

2021

## Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Mentoring Young Black Males' Development

Johnny Anthony Beckwith  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Johnny Anthony Beckwith

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Walden University  
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Abstract

Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Mentoring Young Black Males'

Development

by

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MA, Christian Ministry, Liberty University, 2013

M.S., Criminal Justice Administration, Chaminade University, 1996

BS, Justice and Public Safety (Pre-Law), Auburn University, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

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## Abstract

Black Baptist church leaders are potential male role models for their communities, however there is no straightforward guide on how to optimally support the adolescent, Black male population with life skills development. The research question that guided this generic qualitative study addressed the perceptions of male, Black, Baptist church leaders regarding their role as a support for the development of life skills for the adolescent, Black male. Thirteen, Black, male, Baptist Church leaders from the southeast United States participated in semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Their responses were analyzed thematically, resulting in the identification of four emergent themes: (a) conceptualizing being role models to Black males, (b) the importance of their interpersonal relationships with Black males, (c) their roles representing social responsibility for Black males, and (d) the value of investing in the future of Black males. Participants expressed a shared desire to be intentionally active in adolescent, Black males' lives. The study results promote positive social change by illustrating the expressed need to expand Black, male, Baptist Church leaders' structured involvement with adolescent, Black males through active participation as support roles aiding in the development of life skills for adolescent, Black males.

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| List of Tables.....                        | v  |
| List of Figures .....                      | vi |
| Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study ..... | 1  |
| Introduction .....                         | 1  |
| Background .....                           | 3  |
| Problem Statement.....                     | 5  |
| Purpose of the Study .....                 | 6  |
| Research Question .....                    | 6  |
| Theoretical Foundation .....               | 7  |
| Nature of the Study .....                  | 8  |
| Definitions.....                           | 10 |
| Assumptions .....                          | 11 |
| Scope and Delimitations .....              | 12 |
| Limitations .....                          | 12 |
| Significance.....                          | 13 |
| Summary .....                              | 15 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....         | 16 |
| Introduction.....                          | 16 |
| Literature Search Strategy.....            | 16 |
| Theoretical Foundation .....               | 17 |
| ZPD .....                                  | 25 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Post-Vygotskian Studies.....  | 25 |
| Social Support for Interaction.....                                 | 25 |
| Black Baptist Church as a Social Support Institution.....           | 25 |
| Black Male Experience.....  | 29 |
| Adolescence Stage of Human Development.....                         | 32 |
| Black Adolescent Male Development.....                              | 33 |
| Mentoring.....  | 35 |
| Summary.....  | 37 |
| Chapter 3: Research Method.....                                     | 39 |
| Introduction.....   | 39 |
| Research Design and Rationale.....                                  | 39 |
| Role of the Researcher.....   | 40 |
| Methodology.....  | 41 |
| Participant Selection Strategy.....                                 | 41 |
| Instrumentation.....  | 43 |
| Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection..... | 43 |
| Data Collection.....  | 44 |
| Data Analysis Plan.....   | 46 |
| Issues of Trustworthiness.....                                      | 47 |
| Ethical Procedures.....   | 48 |
| Summary.....  | 50 |
| Chapter 4: Results.....   | 51 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction .....  | 51  |
| Research Setting .....  | 51  |
| Demographics.....   | 52  |
| Data Collection .....   | 52  |
| Data Analysis .....   | 54  |
| Evidence of Trustworthiness .....                             | 56  |
| Credibility.....  | 56  |
| Transferability.....  | 57  |
| Dependability.....  | 58  |
| Confirmability.....   | 59  |
| Results .....   | 59  |
| Summary .....   | 74  |
| Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations ..... | 76  |
| Introduction .....  | 76  |
| Interpretation of Findings.....                               | 76  |
| Limitations of the Study.....                                 | 84  |
| Recommendations.....  | 86  |
| Implications .....  | 88  |
| Conclusion.....   | 89  |
| References .....  | 92  |
| Appendix A Partner organization Pastor Letter.....            | 105 |
| Appendix B Letter of Recruitment.....                         | 106 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Appendix C Study Flyer.....                        | 107 |
| Appendix D Interview Protocol .....                | 108 |
| Appendix E Guideline Questions for Interviews..... | 109 |
| Appendix F Adult Informed Consent.....             | 111 |

List of Tables

Table 1. Emerging Coded Cluster Frequency .....61

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Interview Question Categorization.....60

Figure 2. Emerging Themes Coding Model .....62

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Goings (2015) found that some Black males face challenges and obstacles that affect their life skills development during the adolescent development stage. These challenges and obstacles include but are not limited to: not obtaining a high school diploma, difficulty finding employment, involvement in criminal activity, substance abuse, and being the victims of violence (Goings, 2015; Jordan & Wilson, 2017; Reeves et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

Adolescence is a period of life that encompasses specific developmental needs, and adolescence is also a time in which an individual develops skills and knowledge, such as learning how to manage their emotions and relationships as well as acquire the essential abilities needed in adulthood (Smith et al., 2019).

Adolescence is the stage for foundational learning associated with distinct cognitive maturation changes that can affect development and the second period of rapid growth (Smith et al., 2019). Wilson et al. (2016) argued that voids in mastering necessary life skills in a young person's life cause disruptions in their life skills development. They emphasized that this gap may ultimately contribute to a young person's participation in criminal behavior, delinquency, premature sexuality, low educational achievement, and poverty. Goings (2015) concluded that the challenges experienced by Black males could hinder healthy life skills development and their ability to use basic necessary life skills. In conjunction with these challenges, a vital aspect of life skills development represented in social support is often missing from some Black, adolescent males' lives (Lieberman, 2013; Lozada et al., 2016).

