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Mentoring for Black Male Youth: A Systematic Review of the Research

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Abstract A growing body of literature has been dedicated to evaluating the potential benefits of mentoring interventions. Although the majority of youth served by mentoring interventions are youth of color, little is known about the role of mentoring programs in specific cultural populations. The current literature review was conducted to compile all available research evidence about mentoring for Black boys. The aims of the review were to examine (a) the demonstrated effects of mentoring for Black male youth and (b) the factors that condition or influence (moderators) the effectiveness of mentoring for Black male youth. Available research points to a range of potential benefits of mentoring for this population, such as reduced health-risk behavior and improved academic outcomes, social-emotional wellbeing, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and racial identity. The literature revealed potential moderators of mentoring for Black boys related to program and mentor characteristics. This review showed that there are few studies focused specifically on mentoring for Black boys and that there is generally a lack of rigor in many studies of mentoring programs targeting this group. Further, it is unknown whether culturally tailored mentoring programs are more effective than general mentoring programs targeting diverse youth. We call on researchers to conduct investigations of mentoring for this population, to specifically examine the racial, cultural, and contextual factors that influence the effect of mentoring on Black male youth's outcomes, and to study culturally specific outcomes.

Keywords Mentoring · Black · African American · Boys · Adolescents · Children

Introduction

Mentoring interventions involve the pairing of an older, more experienced (often times, adult) volunteer and a non-familial youth with the goal that the two will establish a meaningful relationship that will be of benefit to the mentee. A substantial and growing body of literature has been dedicated to evaluating the potential benefits of mentoring interventions (DuBois et al. 2002, 2011). Yet little of this research has specifically attended to the role of race/ethnicity and cultural responsiveness of mentoring despite the fact that the majority of youth served by mentoring interventions are youth of color (Valentino and Wheeler 2013).

In particular, Black¹ boys are often targeted by mentoring interventions, but it is unclear the extent to which these interventions have been designed with the specific needs and strengths of this demographic group in mind. Moreover, the question of the suitability of mentoring interventions to advancing the positive development of Black male youth has been interrogated with substantially less frequency relative to broader assessments of program effects that do not account for differential benefits by the race/ethnicity of youth participants. Black male youth have a unique set of experiences in our society (e.g., greater vulnerability to

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¹ We use the term “Black” as the general racial category in the review, but then use the term “African-American” when it is used as the racial category in specific studies below. Black is a more all-encompassing term that could include persons of African descent who may have recently immigrated from Africa or the Caribbean to the U.S., for example.

unwarranted harassment by law enforcement) and consequently, may require that mentoring programs account for these experiences and make explicit efforts to be culturally responsive. Furthermore, mentoring has long been a tradition within the Black community as illustrated through the implementation of various forms of culturally focused interventions (e.g., Rites of Passage programs led by adult leaders; Brookins 1996). Alternatively, a one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring may be justified if empirical evidence suggests that Black male youth display comparable benefits regardless of whether programs intentionally attend to their unique positions in society.

The current review compiles all available research evidence in regard to mentoring interventions that either have been designed to serve Black boys or have been evaluated with specific attention to outcomes as a function of gender and racial/ethnic group membership. Given that this body of literature is fairly nascent and underdeveloped, we also include attention to studies of natural mentoring of Black boys. Natural mentoring relationships differ from formal mentoring relationships in that these relationships develop organically between a youth and an adult from that youth's pre-existing social network. Notably, natural mentoring relationships are much more likely than formal mentoring relationships to involve dyads based on race/ethnicity (Zimmerman et al. 2005). Despite fundamental differences in these two types of relationships (i.e., natural versus formal), we include both in our review in attempts to glean any information available about the potential of mentoring relationships to successfully foster positive developmental outcomes among Black boys. This review is a first step toward compiling the evidence for the specific effectiveness of mentoring interventions for Black male youth. In addition to summarizing the current state of the field, we also identify limitations of the research conducted to date and make recommendations for ways in which future researchers can better investigate the potential of mentoring to specifically attend to the experiences of Black boys.

Before delving further into the review, it is important to attempt to document the extent to which Black boys experience mentoring relationships. *The Mentoring Effect* study revealed that approximately 2 in 3 of the 18- to 24-year-old young people surveyed in this nationally representative study report having had a mentor while growing up (Bruce and Bridgeland 2014). Interestingly, Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) found that African American youth, in general (i.e., without consideration of gender), were significantly more likely to report having had either a natural or formal mentor in comparison to White and Latina/o youth. Other research suggests possible gaps in access to certain kinds of mentors for Black youth in comparison to White youth. Specifically, a study found that Black adolescents were less likely than White youth to report natural mentors from the community

setting (e.g., religious leader, neighbor, employer); however, differences were not found across other categories including relatives, older friends, and teachers (Erickson et al. 2009). Additional studies have found that in comparison to African American adolescent girls, African American adolescent boys are less likely to possess natural mentors (Cooper et al. 2013; Hirsch et al. 2002). Collectively, these findings suggest that mentoring relationships may be a fairly common occurrence among Black boys, even though natural mentoring relationships may be less prevalent among Black boys in comparison to Black girls.

Theoretical Framework

We begin by considering a theoretical framework that enhances our understanding of the ways in which Black male youth are uniquely situated within our society. Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory underscores the need for an awareness of specific challenges and resources facing Black boys when attempting to intervene with this population. The theory instructs us to pay particular attention to unique and specific risk and protective factors operating in youths' lives as well as adaptive coping processes (Spencer 1995). This framework acknowledges systematic and structural forces (e.g., institutional racism) that serve to confer unearned privilege on some and oppression on others. These larger structural influences shape youths' (and mentors') experiences of normative development. Spencer and Tinsley (2008) note, for example, how the transition to adulthood may be a time of hopeful optimism for White middle-class youth who are benefiting from unearned privilege and often faced with myriad opportunities for educational and personal advancement. Meanwhile, this same developmental transition may be marked by substantial uncertainty among Black male youth, particularly those who have experienced economic disadvantage and have had the misfortune of having to navigate cultural norms in the school setting that may differ substantially from norms in their home or neighborhood settings. Spencer and Tinsley (2008) acknowledge that certain adaptive coping behaviors (e.g., developing a hyper-masculine posture) may serve to advance adolescents' needs in one setting (e.g., by fostering increased personal safety in an unsafe neighborhood) but may undermine personal advancement in other settings (e.g., hyper-masculine posturing may be perceived as threatening by school staff and lead to less favorable school experiences). The potential need for Black boys to straddle multiple cultural contexts across school, home, and neighborhood settings is a challenge that not all youth face, and one could argue that mentoring interventions serving Black male youth would benefit from assessing the extent to which this is an issue facing their mentees and devising approaches to properly attend to this need.

Moreover, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory underscores the role of unique and culturally specific protective factors in fostering healthy development, acknowledging that some of these protective factors emerge as a consequence of experiencing conditions of risk. The framework argues that intervention approaches should closely attend to the strengths youth bring to the table and actively work to celebrate and support those strengths as a way of building trust with youth and reinforcing success. Similarly, interventions that help youth better understand broader systems of privilege and oppression and the ways in which those operate to restrict the opportunities available to some can help members of marginalized groups to avoid making incorrect assumptions about their undervalued place in society (e.g., understand challenges they face as stemming from societal rather than personal dysfunction). Spencer and Tinsley (2008) also situate identity development as key to adaptive coping; thus, developing a healthy identity as a Black male youth in a society that often problematizes Black boys and men is a challenging and critical task that mentors could support. Lastly, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory concerns itself with youths' lived experiences, explicitly drawing a distinction between the intentions of interventions and youths' actual experiences of these interventions. In this way, the framework highlights how mentoring interventions that intend to be supportive to Black boys may not actually be experienced as such by youth if the intervention does not properly attend to the unique risk factors imposed on Black male youth by society, the specific protective factors available to them, and the way in which adaptive coping facilitates healthy identity development among this marginalized group.

