blade, knife, or gun to school.
According to Schwab-Stone and colleagues (1995) research findings, 36% of urban
adolescent females in New Haven experienced a violent act against them. In 1994, 46%
of teens in New Haven reported seeing someone shot or shots fired at someone. In 1995,
28% of adolescent deaths in New Haven were homicides (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995).
Such statistics are up around the country. New Haven is a representation of cities found
throughout America. Adolescents face violence on a daily escalating basis everywhere
in the United States (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995).
While the statistics stated above show not all students experience an impact of increased violence, from talking to their students, teachers feel that most adolescents are able to share stories of a death of a family member or friend. These issues that take a quarter or a third of every day, have a strong effect on adolescents. Students hear questions demanding them to figure out their future and they are unable to think clearly or respond to the question adequately (Way, 1995). Teachers often ask them to acknowledge the importance of the subject matter they are teaching. For some students, there is pressure to achieve high grade point averages to enable acceptance to a good college. Other students struggle with the pressure of achieving passing grades in their high school courses and surviving in their communities. Regardless of what a student’s individual struggle is, education plays a major role in every student’s life (Way, 1995).

**Inequalities**

Jonathan Kozol (1991) studied the differences between the wealthiest suburban and the poorest inner city communities. Kozol (1991) found that most urban children began their young lives with an education that was far inferior to that of children who resided in wealthier communities. In his book *Savage Inequalities*, Kozul (1991) wrote, “Denial of the means of competition is perhaps the single most consistent outcome of the education offered to poor children in the schools of our large cities (p.83).” Although all of the children Kozol (1991) studied were required to attend school until they reach 16 years of age, there were major differences in schools, and they appeared to be drawn along the lines of race and social class. Kozol (1991) continued to state that the unequal funding of schools related to the social class divisions, institutional and environmental
racism, isolation and alienation of students and staff within poor schools, the physical
decay of buildings, and the health conditions of students.

In examining urban schools, Kozol (1991) found them to be severely segregated
by race and class, with high rates of single motherhood and lack of legal protections for
youth. The schools were overwhelmingly non-white and very poor, which contrasted
sharply with the wealthier white suburban schools. Through his writings, Kozol (1991)
brought the urban adolescents to life by forcing his audience to hear and contemplate the
urban teens’ dreams and desires for adulthood. His book was first and foremost an
appeal for fairness and equity in American public education. It was, and remains, a work
dedicated to ensuring that every young person in the United States be afforded dignity,
respect, and hope for the worthwhile future.

It is apparent that the disparate quality of education that Kozol (1991) expounds
upon requires the voters’ and tax payers’ attention in both suburban and urban areas to
intervene on behalf of the poor. However, Kozol (1991) feared that changes in policy
and practice would only transpire after numerous scares and acts of violence by the
growing underclass. From his research, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) has supported
these same ideas and suggested changes in political policies as well to remove the class
divisions particularly those concerning parenting responsibilities.

Many of these responsibilities as observed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004)
regarding guidance, cultivation, and academic achievement are analyzed with possible
and plausible school-based solutions. In the urban school community described by
Anfara and Mertz (2006), many social and educational issues are addressed through
small, single-sex advisory programs. Advisory programs are portrayed by Anfara and
Mertz (2006) as small, supportive communities where mutually respectful and meaningful relationships are promoted. Individual attention to students from caring adults provides students with a sense of belonging, and permits school staff members to become actively involved in the affective development of students. Emotional development of each student assists students in developing interpersonal skills, which may contribute to high student achievement (Anfara & Mertz, 2006).

In *Turning Points 2000*, Dieringer professed:

> Every student should be well known by at least one adult. Students should be able to rely upon that adult to assist them in learning from their experiences, comprehend their physical changes and changing relations with their family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every school and community resource needed for the student to succeed, and help fashion a promising vision for their future (p.3).

More recently, the Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development have supported the development of small communities in high schools (Dieringer, 2000). These agencies have indicated that advisory programs possess a key building block for creating small communities within a traditional high school. If we created safe, supportive, and respectful learning environments; personalized adolescents’ learning experience; assisted teens as they develop social and emotional competencies; and provided opportunities to practice social and emotional skills, students will grow more attached to their schools, avoid risky behavior, and achieve more academic success (Dieringer, 2000). Effective advisory programs meet all of these goals.
Results of Research on Gender Differences

In addition throughout the last 15 years, many educational issues have changed with regard to girls and math. While boys still outnumber girls in upper-level math, girls are no longer uncommon. Women are not entering careers that need math in numbers equal to men, but women are not a rarity in these fields. At all levels, there has been increased awareness of the underrepresentation of women in math, science, and engineering. Calling it an issue of “paramount concern,” former National Science Foundation director Erich Block (1993) urges Americans to look to underrepresented minorities and women to meet the growing demand for scientists and engineers in the United States.

During the past few years, there has been an explosion of research on girls and boys and math. Analysis across hundreds of studies suggests that there exists, in the general population, women and girls who outperform men and boys by a very small amount. Females score slightly higher in computation, whereas males score slightly higher in complex problem solving. There are no sex differences in problem solving until high school, when differences favoring males occur (Block, 1993). Greater male superiority in math achievement shows up in more academically selective populations. In an analysis of studies before and after 1974, researchers see sex differences declining over the years to negligible levels. While women still lag behind in some aspects of spatial abilities and in math achievement at the top levels of mathematics, they are gaining on men (Block, 1993). Differences in mathematics achievement are decreasing (Block, 1993).
Gender differences as observed in traditionally “masculine” areas as spatial relations have been reduced. This reduction has occurred by changing teaching practices and providing both girls and boys with opportunities to build their skills. Practice can improve many things, but not genes. Gifted seventh grade boys have been found to score well on the SAT; such findings are often used to justify a biological basis math-related sex differences (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998). However, this reasoning is seriously flawed. Fundamental errors occur when researchers assume that because girls and boys have been in the same math classes they have had the same experiences; assume that differences on SAT, a test the courts have found to be biased against women, are biological; assume that gifted children whose parents pay over $30 for their children to take a test represent the population as a whole, and tell girls and boys before they take the SAT that girls don’t do as well as boys (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).

The irony is that based on research and evaluation, urban girls need encouragement to engage academically and to take more advanced math and science classes. Encouragement strategies (e.g. combat gender stereotypes in the classroom, empower all students as knowers, establish equity in the classroom, and acknowledge student experiences as vital sources of knowledge) have been found effective in previous research (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998). In most schools, as Cousins and Mabrey (1998) suggests, when teachers intervene in seventh and eighth grades, students will decide in eighth grade if they will take algebra. After being in a program with activities showing that algebra is fun and that they can do math, one group of low-income, urban, Hispanic girls all decided to take algebra (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).
Sophomore year is another key decision-making time (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998). While girls and boys are equally apt to take algebra and geometry, girls are more likely than boys to stop there and not take any more math classes unless teachers intervene. However, when new elective courses are designed incorporating higher level math concepts and girls understand these theories they discover what they missing in advanced math classes. Girls decide to take more math and science (and continue taking the courses) after participating in math sessions they see as more fun and more relaxed; with less pressure and less competition; with more hands-on work and problem solving; and with teachers who explain more and answer questions to ensure understanding (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).

Cousins and Mabrey (1998) describe some successful strategies to get girls to consider math and science careers. Particularly, it may be effective to combat stereotypes about people who excel in math and science through informal social sessions with adult scientists, showing girls views of people who are good in math and science and yet possess a sense of humor. This holds for both white girls and girls of color.

Sessions on selecting a career for high school and middle school students do not seem to work in encouraging girls to choose math-or science-related careers. However, talking with scientists and engineers about their work causes girls in several programs to consider those careers for themselves. Also, involving girls in activities that reflect the work of people in different science and math careers (e.g., having them participate in hands-on engineering activities) makes girls six times more likely to consider engineering as a career (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).
Scheduled time is necessary for girls to “just talk” to each other and permit them to discover that there are “girls just like me” in the world. These girls will find other girls who have the same problems, of being a smart girl in math and science (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998). Where follow-up is done, most of the girls continue to keep in touch and provide each other with an ongoing support structure (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).

Cousins and Mabrey (1998) recognize that there are important challenges yet to be met. How are effective programs institutionalized? How are large numbers of teachers reached? How do we move away from the syndrome of “them that has gets?”

Most programs and classes are for boys and girls, yet in co-ed settings, even those incorporating gender equity, boys get the lion’s share of attention and opportunities (Cousins & Mabrey, 1998).

**Equity for all.** Activists, whose major interest is math and science reform, are to involve themselves in equity issues, ensuring that these efforts are effective. As Paul Tsongas (1991) reminds us, “Equal opportunity, we learn, is more than an open gate. It is the appropriate complement of skills and fundamental self-esteem that makes the open gate meaningful. To just open the gate is to engage in a cruel gesture, no matter how innocently it is done” (p. 72).

Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act prohibits sex discrimination in education and across the areas of athletics, admissions, financial aid, and physical and mental health. Despite this legislation and recent progress in gender equity in educational settings, one finds the needs of girls and young women in America’s schools, in general, are not explicitly addressed in recent education reform and goal-setting (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2003).
In the AAUW (2003) report, gender bias in both latent and the manifest curricula is clearly evident. Bias continues in current educational practices, perpetuating the hidden curriculum assumptions of the roles of boys and girls. Teachers, regardless of race and sex, repeatedly interact more with boys than girls and give them more feedback than girls receive (AAUW, 2003). Educators are often not sensitive to the presence or potential impact of bias.

In urban areas, many new immigrant adolescent females are arriving with enormous challenges to overcome. There is the newness of their physical surroundings, lack of experiences with their peers, strain and fatigue from their efforts to adapt and cope, feelings of rejection from a new culture, and confusion in terms of role expectations, values, and identity (Greene, 1993). Generational conflicts arise concerning sex roles, peer relationships with the opposite sex, and dating. In addition, parental loss of power and parents’ inability to function as effectively in the new society leave the urban adolescent female feeling unsafe and unable to rely upon parents for protection (Greene, 1993).

Education is the most essential key in providing a smooth transition for immigrants. English language proficiency has shown to enhance self-esteem and to lower depression rates among the urban immigrant adolescent female. Developing positive relationships with adult advocates and peers from the new country assist the adolescent female in the acculturation process. Community and ethnic social support networks are vital factors in the adolescent female’s ability to begin developing positive coping mechanisms. However, maintaining a strong identification with family is the most crucial and common resilient factor for immigrant adolescent girls (Greene, 1993).
The AAUW (2003) report *Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School* provides a qualitative analysis of middle school girls’ experiences and specific factors that promote more equitable school climates. These efforts suggest school settings use inclusive materials and instructional techniques, lower levels of competitiveness, and levels of higher innovative learning in the classroom. Also, when girls make connections with caring female adults, they are more likely to meet with success, a contention that has been supported by the findings of numerous researchers. In general, these results indicate that the impact of an adult female advocate on the urban adolescent females is positive.

**Lived Experience**

As urban females develop a relationship with caring adult females in school settings, these young women are afforded the opportunities to examine multiple perspectives and operate from their strengths. Their skills can build bridges among themselves and across the multiple contexts in which they dwell. Max van Manen (1997) believes that these contexts are “lived experience.” These stories attempt to mirror what a novel provides a reader, namely, “the chance of living through an experience that provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into the protective factors that exists in the lives of the human condition” (p. 70). Van Manen (1997) provides four fundamental life world themes that he denotes as “existentials.” They are: *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality). Each of the four existentials represents a segment that, when taken as a whole, comprise how all humans experience the world. *Lived space* refers to “felt space,” best described in terms of the feeling one gets when in a particular space, such as at home, and how one thinks about home (van Manen, 1997). *Lived body* refers to the
fact that “we are always bodily in the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 103). Van Manen (1997) describes lived body as one’s reaction to either an admiring or a critical gaze. 

*Lived time* means “subjective time,” not clock time. Lived time is a compilation of all memories of the past that influences a person’s development, as well as how one experiences present pressures (van Manen, 1997, p. 104). Finally, *lived human relation* is “the lived relation one maintains with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (van Manen, 1997, p. 104).

According to van Manen’s (1997) theory, when taken together these existentials are who one is and help explain how one came to view their personal experiences. As a result, the researcher chose this common way to conduct an investigation into the worlds of these young women and utilize qualitative inquiry because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned about each single story (Stake, 2005). As young women construct their own and one another’s stories, they find the power to act with intention as leaders to transform their worlds into arenas of well-being (Dezolt & Stout, 1999).

**Self-Determination Theory: Three Fundamental Needs**

To further explain well-being, Deci and Ryan (2000, 2006) formulated the self-determination theory of personality and human motivation. This theory seeks to explain the extent of satisfaction to which three fundamental needs are met. The three needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and are regarded as “innate, essential, and universal-found throughout cultures and times” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 74). These identified needs correlate with the needs of healthy adolescent development.
Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the perceived internal locus of causality experienced by individuals. It is the idea that an individual does things because he/she chooses to do them, enjoys the freedom of decision-making, and values a sense of control over the environment Deci and Ryan (2000, 2006). Autonomy is not to be confused with independence. Independence is defined by Deci and Ryan (2000) as free from the influence, guidance, or control of another, or others. Autonomy includes having a voice and a choice in activities, although some adolescents still demonstrate reliance upon adults for support (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2006). Deci and Ryan (2000) stress its importance as being a “salient issue across development, life domains, and cultures, and is of central import for personality functioning and wellness” (p. 1580).

Competence

Competence refers to the need that an individual has to be able to perform tasks as one wishes and to complete tasks successfully. Deci and Ryan (2000) offer this explanation of competence: “indeed, the striving for competence as a relatively general propensity can thus be seen as the route to actualizing specific adaptive competencies and to the flexible functioning of human groups in the context of changing environmental demands” (p. 253).

Relatedness

Relatedness refers simply to the need for humans to feel connected to significant others. Lynch and Levers, (2007) defines relatedness as “a sense of belongingness with others and with one’s community” (p. 586). It is surmised by Deci and Ryan (2000, 2006) that the concept of relatedness may have emerged during the evolution of the hunter and gatherer society. Though populations in general are inherently motivated to seek
meaningful, reciprocal, and enduring relationships, adolescent development involves an intense draw towards the satisfaction of the particular need of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2006).

The self-determination theory considers autonomy, competence, and relatedness to be essential psychological nutrients for humans that, when satisfied, are expected to enhance ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2006). When factors detract from the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, well-being and psychological growth in the individual may be thwarted.

In large cities of the United States, concentrations of urban female students face not one or two challenges to these needs being met, but a constellation of barriers to growing up healthy and successful. The factors of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as they affect well-being and psychological growth, are directly related to poverty and, unfortunately, there is also a high correlation between these factors and race and gender as well (Farmer, Price, O’Neal, Leung, Goforth, Cairns & Rees, 2004).

**Mentoring**

Removing these barriers may be found in schools, particularly urban secondary schools, which should provide experiences in conjunction with leadership models that exemplify feminine management. Encouragement of interdependent feminine leadership as a viable mode will increase leadership possibilities for the urban adolescent female, while strongly maintaining feminine traits (Denner, Cooper, Dunbar, & Lopez, 2005). Achieving these qualities may occur through the mentoring relationship between a disadvantaged or troubled youth and a caring, responsible adult which can last into the youth’s adulthood.
Mentoring programs for urban African American youth and young adults are growing at a rapid pace across the United States (Quarles, Maldonado, Lacey, & Thompson, 2008). These programs differ in their curricula, but continue to emphasize the relationship between a disadvantaged or troubled urban African American youngster and a caring, responsible adult. This relationship generally involves spending quality time together and providing support and guidance, with the aim of helping the young urban African American better negotiate life’s difficulties. However, the impact of mentoring programs designed for African American students is inconsistent. For instance, Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) found that African American students with the highest risk of dropping out benefited the most from mentoring. Their grades improved and they were more likely to pursue postsecondary education. They also found that the more positive the perception of the mentoring relationship, the better outcome for the students involved (Jekielek et al., 2002). Yet, in another study, Quarles et al. (2008) found that among at-risk African American youth who participated in a mentoring program called “Big Sister, Little Sister,” displayed a statistically significant positive difference between the youth participating in the mentoring group on the variables of self-esteem, attitudes about drugs and alcohol, grade point average, school absences, and disciplinary infractions and those who did not. Moreover, in another study, Jackson, Davis, Abeel, and Bordonaro, (2000) found that mentoring had positive effects on school attendance and grades in English, but not on promotion rates or standardized test scores. While these studies’ findings are contradictory, there have been compelling testimonials by people, youth and adults alike, who have themselves benefited from the
positive influence of an older person who helped them endure social, academic, career, or personal crises (Quarles et al., 2008).

There are many theoretical reasons to expect that mentoring programs can help urban female adolescents. Within a social support framework, mentoring can often provide some of the social support that is needed for urban children who lack support from family members, community members, or school personnel. In addition, some researchers have found that mentoring programs provide African American youth with role models in environments that lack African American models in specific roles or positions (Jekielek et al., 2002). For instance, an African American female pilot may be an appropriate model for African American adolescent females who have never seen an African American woman in such a role in their community. In other words, mentors can serve as models with whom youth might identify, thus leading them to a broader sense of awareness, increased socially appropriate behavior, increased levels of self-efficacy, and higher postsecondary and career aspirations (Jekielek et al., 2002).

Mentoring provides a modality to intervene with students at risk for educational and social failure. A guide to successful mentoring is especially salient for ethnic minority students who confront cultural and social contrasts between their own values or beliefs and those of their schools and the larger society (Quarles et al., 2008). Group mentoring may offer similar supports as one-on-one mentoring and a more culturally consistent forum for addressing issues of ethnicity (Quarles et al., 2008). Group mentoring offers a format that parallels the collective worldview found in the cultures of visible racial/ethnic groups (Quarles et al., 2008). Therefore, many students of color may
be more comfortable in group mentoring sessions than from only one-on-one mentoring meetings.

Urban adolescent females who have experienced mentoring demonstrate gains in their academic performance and in their relationships with parents and teachers (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007). Herrera et al. (2007) identified however, that there is a lack of studies investigating the impact of participating in group mentoring to assess and compare whether participation operates in a different way to promote other protective factors that influence students’ academic and interpersonal outcomes (Herrera et al., 2007).