Hodges et al. (2016) posited those social encounters with respected people in an individual's immediate circle, which often includes parents, grandparents, other family members, and community members such as church group members, might influence life skills development. These social support connections can significantly impact an individual's overall life skills development and are a critical factor in developing an individual's behavior, being one of the primary influencers of human behavior throughout a person's life (Lieberman, 2013; Lozada et al., 2016). A support relationship is critical because it is an investment in adolescence as a period of rapid growth, learning, adaptation, and formational life skills development (Hodges et al., 2016).

Hodges et al. (2016) identified the church as a community institution where social support relationships can develop and strengthen in a positive environment. For this study, the Black Baptist Church was the primary focus group, and male church leaders' perceptions of their mentoring role in adolescent, Black males' life skills development were specifically explored to determine the impact of these social interactions on adolescent, Black males' growth. There is evidence in the academic literature showing the church as an institution that supports the Black community socially and civilly; however, I could not find any academic research on how this influence may contribute to adolescent, Black males' social skill development (see Givens et al., 2016). Chapter 1 contains the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, and an explanation of the need for additional research.

## Background

During adolescence, environmental and biological changes promote new social encounters as adolescents develop awareness and a sense of self, and the individual is socially salient to influences, stimuli, and information (Tan et al., 2018). Goings (2015) argued that addressing the deficiency in life skills development can limit some Black males' ability to successfully identify their employment opportunities, higher learning opportunities, and resources to integrate into society's social structure. Life skills development research must include the exploration of Black men's successes at various points in their lives. Collins and Perry (2015) and Hope et al. (2017) discussed that Black Baptist Church leaders could serve as a catalyst for adolescent, Black males' life skills development and the expansion of adolescent, Black males' critical life skills to overcome obstacles or barriers in life. I conducted this study to provide insights into this social concern by exploring Black, male, Baptist Church leaders' perceptions concerning adolescent, Black males' life skills development (see Collins & Perry, 2015; Hope et al., 2017). This study bridges the knowledge gap regarding male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perspectives of their role in adolescent, Black males' life skills development.

Historically, the Black Baptist Church is an institution that has provided support for Black communities in various ways, including support for the spiritual, emotional, financial, social, civic growth, and developmental needs of congregants (Hodges et al., 2016). Collins and Perry (2015) identified many historical, Black Baptist church leaders who assumed prominent roles in the political and social forefront, such as Reverend (Dr.) Martin Luther King Jr., Jessie Jackson, and others. These Black Baptist Church leaders

stepped forward to address the Black community's social conditions as a whole on the local and national levels (Fallin, 2017).

Jordan and Wilson (2017) suggested the need for increased support from Black churches as collaborative partnerships with other community members to address the obstacles Black men face as they transition to adulthood. The authors discussed the concept of prophetic activism as Black Baptist Church members and leadership taking on a mentoring role to promote life skills development and facilitate financial growth and success, specifically among Black males (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Prophetic activism refers to church activities that extend beyond a church's walls for the benefit of the surrounding Black communities and a means to facilitate Black economic and political empowerment (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). In addition, the presence of mentors could aid adolescent, Black males with social and life skill development by guiding them on applying life skills (Jordan & Wilson, 2017).

Baptist Church leaders are influential members of some Black communities (Hodges et al., 2016). Baptist church leaders' influence in the Black communities has been a truism for generations. As an institution, the Black Baptist Church is a source for spiritual development and often the impetus in supporting social change outside of the Church (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Hodges et al. (2016) cataloged some of the Baptist Church leaders' support to the community in the 19th and early 20th centuries; however, they did not explore or capture Baptist Church leaders' role in supporting adolescent, Black males' life skills development. In conjunction with the challenges mentioned above, a vital aspect of life skills development and social connections are often missing

from some Black, adolescent males' lives and is a human need (Chapman et al., 2017; Lieberman, 2013).

### **Problem Statement**

In this study, I explored the problem of there being no straightforward guide on how to best support the adolescent, Black, male population in their life skills development. I examined the community-member, nonparental relationship role that the Black, male, Baptist Church leaders represent. Researchers have identified the role of supportive, nonparental adults during the adolescent stage as an asset for life skills development (Arbeit et al., 2019). Along with the cognitive, emotional, and social changes that occur during adolescence, empirical evidence demonstrates that youth benefit from forming relationships with nonparental adults (Arbeit et al., 2019). These relationships can aid in normative life skills development during this transitional time, and the effect of these supportive relationships offers resources that peers and parents are unable to provide.