The Need for Mentoring for Black Boys

Notably, several considerations point to the potential need for mentoring interventions for Black male youth. Black boys in the U.S. face many challenges, many of which stem directly from the failures of key institutions that shape their development and prospects for healthy futures. In schools, for example, Black male students face over-referral for school disciplinary action and special education (Rowley et al. 2014). Similarly, within the criminal justice system, Black children are 18 times more likely than White children to be sentenced as adults (Poe-Yamagata and Jones 2007). Scholars have argued that the narrative in our society about Black children more generally and Black boys, in particular, is dominated by a problem or deficit perspective (Gaylord-Harden et al. 2017; National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) 2013; Rowley et al., 2014); the narrative is “that Black boys are in peril, that mere survival should be their goal, and that their very futures are uncertain” (Rowley et al. 2014, p. 303). Rowley et al. (2014) cite research

indicating that Black parents view their sons as vulnerable and needing protection (which may serve as a barrier to their autonomy and self-efficacy), that teachers tend to have lower expectations of Black boys and over discipline them, and that Black boys may be more likely than other race/gender groups to disidentify with academics.

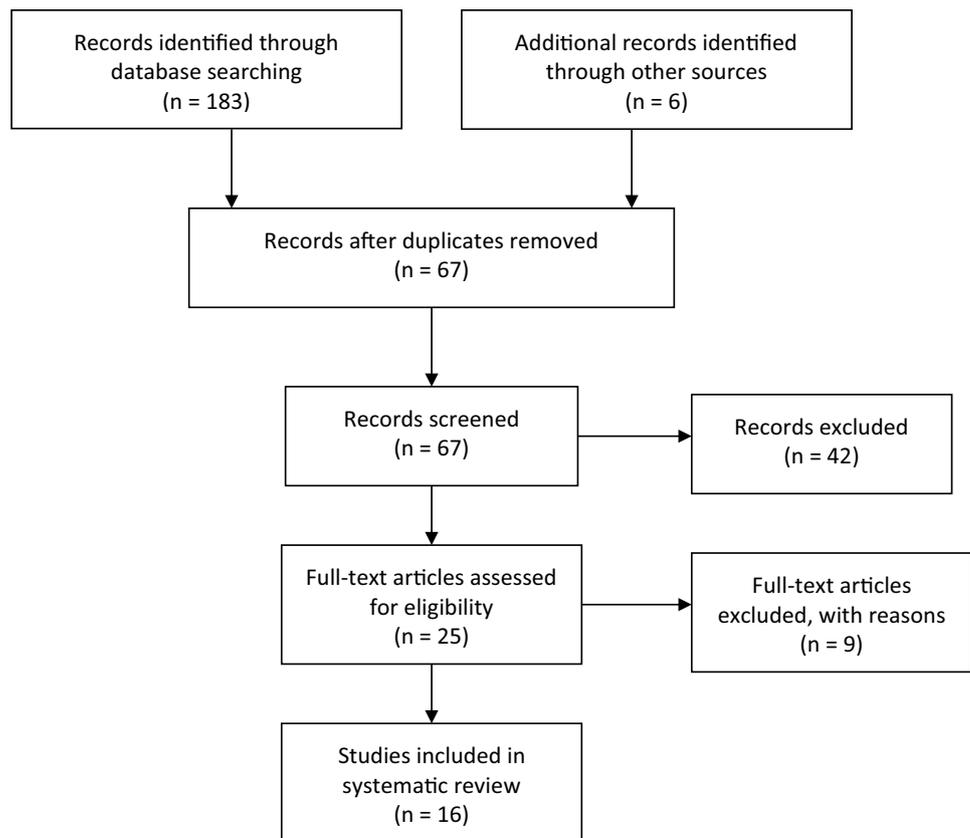
Even more disturbing is recent experimental research demonstrating that Black boys are viewed as older, less innocent, and less human than White boys (Goff et al. 2014). Moreover, Goff et al. found that police officers' dehumanizing views of Black boys were significantly related to their use of force on Black suspects, controlling for how much suspects resisted arrest and the extent to which they were located in high-crime areas. These findings suggest an adultification of Black boys in which our society denies them the opportunity to experience a true childhood. In the face of myriad challenges, it is reasonable to expect that Black boys could benefit from mentoring relationships that aim to bolster their strengths and foster resilient outcomes in the face of environmental risks (NBCDI 2013; Rowley et al. 2014). It should be noted that there is no reason to expect that mentoring alone can reverse the complex and persistent institutional, social, and environmental challenges facing Black boys. However, it may be reasonable to expect that mentoring interventions can empower, engage, and promote the strengths of Black boys and do so in a manner that is complementary to other interventions and policies that seek systemic changes to more fundamentally improve the life prospects of Black boys.

Current Study

The goal of this systematic review is to examine the state of the research literature on mentoring for Black boys. Specifically, this review addresses the following questions: (a) what are the demonstrated effects of mentoring for Black male youth? and (b) what factors condition or influence the effectiveness of mentoring for Black male youth? Based on the literature review findings, we identify key limitations in past research and make recommendations for future research and practice.

Methods

To locate studies, a search was conducted via PsychInfo and Google Scholar. Search terms included mentor*, African American, Black, boys, males, adolescen*, child*, and youth. Inclusion criteria were: (a) investigations of either formal or natural mentoring relationships and activities that take place between Black boys and mentors (i.e., older peer or adult) who provide support for the youth's healthy

Fig. 1 PRISMA diagram

development, (b) at least 80% of the participants in the study sample were Black or African American or, when this was not the case, relevant analyses were conducted on Black male youth specifically, (c) participants were, on average, under the age of 18 years and (d) studies were published in peer-reviewed journals. Our initial literature search via the databases identified 183 records and then 122 duplicates were removed, which resulted in 61 unique articles (see Fig. 1 for PRISMA diagram). The records and some of the full-text articles were screened to determine eligibility for this review, and ten articles met the inclusion criteria. Articles were excluded because they did not meet inclusion criteria (e.g., did not have data analyses focused on Black male youth specifically). We also made a query for studies fitting our criteria in a youth mentoring listserve for researchers and practitioners. All reference lists of the articles that met study criteria were checked for additional studies and attempts were made to locate those articles. An additional six articles were found from these searches, which resulted in 16 studies included in this review.

Results

As shown in Table 1, nine studies were on formal mentoring programs while seven were on natural mentoring. Further,

11 were quantitative studies, three were qualitative investigations and two used mixed-methods. The “**Results**” section is mostly limited to the studies that fit the criteria for the review; however, sometimes we discuss other relevant research that did not meet criteria because of the lack of studies specifically on mentoring and Black boys.

What are the Demonstrated Effects of Mentoring on Black Male Youth?

Our literature review revealed that researchers have examined the role of formal and natural mentoring in a variety of outcomes for Black boys, including academic performance, social-emotional well-being, mental health, health-risk behaviors, racial identity, and interpersonal relationships.