The “visions for the future” are educational interventions on both the macro (e.g., focusing on girls as a group in a co-educational environment, more physical education, sensitizing teachers to female issues, providing assertiveness and leadership training) and micro (e.g., counseling and guiding the urban girl to accept risk-taking and women’s consciousness- raising) levels (Herrera et al., 2007). Transforming the environment for the urban female necessitates fostering conditions that assist the urban adolescent female in developing a raised level of her true identity and self-efficacy.

The proposed study has the potential to support Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development, by demonstrating that when relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, this may be a reason that the urban adolescent female is not equipped with the tools to explore other positive pathways found in her environment (O’Neill, Horton, & Crosby, 1999). This study also aims to support the published works of the 1990s, which brought an influx of non-experimental research examining associations between neighborhood structural variables (derived from the
census or a similar administrative data source), such as neighborhood income or socioeconomic status (e.g., percent poor, percent on public assistance, percent unemployed, percent professionals, percent college-educated, percent female-headed households), racial/ethnic heterogeneity (e.g., percent black, percent Latino, percent foreign-born), and urban adolescent females’ achievement results (O’Neill et al., 1999). This includes the support of van Manen’s (1997) beliefs that “lived experience” stories attempt to mirror what a novel provides a reader, namely, “the chance of living through an experience that provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into the protective factors that exist in the lives of the human condition” (p. 70).

In general, the aforementioned researchers found that residence in an affluent or middle-class neighborhood is positively correlated with adolescent female middle and high school readiness and achievement outcomes. In contrast, urban adolescent females’ behavior and emotional problems are exacerbated by life in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, directly affecting their school preparedness and ability to successfully achieve academically.

This researcher decided to conduct a phenomonologically-oriented, qualitative study, after reading the literature in which Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) describes the reasons that an urban adolescent female may not be equipped with the tools to explore positive pathways found in her environment. Van Manen’s (1997) theory regarding the influence of lived experiences also provided additional impetus for the proposed use of qualitative research to conduct this study. More specifically, this researcher seeks to answer the question: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation? Research
examining mentoring programs found at the high school level of education has increased, but remains limited. The data collected from this study will provide the Pittsburgh Public Schools with additional information that can be used to develop and direct secondary school-based mentoring programs, specifically for urban adolescent females.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Overview of the Qualitative Inquiry

The methodology of this investigative study is explained in this section, answering the research question: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation? The very nature of the question lends itself to a qualitative inquiry, defined by Fischer (2006) as:

An interpretive, descriptive, and usually reflective effort to understand and describe actual instances of human action and experience from the perspective of the participants living in a situation … Indeed, qualitative research is intended to study human events of how they are lived, which is not possible via experimental methods alone (p. 438).

The goal of this inquiry was to “study events in terms of how they were lived” (Fischer, 2006, p. xiv) by investigating the responses of urban females to questions determining the impact of their participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on their lives after high school graduation. Therefore, a qualitative, phenomenologically-oriented research design was determined to be the best approach/strategy/method to understand the collected data on the lived experiences.

Maxwell (2005) identified three goals of a qualitative research plan that apply to this research: personal goals, practical goals, and intellectual goals. Personal goals motivated the researcher, but may or may not be of importance to others. The personal goals of this research were directly related to the researcher's work as an urban secondary
school educator, mentor, and administrator. The driving force behind this inquiry was to understand what impact participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program facilitated by the researcher had on participants after high school graduation.

Maxwell’s (2005) practical goals focus “on accomplishing something—meeting some need, changing some situation, or achieving some objective” (p. 21). Data collected in this study may be utilized by other urban educators in their quest to develop effective high school mentoring programs for urban adolescent females. A broader practical goal would add to the limited literature currently available regarding the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on urban adolescent females after high school graduation.

Intellectual goals have been defined by Maxwell (2005) as well, and they provided the rationale for utilizing a qualitative study. Five goals identified by Maxwell but applicable to this study include:

1) understanding the meaning;

2) understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence that the context has on their actions;

3) identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, generating new themes from the information;

4) understanding the process by which events and actions take place; and

5) developing causal explanations.

Intellectually, understanding the meaning of this study would illuminate how and if the urban adult female was impacted by a secondary school-based mentoring program after graduation. Identifying the particular factors of the mentoring program, such as
interactions with a mentor, developing relationships and engaging in positive interactions and behaviors with peer groups, or one-on-one mentoring sessions, may explain the specific influence of participating in a school-based mentoring program. Discovering unanticipated phenomena would permit the researcher to examine impacting factors not previously considered. Realizing the events present in the participants’ lives and how they respond to them will explain the influence of involvement in the mentoring program. The results gathered will support the causal explanations determined by the researcher through the collection and analysis of the data presented in the interviews. The specific research question is: What is the impact of participation in secondary school-based mentoring program upon urban females after high school graduation.

**Research Design**

The researcher chose the design of the phenomenologically-oriented qualitative method based upon the theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004). The literature published by this author permitted the researcher to discover the significance of investigating the Pearls alumni’s perceptions of how their participation in the mentoring program impacted their lives after graduation from high school.

**Selection of Participants**

All alumni of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls were potential participants. Of the 133 alumni of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls, only 62 members were eligible to participate in this study because they met the criteria set by the researcher. Utilizing purposeful and criterion-based selection of potential participants accomplished the goals that produced data relative to this researcher’s study. Maxwell (2005) identified these goals in his description of purposeful selection of sample populations. The goals were to assist the
researcher in achieving “representativeness of the individuals or activities” selected and
to permit a wide array of discovered information (p. 89). The data obtained from these
urban females represented the average members of the Pearls population more so than
would a random sample.

The criteria for the Pearls alumni invited to participate in the study included:

1) residing in Pittsburgh, PA when they were Pearls;
2) coming from primarily poor and/or immigrant families;
3) being identified by their school counselors and/or social workers at an earlier
   age as at-risk (not completing high school) youth;
4) being considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived;
5) being believed to be of low socioeconomic status (received free or reduced
   payment for lunch);
6) choosing to join a secondary school-based mentoring program;
7) remaining a member of the Pearls during their entire high school experience;
and
8) graduating from Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy within a typical four-
   year time frame.

The Pearls started an alumni association in approximately 2006, and this was the
group that the research associate contacted to begin obtaining mailing information on
potential study participants. The organization was well coordinated, with elected officers
and governed by a set of bylaws. The secretary of the alumni association was responsible
for all correspondence with the members of the organization. Therefore, she was asked
to provide the research associate with a list of alumni addresses of any female who
participated in the Pearls and remained a member of the Pearls during their entire high school experience. The secretary of the Pearls alumni was also asked to assist with introducing the research associate, the study, and letter of invitation to the alumni at their monthly meeting. She was able to explain who would be eligible to participate in the study and asked the alumni members to seriously consider the request. Because the Pearls alumni did not know the research associate, this initial meeting provided a level of comfort for the potential participants. This level of trust enabled the potential participants to make an informed decision regarding whether or not they would consider participating in this study. Following this meeting, the Pearls alumni secretary mailed the letter, which invited the 62 eligible participants to become involved in the study and asked them to contact the research associate (Appendix B).

Individuals considered as potential participants and representative of the average member of the Pearls attended Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy (one of the eight high schools within the Pittsburgh Public School District). Information regarding the student population of the Pittsburgh Public School district and Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy was collected by the Pittsburgh Public School district in 2010. The Pittsburgh Public School District served approximately 25,500 students in 50 schools within the city of Pittsburgh’s 90 neighborhoods. The Pittsburgh Public Schools’ 2010 operating budget was $530,000,000; the district employs over 5,100 employees, including 2,500 teachers and 210 administrators. The district faced the same educational challenges as other major urban school districts, including a 65% poverty rate, a large population of students with special education needs and differing learning styles, and needs of diverse racial and ethnic groups.
Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy High School was the selected site for this study by the researcher. It was a secondary magnet school located in the most northern section of the city, with an enrollment of approximately 800 students in grades nine through twelve. In 2010, the student body closely reflected that of the school district, with a 65% graduation rate, a 71% poverty rate, 18% special education population, and 71% of the students with differing learning styles and needs from diverse racial and ethnic groups. Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy has been historically known for its strong academic courses, expansive arts and music programs, and extensive extracurricular activities. As a traditional academy, Pittsburgh Perry was a secondary magnet school where students were enrolled in required academic classes, as well as prescribed academic electives. As a magnet, students from any neighborhood applied to attend this school. Each student was required to demonstrate a 2.0 grade point average and attend school 80% of days in the past school year, with limited behavioral difficulties, in order to enter into a lottery system of selection which reflected the cultural, socioeconomic, and racial population of the city of Pittsburgh.

All enrolling students and their parents/guardians agreed to sign contracts with the school personnel prior to the beginning of each school year. By signing the contract, the students agreed, with support of their parents, to maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average, attend school regularly, and not engage in disruptive behavior. If a student violated his/her contract, interventions were in place to assist him/her to improve. If the student did not progress in a positive manner, then he/she was returned to his/her neighborhood school.
Within Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy existed a well-organized group of unique, culturally-diverse female students between the ages of 14 and 19 years old known as the Pearls. The Pearls participated in a secondary school-based mentoring program which offered after-school educational and life skills workshops, attended young women’s conferences, completed community service projects, and celebrated successes with planned social events.

The organization known as the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls was started in 2000 with 15 ninth grade urban adolescent females. These females were identified by their guidance counselors, and were considered at-risk urban youth who were having difficulty transitioning from middle school into high school. The original premise for developing this organization was based upon the design of the middle school advisory groups, as described by Dieringer (2000). Each year, the identified young women and their parents were contacted by their assistant principal, who founded the Pearls, and were asked to join this program. The assistant principal explained to them that this was a student organization especially designed to provide support and guidance for young women entering high school. She outlined how they would meet with her in scheduled one-on-one sessions to discuss their success in school. Then, there would be monthly meetings run by elected officers to discuss and select topics of interest to the group. From the meetings, committees would be organized to plan workshops and other activities. At the end of the school year, they celebrated their success by inviting a female with whom they had a strong relationship to share in a reflection of their success. All members of the Pearls continued to participate in the mentoring program until they graduated from high
school. Then, the graduates joined the Pearls alumni group so they could continue to meet and discuss their successes and failures, and share the new life lessons they learned.

All of the members of the Pearls alumni have continued their relationship with each other and the mentor. The organization’s members were Caucasian American, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American. The Pearls alumni were all either enrolled in a post-secondary training program, college, or work. They lived away at college, at home, or on their own. The participants were financially self-sufficient or poor. Some were married, others lived with another individual, and several had children.

Only six of the sixty-two eligible alumni of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls agreed to participate in individual interviews for this research study. However, as stated by Stake (2005) a ten percent sample size of potential participants or six graduates in this study would be suitable to capture a broad picture of the participants’ perceptions. This multicultural sample of Pearls’ alumni was comprised of one Asian American, three African Americans, and two Caucasian Americans. Following high school, four of the six participants were enrolled full-time in college (Nina, Shayla, Maree, and Summer); one is working full-time and is enrolled in college part-time (Breia); and another is working full-time (Camille). Nina, Shayla, Maree, and Summer are living away at college, Camille is living with her grandmother, and Breia is living in her own apartment. The participants are not married or living with someone in a committed relationship and currently, they do not have any children.

**Procedure**

Once the alumnus expressed her interest in participating in the study, the research associate mailed the potential participant the consent forms to be signed and returned
(Appendix C). The potential participants were made aware in the written consent form that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. If the participant chose to withdraw from the study, then the research associate would destroy any data that had been collected from the participant prior to the time of withdrawal. The written consent form stated that no risks would occur to the participants; participation in this study was not intended to harm them, but they may be inconvenienced by providing their time; participants would not receive any compensation for their participation in this study; and that all participants’ names were replaced with an alias by the research associate to assure anonymity. If any names or any material might identify third parties, those names and/or identifying materials were removed during transcription.

Consent forms were returned to the research associate. Only those alumni who returned signed consent forms were contacted by the research associate to schedule their interview. Sixty-two potential participants who met the criteria as stated above were sent the letter of invitation and asked to express their interest in the study within a two-week timeframe. Twenty-nine alumni responded. Six agreed to participate, another two agreed then withdrew before their interviews, four declined to enter the study due to prior professional or personal commitments, and nine did not contact the research associate after receiving the letter of invitation. Eight letters of invitation were returned due to incorrect addresses.

Method

Individual interviewing was determined as the most important means of collecting data from the participants. These interviews provided the researcher with the
opportunity to examine the thoughts regarding the impact that mentoring played in the participants’ lives after high school graduation. Seidman (1991) recommended interviews as the best approach to conduct a phenomenologically-oriented qualitative research study. As Seidman (1991) continued to discuss his recommendations for interviews, he provided the rationale for their use. He proposed that through interviews the participants would be able to: establish the context of their experience; reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurred; and reflect on the meaning their experience held for them (Seidman, 1991).

During the interview session, each participant was guided to reflect upon the meaning they obtained from their experiences as a Pearl. The interview questions asked the participants to describe the knowledge they acquired through the mentoring program, in regard to particular events that occurred in high school. Then they were asked if the information provided them with the understanding to appropriately address similar situations in college/work and not return to their poorly chosen adolescent behaviors. These elements provided the researcher with data that illustrated if there was an impact as a result of their participation in the mentoring program.

The data collected for the research study were gathered individually using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The interviews were scheduled by the research associate and participant. The participant was asked to select a date, time, and place where the interview could be conducted. Allowing the interviewee to choose the setting provided the participant with a safe and secure venue as recommended by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the research associate, and were organized thematically by the researcher later for
interpretation. Each interview followed the semi-structured interview protocol (Patton, 2002). The protocol served as a guide, according to Patton (2002), as “the interviewer remains free to build conversation within a particular subject area and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (p. 343). A high degree of uniformity was therefore maintained by the research associate utilizing the semi-structured protocol throughout all interviews. During the interview session, each participant was guided through the questions to reflect on the meaning she obtained from her experiences as a Pearl.

**Instrument**

A semi-structured interview guide was adapted from the research instrument developed by Dr. Alice Quarles, who previously studied the effects of older urban adolescent females mentoring younger urban adolescent females (Appendix D). The interview was designed to stimulate and encourage open discussions accessing information which recalled the participants’ experiences as a member of a school-based mentoring program. Permission to use the research instrument was previously granted by Dr. Quarles (Appendix E). The interview elicited responses that allowed insight into each participant’s thoughts, worldviews, experiences, and assumptions relative to their participation in the Pearls. Investigation of the research question necessitated that the interview include attention to different aspects of the alumni experiences, including:

1) General background information on each participant (Question 1: Share a little information about yourself. Who are you? What do you like to do for fun? What are you doing now? Career? College? Family? What contributed to your decision about what to do after high school? How are you experiencing life after high school?)
2) Discussions on how each participant experienced life’s problems in general
(Question 2: What was your high school experience like for you? What strategies did you learn/use for resolving problems during high school? Where did you learn these strategies?)

3) Discussions on whom and how each participant was provided with assistance to resolve their life’s difficulties and barriers (Question 5: What kinds of road blocks did you experience in high school that may have caused you not to be successful? Have you experienced any barriers to your goals after high school graduation in college/work? If so, can you briefly describe these barriers?)

4) Discussions on how each participant experienced dilemmas after high school graduation (Question 4: What was your college/work experience like for you? What strategies that you learned in high school did you use for resolving problems during college/work?)

5) Discussions on whom and where each participant was provided with assistance in preparation for her future and where she was at that point in her life (Question 7: Explain the pathway you will take to achieve your short term goals. Did anyone guide you to select and inform you on how to reach these goals? What do you think you will be doing at this time next year? How will you get there? What do you think you will be doing in five years? How will you get there?)

Data Collection

Patton (2002) suggests that the process of collecting information for a phenomenological study involves in-depth interviews with no more than ten individual. However, the number of participants was not as important as was the described meanings
of the same phenomena the number of individuals experienced (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) revealed that the rationale for interviewing was to allow us to “enter the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

To best “enter the other person’s perspective,” specific questions (Appendix F) were selected and adapted from a list of interview questions utilized by Dr. Alice Quarles in her study, *Big Sisters mentoring Little Sisters*. The participants were asked these pre-selected questions in an interactive one-on-one interview guided by the research associate. They revealed information freely as it related to the question. The researcher had previously determined that the participants should be relaxed and comfortable during the interview process. Therefore, the interview meeting was held at a time, place, and date selected by the participant. The research associate interviewed the participants individually and recorded their responses using audio-tape. Experience, skill of the interviewer, and ease were of great value in the interview process. As Patton (2002) emphasized, “The quality of the information obtained during an interview is highly dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341).

During the interview, the research associate used open-ended questions. The questions were designed to gather information on the impact of the school-based mentoring program on the participants’ lives after high school graduation. The language of the questions was not overly sophisticated so that the participants were able to fully understand them, and respond to each question appropriately and with ease. The
questions were chosen to elicit information that identified the impact of aspects of the secondary school-based mentoring program on their lives after high school graduation.

Prior to the beginning of data collection, an application was made to Duquesne University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). After permission was granted to begin the study, potential participants were contacted, data were collected and transcribed, and were used exclusively to address the research goals. The interview meetings were audio-taped by the research associate. Anonymity of the participants’ names and data gathered was maintained throughout the entire process, including the publication of the study. The research associate assigned each participant an identifying code number to replace her name prior to the collection of any information. The research associate used a password security feature of Microsoft Word to lock folders, and to transcribe and save the discussions. Information gathered from the Pearls alumni, identified with an alias, and was locked in a safe in the researcher’s house. Only the researcher had a key to this safe. The research associate placed the identifying aliases in another locked safe in the research associate’s house. Only the research associate had a key to this safe. Seven years following the defense of the study, these audio-tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

The intention of this study was to investigate the research question: What was the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation? Using the verbal responses from the interviews, the researcher analyzed the comments from the Pearls alumni in order to respond to the research question.
The source for data analysis was the transcripts of the conversations from each one-on-one individual interview. The researcher received de-identified data, allowing each participant to remain anonymous.