Although studies have been conducted to evaluate the importance of supportive relationships, many researchers have only considered relationships such as those with teachers and relatives (Smith et al., 2019). I have not found literature that explored life skills development support for adolescent, Black males or the role of mentorship from leaders available through the Black Church. Hodges et al. (2016) discussed the Black Church's historical role within the Black community, identifying it as a place where individuals interacted; developed social relationships; and, at times, gathered for educational purposes. As a critical component of the community, the Black Church has



experienced a shift in participation and community involvement that has reshaped participation (Barber, 2015). Barber (2015) concluded that the Black Baptist Church could be an active participant in the life of adolescent, Black males as a source of nonparental support and a pillar of the community. In this study, I focused on the perceptions of male, Black Baptist Church leaders concerning their role as support for adolescent, Black males' life skills development (see Goings, 2015; Hodges et al., 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and highlight the experiences of male, Black Baptist Church leaders regarding their role and responsibilities providing support for the life skills development of adolescent, Black males (see Lozada et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2014). Additionally, I sought to understand and document male, Black Baptist church leaders' perspectives as nonparental adults from a virtual, faith-based, community environment in a southeastern state regarding their roles in male, Black adolescents' life skills development (see Goings, 2015). The findings of this study will provide information to help form a guideline to inform the Black Baptist Church and other religious communities' leadership to participate as relational support during the adolescent development period for Black males.

### **Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: How do male, Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their roles in mentoring the development of adolescent, Black males' life skills?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Vygotsky's theory concerning the role of social organizations and culture in terms of higher psychological development served as the theoretical foundation of this study. In the theory, Vygotsky maintained that social determinants in the development process render an individual inseparable from their environment. Therefore, this form of learning focuses not on the individual's internal conflict, but memory and higher functions ascertained through social and cultural interactions. Wertsch (1998) suggested that this is a critical contributive role of culture and social organizations and that they influence higher psychological processes.

Vygotsky (1978) maintained that the individual is inseparable from the society where they live, which transmits to the particular forms of conduct and organization of knowledge that the subject has to internalize; therefore, the individual's development occurs in their environment. In these social processes, individuals access the cultural world through social interactions (such as those that occur in support relationships) and carry out actions where they learn abilities that afford them the skills to perform activities they could not achieve previously. Therefore, external influences allow the individual to develop and then proceed to an internal state of adopting those skills (Wertsch, 1998). Along with this theory on the acquisition of higher mental function, Vygotsky also developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this concept, Vygotsky discussed the reliance of the development process on the existence of social resources. For example, when an individual is involved in a collaborative activity within specific social environments, it creates the ZPD. Therefore, like the other higher

psychological functions, the ZPD can only emerge from an individual's social relationships (Wertsch, 1998).

Vygotsky's (1978) explanation of how important interacting with a more mature person is to a maturing individual during their development process provided the foundation for the focus of this study. Vygotsky identified that an older person is a critical component of an individual's ability to achieve higher mental functions. As community members who meet the criteria of older, mature mentors, Black Church leaders may provide the part of filling in the ZPD as described by Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, I explored how Black Baptist Church leaders perceive themselves concerning adolescent, Black males' development of life skills.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a generic qualitative design to guide this research and a purposeful sampling method to locate participants from local Black Baptist churches in a southeastern state. The qualitative methodology was most suited for this study because the natural narrative data collected using this approach allowed for participating leaders to describe their perceptions and experiences in researcher-driven interviews.

Upon receiving Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study, I contacted a local Black Baptist Church in the identified region to explain the study and request assistance in recruiting volunteer participants. Reaching data saturation was used to determine the appropriate number of interviews to be conducted to address the research question adequately. Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially defined data saturation as "the point at which no additional data is being found whereby

the researcher can develop properties of the category (p. 61). This definition was designed for grounded theory analysis, while in this study I used a general thematic analysis approach; therefore, van Rijnsoever's definition of data saturation was used as a guide for this study. van Rijnsoever (2019) stated that data saturation is reached when no new incoming data produces information to address the research question. After conducting the initial interviews, I found that data saturation was reached at 13 interviews. All participants were asked to consent to individual, recorded interviews (with an estimated length of 60 to 90 minutes). As the sole investigator, I performed the data collection and analysis, searching for patterns and themes. I collected and analyzed the descriptive, nonstatistical data to answer the research question.

For this study, I took the philosophical approach of constructivism (see Crotty, 1998). I based this approach on understanding social processes in their natural context and exploring the meanings of social interactions for those involved while understanding that different people construct meaning in different ways, even when experiencing the same events and performing similar tasks or roles (see Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) made the following assumptions about constructivism that were relevant to the instrumentation of this study: (a) qualitative researchers use open-ended questions because human beings construct meaning as they engage with their community, environment, and society, thereby allowing the participants the ability to share their views; (b) historical and social perspectives influence human beings as they engage with their environment; and (c) social interaction represents the basis of meaning that arises out of the exchange within a community.

Lastly, no theory explained what happens in the mind of a male, Black Baptist church leader, so I rejected a grounded theory design since this approach would differ in the manner of data collection and would focus on an emerging idea rather than the perceptions of the participants (see Chun Tie et al., 2019). I employed semi structured interviews using open-ended questions as the qualitative data collection method for this research study, aligning it with the constructivist philosophical approach to social research. Other qualitative designs, such as phenomenology, case studies, ethnography, and grounded theory research, did not align with the research question or fit the intended sample of this study. In this study, I relied on the guided reflections of the experiences that unfolded during the participants' interviews, in keeping with the procedures outlined by Kallio et al. (2016). Thematic analysis was used as the data analysis process, in which the participants' responses were analyzed for patterns and themes (see Braun & Clarke, 2019).

### **Definitions**

*Critical life skills:* Psychosocial abilities for desirable and adaptive behaviors to allow individuals to meet everyday life challenges (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2003).

*Mentoring:* A type of social capital that aids the mentee in developing the skills and attitudes necessary to succeed in school and adult life (Stanton-Salazar, 2016).