Academic Outcomes

A few studies revealed that mentoring was related to better academic achievement in Black male youth. In a study of the *Helping Hands* group mentoring program targeting African American boys in grades 3 through 8, Anderson (2007) examined school records for 26 elementary and middle schools over a 3-year period. Participants were 722 students in the mentoring program and 722 in a comparison group who were a random sample of African American

Table 1 Review of studies on formal and natural mentoring relationships of Black male youth

| References | Formal or natural | Sample | Theory and study design | Results |
|----------------------|-------------------|--|--|---|
| Anderson (2007) | Formal | N = 1444 African American male students in grades 3–8 | Theory: None Method: Quantitative Design: Examined standardized test scores of Helping Hands participants who were compared with a stratified random sample of an equal number of African American male students from corresponding grade levels in the same school district. Three cohorts of students were compared | There were no significant differences in reading or math scores between intervention and control group in any of the cohorts compared. However, there was more growth during the first and second cohorts (i.e., 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 academic years) in standardized math scores for mentored students compared to control students. There was a trend in that more years in the program was related to higher standardized reading test scores participating in helping hands for more years was related more strongly to higher standardized math test scores for students with disabilities than for those without |
| Clark et al. (2005) | Formal | N = 156 African American 7th-grade students (ages 12–14) | Theory: Theory of possible selves Method: Quantitative Design: Twenty middle school classrooms were randomly assigned to either Project AIM or a standard health education curriculum (control group). 11 classrooms received the Project AIM intervention (10-sessions), and 9 classrooms received the standard health education curriculum. Project AIM participants completed a 1-year post-intervention assessment | At post, intervention group was less likely to have intentions to have sex in the next 9 months compared to the control. Mentoring functioned as a protective factor for all participants regardless of previous sexual behavior and gender at short-term follow-up. At 1 year follow up, fewer Project AIM male students reported any sexual intercourse (47%) than control group male students (54%). For participants who were previously sexually active, 77% of Project AIM male students (n = 20) were still sexually active compared to 92% (n = 11) of control group male students |
| Cooper et al. (2013) | Natural | N = 1942 Black youth (ages 12–18, 41% male) | Theory: Stress-buffering framework Method: Quantitative Design: Secondary, cross-sectional data was analyzed from a baseline pregnancy prevention program survey. Examined the role of the presence of a mentor (yes/no) and racial discrimination in depressive symptoms, school behavioral problems and school engagement | Mentor presence was not directly and significantly associated with boys' outcomes. Among boys without a mentor, more interpersonal racial discrimination predicted more school suspensions and less school engagement. However, for boys who reported a natural mentor, racial discrimination was related to fewer school suspensions and more school engagement |

Table 1 (continued)

| References | Formal or natural | Sample | Theory and study design | Results |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Culyba et al. (2016) | Natural | $N=283$ male adolescents (98% were African American); random sample of boys in Philadelphia Mean age = 17.8 years | Theory: None Method: Quantitative Design: Cross-sectional; age adjusted logistic regression was used to test whether the presence of a positive adult connection promoted school performance and protected against substance use and exposure to violence | Youth with a positive adult connection had significantly higher odds of getting good grades, and feeling safe at school and lower odds of ever using alcohol, violence involvement, and witnessing violence |
| Garraway and Pistrang (2010) | Formal | $N=13$ UK African Caribbean males (ages 12–17); 5 African Caribbean mentors | Theory: Youth mentoring model Method: Qualitative (Phenomenological) Design: Focus groups and 1:1 interviews | Participants reported improvements in boys' communication with their family and new friendships. Also reported improvements in help seeking behaviors. Mentor support was perceived to improve parents' attitudes about mentoring, which improved mentoring experience. Shared life experiences between mentors and mentees helped mentors have empathy for mentees, which influenced mentees to trust their mentors Mentored students had significantly higher GPAs ($M=2.89$; $SD=0.5$) compared to comparison students ($M=1.06$; $SD=0.57$), while controlling for 6th -grade math scores on standardized test Mentored students also scored significantly higher on their 8th-grade standardized math test scores ($M=103.53$; $SD=20.9$) compared to the control group students ($M=80.13$; $SD=18.76$), while controlling for 6th-grade standardized math scores BEMI group was more identified with academics, had higher scores on internalization of racial identity attitudes (how closely their self-esteem was linked to their academic success) and lower pre-encounter scores compared to comparison group. No significant differences in the encounter and immersion/immersion scores |
| Gordon et al. (2009) | Formal | $N=61$ African American 8th grade boys | Theory: Racial Identity Theory Method: Quantitative Design: Examined the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) by comparing 29 students in BEMI to 32 students in the non-equivalent comparison group who didn't receive the intervention on racial identity, academic identification and academic performance | |

Table 1 (continued)

| References | Formal or natural | Sample | Theory and study design | Results |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|---|--|
| Hall (2015) | Formal | N=7 African American male high school students | Theory: Critical pedagogy; Pedagogy of the oppressed Method: Qualitative, ethnographic, critical constructivist approach Design: Examined the Young Men for Change (YMC), a school-based, group mentoring program for African American male high school students. Utilizes Freire's critical pedagogy approach. Data collection included observations, semi-structured interviews | Mentoring program processes, including dialogue, problem-posing, and praxis, were related to student outcomes: sense of belonging, emotional expression, critical thinking skills, empowerment and leadership skills |
| Holland (1996) | Formal | N=128 African American students in 5th grade | Theory: None Method: Quantitative Design: Examined Project 2000, Inc, a multi-year school-based, group mentoring program for African American elementary school students. Compared grades and test scores of 53 boys in mentoring program to 75 control group students at a comparable school. No pre-test | Project 2000 boys had statistically significant higher grade point averages in 5th-grade than boys in the control group. Boys in intervention also had significantly higher standardized test scores (subjects unspecified) in 5th grade than their counterparts |
| Hurd et al. (2012) | Natural | N=541 African American older adolescents (M age = 17.8 years) | Theory: Youth mentoring model Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity Method: Quantitative Design: Longitudinal; examined role of presence of natural mentor in racial identity and school beliefs | Presence of a natural mentor indirectly predicted the belief that school was important for future success through participants' racial identity. Gender did not moderate this association |
| Hurd and Zimmerman (2010) | Natural | N=615 African American older adolescents (M age = 17.6 years) | Theory: Resilience Method: Quantitative Design: Longitudinal; Examined role of the presence of natural mentor in high school senior year in the growth trajectory of depressive symptoms, sexual risk behavior, and substance use (5 years post high school) | Male participants (n=292) with natural mentors had greater decreases in depressive symptoms during the 5 years after high school compared to males without mentors. There were no gender specific findings for presence of mentor and growth trajectory of substance use or sexual risk behavior |
| Hurd and Zimmerman (2010) | Natural | N=659 older African American adolescents | Theory: Resilience Method: Quantitative Design: Longitudinal; Participants were asked to report 1 male and 1 female figure they look up to. School outcome measure included GPA, school attachment, and expectations about graduating HS and attending college | There was an interaction between adolescent gender and role model gender in school outcomes. Female participants had more positive school outcomes if they had a female role model. The gender of role model made no difference for boys in school outcomes |