All information obtained from the individual interviews was first broadly examined to gain a general familiarity with the content. During this process, dominant concepts, themes, and issues were noted to form categories; these categories became the codes with which the transcripts were interpreted and meanings developed. Coding by using keywords was a tool of analysis used by the researcher in order to classify the text (Sarantakos, 1993). During the coding process, keywords and ideas gave specific meaning to the written statements and provided a label for the emerging themes (Sarantakos, 1993).

Responses were coded by the researcher. All responses to the specific interview questions were sorted and collectively organized and placed on a spreadsheet according to the initial categories. The researcher identified salient themes, recurring ideas, and belief patterns related to each of the research questions. Major domains, significant statements, extensive description, and formulated meanings were explored to determine similarities and differences across each Pearl alumnus as she responded to the interview questions (Sarantakos, 1993). An additional group of analyzed items were included in separate sections that did not fit into the other identified categories.

The last stage in data analysis was making meaning from what was conveyed in the information acquired during the study. Patton (2002) affirmed, “Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering
explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences…and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world” (p. 480).

“Expressing the fundamental meaning of a text is a judgment call” (van Manen, 1997, p.104). Van Manen (1997) alluded to the flexibility naturally found in qualitative data analysis, as opposed to quantitative data analysis, which has shown a rigid and precise approach to a study. Ultimately, in this study, the systematic coding and analysis of all data reflecting lived experiences provided the researcher with insights into the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation.

The insights and interpretations that surfaced during the collection of data were from the responses of the participants to the interview questions. The researcher, as the interpreter of the stories involved in this study, used anecdotal narratives to support the significance of the stories and the interpreted meanings behind them.

From the literature review, one theory drove the interpretation of this study, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). During the analysis of the data, this framework helped to organize the insights gleaned from the responses of the Pearls alumni through their interviews regarding the impact of their participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on their lives after high school graduation.

**Ethical Considerations**

Many authors have discussed the importance of ethical issues when performing qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). From reading the published works of Patton (2002), the researcher was compelled to respect the
rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants under investigation. Throughout this study, the following strategies were implemented to protect the rights of the Pearls:

1) The objectives of the study were communicated to the Pearls verbally and in writing so that they clearly understood the purpose of the study and their role as participants in the study.

2) Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants. Each individual was made aware that her participation was voluntary and she could withdraw from the study at any time.

3) Participants were assigned an alias by a research associate to protect the privacy and preserve the anonymity of the participants.

4) All transcribed material taken from the interviews was placed into summary form and made available upon request to any participant.

5) All participants’ information and materials were labeled with an identifying alias and locked in a safe. Only the researcher had the key to this safe.

6) All identifying aliases were locked in another safe. Only the research associate had the key to this safe.

7) After the audiotapes were transcribed into a written text, all references to the participant or anyone they spoke about were assigned aliases. No identifiable connection was made between the participant and the information she provided.

Limitations

There were limitations associated with this study. The primary limitation of the research was that the findings were based on the researcher’s interpretation of the data. Since the researcher served as the mentor to the Pearls and was the assistant principal of
the high school where the mentoring program occurred, there is a possibility of interpreting data toward bias that the researcher may hold. A second limitation would include the small sample of participants from one mentoring program within one urban high school. Therefore, lack of generalizability of the findings surfaces as a third limitation. However, van Manen (1997) viewed this as a positive aspect of phenomenologically-oriented research because, as he believed, “The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (p. 22).

**Summary**

There is an overwhelming advantage in listening to the voices of urban females. In searching for support of accessible pathways for the urban adolescent female to succeed after high school, the researcher developed the following question for this study: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation?

Using a qualitative methodological approach, the transcriptions of the interviews with each Pearl alumnus supplied data to respond to the research question. These females from urban environments were able to explain in detail the impact of aspects of participating in a secondary school-based mentoring program upon their lives after high school graduation.

There were a total of six participants in this inquiry. All six participants contributed to the data collected and analyzed by the researcher, and all information was converted to a written text. A categorical system was used to organize keywords or themes to facilitate the process of identifying important ideas. The data was reviewed to identify patterns of
similarities or differences among the Pearls alumni for repeated themes and relationships among the people and/or events.

This study has the potential for assisting the high school reform effort in the Pittsburgh Public School District, as well as principals and teachers, in developing programs and policies whose aim is to provide support for the urban adolescent females during high school and beyond. The analysis of the data is presented in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV begins with a detailed description of the data in this study, as it was coded and analyzed. The process that was used for coding the data and writing the description of the results is also described. Data were collected from individual interviews with six alumni of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls, and is presented in the format of themes and subtopics that emerged from the data. The data were examined using the processes for qualitative research, as described by Peshkin (2000). Interpretation was guided by the researcher’s analysis of the data, as related to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development.

Findings

The findings of this inquiry were organized into two major themes and core ideas in order to answer the research question: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation? As a result of data analysis, two overarching themes emerged as primary factors: 1) relationships between Pearls and others and 2) continued impact of a secondary school-based mentoring program upon the lives of urban females after high school graduation. This dialogue connects the findings from the interviews with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development.

Where are the Participants Now?

Six alumni of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls, a school-based mentoring program, agreed to participate in individual interviews for this research study. This multicultural group was comprised of one Asian American, three African Americans, and two
Caucasian Americans. Following high school, four of the six Pearls alumni are enrolled full-time in college (Nina, Shayla, Maree, and Summer); one is working full-time and is enrolled in college part-time (Breia); and another is working full-time (Camille).

From the interviews conducted during research for this study, additional information was discovered regarding the participants’ personal lives. Breia described that she works full-time at a neighborhood bank, is financially independent, and is now sharing an apartment with her sister, away from the family household. She stated that she has finally met a man with whom she has developed a comfort level, and has been involved in a relationship with him for eight months. She continues to attend alumni meetings, and a few months ago, discussed issues concerning her career with the group. The Pearls alumni have encouraged Breia to follow the advice of family and business colleagues to broaden her knowledge base by enrolling in college part-time. She has accepted this advice, and is now attending evening classes at the Community College of Allegheny County.

Another of the participants, Camille, is also financially independent. She works full-time as a pharmacy technician. She became a pharmacy technician by following the advice she received from the Pearls alumni at a meeting a few months after she was asked to leave college. She has chosen to continue to live with her grandmother, sharing expenses, because her grandmother has limited financial resources. The other four alumni are living in college dormitories or in the same family or friend households as they did in high school. Nina and Summer are attending Chatham College located in Pittsburgh, PA, while Maree and Shayla are attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Nina did not receive financial assistance from the Pittsburgh Promise
Scholarship Program, but Summer, Maree, and Shayla were eligible and did benefit from the funding available to them through this program. Nina is getting ready to graduate from college in spring 2012, whereas the other three young women still have a few years before they finish their postsecondary education.

All six participants are members of the Pearls alumni group who meet monthly. The members of the Pearls alumni continue to function as a support group and invite guest speakers, with assistance from the Pearls’ mentor, to address their concerns and provide them with insight into topics of interest to the group. They also use this forum to discuss personal matters and provide advice to each other on family, education, careers, community, and social issues. At their last alumni meeting, two Pearls shared that they were involved in close relationships with males, and discussed the problems that were arising (e.g., they are seeking to finish college, but are living away from their boyfriends). They were seeking advice on how to resolve issues regarding their relationships. Another group member shared her decision to enroll in college part-time, and thanked the group for their support. Presently, none of the alumni participating in the study shared news of having any children. However, the participants explained that other alumni did share information at the monthly meetings about the new families they have created through marriage or other living arrangements, and how many children they may or may not have at this time.

Each person’s point of view was expressed concerning the impact of their high school mentoring experiences (as Pearls) on their lives after graduation. The key is to describe the story of each of the participants from their perspective, through their own eyes. According to van Manen (1997), “The chance of living through an experience
provides us with the opportunity of gaining insight into the protective factors that exists in
the lives of the human condition” (p. 70). The following sections provide details of the
stories of these six Pearls alumni, as they identify the impact of the school-based
mentoring program on their lives after high school, from their perspectives. The responses
are presented as support for the themes that emerged from the interview data.
Additionally, the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979,
2004) was used to frame the progress of the six participants in this study toward their
development as young adults, and the role the mentoring program played in their
development.

**Theme One: Relationship Between the Pearl and Others**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development
explains how and why adults and peers influence student outcomes. In his model,
Bronfenbrenner describes series of systems found in the shape of concentric circles, with
the child (of any age) at the center. The microsystem is the system closest to the child.
Here, adults from family and school nurture and teach children. At the microsystem
level, bi-directional influences occur.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) describes the influential interactions that take place
between mother and child, father and child, and teacher and child, with the understanding
that the influences flow in both directions. “Bidirectional influences take place when
individuals and groups of individuals interact and directly affect others who exist within
the same layer, as well as those who are in the layers on either side of them. For
example, a friendly, attentive student is likely to evoke positive and patient reactions
from teachers, whereas a distractible student is more likely to be responded to with restriction and punishment” (Berk, 2000, p. 27).

In the instance of a secondary school-based mentoring program, these layers of Bronfenbrenner’s model provides the connection between the children’s microsystems and the external environment, such as school, to mold development. Bronfenbrenner describes the environment as bi-directional interactions between people, objects, or symbols. This mesosystem is surrounded by the exosystem, which refers to the social settings that affect children most, and have the greatest impact on them. For example, these social settings would include the parents’ workplace or the school attended by other siblings because these settings would draw the parent’s attention and time away from one child and their school and direct it toward another child and their school.

**Relationship with Parent/Guardian and the Family**

All six participants shared their relationship with their parent/guardian and families at the beginning of their interview, when they were asked to tell the research associate about themselves. While in high school, one of the six participants, Breia, lived with two parents and one sibling; two participants, Nina and Summer, lived with one parent and one sibling; and the other three participants, Maree, Shayla, and Camille, lived with an extended family member and no siblings. As the interviews continued, the participants explained their living arrangements today. Breia lives in her own apartment; Nina, Summer, Maree, and Shayla live between college dormitories and homes with their parent/guardians or extended family members.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) sees the instability and unpredictability of family life in the microsystem as creating the most destructive force to a child’s development.
Children in an unstable family situation often do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for development. Therefore, if the family relationship in the immediate microsystem breaks down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his/her environment. Children may, in turn, look for the affirmations that should be present in the child-parent relationship in inappropriate places. These deficiencies show themselves, especially in adolescence, as anti-social behavior, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction, or they may look to other people in the mesosystem for what they lack from the parents. In this study, that “person” becomes the school-based mentoring program, including the other Pearls and the group’s mentor. The influence of the Pearls counter to that of the family or parental units is evidenced in the excerpts from individual interviews. Maree began her interview by stating:

My mother died just before I started high school and my father worked a dangerous job and with too many hours to watch me, so I was sent to live with his sister. … everything changed. I had to follow her rules and we fought about things all the time. My aunt made me go in the house at nine because she says our neighborhood is so dangerous. …my aunt was so mean to me and my dad ignored me whenever I tried to explain this to him. I cried a lot. He was too busy to talk to me. I needed someone to talk to about me and school and my mom, but there was no one and I felt lonely and angry all the time.

Then I started high school and I had to follow another new set of rules at school. In the ninth grade, I fought other girls and was constantly suspended from high school. I also would take items from other students. Again I was suspended from
school but this time criminal charges were filed against me. My father was so embarrassed by me that he refused to go to the magistrate with me.

I am in college now and I do not get into trouble like before. But I am still without a close family.

It appears that family structure within Maree’s microsystem affected her in multiple negative ways, including being suspended numerous times in ninth grade for physical violence and anti-social behavior. She also reported feeling angry and isolated a lot of the time. She may not have felt so angry and alone if her extended family as Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) stated was “a group of persons who possessed and implemented a dedicated commitment to each other’s well being” (p 251). Introducing Maree to the Pearls’ mentor and the secondary school-based mentoring program provided her with the ability to create stable and committed relationships with the Pearls’ mentor and the Pearls assisting her to progress towards positive development. Maree is now in college and stated that she utilizes the interpersonal relationship skills she acquired in the school-based mentoring program all the time. The membership in the Pearls and the connection made with the mentor, a caring adult from outside the family structure, helped her not feel so alone and angry. According to Maree, the mentor of the Pearls remains a constant and committed guiding force in the life of the adolescent and adult, often when the family does not provide this. Other participants such as Nina shared similar experiences:

I decided to attend college because of my participation in the Perry Pearls.

I had little direction at home. My mom was a single parent still devastated over my father leaving her so she worked a lot and partied a lot. No one
was home to talk to about my future dreams or tell me how I could make
them come true.

Nina also talked about the negative environmental influences she experienced from living
with an absent parent:

When I have decisions to make at college, I call Ms. Wez or my other
mentor for advice because my mother is still too busy or just doesn’t know
how to help me. They are both so helpful.

Nina struggled academically in high school at first. She talked about her mother not
being home due to her work schedules. So she had no one at home to ask for help.
Belonging to the Pearls permitted her to discover how many ways the Pearls and the Pearls’
mentor could help her, particularly in academic as well as social situations. Even in college
she calls the Pearls’ mentor for advice and she does meet with her college advisor regularly.

Shayla lived with her uncle and she explained:

I am the youngest of three kids. My mom had me when she was 48. My parents
are not married and right now I live with my uncle. I do not get along with my
mother and she is always sick and we fight all the time. So I was a loner for
awhile.

I had a hard time getting along with females in high school. This is where I
needed someone to talk with about the problem with females as friends because
my uncle did not understand.

Shayla’s living arrangement was very different from the other participants. She lived
with an uncle who was searching for an adult female to assist her in transitioning to high school.
Adolescence was a difficult stage of development for her and Shayla’s uncle recognized that she needed the support that he did not know how to provide. So he turned to the school community for assistance. The school personnel introduced him to the Pearls’ mentor and as Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) stated, the school community became part of Shayla’s microsystem. This connection has continued through Shayla’s college experience as she participates as a Pearl alumnus and contacts the Pearls’ mentor frequently for assistance in addressing the challenges she faces in life now. Camille also shared her experience:

I am Camille. I still live with my grandmother because she needs someone to help out with the bills. I am working now. My mom started to live with my stepfather when I was ten. I didn’t like it because it left me alone a lot. She used to always be wit’ me, but then she was always wit’ him. So my mother sent me to live with my grandmother all the time when I went to high school because I was causing too many problems at home. She stopped talking to me and I needed someone. I need to have people in my life that can give me good advice because my mom won’t talk to me and my grandmother is too tired to help me.

When Camille was living with her mother and stepfather, many relationship problems arose. Therefore, she was sent to live with her grandmother. Because of this disruption in her life she began to display inappropriate behavior through lack of school attendance. The school social worker suggested that Camille join a support group like the Pearls to aid her in transitioning to her new living arrangement and to the new freedoms she has found in attending high school.

Camille was asked to join the Pearls when she was in high school. However, she did not join these types of groups when she went to college. By removing her support
system she lost her ability to connect with others for assistance in making appropriate relationship decisions and resorted back to the inappropriate behavior she exhibited when she was younger. Camille stated, “It is hard for me to call Ms. Wez because I mess up a lot but she still makes time for me. She always is there to help me with my problems. But she keeps me seeing a counselor so I can work out my problems better.”

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) stated that the school will become part of the student’s microsystem and the expansion of these microsystems will create a strong mesosystem consisting of ever expanding circles of triads.

As Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) has suggested, in the mesosystem, where relations between different microsystems or connections between contexts are found to be negative when the parent rejects the child, the child will have difficulty developing positive relations with their friends or peers. These issues appeared evident by the descriptions of their behavior provided by Maree, Shayla, Summer, and Camille explaining how their parent(s) rejected them and how they responded to this negative reaction. Summer explains:

I am Summer and I will always be a Pearl. In high school I lived with my mother and my brother. We moved around a lot, maybe five times because we could not always pay the rent, we lived on food stamps, and Social Security because my father was dead due to drugs. Then my brother became involved with street activities. My mother cannot help me much. So when I came to high school I came with an attitude and money. After I went to college I still called Ms. Wez for advice on many different things. Like how to get along better with the people in my dorm. It is great to have someone who lets you call them for help anytime.
However, Nina and Breia experienced positive bonds with their families and healthy relations with their friends and as a result did not engage in physical confrontations as frequently. The roles played by the Pearls and their mentor are therefore somewhat different for these two young women. As Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) stated the family should encompass “a group of persons who possess and implement an irrational (dedicated) commitment to each other’s well being” (p 251).

Breia explains her extended family:

I had my big sister and only two friends because I had my cousins to play with. My family all lives on the same street. Two of my mother’s sisters and their families live on either side of our house. My dad’s brother lives across the street from us with his family. My family is very close and they watch the kids very well. We are together all the time. A lot of the time all of us eat together and we always have fun time together. The kids do not go out just to hang with the other kids. Kids can come to our houses, we watch movies or listen to music and talk and eat, but someone in the family is always with us.

During her interview, Breia revealed that her immediate and extended family members were very close and that they had dinner together every day and talked about their days at school or work. This close relationship with extended family built a strong emotional attachment, and was a positive influence upon her development. Breia’s family and extended family created an environment in which Breia felt valued as an individual and as a family member. This close relationship with extended family built a strong emotional attachment, and was a positive influence upon her development. Therefore, while she did not need the Pearls as much for emotional development, when it
came to career choices after high school, she needed the support of her mentor to explain the decisions she made to work in a bank and not attend college. Breia also needed to learn how to express herself appropriately in the work place and belonging to the alumni group is providing her with this experience.

**Monitoring by Parent(s) and Others**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) describes another influence of the microsystem and family structure as parental monitoring. This is “the effort of parents to keep informed about and set limits on their children’s activities outside the home” (p. 7). Parental monitoring is more likely to occur and have a greater impact in two parent families than in those with the mother as a single parent or the father as a step-parent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). The participants expressed their thoughts on parental monitoring and what they perceived as its effect upon their lives as adolescents. As Breia stated:

If one of my parents was working, the other was home for the kids. If both parents were working, another family member supervised us.