*Prophetic activism:* Church activities that extend beyond a church's walls to benefit Black communities and facilitate Black's economic and political empowerment (Jordan & Wilson, 2017).

*Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*: The zone that defines functions that have not matured yet (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions affected this qualitative research study. First, I assumed and expected that the participants would be willing to participate in both the interview and transcript review. I also assumed that the participants would feel comfortable sharing truthfully and honestly when responding to interview questions without concern about any judgment. The trustworthiness and results of the study were dependent upon the participants' transparency, honesty, and truthfulness in their answers during the interview as part of the data collection process (see Korstjens & Moser, 2019). Another assumption was that the target population of male, Black Baptist leaders was an appropriate sample representation of the Black Baptist Church. It was also assumed that the participants would be transparent about their perceptions about the social development of male, Black adolescents. These assumptions were necessary for the study to produce a credible report on the findings.

When using qualitative, semi structured interviews as the sole method of data collection, the data collected reflects the participants' experiences, realities, and assigned definitions. During data analysis, I explored their responses to determine how the participants' experiences, realities, and definitions might be informed by discourses, assumptions, or ideas that exist in wider society (see Braun & Clarke, 2019). Since I am a novice researcher and a potential weakness for this study, I sought guidance and oversight from my faculty committee members to address potential study weaknesses.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In Chapter 2, I present the literature review that contains a discussion about human development and its relationship with social support. There was a lack of previous studies focused on male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions of their role in developing life skills for adolescent, Black males. To narrow the scope and define the discussion boundaries to this research focus, I identified adolescences for the male, Black adolescents' life skills development stage while using the environmental, historical, and societal experiences as contexts that affect this developmental stage. The study only included Black males who were current leaders in a Black Baptist Church. Since the respondent pool and participants only have male, Baptist Church leaders, using a larger sample, including nonmale leaders and congregants, could give additional insights into the research question with their perspectives.

### **Limitations**

The weaknesses of this study included threats to credibility. I was reliant upon participants' responses during a single interview and their review of the interview transcripts. The research study was susceptible to researcher bias because I am a Black male and a participating Baptist Church member. Therefore, threats to credibility included substantive and ethical validation (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Maxwell, 2015). My use of a general qualitative approach helped provide credibility for the research design and method utilizing the data collected from the participants' data and not through the researcher.

To reduce the potential effect of researcher bias, I used the process of bracketing, which is discussed further in Chapter 3. The scope of this study did not consider activities and strategies to help Black, male adolescents identify or receive existing mentoring and resources they have in their lives. Therefore, the transferability of the findings is only applicable for active, male Black Baptist Church leaders and adolescent, Black males (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to replicate this study and confirm the findings, future research would have to utilize the same participant population (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

An additional limitation of the study could be the transferability and credibility of the data collection process. Information obtained during the interviews depended primarily on the interviewees. The participants' willingness to share through their story was limited to their perspectives and experiences; however, the use of member checks helped establish credibility and ensured the correct interpretation of the participants' meaning assigned to their responses (see Korstjens & Moser, 2019). Thick description was used when looking at the ability to apply the participants' responses to other environments, such as different respondents or contexts (see Korstjens & Moser, 2019). Areas of the research that extend beyond the scope of this study included the perceptions of other faith-based organizations, non-leaders versus leaders, and males versus females.

### **Significance**

The significance of this research study is that it can serve as a tool for the Black Baptist Church and community leadership by providing information to help develop faith-based organizations' guidelines to participate as relational support during the



adolescent development period. My interest in conducting this qualitative study arose from the My Brother's Keeper Initiative launched by former President Barack Obama. This initiative's vision was to unite communities, foundations, and organizations (such as churches) to help connect adolescent, Black males to support networks (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In 2014, President Obama commissioned a group of individuals to research with a focus on the context, opportunities, and challenges in the lives of boys and young men of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This initiative was entitled the My Brother's Keeper Task Force and in the effort to accomplish its appointed task, the task force reviewed statistics, identified research and government programs and policies, and conducted observations to shape their perspectives and assist in planning a path forward in the form of recommendations. The Task Force found that Black, male research participants internalized parts of the negative narrative that resulted in them feeling ashamed or fearful of other young men of color as a critical barrier or obstacle that support the disconnection between adolescent men of color and society (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

This study is significant because I explored how male, Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their contributions in supporting the life skills development of adolescent, Black males (see Jordan & Wilson, 2017). The findings of this study can potentially positively impact and help Black Baptist Church leaders understand their potential impact on adolescent, Black males' lives. The study can add to the body of work and catalyze conversations within the Black Baptist Church as an institution and

among the leadership on a local level about their role as support for Black, adolescent males' life skills development.

### **Summary**

This study relied upon the principles established in Vygotsky's (1986) cognitive development theory to understand the impact male, Black Baptist Church leaders have on adolescent, Black males' life skills development. While the need for Baptist Church leaders' involvement as support for adolescent, Black males in their life skills development is prevalent based on statistical data and research, the actual level of engagement and actions taken are relatively unknown (Barber, 2015; Jordan & Wilson, 2017). I have not found literature that focuses explicitly on church leaders' perceptions of their role and activities in adolescent, Black males' life skills development. I hope to fill a gap in knowledge with this research study.