Table 1 (continued)

| References | Formal or natural | Sample | Theory and study design | Results |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|--|---|
| Kogan et al. (2011) | Natural | N = 345 rural African American high school seniors (41.5% male), their parents and natural mentors | Theory: Attachment Theory Method: Quantitative Design: Longitudinal; 3 time points (baseline, 7-months, 18-months) with youth, parents, and mentor. Examined role of mentoring relationship quality and youth's intrapersonal protective processes in externalizing problems, while controlling for earlier problem behaviors, gender, family intervention dosage, mentor workshop attendance, if mentor was first or second choice mentor | Mentoring relationships characterized by instrumental and emotional support and affectively positive interactions had an indirect effect on youth's lower levels of anger, rule-breaking behavior, and aggression at 18 months through mentees' intrapersonal protective processes (parent-reported self-control and future planning). Gender did not moderate this association |
| Timpe and Lunkenheimer (2015) | Natural | N = 396 African American subset of nationally representative sample (39% African American males) | Theory: None Method: Quantitative Design: Longitudinal; Study examined whether presence of natural mentor during adolescence predicted annual economic earnings in adulthood using Add Health dataset. Control variables included child gender, age, educational attainment, childhood income | Presence of a male mentor during adolescence was significantly associated with an average earnings increase of 88%; presence of a female mentor was not significantly related to earnings. Fatherless youth with a male mentor earned 214% more during adulthood than fatherless youth without a mentor. Effect of presence of a male mentor was 101% higher on adulthood earnings for fatherless youth than for youth with father figure. Results were not moderated by youth gender |
| Utsey et al. (2003) | Formal | N = 6 African American males (ages 12–16) with serious behavioral and emotional problems and in foster care | Theory: Culture-centered conceptual framework Method: Qualitative Design: Case study of Afrocentric, therapeutic group mentoring program. Weekly group therapy sessions for 2 h (topics were around sexuality, substance abuse, and Black male identity), and one-in-one mentoring with a African American male college student at least twice a month. Five principles guided the intervention: group above self, respect for self and others, responsibility for self and community, reciprocity, and keeping it real (authenticity) | Case study notes revealed that participants were able to develop healthy and positive relationships with their mentors |

Table 1 (continued)

| References | Formal or natural | Sample | Theory and study design | Results |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Washington et al. (2006) | Formal | N=6 African American boys (ages 9–17) and their relative caregivers (n=6) | Theory: Social learning theory; Empowerment theory; Afrocentric frameworks Methods: Mixed Methods Design: Examined the Kumba Group, a group mentoring program of the Relative Caregiver Program, which targets children and adolescents receiving therapeutic services for abuse and neglect and to prevent the children from entering foster care system. Pre/post-test design with no control group. Relative caregivers participated in pre- and post-test focus groups. Boys completed pre/post test surveys about spirituality | No significant difference in spirituality between pre- and post-test survey scores for boys Relative caregivers reported improvement in boys' behaviors at home and at school |
| Wyatt (2009) | Formal | N=36 African American high school males and alumni | Theory: Pedagogy of the oppressed; Empowerment theory Method: Mixed-methods Design: Examined GPA of Brotherhood participants and program alumni over a 3-year period, and administered a questionnaire. No comparison group | Brotherhood students and alumni had a 16% increase in their overall GPA between 2005 and 2008—2.43–2.83 Students and alumni reported that the program goals (academic, social/personal, and career) were helpful |

male students by each grade. Three cohorts of students were compared. Although there were no statistically significant differences between students in the mentoring program and those in the comparison group on math or reading standardized test scores in any of the cohorts, there was more growth during the first and second cohorts (i.e., 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 academic years) in math scores for mentored students compared to control students (Anderson 2007).

A quasi-experimental study of the *Benjamin E. Mays Institute* (BEMI) Afrocentric mentoring program with a sample of African American 8th-grade students found that participants in the mentoring program had higher grade point averages (GPA) than students in the comparison group, while controlling for 6th-grade math scores on a standardized test (Gordon et al. 2009). BEMI participants also scored significantly higher on their 8th-grade math standardized test scores compared to their counterparts, while controlling for 6th-grade scores. It is important to note that the intervention and comparison students differed in that those in the mentoring program were also in a single-sex cluster within a coed school whereas the comparison students were enrolled in coed classes. Thus, it is unclear to what extent the classroom gender make-up may have served as a confounding factor. In an evaluation of the *Brotherhood*, an after school group mentoring program for African American high school boys, Wyatt (2009) reported an average increase in GPAs from 2.43 to 2.83 over a 3-year period among 307 participants, but the increase was not tested for statistical significance. Finally, a quasi-experimental evaluation of *Project 2000, Inc* found that 5th-grade African-American boys who participated in a multi-year, school-based, group mentoring program had statistically significant higher GPAs and standardized test scores (subjects were not specified) than African-American boys in a control group, who were from a comparable school without the mentoring program (Holland 1996). Because the author did not report controlling for previous GPA or standardized test scores and because boys were not randomly assigned to the mentoring program versus the control, it is difficult to ascertain whether the higher achievement patterns were actually caused by the mentoring program.

In a cross-sectional study of natural mentoring, a representative sample of mostly African American (98%) male youth in Philadelphia between the ages of 10 and 24 from low-income neighborhoods were asked whether they had an informal adult mentor (defined as adults they look up to who can help them get through tough situations; Culyba et al. 2016). Eighty-six percent of the sample reported having a natural mentor, and it was found that the presence of mentors predicted 2.8 times the odds of getting good grades, while controlling for age.

Mentoring programs targeting Black male students have also reported other kinds of academic and school benefits.

For instance, middle school students in the BEMI mentoring program reported higher identification with academics compared to the control group (Gordon et al. 2009). The majority of the African American high school students of the *Brotherhood* evaluation qualitatively reported that the mentoring program helped them with college readiness and with connecting their education to the real world (Wyatt 2009). Controlling for age, African American male adolescents with natural mentors also were 2.9 times more likely to report feeling safe at school compared to youth without mentors (Culyba et al. 2016).

A cross-sectional study examined whether natural mentoring lessened the negative effects of racial discrimination on school outcomes among African American adolescents (41% were male; Cooper et al. 2013). The researchers controlled for age, family structure, social class, self-reported grades, and daily stressors in the statistical analyses. They found that among boys without a mentor, more interpersonal racial discrimination (i.e., youth's perceptions of the frequency of routine and subtle experiences of unfair treatment during the last year; e.g., "others being afraid of you", "people acting as if you are not smart") predicted more school suspensions and less school engagement. However, for boys who reported a natural mentor, racial discrimination was related to fewer school suspensions and more school engagement. The mentoring relationships may have helped to reduce or buffer the effects of racial discrimination among African-American boys.

Social-Emotional Well-Being, Mental Health and Health-Risk Behaviors

A cross-sectional study of African American male children and adolescents revealed that, controlling for age, the presence of natural mentors predicted a lower likelihood of ever using alcohol and protected participants from violence involvement and witnessing violence. Specifically, participants with natural mentors were less likely to get into a fight at school, be jumped or have access to a gun, see someone holding a gun and see someone get shot (Culyba et al. 2016). These findings suggest that natural mentors may keep African American youth safe from community risks and stressors. Another investigation of natural mentoring relationships of African American high school seniors revealed that male participants with mentors had steeper decreases in self-reported depressive symptoms during the 5 years after high school compared to their male participants without mentors (Hurd and Zimmerman 2010), while controlling for age, socioeconomic status (SES), and parental support.

A longitudinal study of rural African American high school seniors found that those with natural mentoring relationships comprised of more instrumental and emotional support and affectively positive interactions indirectly

predicted less anger, rule-breaking behavior and aggression in youth about 18 months later, while controlling for earlier problem behaviors, youth gender, intervention dosage, and first choice of mentor (Kogan et al. 2011). The authors tested these associations separately for boys and girls in the study and found no differences.