The family supervised the children constantly. Breia shared that if her parents were not available due to work schedules or health issues, another family member would always take their place. Breia’s family and extended family created an environment in which Breia felt valued as an individual and as a family member. Breia continues:

Ms. Wez monitored me in school too by checking my attendance record in classes and in the after school activities. She was concerned about my safety too. Now I am living in my own apartment and I am trying to make good choices. I am still close with my family and visit them often. They like to visit me in my apartment too; I think they are still watching over me and that is a good thing. It makes me
feel safe. I have a boyfriend now and my family likes him and he helps keep me safe too.

Nina’s life was different from Breia’s because she had to assume a role of caregiver for her younger sister after her parents divorced and her mother had to work long hours. As Nina explained:

After my parents divorced, it was me and my mother and little sister. My mom worked long hours and weekends and sometimes partied after work, so I was alone a lot with my sister. I would take my sister with me everywhere. There was no one else to take care of us, so I took care of us. Ms. Wez or another adult from the school like a coach or other parent would ride us home when it was late after school and made sure we were safe getting into our house.

Our neighborhood was not safe. But our neighbor watched our house and us all the time, so that no one bothered us. It was lonely but we had each other and we still do. I can’t wait until I can afford a safer place for us to live and a car to take us places.

Now I am living at school and am very careful. I only go out in pairs or groups. I am careful at parties and don’t drink too much. The friends I have made now are always around to do things with or study with so I feel safe with them.

Shayla stated:
My uncle was known by the kids in the school because he worked at the rec center. Everyone likes him. Because the neighborhood near the school was bad he would ride me and my friends to school things at night. He watched over me and my friends all the time. I really miss that now that I am away at school. But,
I try to keep safe at school. I don’t party a lot. I have made some friends that I can hang with when I want to. I follow the keep safe rules we learned in the college prep workshops. I know how to take care of myself but I don’t want to get in trouble by following the violent ways of the streets. My uncle worked so hard with me to get me here I do not want to hurt him by not doing my best.

The exosystem, which consists of indirect yet significant influence on an adolescent’s life, such as the parent’s workplace, had a critical affect on Nina and Shayla. Because of the role Nina assumed due to her mother’s work schedule, she had to accept the responsibility for her younger sister and leave school at the end of each day to meet her sister at the middle school. It was this sense of responsibility and concern for her sister’s well-being that compelled Nina to keep the siblings together in a safe environment. Members of the neighborhood helped to keep Nina and her sister safe because her parents were frequently absent. Shayla had to rely upon her own judgment and lessons learned to provide safe surroundings for her well being as did Camille, Summer, and Maree. Camille explained:

My mother sent me to live with my grandmother permanently when I went to high school because I was causing problems at home between her and my stepfather. High school was hard. I began to cut classes and leave the school with some of my new friends. One month you have friends, and the next month they hated you. Someone got caught by school police and they told on me. So my grandmother was told about me and she came to the school. She talked to Ms. Wez and they decided to put me on sign-in sheets. At first I didn’t listen and kept cutting school. Then I had to go to the magistrate and he made me stay in
school or pay a fine. I didn’t have money to pay the fine so I started the sign-in sheets again. This worked for awhile but then I started cutting again and the magistrate made me do lots of community service projects in and out of school. It was hard for my grandmother to keep me safe so she asked the school for help. When I went away to college I forgot about the skills I learned in the Pearls’ workshops. I drank, argued a lot and fought a lot with females and the RA and I was arrested. No one was watching out for me. So, I used the violent ways of the street instead of my street smarts. After many warnings, I was asked to leave college.

Summer shares a similar view of her responsibility for her own safety, as her mother did not leave the house very often, although since one of her brothers was involved in street activity, she was protected by the negative forces in her neighborhood. She did not physically fight with others often but she would engage in this form of confrontation when called upon to do so. Summer stated:

The high school environment was all about clothes, nails, hair, boys, and drama. I fought one girl and then the rest stayed away. They knew my brother who was in the street stuff. So I was kinda protected. When my brother went away his friends watched over me but this is when Ms. Wez was asked to watch over me too.

In college things are different. I have started over. I like college life and try to keep myself away from problems. I have met lots of guys but I am careful. I want to be a teacher so I don’t want to get in trouble for anything. I study hard and hang with a few of my friends. We go to things on campus most times. I
don’t have much money so I stay close. Ms. Wez still checks up on me to be sure I am going to all of my classes and keeping up with my assignments. I like having someone who cares.

Maree shared similar thoughts as well:

I followed my aunt’s house rules until I graduated from high school. I would sneak out sometimes to stay out late. But I know how to take care of myself. Now that I am in college I don’t like partying too much anymore because when I do I get in trouble. I have not been arrested yet but it could happen so I am careful. I can take care of myself because I have had to all my life. But I don’t want to do anything stupid.

However, all of the participants agreed that their neighborhoods were not safe and were crime-ridden. Only Breia and Nina had someone from the family or neighborhood monitoring them. All of the participants continually searched for safe environments outside the home, which they found in high school and then college/work. Their families and the adult(s) outside the family that were their neighbors and friends worked together to counteract the elements found in the crime-ridden neighborhood where they lived providing a parental monitoring system. Belonging to the Pearls not only provided a safe environment for the members, with their friends, to attend after-school activities, but also provided a mentor who supported them by taking them places, teaching them to make smart decisions, chaperoning or sponsoring extracurricular events, and providing the members with financial assistance for admissions, food, clothing, and transportation to participate in these experiences. The school became the Pearls’ community. Now that they have moved away from home, they are aware of the dangers that exist where
they live and attempt to remain as free as possible from these facets of life. A small measure of safety is provided for the participants through the macrosystem that is comprised of the cultural customs, values and laws the participants find in the neighborhoods where they live, work, or attend college.

**Parent/Guardian Interaction with the Pearl’s Life in School/College/Work**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) defined human development as a sum of influences of objective environmental changes, as found in the mesosystem. The mesosystem sphere of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) model discusses how the diverse aspects of a school and an adolescent’s microsystem can work together positively to impact their development. The parents and school create a mesosystem for the adolescent by bringing a part of two different microsystems together, and forming a bridge that helps the child to maintain a sense of constancy and familiarity in her life.

Microsystems and mesosystems both affect the child directly because they are settings in which the child personally engages and is socialized. Only two (Breia and Shayla) of the Pearls’ parents/guardians regularly attended scheduled parent-teacher, parent-counselor, and parent-mentor conferences. Once these types of interactions are absent or are negative, behaviors exhibit themselves as deficiencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). The occurrence during high school of defiant behaviors was described by Maree, Shayla, and Camille. As adolescents, these three exhibited inappropriate behaviors and were excluded from school because of their actions. Therefore, their parents/guardians were compelled to attend parent-assistant principal and parent-mentor conferences before the student could be readmitted to school. When the parents/guardians and student met with the Pearls’ mentor, school attendance was
addressed and its impact on academic achievement was described. The adolescents’
teachers were also asked to meet with the parent/guardian to discuss the student’s
academic progress, and strategies for improvement were identified. Additionally, the
students were encouraged to enroll in the secondary school-based mentoring program and
an action plan was developed for the student to follow so she could progress toward
positive self-direction. Only one of the participants, Nina, stated that she joined the
Pearls from personal interest without being encouraged by her parents/guardians or the
school community because of inappropriate behavior. Of course, any behavior changes
occurred over time, with continuous monitoring by the mentor of the Pearls, the teachers,
and the parent/guardian, as the following participants stated. Maree said:

My dad dropped me off at Pittsburgh Perry the first day of high school. No
one went with me and I was a little scared. I had not been in this school
before today. As I tried to find my way I decided that I had a nice smile, so
I smiled a lot. The first couple of days of high school I smiled at every one
I saw, kids, teachers, security, and they smiled back. That was over when
someone started talking stuff on me and I had to fight her.

My dad had to get me back in school and he was mad because he had to miss
work. After the third time, my dad was ready to quit helping me until Ms. Wez
told him about some things she could do to help me, things like me meeting with
grief counselors, school social worker, tutors, peer conflict resolution groups, and
the Pearls, a school mentoring program for girls. So he said, “Put her in all of
them” and he never came back until graduation day. I went to college by myself
and my father sends me some money but my father never comes to see me in
college. I know I can depend on Ms. Wez and if something is happening at school that is special or if I am in trouble she will come.

Nina continues to live with her mother and sister when she comes home from college and she intends to live with them after college graduation. Her mother continues to work long hours and she said:

My mother did not have time to come to high school to meet with my counselor or mentor. She did not go to anything I was involved in until my senior year. Then she did go with me to Senior Recognition Night and to graduation. I went to both colleges alone. Everyone was working so no one could help me either time. This last time my uncle dropped me off with all my stuff. It was no surprise when my mother did not go to anything I was involved in during college. But she will come to graduation. I do count on Ms. Wez and my other mentor because they always provide time for me and anytime I need someone one of them will be there to help me. They both plan on attending graduation too. Without their constant care and concern I would have had a very difficult time achieving what I have. I know we will always be close friends.

Shayla lived with an extended family member. She did agree it was better than when she lived with her mother, although she still experienced difficulty transitioning to high school. Shayla shared:

I live with my uncle. I am so happy to live with him because we eat regularly, sleep in clean beds, and we don’t argue like me and my mom. He took me to school the week before school began to make sure my schedule was okay. He asked to have a tour of the school and had me meet all the adults I needed to know.
before school started. All the kids knew my uncle who worked at the rec center, and I was able to make friends quick, mainly with the boys.

I was a loner for awhile. My uncle had to come with me to school one day to talk to my assistant principal and asked Ms. Wez to introduce me to a few girls I could make friends with and who would help me fit in better.

My uncle would meet regularly with my counselor and with Ms. Wez. He came to school for everything such as parent-teacher conferences, Take your father to school day, the plays, my performances with the band, and to all the sports games. He really cares about me.

Now at college, my uncle moved me in and comes to school for parent weekends and sports. Sometimes he just comes to see me. We spend time together and he has met my advisor and my friends here. He is very involved in my life and so is Ms. Wez. She has come to visit me a few times. I always tell her how she has helped me decide what I want to be. Every time I come home from school I call her so we can get together to talk about my studies and friends and my life. We talk about my future plans and how I want to shadow a juvenile probation officer or police officer.

Breia explained:

My parents came to school for everything. They went to open house, parent-teacher conferences, awards breakfasts, Pearls activities, and belonged to the parent-teacher organization and band parents group. One or the other of my parents or family members would travel to all the sports games with us and would help raise money for things the kids needed. But they could not help me find the
job I wanted. Thanks to Ms. Wez and those women from the bank that she had me meet. I am working in a great bank job.

Summer and Camille spoke about their similar family involvement. Summer said:

My mother couldn’t come to school because she was afraid to leave the house.

Camille shared:

My mother was too busy to come to school for me but my grandmother did for some things. But if she was sick she couldn’t always be there. Even when I got arrested those times in college my mom didn’t come to help me she sent my uncle. When I finished at Bidwell, my grandmother and Ms. Wez came to see me get my certificate.

As Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) suggested, and the above examples demonstrate, building connections between students, parents, teachers, and mentors are critical factors when developing an extensive mesosystem in schools. Attachments to and interactions with teachers, parents, and students found in the adolescent’s mesosystem can assist young females in progressing to relate appropriately with others after high school. Breia and Shayla described how their parent/guardian and family interacted with the high school community and continued to support them along with the Pearls’ mentor after graduation. Breia began high school with a fully functional support system in her microsystem, but Shayla was seeking affirmations in the mesosystem of the school. Fortunately for Shayla, she did connect with the Pearls and the Pearls’ mentor in school to assist her transition from elementary to high school. Nina, Maree, Summer and Camille explained how they lacked the encouragement found when students, parents, and teachers interact on a regular basis. As Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) indicated,
adolescents who do not find student, parent, and teacher support will then look in inappropriate places such as affiliations with unacceptable peer groups whose influence upon them encourages lack of self-discipline and self-control. Maree, Summer, and Camille did demonstrate a lack of self-discipline and self-control during their initial years in high school. However, once they participated in the secondary school-based mentoring program and were paired with the Pearls’ mentor, they learned to develop strategies that would permit them to progress in a positive manner.

**Changes in the Pearls’ Personal Environment**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) claims that the chronosystem, which extends the environment, involves changes in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, residence, or degree of hectic-ness in everyday life. A chronosystem displays change or consistency over time, not only in the characteristics of the person, but also in the environment in which a person lives. It is during times of change that the family may experience loss of economic security, and is forced to mobilize their human resources. Adults and adolescents take on new roles and responsibilities, both within and outside the home, working together to keep the family solvent. This change may function either positively or negatively. In the positive form, loss of economic security provides children with effective training in initiative, responsibility, and cooperation, buffering the negative effects of poverty. However, in the negative form, a lower socioeconomic status may cause devastating conflicts among adult family members, resulting in ill effects upon the development of the children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Elements within the chronosystem can be either external (e.g., a parent’s death, divorce, step-parents) or internal (e.g., the physiological changes that occur with the
aging of an adolescent). Four of the participants, Nina, Camille, Shayla, and Maree, revealed that they lived with a single parent or extended family member. As each of these four girls experienced changes that come with adolescence, external factors caused anger or resentment issues to surface, resulting in the participants behaving in inappropriate ways. For example, life events determined with whom they would live.

Nina explained:

> When my father left my mom, my sister and I lived with our mom. After my parents divorced we had less money so my mother worked longer hours. My dad would occasionally give us some extra money if we needed to get new clothes or have our nails and hair done. However, since I have started college he pays my mother less child support and does not send me much money. But I have managed to get a part time job and I am doing fine. I know once I graduate I will find a full time job and maybe my mom, my sister, and I will move to a better house in a nice neighborhood.

My mother can’t send me much money now I’m in college but I work and get by. I call Ms. Wez every time something good happens in my life and sometimes when bad things happen too. She always makes time for me. Ms. Wez and my other mentor are preparing me for job interviews. They have helped me pick out the proper clothes to wear, reviewed my resume, and researched the types of questions I may be asked. We have practiced the answers to the questions many times. They are giving me the confidence I need to get a job.

Camille shared that her stepfather interfered with her relationship with her mother. She became very angry when her mother sent her to live with her grandmother.
That caused the make-up of her nuclear family to change. So, Camille projected her feelings of anger upon other adolescent females because she misunderstood the verbal interactions they had with her. This resulted in her engagement in physical confrontations with others.

Camille explains:

My mom started to live with my stepfather when I was ten. I didn’t like it because it left me alone a lot. She used to always be wit’ me, but then she was always wit’ him. When he moved in, we did have more money. We stopped getting food stamps and paid the credit card bills and rent on time. Then we moved to a house instead of living in a small apartment. I had my own room.

Soon, we had new furniture and a new TV with all the cable channels. At first my stepfather was cool, but after they got married, my stepfather started bossing me around and I hated that, so I would run away and end up at my grandmother’s. So my mother sent me to live with my grandmother all the time when I went to high school because I was causing too many problems at home.

I went to high school by myself. I thought I could go and not have any problem. I was so surprised at how big the school was and how many kids there were and how lost I felt. I cut a lot of classes. But then my grandmother and I had to go to the magistrate because I missed too much school. I was fined and had to work off the fine through community service, which I did at our church’s daycare on Sunday mornings.

By getting referrals and going to the magistrate, I had to see Ms. Wez, my assistant principal each day before school. We would talk for a few minutes and I
would pick up my sign in sheet from her. These sheets would record my behavior, attendance, and grade for the day from each class. Then my grandmother and Ms. Wez had a way of following me when I was in high school. My mom didn’t help me move into college and she didn’t help me move out. She is so embarrassed by me that she won’t talk to me. She never helped me or my grandmother. I did get help with college and with the training program costs but I needed clothes and school things. My grandmother managed to get some money to help me. Since I have a job I help my grandmother pay the bills. My grandmother still helps me because she listens to me but she’s old and sometimes I call the Pearls Alumni who help me and talk to me. I am ashamed sometimes to talk to Ms. Wez like my friends tell me to do. I know I let her down. But she still talks to me like she use to when I call her or see her at the meetings.

Conversely, Shayla explained how the illness and the age of her parent caused her to create a new family with an extended family member. Living with an extended family member was not a negative experience for Shayla, although she did not want to cause her uncle concern by sharing the difficulties she was experiencing at school with her peers with him. When her uncle had to return with her to school following a suspension for a physical confrontation she started, Shayla had to open the dialogue with him regarding her struggle with interactions with other adolescent females. It was then that she was asked to enroll in the mentoring program for support and in anger management counseling for anger issues she needed to address. Shayla shared how changes in her external environments impacted her life as an adolescent and as an adult. Shayla explained how her life improved when she moved in with her uncle. She stated:
My mom had me when she was old and so my sisters are a lot older than me. S. is 21 years older and Y. is 18 years older. They were out of the house when I came along. My parents are not married and right now I live with my uncle from my dad’s side. I do not get along with my mother and she is always sick and we fight all the time. My dad and my sisters are too busy working. I moved in with him during middle school. This is when my mom became very strange and was in the hospital for awhile. My uncle lived close to the school, in fact only three houses away, so it was fine. I had clean sheets and clothes, the refrigerator was filled with food, and I had money when I needed it for school supplies or borrowing videos or going to concerts.

My uncle comes to visit me at college. He likes sports so we go to a lot of games together. He really takes good care of me. He gives me money every month. When I need school advice he has me call Ms. Wez which I do all the time. We talk about everything. She explains how things will get better each year. I am glad to have her. I don’t get to the alumni meetings very much and I miss everyone but I do see them when I come home during breaks. I see Ms. Wez too.

Maree says:

I felt poor after my mom died because my aunt took my money. But, I did have a place to stay and my dad gave me extra money when I asked for it. My neighborhood is filled with crime and drugs but I can take care of myself. I thought I could not go to college because of money but Ms. Wez had me see how grants and the Pittsburgh Promise would help. I do not have much money in college but none of my friends do either. We share. I work part time and my dad
sends me money that helps. I know once I graduate from college I will get a job and have money. When I come home from school, I call and talk to Ms. Wez. Sometimes we meet for coffee or lunch.