Goings (2015) identified that some Black males face challenges and obstacles in their life skills development overall. In Chapter 2, I review various forms of the literature that discussed these challenges and barriers as well as their impact on life skills development (see Givens et al., 2016; Goings, 2015; Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Chapter 2 includes an introduction, the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, a review of the literature related to the fundamental concepts of this study, and a summary.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this current qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of male, Black Baptist Church leaders regarding their role in providing support for the life skills development of adolescent, Black males. The research adds to the literature in understanding Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions of adolescent, Black males; their experiences that create this perception; and the factors that could bolster adolescent, Black males' life skills development. Additionally, these findings provide Black Baptist Church leaders with resource information on how they can play a role in adolescent, Black males' life skills development.

While the literature on the historical challenges Black men face exists, few studies have explored life skills development challenges and the significance of support systems and institutions for adolescent, Black males (Goings, 2015; Jordan & Wilson, 2017). In Chapter 2, I present a review of the extant literature that discusses and applies Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. I also review historical and current literature related to adolescent, Black males' life skills development; the Black Baptist Church as a social support institution within the Black community and mentoring as a social support system.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The Walden University Library was the primary source for all articles for this literature review. I also used the Bureau of Criminal Justice Statistics database, which contains U.S. criminal justice statistics, information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government. The ERIC database was used to locate articles because it provides indexes to over a million journal

and non-journal authorities focused on education research, including work produced or funded by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Census Bureau, Howard University and, the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University. I also used the National Academies Press database, which contains hundreds of books on various behavioral and social sciences, education, industry, and labor areas. I accessed SAGE Journals online to identify specific journals, including current, peer-reviewed journal articles in psychology, political science, management, and education that supported the theoretical framework development and identified Black Baptist Church leaders' social role.

To search for relevant material, I used the following keywords: *African American Baptist Church Leaders' role, Life skills development theory, African American male life skills development, mentoring, and faith-based mentorship*. In addition, I accessed the SocINDEX using the keyword search terms of *sociology, criminal justice, gender studies, and family studies* based on Walden University Library's portal information. According to Walden University (2018), SocINDEX is the world's most comprehensive and highest quality sociology research database.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory contained principles that explain how learning and development are cognitively achieved within a social-historical context. These principles are known as the generic law of cultural development, the mind's cultural mediation, and completion. According to Vygotsky, the purpose of these principles is to develop higher mental functions. These higher mental functions

internalized through social relations result from interactions within a social-cultural environment (Wertsch, 1985, p. 66). A child's internal psyche changes throughout their life development process, and they gradually master social behaviors concerning the cultural model and templates that guide them in their development (Pathan et al., 2018).

These social and cultural forms of external rules are internalized by the individual and become a part of their thinking (Witte, 2005). This internalization transfers the responsibility of thought and behavior from the external other onto the individual (Pathan et al., 2018). Vygotsky's ideas of these conceptual tools include culturally constructed tools (beliefs and attitudes) and form sociocultural environments (Daniels, 1996).

According to Vygotskian thinking, the construction of knowledge in a person's mind does not originate there; instead, it is an element cocreated between a more and a less knowledgeable individual (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shabani, 2016). Thus, knowledge construction is a socio-cultural process (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shabani, 2016).

The following core concepts of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory served as the theoretical foundation of this study: (a) learning precedes development, (b) the basis of learning is social interaction; as a process of learning is developed through internalization and apprenticeship that transform skills and knowledge from the social to the cognitive plane, and (c) the ZPD is the primary activity space in which learning occurs (Walqui, 2006). Vygotsky (1987) stated that there is a clear distinction between biological and socio-historical development forms concerning growth, arguing that the biological maturations that unfold over time do not necessarily constitute development but rather lead to new social interaction and behavior. Hence, learning as a mediated process is

social in origin and results from an interaction between the child and more experienced members of society, including parents, teachers, elders, and peers (Vygotsky, 1978, 1995). The distinguishing concept of social-cultural theory is that higher forms of human mental activity are mediated (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that just as humans rely on tools and activities in the physical world, they use symbolic tools, signs, or culturally created artifacts to mediate their relationships with others. In Vygotsky's view, psychology's task is to understand the organization of human social and mental activity through culturally constructed artifacts and social relationships (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shabani, 2016). Vygotsky's psychological approach seeks to find the foundational principles of human culture by assigning cultural practices and symbols. These practices and symbols stem from the fact that cultural characteristics are the complexities of higher psychological functions (Witte, 2005).

Cultural tools is the evidence of human development and the capacity for individuals to internally reconstruct an external experience demonstrated in cultural forms of thinking into a social phenomenon (Pathan et al., 2018). This social phenomenon becomes a part of the individual psychological functioning. Hence, there is the implication that this process is one of construction and not imitation; it depends upon the presence of a cultural system represented and necessitates social interaction (Maring, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) stated that individuals interacting with each other are critical in developing knowledge.

The main component of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is that learning is a sociocultural process dependent upon interactions with others (Cherry, 2010). The learner would have a complete comprehension of the information through exposure and interaction to various thoughts and ideas. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is also focused on imitation in learning, wherein the learner duplicates another's actions (Cherry, 2010). Lastly, in the sociocultural theory, Vygotsky looked at the ZPD, defined as the difference between what a learner can do with and without help (Cherry, 2010). The theory holds that constant interactions can impact people simultaneously as they move through their community (Cherry, 2010). This type of learning varies with each culture, especially since different ethnicities possess different customs.