In an evaluation of the *Adult Identity Mentoring* (AIM) program, 20 seventh-grade classrooms were randomly assigned to either the 6-week AIM program or a standard health education curriculum (Clark et al. 2005). Based on the theory of possible selves, the goal of the AIM program was to reduce sexual risk behaviors by increasing African American youth's interest in successful adult development. Students were encouraged to think about their desired future and how their current risk behaviors could negatively affect their future goals through the use of small groups and role models that created and sustained group norms of delaying or abstaining from sexual activity. Findings indicated that the AIM program influenced positive changes in sexual behavior among boys. Specifically, 1 year after the intervention and controlling for baseline differences, fewer male students who were in the AIM program (47%) reported any sexual intercourse than male students who received the standard health education curriculum (54%). Further, for participants who were previously sexually active, 77% of boys ($n = 20$) who received the AIM intervention were still sexually active at the 1-year follow-up compared to 92% ($n = 11$) of boys who were in the standard health curriculum, although this finding was not tested for statistical significance.

In a pre- and post-test design with no comparison group, an evaluation that included six African American boys and their relative caregivers in the *Kuumba Group* mentoring program showed that the relative caregivers reported improvements in their boys' behavior at school and at home (Washington et al. 2006). However, the researchers did not specify the types of school and home behaviors. Further, this was the only study to examine the role of mentoring on spirituality, and the researchers did not find significant differences between pre- and post-test scores on boys' spirituality.

Racial Identity

Rhodes' (2005) theoretical framework of youth mentoring suggests that one of the processes by which mentoring influences positive youth outcomes is through youth's identity development. Ethnic and racial identity development is particularly important for Black boys, as several recent literature reviews have concluded that a positive ethnic and racial identity is related to better academic, psychosocial and health outcomes in African American adolescents (Neblett et al. 2012; Rivas-Drake et al. 2014).

Two studies examined the role of mentoring in Black boys' racial identity. African American boys in the BEMI

mentoring program had more positive internalized Black identity scores and lower pre-encounter scores (i.e., a race neutral stance that minimizes racism and race related issues) compared to the control group. In a study of African American older adolescents, Hurd et al. (2012) found that the reported presence of a natural mentor predicted higher racial identity attitudes, specifically on private regard, public regard and centrality. They further found that the reported presence of a natural mentor indirectly predicted the belief that school was important for future success through participants' racial identity or their positive perceptions about people from their own race (e.g., I am proud of Black people). Evidence in support of this pathway did not differ significantly across male and female study participants, but the model did hold for male participants specifically. Hence, research shows some preliminary support for the potential role of mentoring in influencing racial identity development in Black boys.

Interpersonal Relationships

Researchers and practitioners have discussed that group mentoring models may be more congruent with Black cultural values because of its collectivist and interdependent approach and format. Qualitative studies of group mentoring programs targeting Black boys have revealed that a benefit of participating in these programs is improved relationships with other boys and men. For example, a case study of an Afrocentric therapeutic group-mentoring program for African American boys in the foster care system reported that boys developed healthy, trusting, and positive relationships with their African American, male college student mentors (Utsey et al. 2003). Research on boys of color in group mentoring programs has pointed toward the importance of brotherhood and emotional connection that are developed among participants. A qualitative study was conducted of 14 African-American and Latino male adolescents in the *Umoja Network for Young Men* (UMOJA), a school-based, group, male mentoring program at an alternative high school for students who are overage and under-credited, i.e., at least 2 years behind in age and credit toward the high school diploma (Jackson et al. 2014). Based on observations of the group mentoring sessions, observations of the students in their English class, and three focus group discussions over a 2-year period, Jackson et al. (2014) found that participants reported feeling a sense of unity, brotherhood, and reciprocal love, which referred to openly expressing love and care for one another and in turn feeling loved and cared for. They also reported a collective responsibility for their school success and emotional well-being. Finally, the study revealed that trust was established in the mentoring program, which enabled students to open up and talk about their personal lives. The researchers concluded that group

processes seemed to have contributed to students feeling that they have the potential to succeed and to have higher educational aspirations.

Similarly, another qualitative study of the *Brotherhood* program, which targeted African American and Latino male adolescents, revealed that one of the benefits to participating in this group mentoring program was the close relationships and bonds that youth developed with their peer mentors (Sánchez et al. 2016). The investigation further found five program processes that facilitated close mentoring relationships: (a) rapport-building activities, (b) safe space, (c) mutual support, (d) group identity, and (e) trust. Overall, group mentoring programs seem to facilitate the development of Black boys' positive and close relationships with older peers and men.

What Factors Condition or Influence the Effectiveness of Mentoring for Black Male Youth?

Past research has revealed that there are program and mentor characteristics that may play a role in influencing the effects of mentoring for Black boys. Program characteristics include the culturally tailoring of programs, mentor training, youth-driven approaches, and parental participation. Mentor characteristics include mentor race, gender, and cultural sensitivity.

Program Characteristics

Practitioners serving Black male youth have often developed and implemented culturally tailored mentoring programs. Hypothetically, these types of programs may offer enhanced benefits for Black boys because the approaches may be consistent with their cultural values and take into consideration their cultural and community context. Some mentoring programs for Black male youth include “deep structure” adaptations (Resnicow et al. 2000). These types of adaptations are focused on addressing the cultural, psychological, social, environmental, and historical factors that influence the behaviors of the target group (Resnicow et al. 2000). An example of a deep structure adaptation is when a program is designed to incorporate cultural values or traditions of Black or African American culture. For example, two mentoring programs, the *Brotherhood* program (Wyatt 2009) and the *Kumba Group* (Washington et al. 2006), incorporated the *Nguzo Saba* into their curricula. The *Nguzo Saba* are seven principles or values that serve as the basis for Afrocentric movements in the U.S.: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. These values have been used to connect African Americans to their heritage and understand their experiences with racism, slavery and the influence of the dominant European worldview and culture (Johnson 2001).

The *Kuumba Group* also incorporated NTU (pronounced “in-to”) into their program, which is an Afrocentric psychotherapeutic approach aimed at healing via harmony, balance, interconnectedness and authenticity (Washington et al. 2006). The BEMI mentoring program also emphasized similar Afrocentric values and teachings in their program, specifically “Sankofa (go back and fetch), spirituality, Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Uhuru (freedom and social justice), and Maat (truth)” (Gordon et al. 2009, p. 282).

Other examples of programs incorporating deep structural adaptations include the *Umoja* mentoring program, in which African drumming circles (Spir-rhythms) were utilized as a cultural arts tool to provide group mentoring to African American male adolescents (Watson et al. 2015). Utsey et al.'s (2003) therapeutic group mentoring program for African American boys in the foster care system emphasized the following principles: (a) group above self, (b) respect for self and others, (c) responsibility for self and community, (d) reciprocity, and (e) authenticity.

Implicit in the design of several programs also is the idea that effectiveness may be enhanced when attention is given to cultural tailoring with respect to not only race, but also issues of gender and its intersection with race. For instance, in the aforementioned therapeutic group mentoring program, participants learned what it means to be an African American male in an anti-Black society (Utsey et al. 2003). Unfortunately, none of the previous studies that included deep-structure adaptations examined whether culturally tailoring mentoring programs actually increases their effectiveness.

Although not exclusively targeting Black male youth, also of note are mentoring and other kinds of culturally tailored interventions that have been designed with the aim of addressing the achievement gap between African American and White students. Researchers conducted a study of African-American and Latina/o youth who were randomly assigned to mentors who received training and support in the use of messages and activities that were directed toward changing mentees' beliefs about intelligence (i.e., fixed versus malleable) in order to address stereotype threat (Good et al. 2003). The authors found that participants in the experimental condition exhibited greater improvement in standardized test scores during the transition to middle school compared to those assigned to mentors who did not receive this type of training and support. In related research, Yeager et al. (2014) conducted a series of studies to investigate the use of “wise feedback” from teachers as a strategy for breaking the cycle of cultural mistrust toward education among African American middle school students. Wise feedback referred to teachers communicating high expectations and the belief that the student can achieve them. Students who received wise feedback from their White teachers on an essay were more likely to turn in a revised

essay, improve their essay scores, and even improve their grades compared to African American students who did not receive wise feedback. Unlike their African American counterparts, White students' grades in the wise feedback condition did not improve, thus suggesting greater sensitivity of African American students to wise feedback. In their analyses, Yeager et al. (2014) did not find that gender moderated any of the findings, implying that the pattern is similar for both African American girls and boys. Overall, these findings combined with the results from Good et al.'s (2003) study suggest ideas about factors that, when incorporated into mentoring interventions, could enhance benefits for Black boys.