Breia, however, did not consider her family to be poor at all. They had their own home and the family business. Breia stated:

We have everything we want. We have a car, and buy clothes and lots of food. We have a pool in the back yard and go on vacation. Any time I need money I just ask. Our family lives on our street and we have fun together all the time. I do have bad streets to go by when I go to school but usually someone drives me to and from school. We take the other kids in the neighborhood too. Being on my own is hard sometimes but my family helps me. They buy me food and stuff. They take me on vacation with them. They helped get everything I needed for my apartment.

Five of the six participants did not consider themselves as living in a low socioeconomic environment while they were in high school because they had the same material items as their friends, even though each one qualified to receive free or reduced payment lunches. Each participant was able to have her hair and nails maintained professionally, buy the latest fashions, and own a cell phone. All they had to do was ask their parent/guardian for these things and they received them. Only one participant, Summer, considered her family to be poor because she had to work to acquire these items. However, once they went to college/work and were living away from home they experienced how difficult it was to live on a limited income. Each participant shared how they recognized the importance of obtaining an education whether it was a high school
diploma or some type of post-secondary education in order for them to secure a career of
their choice. The careers they selected could provide them with an income which would
permit them to progress out of the low socioeconomic environment in which they have resided.

The participants revealed other factors which are found in the macrosystem that
affected them, such as laws defined by the government; cultural values as described by
the family, church, and community; and the media as dictating current fashion trends.
One participant, Camille, shared how cultural values and the law affected her ability to
remain in college. When she began engaging in physical confrontations in college with
other young women she was arrested. After three arrests and interventions by college
personnel she was asked to leave the school because these types of behaviors were not
legally or culturally accepted by the college community.

To urban females, the media defines their place in society and helps them develop
interpersonal skills (Granello, 1997). Four of the participants placed emphasis upon the
professional appearance of their hair and nails, as determined by the media. Five of the
participants dressed in clothing that represented the current fashion style influenced by
popular music videos, movies, and magazines. Each participant used vocabulary
commonly found in the young urban community, such as “shoppin’” and “swag.”
Examples of how the macrosystem affected Summer’s and Nina’s lives were described in
their interviews. Summer spoke about being poor, and began her interview by saying:

When I went to high school my family became poor as could be. There was my
mother, my brother, and me. We moved around a lot maybe five times because
we could not always pay the rent, we lived on food stamps, and Social Security
because my father was dead due to drugs. Then one of my brothers became involved with street activities. So when I came to high school I came with an attitude and money. My mouth was horrible. My mother did not know what to do for me and not at all how to help my brother. One of my brothers went to college and never came back home. The other became involved with street activities. Because one of my brothers was involved in gang activity, I had money to buy everything I wanted and, of course, this caused drama with the girls in the ninth grade. Then my brother was arrested and sent to prison, and everything changed after that. I kept telling my mom that she needed to go to work, and we would fight a lot about it. But she has problems and just couldn’t leave the house. Sometimes I really hated my life; it was so hard. But I found a job working for my cousin.

I am in college and still poor but I work part time. I did get grants and money from the Pittsburgh Promise but I still had to borrow some. But that’s okay. My mom still doesn’t get much money but she is working for my cousin only she can’t help me. But she talks to my cousins and asks them to send me clothes and stuff and they do.

Ms. Wez sends me school supplies when I need them. She calls me a lot to see how I am doing and how my grades are. I need to talk to her so she can help me with my problems and she does.

Nina shared the impact that her parents’ divorce and mother’s long working hours had upon her joining school activities, but she was able to resolve the problems. Nina said:
After my parents divorced and money was a problem, my mother began working long hours, causing me to have to care for myself and my younger sister. My new role and responsibility caused me to constantly change my after-school activities schedule to include my sister. My life became very complicated and it seemed all I did was run.

I am getting ready to graduate from college. I am so happy because now I can get a job and have a little money. I miss my mother and sister. It is hard for them to spend time with me because we are all working and my sister and me are studying but maybe when I move back home we can make time. Ms. Wez always makes time for me. She comes to school to see me because no one else does. We call each other and I also call my writing mentor. These two women keep me on track. My writing mentor is helping me find a job as a journalist. That is my dream.

Summary: Theme One

The family is the closest, most intense, and most influential part of the microsystem. The effect of the family expands to include all aspects of the child’s development: language, nutrition, security, health, and beliefs. All of these traits are developed through feedback found within the family. Adolescents come to school largely having been influenced by their family, whether it is from a single parent family, generation-skipping family, or other nontraditional grouping. Schools directly affect the family, and these relationships are all bi-directional and inter-related in a complex and ever-changing matrix. Therefore, adults in schools need to be able to interact with a great variety of family systems and understand the effects the family has upon adolescent
behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). In their individual interviews, all participants stated that the interactions between the Pearls’ mentor, students, and their parents/guardians established a strong working relationship that supported and monitored the adolescents as they attempted to reach their goal of improved academic performance and progress toward high school graduation. All of the participants did graduate from high school. Five of the six participants entered college after high school graduation. Four of the five remain in school, one is working and attending college part time, and the other one is working full time after completing a post secondary training program. All have revealed through their interviews that the relationship they developed in high school with the Pearls’ mentor has continued through college and work. Five of the six participants stated that they continue to utilize the skills and strategies they learned through engaging in the secondary school-based mentoring program.

Theme Two: Continued Impact of Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program on the Lives of Urban Females after High School Graduation

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) considers the family and the school to be integral parts of the child’s mesosystem. The immediate environment of the school permits a child to experience a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships. Schools fulfill an important secondary role, but in today’s society, teachers often assume a primary role formerly held by the parent. To illustrate, when Maree, Shayla, and Camille were in the ninth grade, their inappropriate behavior in school resulted in their parents/guardians meeting with Ms. Wez, the Pearls’ mentor and assistant principal, on a regular basis. These bi-directional interactions between the Pearls’ mentor, students, and their parents were to resolve issues the girls were experiencing as they began high school,
including behavior, attendance, and grades (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). However, once they began college/work they discovered that they needed to continue their relationship with the Pearls and Pearls’ mentor and rely upon the knowledge they gained in the secondary school-based mentoring program to maintain academic and social success.

**Attending College and Finding a Career**

As Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) model indicates, an individual is introduced into the mesosystem, which provides the connection between the structures of the child’s microsystem. The interaction of structures within a layer and the interaction of structures between layers are key to this theory. The following participants’ quotes, taken from the interviews, reinforce Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) statements regarding connections found within the microsystem creating mesosystems which provide the individual with the skills to progress forward in their development toward adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Camille stated:

My grandmother did not go to college, she didn’t even graduate from high school, so I needed help with everything about getting into college. The meetings with the student guidance counselors really were a big help to me. I had help with my college applications and aid forms from them. I did get accepted to a school I wanted to go to, but I was sent home. When I was asked to leave school I was ashamed to tell Ms. Wez but she found out from one of my friends. She called but I didn’t call back. I didn’t talk to her until I went to one of the alumni meetings with Tessa and saw her there. The Pearls alumni were so nice to me. Between the
Pearls alumni and Ms. Wez, they encouraged me to go to Bidwell Training Center to get training in something. Tessa even helped me fill out the application and went with me to meet the people who register you. Because Ms Wez had us make copies of all of our college forms and essays, it made it easier for me to apply to the Bidwell Training Center for pharmacy technician school because I had most of the information they wanted in these forms. So, I had somewhere to find everything. Ms. Wez told me I could get into this new school and I did. I feel good that I finished it and like my job but I want to go back to college. When I am ready to apply to colleges again, I will have a lot of the things I will need.

Summer experienced a similar situation, where teachers who were concerned with her success in school referred her to her academic counselor. The counselor then introduced Summer to the mentor of the Pearls as she explained:

I was accepted into college because Ms. Wez helped me. She watched me in high school so I didn’t miss too many days. She helped me stay out of trouble with other kids. She helped me with my applications. My mother did not graduate from high school and did not know how to help me. My mom is a good mom but she has problems and I needed someone like Ms. Wez to help me. Now I will finish college because of the goal setting and career workshops held by the Pearls. I want to be a teacher and will begin student teaching next semester. College was hard at first but I remembered to use the study habits we learned and practiced getting us ready for college. I remember to study first and fit partying in on the weekends. I also remember to keep safe. I follow the advice we got in the workshops and not go to just any party or not go alone to stuff on campus. I
chose teaching because of Ms. Wez and the great math teacher who tutored me in high school; I want to do the same thing for other kids. Maybe I can even start my own Pearls group in my own school once I become a teacher.

Maree spoke about her experience entering college:
I had no one to help me look for a college to attend after high school. So during my one-on-one sessions with Ms. Wez I told her about this and how it was bothering me. Together we researched schools in the area that I could go to. We looked at large schools and smaller ones. Ones with smaller classes seemed to fit me better. I felt I needed more teacher attention because I was so nervous about this next step in life. I didn’t want to fail. So Ms. Wez had a group of student guidance counselors meet with the Pearls who were juniors and seniors. We did spend a few evenings after school with them and they went over study skills and how to write a good college essay and helped us fill out college application forms, Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms, and Pittsburgh Promise (scholarship) forms. I really needed this help and I used it. With Ms. Wez’s and their help I was accepted into my first choice college.

I want to be a social worker. Since I have been through a lot I think I can help other people with their lives. College is great. I am on my own but someone always has my back. I have had to meet college advisors and that was hard at first. But Ms. Wez kept telling me to do it so I can get in the right classes. My advisor is very nice. I meet with her often as I have a lot of questions about my classes and grades and how to get some help when I need it. Having the Pearls’ mentor taught me to ask for this help. Now I think of Ms. Wez as a friend. She
always shows me the right direction. The other kids at school are good friends.

We argue but we don’t fight. I like that. I’m tired of fighting.

Nina shared:

I am almost ready to graduate from college. It has been great. I love school even
if it is hard. Ms. Wez and my writer mentor have really helped me stay focused.

Ms. Wez knew that when I came home from the college that was too far away that
I needed someone to get me moving again. She pushed me to enroll in
Community College of Allegheny County and then in the school I now attend.

My mother didn’t know what to do at first when I came home but now she does
and can help my sister if things happen to her.

Shayla talked about becoming a probation officer:

As a Pearl I attended many workshops about careers. At one of these workshops I
met a judge, lawyers, a police officer, and probation officers, and they were all
women. These women invited me to shadow them in their jobs and I loved every
minute of these experiences. Now I know that I want to be a juvenile probation
officer like Ms. Edmonds. I met her with Ms. Wez. I am very busy in college
studying hard. These classes are hard but I know what I have to do. I follow the
skills we learned in the Pearls’ workshops that taught us how to take notes in
classes and other things to use to help us learn. I was attending the small satellite
college and will move to the main campus next semester.

One of the biggest road blocks in high school were other females being jealous of
you. This leads to he said/she said stuff and then an argument and a fight. Other
kids love to see a fight so they push you into one. With this going on you miss out
on what is going on in class because you can’t think about the class you are thinking about what someone said. You have to separate yourself from this or you will not be successful. Too much will get you passed by in life. The Pearls helped me see this as a problem. This does carry over to college a little but not so much. Because of the workshops around conflict I have learned how to deal with it like an adult. Living in a dorm with a lot of females at first caused me to relive some of the same things I had to deal with in high school. But instead of fighting I used the conflict resolution skills I learned to avoid fights. I know I need to get along with other females and I work at it all the time. I can’t wait until I am ready to graduate. My uncle will be so proud.

Five of the six participants spoke of their initial interactions as they began college. Previously they also spoke about beginning high school. They each shared that they were afraid and excited to attend both high school and college. Maree and Camille shared that they both experienced a difficult transition from middle school into high school and then into college. They both made unfortunate decisions in high school that resulted in their receiving numerous 10-day suspensions for inappropriate behavior. Maree learned new appropriate responses from the high school transition to utilize in college but Camille did not. Only Breia’s mother and sister, and Shayla’s uncle, took them to school to help ease their transitions to the size of the building, student body, and to introduce them to adults outside the family with whom they could begin to develop relationships before school began. Initiating a connection between the adolescent and the Pearls’ mentor in the microsystem forms a mesosystem. Shayla’s uncle repeated this transition process as she entered college. They went to the college to meet her advisor, review her schedule and
discover where she could seek tutors as needed. However, Breia’s mother and sister had to permit her to begin her new career alone.

Each participant explained how she set major short-term and long-term goals with assistance from the one-on-one meetings with the Pearls’ mentor and from other working women during the planned workshops of the secondary school-based mentoring program. The membership in a school-based mentoring program enabled the participants to discover what careers were open to them, what post secondary educational programs existed, what types of employment were open to them upon high school graduation, how to apply to either colleges or work. Professional women invited to participate in the workshops with the Pearls assisted the urban females on a short term basis. Two women helped Breia obtain a job in a bank and other women permitted the participants to shadow them at their work sites. Only one woman, a journalist, was identified as assuming the role of an outside mentor for one of the participants, Nina. However, Bronfenbrenner describes the adolescent as one who shapes his or her environment, making it particularly applicable to understanding mentoring during this period.

**Ongoing Relationship with a Caring Adult Outside of the Family**

The child’s primary relationship needs to be with someone who can provide a sense of caring that is meant to last a lifetime (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). This relationship must be fostered by a person (or people) from the microsystem, within the immediate sphere of the child’s influence. The adult does not have to be a family member; it can be an adult outside of the family who is interested in the development of the child. Bronfenbrenner asks the question if it is necessary for the school not only to support consistency between students and teachers, but also to provide adults who will
develop long-term relationships with students. These relationships should involve a strong tie to the child that ideally is meant to last a lifetime. These connections help a student develop cognitively and emotionally (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004), and develop the necessary skills to appropriately relate to others in their environment, including school personnel and peer groups, and work colleagues. Five of the six participants previously shared that they were initially afraid to attend high school. As one example, Breia’s mother and sister took her to school to help ease her transition her to the size of the building, student body, and to introduce her to Ms. Wez, the Pearls’ mentor and assistant principal, with whom she could begin to develop a relationship. Throughout each of the sections in this Chapter, the ongoing presence of the mentor of the Pearls is repeatedly cited as one of the most impactful relationships on the Pearl both during and after high school.

Nina said:

Ms. Wez knew me all during high school. Since my parents did not go to college, they wanted me to have this opportunity to do so. So, they contacted my counselor and he gave them Ms. Wez’s name because she worked with a lot of the females at school. I would meet regularly with Ms. Wez, particularly because I needed to talk with someone older about my home life. She would meet with me to discuss my hopes and dreams. Ms. Wez also gave me advice on colleges in Pittsburgh to apply to attend where the classes were small, advisors were accessible, and tutoring was available. But I had dreams of attending an out-of-state college but after I went away I missed everyone so much and the life style there was so different and I did not really know anyone. So I came back home.
Of course rumors were flying about my return. It made me feel like a failure and Ms. Wez heard about the difficulties I was having at this time. She called me to come in to the school to meet with her. Ms. Wez worked hard to talk me into enrolling in Community College of Allegheny College to finish another semester of classes. She met with me to start me on the road to applying to other colleges in Pittsburgh for the next year. Life is fine now. I am working hard in school and have a job on campus as a newspaper columnist and yearbook editor. I love my new friends and things are familiar and falling into place. I still keep in touch with Ms. Wez and the Pearls’ alumni.

Nina expressed that she needed an adult to guide her through the college application and grant processes because there was no one at home who could help her, as well as someone who would support her while in college. Breia didn’t want to go to college and needed an adult to support her decision when she spoke with her family.

Breia shared:

My mom knew Ms. Wez, the assistant principal, and introduced me to her. She asked Ms. Wez to help me fit in because I was so shy. So Ms. Wez told me she would meet with me during the first week of school, and she did to see how I was doing. Ms. Wez called me and some other ninth grade girls to her office and talked to us about joining the Pearls. From that day on, Ms. Wez became my go to person in school. When I told Ms. Wez that I wanted to work in a bank, she helped me by showing me where my strengths were. She had me get classes put into my daily schedule that would give me the skills I needed to work in a bank. Going to work after high school graduation was okay with Ms. Wez and she talked
with my mother about it. So that really helped me too. I am now working at a neighborhood bank and love it.

Summer explained that she would continue to need support as she progressed from high school to college and beyond. She said:

My mom is a good mom but she didn’t know how to help me with high school or how to go to college or pick a career or even get a job. My brother who is finishing college had help from his football coach. So I needed help and didn’t have a coach. My brother told me to go to my counselor but she was too busy. Then some teachers hooked me up with Ms. Wez and the Pearls because they were afraid that I would end up in street stuff like my other brother. When I got into trouble my brother or Ms. Wez get me out of trouble. No one came to school unless I was in trouble. It was great to have Ms. Wez because she was there for me. She helped me learn study habits and test taking skills. From practicing these things now I understand how to prepare for classes and tests in college. In high school Ms Wez met with me at least twice a month but she saw me every day. She helped me with my grades, college applications, and introduced me to successful working women. It really helped as I am in college now and I still talk to Ms. Wez and the Pearls in the alumni.

Another thing Ms. Wez talked to us about was the importance of reading. I hated to read some of the books in high school we were given. It was hard but I did it to get good grades. The Pearls had to read books too. *Jane Eyre* was so boring at first but Ms. Wez kept on telling us to get past Chapter 3 and it gets more interesting. Boy was she right. Now I know why I had to get use to so
much reading. The more you do it the faster you read and the more you understand. The English and history books were a challenge for me good thing I learned in the Pearls how to read, write in the margins, underline important things and take notes it really pays off. Of course, high school was hard but Ms. Wez made sure I had tutoring when I needed it. When I ran into trouble in college I remembered Ms. Wez’s advice to ask my college advisor to find me a tutor and so that really helped me pass. I learned from the Pearls workshops if you need help all you have to do is ask. It has really worked for me now that I am here in college. Ms Wez helps to give me advice and tells me who to see for help or more advice. I know I will need her to help me when it is time to get a real job.

Shayla explains:

I have my uncle who helps me most of the time but when it comes to advice in college or about careers he has me call Ms. Wez. Having a close contact really helps me when I am feeling low and lost.