For the current study, I viewed individual development from the external social-cultural lens of male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions as participants in adolescent, Black males' life skills development. Here the socio-cultural concepts associated with development serving as the foundational focus were: "individual mental functions develop from specific social interactions" and "these interactions are retained within the human consciousness" (Eun, 2008, p. 135). Eun's (2008) explanation aligns with Vygotsky's theory in that acquiring higher mental function requires social interaction with a specific social-cultural environment. Related to the current study, the Black Baptist Church's social nature lends itself as a social-cultural environment that can serve as a place where Vygotsky's sociocultural theory would say learning and developing a higher mental function can reasonably occur.

**ZPD**

Vygotsky (1978) built upon the Piagetian (1959) idea of the child as an active learner; however, Vygotsky emphasized social interaction's role in learning and development. For Vygotsky (1978), adults and children are active participants in the child's development and learning process (Cole & Cole, 2001). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has primarily appeared in the academic classroom. In the classroom application concerning education, both the teacher and student are active participants in the child's learning process. In the teacher-student relationship, the teacher's intervention into the child's learning is necessary, with the quality of this interaction seen as crucial to the learning process (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017).

This social interaction aspect of the learning process is associated with social constructivism, emphasizing social interaction in development and learning (Smith et al., 2019). According to Vygotsky (1978), this type of quality learning occurs in the ZPD. The ZPD is the most crucial concept of Vygotskian theory and was initially used to emphasize psychological testing at school (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky stated that testing should be based not only on the current level of a child's achievements but also on the child's potential development, claiming that the actual level of development or independent ability does not sufficiently describe development.

The ZPD is an indicator of what the individual has already developed; therefore, an individual's assisted performance level indicates what a person can achieve in the future (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD for an individual is the distance between their actual and potential developmental level. This distance is



measured by assessing an individual's independent ability with the level of potential determined by interactions with a knowledgeable adult influence or collaboration with a more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky, a child's development is possible with the advice of a teacher, parent, or any peer. Therefore, in the areas in which an individual cannot function independently, they can acquire the ability through a relationship with a more knowledgeable person (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). According to the ZPD, an individual's independent developmental process is enhanced due to interactions with a more experienced person.

### **Post-Vygotskian Studies**

Vygotsky's work, published posthumously, has stimulated a wealth of research globally. Several, prominent, leading theoretical perspectives have developed from Vygotsky's work that all investigate cognition development in social, cultural, and historical contexts. For example, Rogoff (1998) developed the concept of cognitive apprenticeship and guided participation based on the idea of the ZPD, stating that adults assist children in their development. This assistance comes in the form of adult involvement in activities, helping the children structure their problem-solving skills and adapt their understanding to new situations (Rogoff, 1998). The situated cognition approach (Daniels, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991) views learning as engaging in problem solving through participation in ongoing, everyday activities (Moll & Greenberg, 1992). This approach aims at establishing cultural connections between what teachers and students do in classrooms and what students experience in the community. Finally, there is the concept of distributed cognition, which looks at the phenomenon of understanding

as extending beyond the individual (Daniels, 2001). Daniels (2001) explained that humans cannot reach their sense of individual abilities and achievements outside of the connections developed from the society in which they are immersed.

Activity theory applies the concept that development is a mediation process formed from human reaction and interaction with society (Daniels, 2001). Eun (2008, pp. 1396140) contended that Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive development theory differs from the existing approaches. With other views recognizing the process of social interaction as essential to development, Vygotsky posited those psychological functions are inherently social and that behavior or social interactions and consciousness in this context are aspects of a single system. From this perspective, the transformation of social action through internalization is complicated and prolonged and requires two or more people (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). When applying Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, a school setting exposes children to activities, classroom lessons, and specific instructional practices; this daily exposure to thinking based on experience changes to form what Eun termed as the "scientific" or "true" concepts. Therefore, I selected Vygotsky's theoretical understanding of cognitive development as the theoretical foundation for this study.

Vygotsky's theory of learning emphasizes socialization as a framework for thinking and development determined by the existing culture and reinforced by the interactions within the cultural context (Glassman, 2001). In this context, one can conclude that for Vygotsky, internalization through social relations stems from new or younger community members' socialization. Thus, these relationships teach the new or younger members the appropriate behaviors and mindsets (Glassman, 2001). With this

view of learning theory based on the emphasis of a given social structure, one can conclude that acting and thinking are prescribed by the existing culture and reinforced by specific cultural tools. (Glassman, 2001). Thus, in terms of Vygotsky's theory, this learned higher mental function reflects human activity's cultural system.

### **Social Support for Interaction**

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social-mediated process and learned through historically and socially constructed knowledge and activities. According to Veresv (2010), social relations are not factors but a very informal learning source. Learning, like many other human processes, is a relational endeavor (Gergen, 2009, pp. 48). ". . . [v]irtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationships. According to Vygotsky (1978), individual and life skills development occurs as culturally derived forms of social regulation and are internalized by the individual and transformed into new personal tools for thinking and acting in the world. Chapman et al. (2017) described the concept of cognitive development as involving a broad spectrum of social interactions.

Chapman et al. (2017) suggested that humans, wired to connect through social interaction, desire or drive to seek others to understand their thoughts, behaviors, and other human attributes are innate. Chapman et al. also identified through their research that as people connect or interact with others, they form the basis for personalities, values, judgment, and behavior. Chapman et al. suggested that the environment influences individual development and active participants, including family, peers, and

church members. This study explored male Black Baptist leaders' role in their perspectives on adolescent Black male life skills development requirements.