Another program adaptation that might influence the effectiveness of mentoring for Black Boys is a youth-driven approach in which boys are viewed as partners in the delivery of mentoring rather than only as recipients of mentoring. For instance, the *Young Men for Change*, a school-based group-mentoring program for African American male high school students, utilized a critical pedagogy approach (Freire 1996; Hall 2015). Rather than using a hierarchical approach, in which the mentor imparted knowledge onto the mentee, mentors and mentees co-constructed knowledge and reflected on the institutional and societal forces that influence their experiences as African American teenage boys. This approach challenges the status quo and is used to empower youth to understand their life circumstances, make choices, and to take action to improve their lives (Hall 2015). Based on critical pedagogy, the *Young Men for Change* curriculum had three phases: (a) dialogue, in which arts-based activities were used to help mentees express themselves emotionally without sacrificing their masculinity, (b) problem posing, in which mentees were encouraged to make connections between their own lives and the broader society, and (c) taking action, in which mentees generated and implemented strategies for creating social change.

Researcher observations of the *Young Men for Change* program and qualitative interviews of seven mentees in this program suggested that the critical pedagogy approach used in the program offered several benefits for participants (Hall 2015). First, it was reported that the dialogue phase created a sense of belonging and helped mentees to express their emotions within a safe space, both of which may have improved their socio-emotional well being. Second, Hall (2015) found that students' critical thinking skills improved as a result of the problem-posing phase. Lastly, the praxis (taking action) phase, in which students organized a community forum to dispel negative stereotypes about African American boys and men, appeared to empower students to utilize and further develop their leadership skills. The youth-driven and critical pedagogy approach of this program is similar to Weiston-Serdan's (2017) call for the mentoring field to take a critical mentoring stance, in which youth voice is central

to mentoring, from the organizational and program levels to the interpersonal level, as well as utilizing a critical consciousness perspective that incorporates critical race theory, intersectionality, and social justice. Researchers have yet to examine, however, whether a youth-driven and/or critical approach to mentoring enhance benefits to Black boys.

Program features that are responsive to the existing relationships and sources of support that Black male youth have available to them also have the potential to be important. In the *Village Model of Care* mentoring program that targeted African American male and female adolescents, more parental participation, as rated by program staff, was related to greater increases in GPA (Hanlon et al. 2009). However, more parental involvement was also related to higher parental level of education, and thus, the GPA increases could be due to parents' educational level rather than parental involvement. Despite this limitation, utilizing existing social supports, such as parental relationships, may be important for mentoring program staff to consider in order to strengthen the role of mentors in the lives of Black boys. Specifically, Keller (2005) has argued that mentoring relationships should be considered along with other relationships with adults in youth's social network. Further, having the support and engagement of parents can increase the potential of *network-engaged mentoring*, in which existing relationships in the lives of youth are viewed as resources that can support their healthy development (Schwartz et al. 2017). Researchers have not investigated, however, whether parental participation in mentoring programs moderates the effects of mentoring for Black boys.

Mentor or Youth Characteristics

A mentor characteristic that has received attention in the literature is whether cross- versus same-race mentoring relationships matter in youth mentoring programs. It is important to note that the majority of the mentoring programs included in this review recruited African Americans exclusively as mentors. There are no studies, however, that have examined the implications of matching Black male youth with a Black versus a non-Black mentor. Rhodes et al. (2002) compared cross- and same-race mentoring relationships in a sample of African American, Latina/o, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Biracial youth in *Big Brothers Big Sisters*. The authors did not report the specific number of African American boys who were in cross- versus same-race relationships. Controlling for mentoring relationship duration, Rhodes et al. (2002) found that boys of color in same-race matches ($n=70$) had smaller decreases in confidence in school work and feelings of self-worth at 18 months after starting the mentoring program compared to boys of color in mentoring relationships with European American mentors ($n=39$). No statistically significant

differences were found, however, on several other outcomes (e.g., grades, skipping class, alcohol use). DuBois et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of youth mentoring programs did not find that programs that specifically matched youth to mentors by race/ethnicity were more effective than programs that did not. Because none of the previous studies examined the effects of having a Black versus non-Black mentor for Black boys specifically, it is unknown whether the race of the mentor matters for this population.

Although outside the U.S. context, only one study touched on the significance of having a Black male mentor with similar life experiences (Garraway and Pistrang 2010). A qualitative study of mentors and mentees in the United Kingdom (UK) reported that shared life experiences (e.g., similar school struggles, being an African Caribbean boy/man in the UK) helped mentors have empathy for their mentees, and in turn, mentees trusted their mentors. When asked about cultural similarity with their mentors, mentees stated that it was not so much the shared cultural identity that was important as it was their shared life experiences. However, as the authors state, the boys' and mentors' shared cultural experiences and shared life experiences (e.g., discrimination) were related to being an African Caribbean boy/man in the UK. As such, a combination of a shared cultural and gender identity and similar life experiences may have helped to promote bonds between Black boys and their Black male mentors and thus contributed to the observed positive outcomes.

Some researchers have examined mentees' perceptions of their mentors. Although a slightly older population, a study of 74 African American male college students who were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in which they listened to mock mentor–mentee interactions revealed that participants rated African American faculty mentors as more culturally sensitive and a more credible source of help than White faculty mentors (Grant-Thompson and Atkinson 1997). Further, cultural mistrust may influence Black male youth's mentoring relationships with mentors. Specifically, students' perceptions that African American mentors were more culturally sensitive were strongest among participants with the highest levels of cultural mistrust toward White mentors (Grant-Thompson and Atkinson 1997). This suggests the potential for same-race mentoring relationships to be particularly important for Black boys with higher levels of cultural mistrust and thus implicates youth and mentor characteristics together. Yet, the potential also exists for this type of dependency to be mitigated by program practices, such as training for White mentors aimed at promoting use of culturally responsive approaches to supporting Black boys (e.g., wise feedback, Yeager et al. 2014).

Another youth characteristic that may interact with mentor race is ethnic identity. Although no studies examined ethnic identity as a moderator specifically among Black boys,

an experimental study examined the role of ethnic identity in African American high school boys' and girls' ($n = 94$) perceptions of a hypothetical adult mentor (Linnehan et al. 2005). The authors reported that African-American students with lower ethnic identities perceived White mentors to be significantly more competent and predictable than their counterparts with higher ethnic identity scores. In contrast, students with higher ethnic identities rated Black adult mentors as more competent than students with lower ethnic identities. This study reveals that the racial/ethnic identity of Black boys may play a role in their perception of their mentors.