Maree describes:

Ms Wez watched over me in high school. I had to report to her every day the first two years about my behavior and attendance because it was so bad. After I got my behavior in control then I did better. I thought once I went to college I wouldn’t need help or advice from Ms. Wez. I was wrong. I called her the second day I was away to ask something. I thought I could become someone new when I went away but I found out that was not true. I do act right but I have no one at home to call so I do need to call Ms. Wez. She helps me find out where to go for help with studying and problems with my roommate. She is a good listener
and helps me make good decisions. She reminds me of the things we learned in the college prep workshops. So I may not need all my old friends all the time but I do need to talk with her and yeah I need the Pearls alumni too.

Only Camille had difficulty contacting Ms. Wez after high school graduation. She reveals:

In high school I needed help. I made a lot of bad decisions at first. But after I joined the Pearls and met with Ms. Wez I thought I was okay. Ms. Wez had me meet with a therapist and attend group therapy sessions and that helped me. She helped me get into college and I didn’t look back. I started out alright but then things happened and I handled the stuff the way I learned on the street not in high school. So after I got into fights with other females and the RA, I was arrested a couple times and was asked to leave college.

After I came home I was so ashamed I didn’t want to talk to anyone. But Tessa kept calling me to go see the Pearls alumni and Ms. Wez. with her. I did and am glad I did. I still feel bad when I see Ms. Wez. She tried hard to help me but I know I need other kind of help and I want to see a therapist again.

All six participants shared how their relationship with an adult outside of the immediate family, the Pearls’ mentor, helped them throughout high school to experience positive outcomes both academically and socially and continued into college and work as a young adult. The examples provided by the participants indicated how consistent reinforcement from the positive influences a caring adult, even if they are not related, within the individual’s microsystem can offset the impact of negative forces from the adolescent’s environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).
Participation in the Pearls

Teachers and peers are found in a child’s microsystem, according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development. They provide the face-to-face interactions where particular physical, social, and symbolic features invite, permit, or inhibit complex relations in the child’s immediate environment. In their interviews, the six participants discussed how this face-to-face interaction through participation in the Pearls had a positive effect upon their success in high school and after graduation. The participants identified the following four influencing factors that were part of the secondary school-based mentoring program: support from the members of the Pearls and Pearls’ alumni, participation in career workshops, connection to professional women, and preparation for college/work.

Support from the members of the Pearls. Breia and Summer spoke about the support they found belonging to the Pearls. Breia began by saying:

Now as part of the alumni group, I find everyone tries to help everyone get what they want and need. They helped me finally decide to take evening classes at college while I work. I talk to them about my boyfriend and sometimes ask their advice on relationship problems. Now that I live on my own and they give me advice on good buys on furniture and other house items.

Summer’s experience was similar, as she explains:

Belonging to the Pearls surprised me because they agreed it is hard to get along with others until we really take time to get to know them and try. We learned how to use these skills in some of the Pearls’ workshops on relationship building and conflict resolution. I use these skills all the time with my new friends I made
at college, and I always keep in contact with the Pearls alumni. Being part of the alumni helps to encourage me and gives me the support from friends that I need to finish college.

**Participation in career workshops.** Workshops were planned by the Pearls and the mentor of the Pearls. Topics of interest for the workshops were suggested by the members of the Pearls. One area of significance expressed by the participants involved women in the world of work. Shayla stated:

As a Pearl I attended many workshops about successful women in the world of work. I asked for a particular workshop on careers in law because I was interested in this. Ms. Wez knew some women that worked in a law firm that she shared with us so we could plan this one. She called one person from the firm before we did to let them know we would be calling them to plan the workshop. We planned everything like the fliers and invitations and the introductions of our speakers and learned a lot while we did it. At this workshop, I met a judge, lawyers, a police officer, and probation officers, and they were all women. I was already in the eleventh grade and did not know yet what I wanted to be, but I knew it would have to do with the law and kids. These women invited me to shadow them in their jobs and I loved every minute.

Now that I am in college I discovered that I want to become a probation officer and work with juveniles. So I have my mind set not to miss classes because it is too hard to make up what I missed. The criminology and sociology classes are great and I have good grades in them and I am passing all the other classes too.
I can’t wait to graduate and work in the field. I like college, at first it was hard. But now I am fine. I follow the study skills I learned and they work for me also, I talked to Ms. Wez and she told me about the math tutoring program here. So I used that. I stay away from parties where I don’t know the people. I hang with my roommates. I like acting, I found this out in high school and now in college I have been in a few plays.

Nina responded by sharing:

Careers were constantly being described and discussed at the Pearls workshops, and women who worked their way into very successful and meaningful careers would present their journey at these sessions. At each workshop women in a different group of careers would talk to us about their jobs. This is where I met my other mentor who is a writer. I keep talking to her about my future as a writer and she has really helped me.

Ms. Wez helped me try things. As an officer of the Pearls, she asked me to plan a year of agendas for the meetings with the other officers. She let the Pearls make all the decisions with her help. This really helped me as a college student because I am involved in many student organizations here on campus and have used this knowledge and my organizational skills all the time. I stay part of the Pearls’ alum and see or talk to Ms. Wez all the time.

**Connection to professional women.** The career workshops provided a vehicle for the Pearls to meet and interact with other women with whom they could develop short or long term relationships. As Nina shared:
I met a great writer at one of our workshops. She helped me make and adjust my short-term goals, and we talked about a few long-term ones which were hard for me to see at first. She had suggestions on what colleges to attend, what classes to take, and of course, what internships to try to get. She was wonderful to meet and we have remained close even now.

Breia explained how she met women working in the banking industry through the workshops. This was her first experience networking with women outside the family. She explains how she discovered that other women with interests similar to hers might take an interest in helping her obtain a career of her choice. Breia said:

I loved going to school, but did not like schoolwork except accounting classes. So, after I graduated from high school, I didn’t want to go to college; I wanted to work in a bank. One of our workshops was on business and banking careers. This was right after we had lessons on proper etiquette. We learned things that Ms. Wez said would help us, like dress for success, be positive, smile a lot, say please and thank you, and of course, writing thank you notes to people who speak at our workshops or after an interview and even after we get gifts. So I asked if I could be a greeter for this workshop. Ms. Wez helped me get ready for this workshop by giving me questions to ask during the discussion part of the workshop. Ms. Wez made sure I met everyone and that I talked to the women who worked in banks. I really liked meeting these women they were so nice to me. They offered to help me with a job application and letter of interest. They even said they would call possible bank employers to help me get an interview. Two women gave me their phone numbers so I could call them for interview questions to practice before I
went on my interviews. I called these women and they helped me by giving me interview questions and good answers to the questions. I was so scared but I made myself go to the banks and apply for jobs. Practicing the interview questions in high school with teachers, other students, and the women I met helped me. Each group had a comment for me to follow like make eye contact and use certain words and do not use um so much. Finally, I got a job at a bank. I am so happy working there. The women from the banks who helped me get started keep in touch with me and I am so glad they do. When I need advice about work they are there to give it.

Summary

This study of the impact of a school-based mentoring program on urban females after high school graduation utilized Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development to organize the discussion of the development of six individuals within the context of the systems of relationships that formed their environments. Bronfenbrenner’s paradigm describes the complexity of the “layers” of one’s environment, each having an effect on the individual’s development. The interaction between factors in the participant’s immediate family, school, community, environment, and societal landscape fuels and steers her development.

Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple through the other layers. As was seen with the six participants in this study, elements that fit within each system of Bronfenbrenner’s model include the family, the secondary school-based mentoring program, the Pearls’ mentor, and college/work. As the participants moved forward into college and/or work they described how they integrated the education they received as
Pearls to discover their future. The stories of the Pearls alumni illustrate the impact of the secondary school-based mentoring program. Implications of the findings of this research and recommendations based on the findings are presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development acknowledges that the individual and her environment are features of her development. Bronfenbrenner also describes how, if these influencing factors are positive, beneficial outcomes can result from the interactions between the two. Chapter V begins by revisiting the central purpose, research question, and theoretical framework that was used to gain an understanding of the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after graduation from high school.

A summary of the findings from Chapter IV and a discussion of how the data was interpreted are provided in the following sections. Two major themes, with subtopics, emerged as a result of data analysis: 1) the relationships between the Pearl and others and 2) continued impact of a secondary school-based mentoring program upon the lives of urban females after high school graduation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program upon the lives of urban females after graduation from high school. A review of available literature revealed there was a lack of information devoted to urban adolescent females and, in particular, urban females following high school graduation. The lack of literature provided the motivation for this qualitative research study. The following research question was designed in an attempt to address this issue: What is the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation?
All six participants shared their stories through a one-on-one interview process with a research associate. Questions asked during the interview were designed to gather information through the reflections of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls’ alumni. A research associate was selected to conduct the interviews because the researcher was the mentor of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls and was the assistant principal in the high school they attended. After each interview the research associate transcribed the participant’s reflections for the researcher to review. As the researcher read the responses, the major collected themes that materialized revealed a connection between the participants’ stories and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2004) bioecological model of human development (Appendix A). This model describes the individual as being surrounded by various layers of systems with the person at the center. Each system, or layer, contains individuals and groups of individuals. The closest layer is the microsystem which has the most immediate effect on the individual. The next layer, the mesosystem, encompasses connections between microsystems, such as home and school that assisted in fostering individual development. The exosystem is composed of contexts that engulfs the mesosystem is described as a structure that affects the individual’s microsystems and mesosystems indirectly. This system for example involves the parent’s workplace and impinges on home and school where the individual is found. The outermost layer of the model which encloses the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem is called the macrosystem. The macrosystem consists of factors that influence and sometimes support the child within the environment such as cultures, norms, and laws providing for the individual’s safety. One layer remains in the system and that is the chronosystem. The chronosystem flows in and out of the bioecological model over time and it involves the
“temporal changes in an individual’s environment, which produced new conditions that affect development such as a death of a parent or divorce. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) looks at the child’s development within the context of these complex systems of relationships as each layer has an effect forming his or her development. He enhances understanding human development by describing how changes or conflicts in any one layer ripple throughout the other layers as described by the participants of this study. Intervention strategies such as mentoring provide the urban adolescent female and the family with the guidance and support necessary for the urban adolescent female to progress positively towards adulthood.

**Assertions**

From the analyzed data that emerged, five assertions were made from the six participants’ reflections of their lives after high school graduation. The assertions are grounded in the findings from the study. The first assertion was that the mentor in a secondary school-based mentoring program has a critical influence on the participants’ development in a positive manner. A second assertion was that high schools and colleges and work should cooperatively join forces with parents/guardians to support the urban female. The third assertion was that connecting the urban female to a secondary school-based mentoring program and continuing with membership in the Pearls alumni produced positive developmental outcomes. A fourth assertion was that the mentoring program should include multiple strategies for engaging the adolescent female and providing her with the necessary skills for academic and social success in high school and into college and work. The fifth assertion was that the Pearls, who are linked by social ties, share
common perspectives, and engage in joint activities within a geographical location created a community. The following sections discuss the basis for each assertion.

**The Mentor in a Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program is Critical**

At the beginning of each interview, the participant described her relationship with her parents/guardians. Of the six participants, three of the Pearls believed that the instability of their family life created a destructive force to their development. These three Pearls, Maree, Shayla, and Camille, lived with an extended family member and not with their parents due to death, divorce, a new stepfamily, or mental health issues. All three demonstrated anti-social behavior and lack of self-discipline during adolescence due to feelings of anger, rejection, and isolation. Each expressed the need for guidance from a caring adult. Once they were connected to the Pearls’ mentor, they were invited to engage in one-on-one mentoring sessions, group meetings and group workshops. It has been suggested that the mentor be of the same gender because girls “seek out and listen attentively to advice from women” (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990, p. 6).

All six participants graduated from high school and entered college/work with an individual plan for success. Five of the six participants continued to describe the lack of family support guiding their decision-making regarding academic success and career selections. They described the need to connect with a caring adult as they progressed toward completing both a secondary and post-secondary education. The majority of responses to questions about whom or what helped the Pearls alumni remove the barriers they had encountered indicated the caring support of the Pearls’ mentor. The presence of a caring mentor in their lives provided the guidance necessary for their successful advancement in college and work. Breia expressed how helpful the Pearls’ mentor was
in high school, when she informed her family that she decided not to attend college immediately and wanted to work in a bank. Her family supported her decision because of the Pearls’ mentor’ recommendation, but they continued to encourage her to attend college at least part-time, even though they did not know how to assist her in enrolling in an appropriate program. She finally decided to enroll in evening classes after meeting with the Pearls’ mentor and the Pearls alumni. The Pearls’ mentor provided her with advice, information, and assistance in completing the college application forms and in selecting the beginning courses in an accounting program.

The participants shared how their relationship with the Pearls’ mentor helped them throughout their high school experience and continued while they went to college or to work. Each Pearl described how she had difficulty shifting from elementary or middle school to high school and then to college/work. Maree, Shayla, Camille, and Summer claimed they needed to find a way to fit in with their peers and to have friends during high school and college. Three participants, Maree, Shayla, and Camille, found themselves frequently lacking self-discipline and engaging in physical confrontations while in high school. Counselors, teachers, and guardians introduced these at-risk students to the Pearls’ mentor. These three young women learned to monitor their own behavior through an individual self-designed plan learned in one-on-one mentoring sessions while in high school. Maree and Shayla became determined to utilize the learned strategies that could change their circumstances. These changes would prove to be a beneficial factor that helped them find success in both high school and college. The lessons they learned from their mentor resulted in their ability to believe that they could overcome anything, as long as they understood and implemented strategies for success.
As Dieringer (2000) emphasized, “The relationship between the students and the advocate should ensure that no youngster experiences the sense of isolation that frequently engulfs teenagers during this critical period of their lives” (p. 5).

In contrast, Maree is alone and explained how she continues to need the help of a caring adult now that she is in college, so she maintains her connection with the Pearls’ mentor through regular phone calls and visits. This relationship assists her with making important decisions regarding personal issues, academic selections, and future career choices. Also, Camille, Shayla, and Nina shared the same necessity for guidance through college/work. They continue to connect with the Pearls’ mentor and find the support they are seeking through this lasting relationship.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) clearly focuses on roles, relationships, and activities as key elements in the developmental process. He also affirms the importance of non-parental adult relationships. This secondary school-based mentoring program was designed to provide adolescent females with opportunities under the supervision of a supportive and caring adult female outside of the family for the Pearls to accept new roles as school leaders, build new relationships with other Pearls, and experience new activities that would lead to new competencies that would carry through high school and into life after high school. In the urban and poor community, having a supportive and attentive adult has been found to correlate with children and adolescents displaying fewer dysfunctional behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). However, some children do not have constant and mutual interactions with a parent/guardian. Knowing that a breakdown in the home exists the educational system has been given the responsibility for addressing these deficiencies and helping at-risk young women develop attachments through
interactions with a caring adult outside of their family. The relationship through a secondary school-based mentoring program helped the Pearls to move toward healthy development by uniting them with an adult outside the family who provided them with safety, friendship, support, direction, and faith in their ability to achieve.

**Schools Should Work Cooperatively with Parents/Guardians Throughout High School and College or Work to Profoundly Support the Urban Female**

The second assertion based on the themes from the data was the belief that parent/guardian involvement in school (high school and college) was an important facet of the development of each Pearl. Since schools and teachers fulfill an important secondary role in the student’s growth, they should work together to support the relationship with the family and create an environment that welcomes and nurtures the student. When the parent(s) attended meetings with the assistant principal and/or Pearls’ mentor, the Pearl’s family and the school became integral parts of the Pearl’s development. These meetings permitted the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the student to understand the connection between the school and the Pearl, thereby working collaboratively to assist her growth and development. The meetings also fostered an appreciation of the role of the secondary school-based mentoring program, including the mentor, in the healthy development of each Pearl. Meetings with parents/guardians were not always for positive reasons. However, an outcome of these parent, student, mentor conferences, was that these students were encouraged to participate in the Pearls because their parents/guardians were absent due to a variety of reasons or were unable to fill this role. As a result, a constructive mesosystem was created due to the discussions and collaboration between the school, family, and Pearl. Morrison, Brown, D’Incau,
O’Farrell, and Furlong (2006) confirmed the need for students to have support from different people and institutions, especially schools. Schools should focus on strengths of students, while also taking deficiencies into consideration, and help support those strengths in hopes of compensating for weaknesses. Because so much time is spent at school, educators are being called upon to help increase protective factors through engaging students in meaningful participation in the school community, in an effort to mitigate the lack of support from home or other areas (Morrison et al., 2006).

**Long Term Connections to the Mentor and Other Members of the Mentoring Group Help Urban Adolescent Females Achieve Continued Success**

The third assertion found after analyzing the responses from the Pearls alumni was that belonging to a secondary school-based mentoring program with long term connections to the mentor and other members’ acts as a protective factor in helping urban adolescent females achieve continued success. Klem and Connell (2004) added, “Studies show students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with school. These students also will become more engaged academically” (p. 262). Specifically, connecting the Pearl to the mentor, Ms Wez, and the alumni in an ongoing way, produced positive developmental outcomes in the urban female.

As the Pearls improved their academic status, they were able to participate in extracurricular activities. Lynch and Levers (2007) suggest that many benefits arise for a student when they participate in extracurricular activities such as sports or marching band. Such benefits include, but are not limited to, cooperation, teamwork, self-evaluation, and healthy competition. For the participants in this study, softball, dance, or drill team were
not simply something to do for fun but, as indicated in the interviews and as supported by the findings of Lynch and Levers (2007), these activities have had a positive impact on how the Pearls dealt with their anger, increased academic achievement, and developed positive relationships. Their successful engagement in these activities encouraged the participants to become involved in similar organizations in college.

In college now, Nina, Maree, Shayla, and Summer explained how they have learned to interact well with others as a result of belonging to the Pearls and engaging in a variety of activities in high school. They continue to use the skills they acquired through participation in the Pearls workshops on developing relationships, working as a team, peer mediation, and conflict resolution, as well as study skill habits. All six participants shared ways in which they were the initiators of their own behavior in high school and college or work, and five of them described how they were able to modify their behavior through self-assessment strategies they discovered during the activities of the secondary school-based mentoring program. Only Camille explained how she continued to require additional assistance from a professional counselor.