Social support for Black men was a variable identified that may account for individual differences in their life skills development (Kondrat et al., 2017). Social support for this study is defined as the presence and perceived availability of social resources that assist individuals during times of stress, growth, and development (Kondrat et al., 2017). The historical experiences of Black men can leave them with a sense that there are limited resources available, especially in an individual caring for them (Tough, 2015). The social support model purports that social support serves as a mediator to mitigate life experiences' detrimental impact, such as higher poverty levels and racial discrimination (Kondrat et al., 2017). Tough (2015) connected social support to better adjustment and Black males' psychological well-being (Tough, 2015). This connection supports the idea that social support can positively impact the relationship between psychological and life skills development.

### **Black Baptist Church as a Social Support Institution**

Buser and Buser (2014) argued that the church in the Black community played a significant role in addressing the community's social issues. Historical evidence within the Black community demonstrates church leaders' role inside and outside the church walls. In the pursuit of self-sufficiency, the Black community historically attempted to maintain a sense of dignity and pride by establishing separate institutions such as schools and churches (Buser & Buser, 2014). While Black schools afforded the Black community the chance to learn essential reading, writing, and mathematics skills, most

did not advance their people's minds or educate them to the level required to succeed in business or professional settings (Pendergrass, 2017). The Black Church, specifically the Baptist denomination, became the cornerstone of community activism to combat the lack of resources and opportunity drought that Black people encounter. Pendergrass (2017) identified the Black church's historical connection to the Black community. The Black Baptist church has many programs, initiatives, and support efforts to empower or assist congregants and community members overcome life struggles (Pendergrass, 2017). Hodges et al. (2016) argue that many missed opportunities to participate in adolescent Black males' life skills development by church leaders.

Hodges et al. (2016) explained that many adolescent Black males' needs are not being addressed or understood on an individual level. The Black Church's historical role for Pendergrass (2017) was prevalent during the Civil Rights era of the United States. The Black Church played a significant role in addressing racial discrimination in the United States. The church assisted the Black community in moving from marginalization, disenfranchisement, and other abuses in society. However, Pendergrass (2017) suggested that the challenges the church leaders will encounter in time are related to how they can influence adolescent Black males to support their efforts and identify their role in the Black community.

The church's role is interwoven in the Black experience's cultural setting, thereby having a traditional place in communal worship, collectivity, and mediating the Black people's journey in a broader social context (Taylor et al., 2014). For centuries, the Black Church has served as a central institution for the Black community by providing social,

economic, and communal support for communities in times of need. In addition, the Black Church served as a key leader in many social and political movements (Krause, 2016). Its influence was significant in the Black community, the family, and community structures (Brown et al., 2014; Owens et al., 2020). The Black Church extends into individuals' familial and cultural lives for the Black community, making its significance beyond its primary role as a religious institution. The church is instrumental in molding the community's attitudes, expectations, and social mores as a central institution in the Black community (Brown, 2014; Owens et al., 2020).

Barber (2015) identified the impact and influence of church leaders as a driving force for the social structure and expectations within Black communities. Although some Black churches historically have played a role in addressing social change within the Black community, Givens et al. (2016) suggested an identifiable deficiency. This deficiency concerns the Black male, and Givens et al. indicated a need to increase Black male-focused initiatives. Specifically, Givens et al. suggested that the Black Church should collaborate with stakeholders in the community to address adolescent Black males' needs.

Barber (2015) analyzed the Black Church's current role in the public sphere and argued it should fill a vacuum of social support within the Black community. In 2003, the Howard University Center for Urban Progress completed research for the Lutheran Church. It developed a plan to address Black males' social issues (The Howard University Center for Urban Progress, 2003). The Howard University Center for Urban Progress provided the Lutheran Church's leadership with a comprehensive report to

better understand Black males' experience to support their efforts to grow and develop (The Howard University Center for Urban Progress, 2003).

The Howard University Center for Urban Progress serves as an example for addressing the Black Church's role; however, Howard University Center for Urban Progress conducted no additional information or follow-up in the years following the report. Research addressing how faith-based programs can assist Black males is essential to help with internal and external conversations on supporting Baptist Church leaders' efforts as they continue to identify their mentoring role in helping adolescent Black males (Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

Jordan and Wilson (2017) discussed several methods of how a community can best support adolescent Black males' success through partnerships between families, churches, and public schools. Jordan and Wilson conducted a comparative case study of two churches, which revealed the church's role in educating and developing adolescent Black males. Their research defined this type of support as prophetic activism. Prophetic activism essentially is the active participation of church leaders as social support, such as mentorship within their community (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Prophetic activism refers to church-led activities that extend beyond a church's walls to benefit the Black community and be the impetus for economic and political empowerment (Jordan & Wilson, 2017).

Prophetic activism in the form of mentoring can add value to the Black community by supporting the needs of adolescent Black males (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Prophetic activism aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) premise of a more knowledgeable individual being an intricate part of a less mature individual's development process. In

prophetic activism, the church leadership will serve as the individual with a better understanding of life situations and increased knowledge, skills, and abilities to apply lessons learned (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Mentoring programs directly reflect the concept that an individual's higher mental functions/capability appears initially at a personal level or the inter-psychological plane, which develops from elementary functions such as attention, sensation, and perception. An individual continues to evolve from external stimulation and interaction, which allows them to move to the intra-psychological plane supported by others and the environment. Developing psychosocially through people's connections and cultural experiences enables an individual to transition between the planes. More importantly, it is the dialogue and the language exchanges that help everyone make sense of the environment around them (Wertsch, 1998).