Other studies have examined the potential significance of mentor gender for Black male youth. Participants in Garraway and Pistrang's (2010) study discussed that mentors were role models of what it means to be a Black male. Specifically, mentors were models of how men could discuss emotional issues without compromising their manhood. A study of natural mentoring using data from a nationally representative sample found that reporting a male mentor during adolescence was associated with an average 88% increase in self-reported economic earnings in adulthood among both African American boys and girls, whereas the presence of a female mentor was not significantly related to earnings, controlling for child gender, age, educational attainment, and childhood income (Timpe and Lunkenheimer 2015). It was also found that African American male and female adolescents who did not have a father figure but had a male mentor reported earning 214% more during adulthood than youth without a father figure and without a mentor. They further found that African American adolescents who had a male mentor but not a father figure earned more during adulthood than African American adolescents with a father figure (Timpe and Lunkenheimer 2015). Although not unique to boys, these latter findings suggest that the presence of a male mentor during adolescence may be particularly important for the future economic earnings of Black boys without a father figure in their lives.

Discussion

Although many mentoring interventions, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, target youth of color (Valentino and Wheeler 2013), including Black male children and adolescents, little is known about the effects of mentoring for specific racial and cultural groups. Our literature review focused on examining the effects of mentoring for Black boys because of the importance of mentoring in enhancing positive youth development and preventing problem behaviors (DuBois et al. 2011). Our review resulted in only 16 studies that met criteria, even though there are many more mentoring programs targeting Black boys that have not been evaluated.

The limited available research points to a range of potential benefits of both participating in formal mentoring programs or the presence of natural mentoring relationships for Black boys, including in the areas of academics, social-emotional well-being, mental health, preventing risky behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and racial identity. Some researchers have gone beyond examining the presence of mentoring and examined the benefits of higher quality mentoring relationships (e.g., Kogan et al. 2011) in Black boys. It was found that potential moderators of mentoring are program characteristics, such as the culturally tailoring of programs, mentor training and messaging, youth-driven or critical mentoring approaches, and parental participation, as well as mentor characteristics, such as race, gender and cultural sensitivity. However, some of these moderators have not been empirically investigated in Black boys.

Given the unique set of experiences of Black male youth in our society, many of the formal mentoring programs included in this review were explicit in their efforts to be culturally responsive by considering the needs and strengths of Black boys in the design and implementation of the program. Some of the mentoring interventions were developed with African or African American culture, history and values in mind by including Afrocentric principles and values in curricula (Gordon et al. 2009; Utsey et al. 2003; Washington et al. 2006; Wyatt 2009). Further, some researchers intentionally utilized a group mentoring model, rather than one-on-one, because researchers argue that it may be more culturally congruent with African American culture (Utsey et al. 2003). In support of this idea, research suggests that group mentoring promotes brotherhood, belonging, and closer mentoring relationships among boys of color (Jackson et al. 2014; Sánchez et al. 2016). However, it is unknown whether including these culturally specific modifications to mentoring programs makes mentoring more effective for Black boys compared to mentoring programs that do not make these adaptations.

Another way in which researchers considered the role of racial and cultural processes in mentoring relationships was by examining the role of culturally specific risk factors as well as adaptive coping processes, as suggested by Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (Spencer 1995). For instance, Cooper et al. (2013) found that the presence of natural mentoring relationships buffered the negative effects of experiences of racial discrimination on school suspensions and school engagement. An important adaptive coping process for youth of color is racial and ethnic identity (Neblett et al. 2012), and two mentoring studies found support for the positive role of mentoring in Black boys' racial identity (Gordon et al. 2009; Hurd et al. 2012). Hurd et al. (2012) further found that the presence of a natural mentor indirectly predicted educational attainment via racial pride and the belief that school was important for future success.

These studies have implications for the importance of considering how mentoring programs can be used to promote Black boys' racial identity and as a tool to lessen the negative impact of racial discrimination in their lives.

An important finding in this literature review is that youth characteristics interact with mentor characteristics. An experimental study of African American high school students' perceptions of adult mentors suggest that adolescents' ethnic identity interacts with how they perceive White versus African American mentors (Linnehan et al. 2005); specifically, those with low ethnic identity rated Black mentors lower than students with higher ethnic identity. These lower ratings could be due to negative stereotypes that the low ethnic identity students had about their own racial group. Another youth characteristic that interacts with mentor characteristics is cultural mistrust toward Whites (Grant-Thompson and Atkinson 1997). The previous studies were not specifically conducted with Black boys, but the findings suggest that their racial/ethnic identity and cultural mistrust are important considerations in mentoring. For example, if a Black mentee enters a mentoring program with a low racial/ethnic identity, then it would behoove program staff to focus on improving the youth's racial/ethnic identity given the positive outcomes associated with this developmental process (Neblett et al. 2012).

Limitations of Research

The evidence in support of the benefits of mentoring for Black boys is, at present, tentative and preliminary because of the limitations in the rigor of the research reviewed. Of the studies on formal mentoring programs, only one used an experimental design in which participants were randomly assigned to the mentoring program versus a control group. Specifically, Clark et al. (2005) randomly assigned classrooms to the intervention or a standard health curriculum. None of the studies randomly assigned individual boys to a mentoring program or comparison group. A few studies used a quasi-experimental design (e.g., BEMI mentoring program, *Project 2000, Inc*), in which there was an intervention and comparison group, but participants were not randomly assigned to the group. Hence, the groups might have differed in other ways beyond participation in the mentoring program. Further, a couple studies (e.g., Holland 1996) utilized only a post-test design without controlling for previous outcome data and thus it was difficult to know whether any differences between the intervention and control group might have already been present at the beginning of the mentoring program. Other studies descriptively examined self-report GPAs over time without testing for differences over time (e.g., Wyatt 2009). Some of the studies also had small sample sizes, which limited the generalizability of findings. More rigorous evaluations of mentoring programs

targeting Black boys should be conducted to better understand whether mentoring is effective for this population.

There were also limitations in the studies of informal mentoring relationships of Black boys, such as the use of cross-sectional data (Cooper et al. 2013; Culyba et al. 2016), which limits the interpretation about the causal direction of the association between mentoring and outcomes. However, researchers included appropriate control variables (e.g., age, social class, grades, stressors) to better interpret findings in those cross-sectional studies.

Future Directions for Research and Intervention

This literature review points to many directions for future research. It is suggested that future investigators examine the suitability of mentoring interventions for Black boys by comparing the effectiveness of mentoring for this group compared to other racial/ethnic groups, and if so, what accounts for those differences. Furthermore, although some of the studies included in this review were about mentoring programs that were culturally tailored toward Black youth generally or Black boys specifically, it would be helpful to test whether making cultural modifications increase the effectiveness of these programs for Black boys. Recent work suggests the value of cultural responsiveness in interventions for Black youth (Jones and Neblett 2016), and various meta-analyses have been conducted to investigate whether culturally tailored psychotherapeutic interventions are more effective for youth of color compared to standard interventions, but they yielded mixed results (Huey et al. 2014). This type of meta-analysis for mentoring interventions would be helpful. Similarly, mentoring researchers should investigate whether Afrocentric mentoring programs are more effective in promoting positive outcomes in Black boys compared to traditional mentoring programs. Although researchers suggest that group mentoring approaches may be more culturally consistent with African American culture (Utsey et al. 2003), research is needed to assess whether group versus one-on-one mentoring approaches are more effective for Black boys.