The Mentoring Program Should Include Multiple Strategies for Engaging Urban Adolescent Females and Providing these Young Women with the Opportunities to Develop the Essential Skills for Academic and Social Success in High School and College or Work

Each participant experienced success as a leader or role model while in high school, each graduated from high school, and each set future personal and career goals. All participants stated that aspects of their participation in the Pearls allowed them to continue pursuing leadership roles after high school graduation. Establishing the
mentoring program as an organization permitted the participants to become elected officers or committee chairwomen. These roles permitted the Pearls to begin to explore and learn how to assume a leadership role in a structured setting. Nina joined the staff of her college newspaper, and wrote and edited numerous articles. Maree joined the college band and became a section leader. Shayla was elected as a class representative for the college student advisory council. Summer is the treasurer of a college organization she joined with Nina for young African American female writers.

Through the one-on-one and group mentoring sessions and workshops in which they participated, the Pearls alumni reflected on the ways they learned to change their negative beliefs, acquired through a variety of peer groups, into positive ones. The members of the Pearls alumni identified how they began to choose their actions in response to the requests of adults they met through workshops during high school, thus changing their behaviors for their own benefit. From their reflections, the participants were able to explain how different opportunities helped to create individual pathways to success.

The secondary school-based mentoring program utilized multiple strategies for behavior modification, removal of barriers in high school, engagement in school and social activities, graduation from high school, selection of post-secondary programs and career goals, and maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. Four participants spoke of the individual behavior modification plan they designed with their mentor and help from the other Pearls. Each participant was encouraged to ask for tutoring on an as needed basis. Three participants spoke of the career shadowing experiences they engaged in. Five of the six participants were able to carry the acquired knowledge with them after high school.
graduation. Nina, Maree, Shayla, and Summer are enrolled in college full-time. Breia is working full-time and attends college in the evening. Only Camille, who is working full-time, has had to take time to reorganize her life after recognizing that she still has anger issues to resolve before she can continue with her dream goal of obtaining a college education.

Additionally, the findings in this study substantiated the value of the secondary school-based mentoring programs in which the Pearls’ mentor remained informed and connected to the outside community. The support and information provided by the program and created by the Pearls’ mentor deemed it necessary to build community ties with institutions and professional organizations. These connections introduced and engaged the Pearls in a networking system that provided them with additional guidance regarding post-secondary or college preparation activities and options as well as career opportunities.

Mentored Urban Females who are Linked by Positive Social Ties, Share Common Perspectives, and Engage in Joint Activities Create a Community

Mentoring programs should create a community for its members. The Pearls expressed a need to belong to a group and created their own community. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model recognizes that individuals do not develop in isolation, but in relation to their families, homes, schools, communities, and society. Between family, school, after-school activities, and hanging out with friends, much of a young person’s day is spent in formal or informal groups (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Bridgeland et al. (2006) studied attachment theories that suggest belonging to a group, such as the secondary school-based mentoring program, will fulfill one of the strongest
human motivational needs. While the family is the first unit in which young people belong, they soon become a part of school and other community groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004). The Pearls alumni in this study indicated that they share a strong bond with the other members of this organization. This connection has created a sense of community that sustains them to continue to achieve success, despite the fact that they lived in poverty as adolescents and young adults.

The Pearls’ alumni shared repeatedly that they had a need to belong to a group, to have positive interactions with others, and to have the opportunity to be embraced by people around them. They described this concept as they reflected on their participation in the secondary school-based mentoring program. When Nina and Summer experienced dating disappointments, the Pearls rallied to support these members by the group decision that they attend school functions together. They participated in the school plays and engaged in a book club as a group. Maree and Camille shared how they had to attend particular therapy sessions and were supported by the group escorting them to these meetings. Through the connection to the Pearls, the alumni who participated in this study explained how they developed a strong bond with other Pearls. Lasting friendships were formed in high school through the secondary school-based mentoring program, and continued after graduation into college and work.

Additionally, for the last twenty years, a slow-growing body of literature has surfaced that addresses the influence of peer relationships upon the lives of adolescents (Berndt, 1996). The six Pearls alumni in this study communicated the positive connections they made as Pearls; connections which continue to serve as another protective factor in their lives. For example, Maree, Nina, Shayla, Camille, and Summer
all shared how they engaged in physical confrontations with other females, particularly when they were in the ninth grade. However, when they became members of the Pearls, they learned how to connect positively with other females. They were able to develop strategies to stop their engagement in violent behavior and, instead, to build satisfying interpersonal relationships. However, as Camille discovered, if one decides not to appropriately connect with other females in college or work (i.e. create a community) and repeated altercations occur, that individual suffers severe consequences. Camille found this to be true when she went to college and decided to initiate and engage in physical confrontations with other females. She did not rely upon her learned conflict resolution and mediation techniques to resolve anger issues that surfaced with females she did not know. Consequently, she was asked to leave the college and now must re-examine her future career pathways. Camille realizes that she can still achieve the success she wants; it just may take a different direction and a little longer. The ongoing connections between the Pearls alumni and their support of each other describe a true sense of belongingness with others and with one’s community includes the presence of relationships that are characterized by mutual caring and concern. Throughout the individual interviews, all six females shared examples of their sense of belongingness with the Pearls and their caring relationship with the Pearls’ mentor resulting in the creation of their own community, impacting their choices long after high-school ended.

**Implications**

The intent of this research study was to expand the knowledge base within the education profession, and to increase the amount of available literature concerning secondary school-based mentoring of urban adolescent females and its impact upon their
lives after high school graduation. In light of the lack of literature on the phenomena existing between mentoring relationships and the development of aspirations in high-risk adolescent female mentees, this study has provided information for development in mentoring programs.

Congruent with the literature, the secondary school-based mentoring relationships in the current study had positive effects on the aspirations and possible future lives of the participating females after high school graduation. The elements of the secondary school-based mentoring program played a significant role in the outcomes. These aspects emphasized the importance of the commitment of meaningful time together, the dedication to regular contact, and the assurance of long-term connection helped to build nurturing relationships that fostered the academic, social, and emotional skill development in the urban females, therefore building human capital (Payne, 2008). The progressive development of the participants was expressed in their statements regarding their capability to develop and execute plans and goals, which were reinforced by the Pearls’ mentor and the other female adults the mentor involved in their lives. The participants all perceived themselves as becoming successful as they worked through adolescence, with the guidance of the Pearls’ mentor, toward attaining their future career aspirations. The assertions that emerged from the reflections of the Pearls alumni advocates replication of similar secondary school-based mentoring programs in urban schools that will encourage urban females to achieve academic and social success.

The Pearls’ mentor also recognized the value of the school social workers, who have the knowledge to identify the at-risk students and the ability to connect students to mentors who will better prepare them to meet the challenges of attaining success in high
school and beyond. Leadbeater and Way (2007) indicated that at-risk adolescents and their families are less likely to capitalize on the resources available for higher education and post-secondary opportunities. Mentors can serve to support their mentees’ futures. Too often, at-risk mentees do not realize the resources available to them in their own schools. They do not have parents who have the time, the information, or the experience to encourage children to seek the resources available to enhance their academic performance or secure their future plans (Leadbeater & Way, 2007). Not intending to usurp the parental role, mentors who are so inclined, a secondary school-based mentor and mentoring program can augment the parental support with information on available educational and financial resources. By working together the parents, schools, mentors, and mentees could be better prepared to meet the challenges of today and the future (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004).

Additionally, the data supports the development of close personal relationships, as described by the Pearls alumni in this study. The participants provided the implication that they had a close link with the Pearls’ mentor, an adult outside the family, and with other members of the Pearls. This close bond helped to protect them from negative choices and redirected their personal, educational, and career goals through the planned activities of the secondary school-based mentoring program. These relationships between the mentor and the Pearls and the Pearls and other Pearls formed through participation in the secondary school-based mentoring program suggest another reason for replication of these programs.

Leadbeater and Way (2007) researched adolescent friendships and discovered the potential protective role of friends, which had even more of a positive impact when the
friends in question liked school and did well in school. As the Pearls observed their friends, other Pearls, focus on school work and joining in activities they were encouraged to mirror these same behaviors. When these friendships continued after high school graduation as Camille stated these friendships helped her to regroup and focus her attention to attain her desired educational goal along a new pathway.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) states that we as educators need to build bridges between home and school. Parents must begin to realize that the schools cannot do all the work. Schools need to extend to the parents as many options as possible to permit them to become involved in their child’s education. However, because of the many barriers that working parents experience as they attempt to adjust their schedules so they may be involved at school, mentoring becomes an apparent means of support to the entire family. Through secondary school-based mentoring programs, other lines of communication open between home and school. The opening of communication lines between parents and school is an effective strategy that schools can implement so that parents and schools can collaboratively support the urban adolescent female.

Other implications for secondary schools emerged as a result of the findings of this study. It may assist teachers involved in the education of urban adolescent females living in poverty, specifically. The themes of this study are of value to teachers and are directly related to educational practice. The information provided regarding the impact of elements of a secondary school based mentoring programs can give educators options to explore that helped a particular group of females, who lived in low socioeconomic neighborhoods and poverty stricken families, to achieve success. The data supported the fact that one-on-one sessions with a mentor provide the urban female with uninterrupted
time to discuss issues of personal concern that are associated with academic and social successes and failures, family dilemmas, and college and career aspirations. The workshops provided the participants opportunities to discover who they are and how women have contributed to their community, determine what goals are and how to set them, complete college, scholarships, grants, and loan applications, connect with professional women, and as an enrichment explore the city where they live to recognize the magnificence that surrounds them. Each of these strategies should be integrated into a secondary school based mentoring program to further support the urban adolescent female.

By initially working in a mentoring setting, educators can apply strategies that begin to address, as Field and Hoffman (1996) outlines, five major components in regard to every student: “… know yourself, value yourself, plan, act, and experience outcomes and learn” (p. 3). To assist female students to know and value themselves, educators must learn who their students are and discover their strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and needs. As stated previously Brown and Gilligan (1993) and Garbarino (1999) all deem it necessary for schools to provide a same-sex adult who will cultivate a stable, long-term relationship with adolescents. In the urban school setting, this connection with a mature adult female means an experienced female who listens and assists the urban adolescent female with developing decision making skills and avoiding possible life-altering choices.

In order to provide support for urban adolescent females, any female school employee can assume the role of a mentor if she is committed, is a good listener, can serve as a guide, is connected to the community, and is working or living in an urban
setting. This female mentor can lay a foundation from which the young urban female can begin to build healthy and positive attitudes toward herself and others. In a secondary school-based mentoring program, female educators can also help urban adolescent females to plan, act, and experience outcomes by conducting group meetings and organizing workshops with guest speakers from colleges, the world of work, and professional organizations.

Along with helping students to discover how to effectively plan and conduct organized and meaningful group meetings and workshops in the mentoring program, the mentor can effectively help the urban adolescent female to transfer this newly acquired knowledge and skill. This can be accomplished by the mentor encouraging the urban adolescent female to take an active part as a participant and leader in other school organizations. All six participants expressed strong connections with school after they were encouraged to participate in the Pearls. Most high schools offer programs that are in addition to the daily academic schedule in the creative arts, athletics, community service-related organizations, and academic elective areas. Mentors can encourage every student to participate in at least one of those activities, and monitor the student to determine if she chose to participate. In this way, all students can begin to develop a sense of connection to their schools (Quarles et al., 2008). The relationship with the Pearls’ mentor should continue past high school for an indefinite period of time, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004). When parental support is lacking in a young adult’s life, the mentor can fill the individual’s need for connection and guidance. All six participants from this study felt a strong bond with the Pearls’ mentor and identified the strong connection as a protective factor in their developmental process during high school. Secondary school educators are
favorably positioned to facilitate positive mentoring relationships. The individualized attention a mentor can offer may result in the type of interpersonal relationship that is lacking in the life of the urban female, yet is so necessary for her to attain healthy development (Quarles et al., 2008). Another implication that became evident was that the mentor/mentee relationships should continue beyond graduation, as seen with the Pearls alumni. The relationship with the Pearls’ mentor should continue past high school for an indefinite period of time, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004). When parental support is lacking in a young adult’s life, the mentor can fill the individual’s need for connection and guidance. Employers and women’s organizations often provide additional support to mentoring programs that link adolescents and young adult females with women in the workforce for academic or career-related support.

Finally, mentoring programs can serve as the link to working with families to keep parents involved in the lives of their children. When parents are not able to attend school meetings during the day, arrange sessions at more convenient times to accommodate their schedules. If transportation is a dilemma for parents, schedule parent meetings in their communities or churches or provide buses or car pools to bring them to school. Also, shop in the community so parents see you and feel free talk to you in a non-threatening environment. E-mail information to parents who have access to computers or call them on the phone at times when they are available. This is certainly a lofty goal, but the connection between home and school is extremely necessary for the urban adolescent female to experience healthy development.

The results from this study support the theories expressed by Quarles et al. (2008) in their research publication, *Big Sisters Mentoring Little Sisters*. This investigation
examined the utilization of early intervention and prevention strategies through participation in mentoring programs. The researchers identified the goal of mentorship as building positive relationships with adult role models in an effort to foster social competencies, promote academic motivation, and build a positive image of self (Quarles et al., 2008). The perception of these nurturing adult/adolescent relationships has been that they will foster positive change; however, there is little research to assess the impact of these programs. The primary focus of the *Big Sisters Mentoring Little Sisters* research is on the impact of this mentoring relationship on the females’ academic progress in elementary and middle schools. Because only a few empirical studies of urban preadolescent females and the impact of school-based mentoring upon their lives during high school exist, the results from this study will aid in supporting their recommendations.

This study has also provided the field of education with a rationale and information to support the development of mentoring programs in urban secondary schools for adolescent females. Congruent with the limited literature, specific elements of the mentoring program, the Pearls, had positive effects on the aspirations and possible future selves of urban adolescent females. A variety of elements of the mentoring program played a significant role in the outcomes. Furthermore, the emphasis on the importance of the commitment of quality time together, both regular contact and dedication to a long-term bond, helped to build nurturing relationships that fostered the academic, social, and emotional skill development in the mentees.

**Limitations**
Limitations of this study were described in chapter three and, as stated, are partly attributable to study design; specifically, the utilization of interviews. The findings and conclusions were based upon the researcher’s individual skills and were more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies, which may not be value and belief-free. A secondary limitation may have resulted due to the researcher’s lack of firsthand experience. The researcher never lived in an economically disadvantaged environment; similar to where the participants resided during the years they spent in high school. Lack of generalizability of the findings surfaced as a third possible limitation, for reasons such as the following: there was a small sample of participants, graduates came from one urban high school, the investigation took place in one urban school district, and the researcher was a mentor and assistant principal of the Pearls alumni participating in the study. Qualitative research is sometimes said to have as its goal the understanding of the sample studied, rather than generalizing from the sample to the population (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). However, the results of qualitative research can be applied to other settings as long as the reader of the research understands the limitations. Van Manen (1997) viewed this as a positive aspect of phenomenologically-oriented research because, as he believed, “The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (p. 22).

**Recommendations for Additional Research**

Several recommendations for additional research can be generated on the basis of the findings of this investigation. The main question for consideration involves gaining a greater understanding of the impact of participation in a secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of urban females after high school graduation. Given the selection
of one urban high school in the Pittsburgh Public Schools to investigate the impact of mentoring on young girls’ lives after high school graduation, one would naturally ask: Are other adolescent females from urban, low socioeconomic neighborhoods, or poverty-stricken families mentored? If so, what was the impact of their mentoring program on their lives after high school graduation? What specific elements of the mentoring program were impactful? Can these females achieve success in their lives after high school graduation if they are not mentored?

Several additional questions to guide future research on mentoring with urban adolescent females include:

1) Are there mentors for adolescent females who do not reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods or poverty-stricken families and attend Pittsburgh Public Schools? Are these same females in a mentoring program? What successes have they experienced? Who or what helped them achieve these successes?

2) What other barriers exist even with a mentor that may prevent the urban adolescent females, who reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods or poverty-stricken families, from achieving success after graduation?

3) Do urban females who have the strong connections with their friends who can understand the circumstances in which they live rely on friends for companionship, strength to resist negative temptations, and caring and support?

Examining these questions may help urban adolescent females receive additional support that can reasonably be offered from educators or mentors. Applying these findings and those from the Pearls’ reflections on their secondary school-based mentoring program will foster other urban females with pathways towards positive development.
Summary

The results of this inquiry were obtained from the six young women who agreed to share their stories regarding the impact of a school-based mentoring program on their lives after high school graduation. As adolescents, the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls alumni: resided in Pittsburgh, PA; came from primarily poor and/or immigrant families; were identified by their school guidance counselors and/or social workers at an earlier age as at-risk (for the purpose of this study, “at-risk” is defined as students who are not performing at grade level and are considered potential high school dropouts); and were considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived. All six Pearls alumni who participated in this study developed a connection between specific high school experiences, their ability to achieve success, and their selection of post-secondary choices. Their stories revealed that they were able to “thrive,” despite the negative effects of living in low socioeconomic neighborhoods and in poverty-stricken families because of their participation in the Pearls, a secondary school-based mentoring program, and their relationship with the Pearls’ mentor. The participants from the Pearls alumni contributed details through interviews that helped clarify the answer to the research question. These descriptions of the practices and the impact of the secondary school based mentoring program known as the Pearls will provide the Pittsburgh Public Schools and other secondary schools with information that may be used to develop and direct secondary school-based mentoring programs, specifically for the urban adolescent female.
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doi: 10.1177/001128793039001007


Appendix A

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development

Appendix B

Written Letter of Invitation

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 Forbes Avenue

School of Education

600 Forbes Avenue

Department of Instruction and Leadership in Education

Pittsburgh, PA 15282

Canevin Hall

Tel. 412.396.5569

Fax. 412.396.5388

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Pittsburgh Perry Pearl Alumnus,

Greetings! I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. I am a research associate writing this letter of invitation to ask you to consider participating in a research study being conducted by Mrs. Sandra Wesolowski, assistant principal at Pittsburgh Perry High School and advisor for the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls, an urban secondary school-based mentoring program. The title of the study is “The Impact of Participation in an Urban Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program on the Lives of Females after High School Graduation.”