Furthermore, it would be helpful to examine whether deep-structure versus surface-structure adaptations to mentoring are sufficient to produce positive outcomes in Black boys. Surface structure encompasses aspects of interventions that involve matching program materials and messages and/or vehicles and settings for intervention delivery to the target population's characteristics (Resnicow et al. 2000). This may include using language, people, places, and food of the target group. The practice of matching Black boys to Black mentors is an example of a surface structure adaptation, and as mentioned earlier, most of the mentoring programs included in this review exclusively recruited African Americans as mentors. Other examples of surface-structure adaptations

are depictions of Black youth in program materials (e.g., training curriculum for mentors) and hiring staff members who are from the same community as mentees. Deep structure involves adaptations that incorporate the cultural, psychological, social, environmental and historical factors that influence the behaviors of the target group (Resnicow et al. 2000). Examples are training and supporting mentors in the use of messages and activities that are directed toward reducing Black boys' vulnerability to the harmful effects of stereotype threat (e.g., Good et al. 2003) as well as negative stereotypes in general (e.g., hypermasculinity), and similarly, using mentor training and staff-facilitated mentor-youth activities to support mentors in exploring masculinity, racial and gender identity and coping with experiences of racial discrimination with Black boys. Programs that are designed to incorporate values or traditions (e.g., Gordon et al. 2009; Watson et al. 2015) of the cultures of targeted Black boys would also be reflective of deep structure adaptation. An assumption is that deep structure adaptations, such as Afrocentric mentoring programs, would be more beneficial to Black boys compared to surface-structure adaptations, such as programs that simply match Black boys to Black mentors. However, this idea needs to be tested.

The mentoring field has produced mixed results with regard to the effects of cross- versus same-race mentors on youth outcomes (Sánchez and Colón 2005), but researchers have yet to examine whether matching Black boys to Black versus non-Black mentors makes a difference in their mentoring relationships or youth outcomes. We suggest that the field conduct studies in which Black boys are randomly assigned to Black versus non-Black mentors to determine whether race matters in these relationships. The similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne 1971) and Garraway and Pistrand's (2010) study of African-Caribbean boys and their mentors suggest that the cultural similarities of Black mentors and boys would yield understanding and higher quality mentoring relationships, and in turn, more positive youth outcomes. Beyond investigating the youth outcomes of cross- versus same-race relationships, researchers should examine which cultural processes matter in cross- versus same-race relationships. For example, do boys' cultural mistrust toward non-Black mentors, or White mentors specifically, serve as a barrier in developing high quality mentoring relationships? Or does cultural mistrust serve more as a relationship barrier for boys who have experienced racial discrimination? Does the racial/ethnic identity of Black male mentees matter in their perceptions of their Black/non-Black mentor? The answers to these questions have implications for the types of mentors who are matched with Black boys, mentor training curriculum content, and how much support and supervision is provided in mentoring relationships.

A literature review about interventions targeting boys of color and utilizing a positive youth development framework

suggested that interventions should be tailored toward boys' gender (Gaylord-Harden et al. 2017). Some programs (e.g., Utsey et al. 2003) took a more intersectional approach by incorporating messaging and curricula about what it means to be a Black male in U.S. society, and thus, research is needed on whether both cultural and gender tailoring makes mentoring programs more effective for Black boys. Further, given the positive outcomes of a healthy racial/ethnic identity for youth of color (Neblett et al. 2012), it is incumbent for mentoring programs to promote a positive racial and gender identity among Black boys. More research also needs to be conducted to examine the role of mentoring in the development of Black boys' racial identity. We did not review any mentoring studies that considered intersectionality in other ways besides race and gender. That is, the mentoring programs examined in this paper did not mention other forms of oppression and identity that may intersect with race, such as sexuality or disability. It is important to acknowledge the complexity of experiences of Black boys with multiple identities and that they "potentially can be marginalized not only on the basis of their racial and class identities but also on the basis of and in combination with other identities" (Chambers and McCready 2011, p. 1373). A more holistic approach attending to the various identities and within-group diversity among Black boys would better meet their needs and promote their positive development.

Given Black boys' experiences with racism in the U.S. and how they are negatively treated by various institutions and adults (e.g., law enforcement, criminal justice system, school personnel), it is important to design mentoring interventions that help Black boys process these unique race/gendered experiences as well as teach them skills to effectively cope with these stressors. Further, a critical mentoring approach (Weiston-Serdan 2017) would be beneficial in working with Black boys to help them analyze and address the systemic and contextual forms of oppression that they experience in their everyday lives rather than taking a deficit approach that might only focus on skills training, which may translate to the idea that they are to blame for their current problems. Only focusing on Black boys' skill-sets might inadvertently teach them that there is something fundamentally wrong with who they are as human beings and that they simply need to learn how to cope better. In fact, recent longitudinal research has revealed that although resilient low-income Black youth might show positive developmental outcomes, such as high aspirations, investment in education and unwavering persistence, these same youth show more negative physical health outcomes as adults (Brody et al. 2016). Thus, at what cost should mentoring interventions solely focus on teaching Black boys to be persistent and resilient in the face of system oppressions (Sánchez 2017)? A critical mentoring approach (Weiston-Serdan 2017) requires that

mentors and staff collaborate with Black boys in analyzing and addressing these systemic forces that are contributing to the problems that Black boys face in the U.S. Hall's (2015) critical pedagogy approach to the *Young Men for Change* mentoring program is consistent with the critical mentoring approach, and more research is needed on whether these critical mentoring approaches produce positive outcomes in Black boys and how these outcomes compare to traditional mentoring programs.

The findings from this literature review also have implications for mentor training. Given research showing the benefits of training mentors on using messages and activities specifically directed toward changing African-American and Latina/o youth's beliefs about intelligence (Good et al. 2003), it would be valuable to research whether these types of trainings reduce the academic achievement gap experienced by Black boys specifically. Further, Yeager et al.'s (2014) research on White teachers' wise feedback suggests that mentoring programs that are academically focused could train their mentors on how to provide wise feedback in order to improve Black boys' academic outcomes. These types of interventions could help to combat the stereotype threat messages that Black boys experience. Furthermore, mentors should be trained on the unique stressors and experiences of Black boys as well as the historical and current systematic ways in which our society limits their opportunities and dehumanizes them. This type of training would enable mentors to better understand and support Black boys. We suggest that researchers investigate whether these types of trainings promote higher quality relationships between mentors and Black boys, and in turn have more positive outcomes in mentees.

Finally, this literature review has implications for theory. Many of the theories used in the investigations reviewed were related to the outcomes or predictors of the studies or to the approach taken in the intervention. A few studies drew from Rhodes' (2005) youth mentoring model. We suggest that future researchers use youth mentoring frameworks in combination with Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (Spencer and Tinsley 2008) because this developmental theory takes into account the lived experiences of youth of color and acknowledges the systemic and structural forces that influence their healthy development as well as their adaptive coping behaviors specifically. Alternatively, future researchers may develop a theory that takes into consideration how race, gender and other culturally specific and contextual factors influences Black boys' mentoring experiences and ultimately their developmental outcomes. These theories could guide future research questions about the mechanisms of change regarding how mentoring influences boys' outcomes and thus enhance our ability as researchers to properly evaluate mentoring interventions targeting Black boys.

Conclusion

Further research is needed to better understand the effectiveness and applicability of mentoring to Black boys specifically. Given the failures of various institutions and systems in adequately meeting the needs of Black boys and the dominant, deficit narrative in our society about Black boys, mentoring may be one of the various forms of intervention that could help to alleviate some of the environmental challenges facing this population. Positive youth development researchers discuss that the narrative about boys of color in U.S. society and in the literature is dominated by a deficit or problem perspective (Gaylord-Harden et al. 2017; Rowley et al. 2014). Mentoring has the potential to change this narrative and many researchers and practitioners who have designed and implemented mentoring programs or studied mentoring among Black youth take into consideration their culture, strengths and challenges. Although this literature review shows some benefits of mentoring for Black boys, there were few studies and the rigor of this research literature was limited. We call on researchers to conduct investigations of mentoring for this population, to specifically examine the racial, cultural, and contextual factors that may influence the effect of mentoring on boys' outcomes and to study culturally specific outcomes.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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