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you were an active member of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls for four years and graduated from Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy in a four-year timeline. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

Mrs. Wesolowski’s research project has been granted approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Duquesne University. The IRB is a group of university faculty members who make sure that research is being conducted fairly and that your rights are protected. Mrs. Wesolowski’s research study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of her requirements for a doctoral degree in Instruction and Leadership in Education at Duquesne University.
In order to conduct this research, Mrs. Wesolowski must clearly explain the study to you so that you understand its’ purpose, and she must make the expectations clear so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not you want to participate. If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at 412-519-8562 or e-mail me at tpheone@gmail.com. Once you get in touch with me and provide me with your contact information, I will explain the study to you and then send you a consent form. After reviewing the consent form, if you choose to participate, you will sign the form and mail it back to me. As soon as I receive the returned signed consent form, I will call or e-mail you to schedule an interview. During this study I will keep your identity anonymous from the researcher by assigning an alias to you so that you may freely answer the research questions.

I must receive your signed informed consent form before you can participate in the research study. If you decide to take part and need transportation or babysitting money in order to participate, it will be provided for you.

In closing, Mrs. Wesolowski thanks you for your time. It is Mrs. Wesolowski’s desire that the information gathered from this study will assist administrators and staff members of the Pittsburgh Public Schools to more effectively meet the needs of urban adolescent females and help them to achieve success. A summary of the results of the study will be available to you at the completion of the study at no cost to you, upon request.

Sincerely,

Ms. Pheone Tolliver, LSW.

412-519-8562 (cell)
Appendix C
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:

The Impact of Participation in an Urban Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program on the Lives of Females after High School Graduation

INVESTIGATOR
Sandra L. Wesolowski, M.Ed.
1150 Links Way
Gibsonia, PA. 15044
724-265-1412 (home)
412-608-8162 (cell)
mswez@aol.com

ADVISOR
Karen Levitt, Ed.D
Duquesne University
School of Education
409A Canevin Hall
412-396-6103
levitt@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
Funding has not been requested to complete this study.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:
The researcher is interested in studying the impact of participation in an urban secondary school-based mentoring program on the lives of females after high school graduation. Specifically, the researcher is interested in the impact of participation in the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls on their life after high school graduation.

This study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of the investigator’s requirements for a doctoral degree in Instruction and Leadership in Education at Duquesne University.
PARTICIPATION:

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you were an active member of the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls for four years and graduated from Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy in a four-year timeline. If you choose to participate, you will be asked eight (8) questions in an interview setting the impact of participation in the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls on you and your life after high school graduation. The interview will be conducted by Ms. Tolliver, a research associate, at a place and time that you select. The interview will last approximately ninety minutes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

The following describes what you will do if you choose to participate:

1. If you agree to participate in the study, you must contact Ms. Tolliver, the research associate so she may send you a consent form. You will sign and date this consent form and return it to the research associate in the stamped envelope provided.
2. You will schedule an interview with the research associate. The interview will last about 90 minutes. You will be contacted by Ms. Tolliver, the research associate, by telephone or email, after your signed consent form is received. She will schedule your interview at a time and place you will select.
3. You will participate in the interview.

RISKS:

Participation in this study is not intended to harm you. However, you may be inconvenienced by providing us with your time. The research associate will do everything possible to keep the interview within a ninety minute time frame

BENEFITS:

There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this research. The results of this study may assist high school reform in the Pittsburgh Public Schools in the future, and support development of programs and policies that provide urban secondary school-based mentoring programs like the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls.

COMPENSATION:

You will not be paid to participate in this study. If you decide to participate but need money or arrangements for travel or babysitting, the research associate will coordinate this for you.
CONFIDENTIALITY:

During the study, we will do our best to maintain confidentiality by meeting the following conditions:

1. Your signed consent form will be returned to the research associate in the stamped envelope provided. The research associate will replace your name with an alias. All forms will be labeled with the assigned alias, not your given name.
2. Your name, identity, and reference to any of the data collected from you will be kept anonymous from the researcher and from the readers.
3. After the audio taped interview is transcribed into written text, all references to you with regards to the study will be replaced with the alias assigned to you. No identifiable connection will be made between you and the information you provide. Also, if you mention any names or any material that might identify third parties, those names and/or identifying materials will be blanked during transcription.
4. The research associate will collect all response information from you during the interview. She will transcribe the information and label the data with your alias. The researcher will only receive de-identified data. Then, she will provide the transcript of the interview to the researcher, who will place the written responses in a lock box that only she will have a key to. The research associate will place a list, linking participant names to the alias assigned, in a separate lock box. Only the research associate will have a key to this lock box.
5. All audiotapes, notes, and transcripts will be destroyed within five to seven years after the completion, defense, and approval of this dissertation. The researcher will insert the tapes and transcripts into an industrial cross-cut paper shredder, put the shredded material in a plastic bag filled with soapy water, and place the bag in the trash. The research associate will insert the alias codes into an industrial cross-cut paper shredder, put the shredded material in a plastic bag filled with soapy water, and place the bag in the trash.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. To withdraw, you only need to inform the research associate, Ms. Tolliver, at 412-519-8562 (cell) or by email tpheone @gmail.com, and tell her that you are no longer interested in participating in the study, and she will immediately withdraw you from the study. If you have already completed your interview, your responses will not be used in the study and the transcript will be destroyed. You will receive written confirmation of your withdrawal from the study within seven days.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

Upon request to Ms. Tolliver, a summary of the results of the study will be available to you at the completion of the study at no cost to you.

If you have any questions or are in any way dissatisfied with the process of the research study, you may contact the researcher, Sandra L. Wesolowski, at 724-265-1412 (home) or 412-608-8162 (cell). You may also contact Dr. Karen Levitt, dissertation advisor for this study from Duquesne University, at 412-396-6103, or Dr. Joseph Kush, chairperson of Duquesne University’s Institutional Review Board, at 412-396-1151.

SIGNATURES:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me as a participant in this study.

Please keep one copy of this consent form for yourself and return one copy with original signatures in the stamped envelope provided.

I agree to participate in this study.

_________________________________________   __________
Name (Printed)                                                            Date

_________________________________________
Name (Signature)

_________________________________________   __________
Researcher’s Signature                 Date
Appendix D

Interview Questions

During a one-on-one interview session, the women who are Pittsburgh Perry Pearl alumni will be asked pre-selected questions by the researcher. Participants will be encouraged to freely answer each question. These questions have been selected from a previously validated survey designed by Dr. Alice Quarles, author and researcher from Miami-Dade County Public Schools, to assess the impact of Big Sisters mentoring Little Sisters. Permission to use these questions was granted by Dr. Quarles. The participant questions are:

1. Share a little information about yourself. Who are you? What do you like to do for fun? What are you doing now? Career? College? Family? What contributed to your decision about what to do after high school? How are you experiencing life after high school?

2. Why did you decide to join the Pittsburgh Perry Pearls? Describe this organization. Think back on the events you experienced as a Pearl: the workshops, the meetings, the individual mentoring sessions. How did these experiences provide knowledge or skills that required you to think about your choices or act differently after high school? How has this knowledge been beneficial after high school graduation?

3. What are your strengths? When and how did you discover them? What are your weaknesses? When and how did you discover them?

4. What was your high school experience like for you? What strategies did you learn/use for resolving problems after high school? Where did you learn these strategies?

5. What kinds of road blocks did you experience in high school that may have caused you not to be successful? How have you learned to remove these barriers? Have you experienced any barriers to your goals after high school graduation? If so, can you briefly describe these barriers?

6. Did participating in the Pearls help you to set short and long term goals after high school graduation? What types of goals did you have before graduation? Have these goals changed? If your goals have changed, how
and why have they changed? Has membership in the Pearls impacted your goal decisions?

7. Explain the pathway you will take to achieve your short term goals. What do you think you will be doing at this time next year? How will you get there?

8. Is there anything not already mentioned about the Pearls that impacted the way you make decisions after graduation? If so, please describe.
Appendix E

Email Granting Permission to use Individual Interview Questions

Yes - anything I can do to assist

From: sandra wesolowski <mswez@aol.com>
To: jmq3@bellsouth.net
Sent: Mon, February 14, 2011 3:03:17 PM
Subject:

Good Afternoon Dr. Quarles,

I am currently a doctoral student at Duquesne University in Pgh. PA. I have begun my research and am interested in writing about mentoring at risk urban adolescent girls in high school and the impact of this mentoring program after high school graduation. Would you please permit me to use the questions from your study Mentoring and At-Risk Adolescent Girls: A Phenomenological Investigation. They apply directly to what I wish to discover. I would be willing to share my findings with you upon completion of my study.

Thank you in advance.

Sandra Wesolowski  My email address is mswez@aol.com
Appendix F

Research Associate’s Confidentiality Agreement

Title of Research Study: The Impact of Participation in an Urban Secondary School-Based Mentoring Program on the Lives of Females after High School Graduation

Investigator                  Advisor
Sandra L. Wesolowski, M.Ed.    Karen Levitt, Ed.D
1150 Links Way                Duquesne University
Gibsonia, PA. 15044           School of Education
724-265-1412 (home)           409A Canevin Hall
412-608-8162 (cell)           412-396-6103
mswez@aol.com                levitt@duq.edu

When conducting research on human participants, care should be taken at all times to protect their rights to confidentiality and privacy. As a Research Associate working with Sandra Wesolowski you may be entrusted with sensitive information including participant data. During the course of your work in this study, you are expected to adhere to the following guidelines for assisting with research:

1. Individuals who participate in this study have the right to complete confidentiality. Participants’ responses and their identifying information should not be discussed with anyone who does not belong to this research team, including close friends and family members. In addition, discussion of participants’ data with the researcher should be restricted to areas in which others cannot overhear the conversation.
2. Any data containing participants’ identifying information should never leave the research associate’s possession. If these materials were lost or stolen, irreplaceable data would be lost and participant confidentiality would be compromised.
3. Participants’ responses and personal information should be treated with great respect. This information should be used for this research study and learning purposes only.
4. Results from these interviews should be released only to the researcher.
5. The above guidelines regarding confidentiality and questions security must be followed even after you conclude your work on this research.
I, ______________________, understand and agree to comply with all of the above-stated guidelines.

______________________________
Name of Research Associate (printed)

______________________________  ____________________
Signature of Research Associate  Date

______________________________  ____________________
Signature of Researcher  Date
Appendix G

Sample of one of the Pearls Annual Mentoring Program and Project

This document describes the steps taken to create a secondary school-based mentoring program for at-risk urban adolescent females from grades nine through twelve. The recommendation that these urban adolescent females join this program was determined because they: (a) came from primarily poor and/or immigrant families, (b) were identified by their school guidance counselors and/or social workers at an earlier age as at-risk (for the purpose of this model, “at-risk” is defined as students who were not performing at grade level and were considered potential high school dropouts), and (c) were considered culturally or educationally disadvantaged or deprived (Payne, 1998, 2008).

Mentoring is important to these young women as they have openly expressed a need to develop an on-going, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult. The adult is available to them and can encourage, listen, give advice, advocate, act as a role model, and share information and experience with them.

Establishing a secondary school-based mentoring program takes planning and commitment. While every school and community has its own specific needs, this guideline may serve as a tool for designing any individual program. The time line is flexible, based on individual needs and community resources.

The guideline was developed after reading William Grays (1989) Advice on Planning Mentoring Programs for At-Risk Youth and reviewing the publications of Bonnie Leadbeater, Niobe Way, Alice Quarles, Nancy Maldonado, Candice Lacey, & Steve Thompson on mentoring at-risk urban adolescent females. The following steps
were designed specifically for those female students enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public

Schools at Pittsburgh Perry Traditional Academy:

1. Establish Program Need – The program will include all at-risk female students
identified and recommended by the guidance counselor, social worker, and/or
teacher. It concentrates primarily on students entering the ninth grade and focuses on
their behavior, attendance, and grades.

2. School commitment – The mentoring program will compliment the student’s regular
academic schedule. Following an initial meeting with their mentor, the students
participating in the program will have their behavior, grades, and attendance
monitored daily. The results will then be shared with their parent/guardian weekly
and the mentor will locate additional assistance such as tutors or behavior
modification groups as appropriately identified by these reports.

3. Identify program staff – One person will coordinate the program and oversee its daily,
weekly, and monthly progress. Other staff members will be recruited to monitor the
group activities and assist with providing community resources.

4. Goals – The primary goal of the program is to reduce the high school drop-out rate of
at-risk urban adolescent females. This may be accomplished by mentoring and
monitoring the urban adolescent females recommended for enrollment into this
program.

5. Develop activities and procedures – Each adolescent female will schedule a weekly or
biweekly one-on-one session with the mentor. The ninth and tenth grade students
will meet weekly for a total of thirty weeks and the eleventh and twelfth grade
students will meet biweekly for a total of fifteen weeks.

From this group of students, the females are invited to join an organization known as
the Pearls. Monthly group meetings are scheduled to occur from 2:30 pm until 4:00
pm planned by the organization’s elected officials. All members are invited to attend
these meetings. Each meeting follows a student officer prepared agenda abiding by
Roberts Rules of Order. Events, fundraisers, and social affairs are presented and
voted upon by the group membership at these sessions. Topics of interest to the
group are placed on the agenda and are described and discussed in detail for
consideration. The topics are voted upon and arrangements are made utilizing
community resources to assist with the design and schedule of at least six workshops
for each new school year. Then a master schedule of group meetings, activities, and
workshops is developed and distributed to each participant. Following each event,
activity, and workshop, evaluations are completed by the participants and at the end
of each semester an assessment is conducted in which the participants and mentor
describe the effectiveness of the one-on-one mentoring sessions.

6. Identify students – Participation in the Pearls is voluntary. Students are referred by
teachers, counselors, social workers, or parents. The urban adolescent females who
benefit the most from this experience are those who are receptive to new ideas, committed to at least one year participation, and are able to listen and ask questions.

7. Monitor mentoring process – Monitoring during the program is accomplished through evaluation questionnaires and during the one-on-one mentoring sessions to address problems students are experiencing quickly. The mentor must realize that they cannot always resolve every student problem and other resources such as social workers and social agencies may need to be consulted.

8. Evaluation – On-going evaluations are a necessity to measure the program’s effectiveness and suggestions for improvements for the future. Revisions are continuous and change the elements of the program according to student need.

Suggestions for this style of program:

- Schedule one-on-one mentoring sessions with the student permitting them to select a time convenient for them before and after school, during study hall, or lunch.
- Meet with the organization officers to create a schedule for conducting monthly meetings.
- After deciding upon a theme and suggested workshop topics from the membership of the organization, invite community resource associations and businesses to meet with the organization’s officers. Together design workshops focused on the items of interest.

- **Sample of Group Project:**
  1. The Theme one year was discovering how women helped to build Old Allegheny (the north side of Pittsburgh).
  2. Meet with influential community leaders to generate a pool of guest speakers.
  3. Topics:
     a. Introduction to Old Allegheny – bus excursion visiting historical sites that contributed to the growth of the north side of Pittsburgh including a house tour – Summerhill Community Association
     b. Historical overview of how urban females progressed from adolescence to adulthood describing events that determined the choices they made – Summerhill Community Association
     c. Readings and discussions from the book *Valley of Decision* by Marcia Davenport, a novel written describing life in Old Allegheny during the late Nineteenth Century. *Valley of Decision* depicts a women’s life choices during this era and the consequences of their selections – Carnegie Library guest speakers.
d. Movie Night: Watch the black and white film *Valley of Decision* and follow with a discussion and sharing session – Pittsburgh Perry Staff

e. Becoming lifelong learners-utilizing the resources found within the Carnegie Library – Carnegie Library guest speakers

f. An Afternoon with an Author – Selected women authors from Pittsburgh and specifically the north side of Pittsburgh will present their books, poetry, and essays, discuss how they started to write, explain their life choices, what influenced these choices, and describe how they created their works of art – Summerhill Community Association

g. A writing session - Each participant will create a writing sample by selecting their own type and style which will be reviewed by an author for critique and revision. The revised writings will be placed into a small book format titled: *The Pearls* – created by the female members of the Summerhill Community Association, the Pittsburgh Perry Staff and the Pearls.

4. Each participant (both Pearls and guests) will complete a workshop evaluation.
**Student Evaluation Form**

Please read the directions for each segment carefully and then answer the question in the space provided to the best of your ability.

For example: Place a check in the space to the left of your selected answer.

I am between the ages of:

__ 13-14 years old
__ 15-16 years old
__ 17-18 years old.

Now begin answering the questions.

1. What was the name of the workshop? (Write Out the title)

   __________________________________________

2. How many hours did you participate in the workshop? (Circle the amount of time)

   1-2 hours  2-3 hours  3-4 hours

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating, please indicate how you would evaluate this workshop overall by placing a check in the space provided to the left of the number.

   ___1   ___2   ___3   ___4   ___5

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating, please indicate how you would evaluate this workshop’s first guest speaker, Mrs. H., by placing a check in the space provided to the left of the number.

   ___1   ___2   ___3   ___4   ___5

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating, please indicate how you would evaluate this workshop’s second guest speaker, Ms. T., by placing a check in the space provided to the left of the number.

   ___1   ___2   ___3   ___4   ___5

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating, please indicate how you would evaluate the length of the workshop by placing a check in the space provided to the left of the number.

   ___1   ___2   ___3   ___4   ___5

7. What part of the workshop did you find to be the most interesting to you?

   ______________________________________________________________

8. What part of the workshop did you find to be the least interesting to you?

   ______________________________________________________________
9. What would you change about the workshop?
Presenter Evaluation Form

Please read the directions for each segment carefully and then answer the question in the space provided to the best of your ability.

1. Were you greeted properly today?

2. Were the Pearls dressed appropriately? What suggestions would you have for them?

3. Were you introduced correctly? What suggestions would you have for them?

4. After you removed your coat and arranged the handouts, power points, or items for presentation, were you offered food and drink?

5. How many times have you presented this type of information to adolescent audiences? ____________ If so, was there a difference between the groups?

6. How receptive do you feel the Pearls were to you?

7. Did the Pearls participate during your presentation?

8. Were the Pearls prepared for the workshop?

9. What suggestions do you have for improvement?

10. Do you feel this workshop was useful to the urban adolescent female? Please explain.

11. Do you feel the participants benefited from the collection of their writing samples?