### **Black Male Experience**

As a group, Black men experience high incarceration rates, violence, death, unemployment, and lower college graduation rates than men in other racial and ethnic groups (Phelps & Pager, 2016). Historically, Black males were at a disadvantage because of slavery, denial of voting rights, terrorism, hate crimes, and many other transgressions (Barber, 2015). According to the Census Bureau in 2015, the average non-Hispanic Black median household income was \$40,165 compared to \$65,845 for non-Hispanic white households. In 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 22.9% of non-Hispanic Blacks than 9.6% of non-Hispanic whites lived at the poverty level. In 2017, Blacks' unemployment rate was twice that of non-Hispanic whites (9.5% and 4.2%, respectively); 86.0% of non-Hispanic Blacks had earned at least a high school diploma, 92.9% of the



non-Hispanic white population. The Black community has endured a long history of abuse, degradation, and suppression from the days of slavery through Jim Crow laws and during current times (Barber, 2015). In addition, Barber (2015) discussed how the lack of church involvement, or being complacent, negatively impacts adolescent Black males, further exacerbating their suffering within society because they lack the influence of positive male figures (Phelps & Pager, 2016).

The growth of incarceration rates for Black males in the United States over the last 4 decades has spawned commentary and a growing body of scientific knowledge about its causes and the consequences for those imprisoned, their families, communities, and society on a grand scale (Phelps & Pager, 2016). High levels of incarceration have a devastating impact on adolescent Black males' life skills development (Phelps & Pager, 2016). Black Americans represented 27% of those arrested in 2016 in the United States—double their share of the total population (Fetig, 2018). The Black youth comprised 35% of all juvenile arrests in 2016 yet accounted for 15% of all U.S. children (Fetig, 2018).

The ability to successfully navigate social and economic barriers significantly affects Black men in finding employment, moving into higher education, or successfully integrating into the social structure. Historically, Black males' socio-demographic outlook has not been promising as this group experiences a high rate of unemployment, incarceration, and death along with low levels of economic mobility (The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006).

In 2006, the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a study that found Black men represented 14% of the total male population in the United States (The Washington

Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006). The Kaiser Family Foundation study also found that among the 4.5 million Black males, only 7.5% had graduated from college, 19.5% were unemployed (which was double that of all other ethnic groups), and 40% incarcerated (The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006). In 2011, a Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard study entitled "The Race and Recession Survey" found that Black men expressed higher stress and concern than their ethnic counterparts (The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011).

These concerns were related to Black males' encounters with violence, negative interactions with law enforcement, and high unemployment rates. The experiences mentioned above are perpetuated and experienced by adolescent Black males who, in turn, suffer in their development within the community because they lack the influence of positive male figures (Givens et al., 2016). Black males often face barriers that can impact their life skills development during the critical transition period from adolescence to adulthood (Givens et al., 2016). Black males persist through racial stereotypes, barriers to education, economic and political equality (Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

As a collective group, Black males encounter negative stereotypes pertaining to their manhood. Such stereotypes include social alienation, insecurity of identity, and a negative self-image (Williams & Deutsch, 2016). Most stereotypes are barriers that can lead to Black males' misunderstanding of their masculinity, public importance, and significance in the Black social and cultural context (Wade & Rochlen, 2013). The inability to attain the traditional masculine role has hindered Black males from realizing

the fundamental aspects of this power and privilege (Phelps & Pager, 2016). Social barriers persistence to the expression and achievement of masculinity has generally resulted in disadvantages for Black men.

These disadvantages have negatively contributed to Black men failing to master crucial life skills in childhood and adolescence and attribute to a society that has historically reduced the significance of Black men, which has made adolescent Black males' life skills development difficult. Goings (2015) argued that addressing the life skills development deficiency and limits placed on Black males' ability can help increase their employment opportunities, help them take advantage of higher learning opportunities, and successfully integrate into society's social structure. However, this must include research to explore Black men's successes at various points of their lives. Collins and Perry (2015) discussed that the Black Church leader could serve as a catalyst for adolescent Black males' life skills development and expand their abilities to overcome obstacles or barriers in life. Hence, this study may provide insight into this social concern by exploring Black, male Baptist Church leaders' perceptions concerning adolescent Black males' life skills development (Collins & Perry, 2015; Hope et al., 2017).

### **Adolescence Stage of Human Development**

Erickson (1968) identified the crisis identity versus role confusion stage for youth between 12 and 18 as a distinct developmental milestone. As summarized by the Tanner stages (Marshall & Tanner, 1970), adolescents' healthy biological development uses age

to indicate typical ages and adolescent stages. This indicator is primarily concerned with defining the differing levels of ability and tools.

Adolescent development is unlike other stages of development since, in this stage, there is a tendency to rely on role models (Erickson, 1968). There is academic literature in support of the fact that during the adolescence stage, young people seek out someone to have faith in, admire, and a reliable model they can depend upon for guidance and advice as they develop (Phelps & Pager, 2016). Tough (2012) conducted interviews with various economists, educators, psychologists, and neuroscientists during his research to show how children succeed and to demonstrate the importance of positive role models.

Tough (2012) offered a comprehensive discussion on how and why children fail. His research showed that for an individual to succeed in life, they must have help developing personal qualities through a host of support systems that offer life skills development which aids and directs their paths to successful social integration (Tough, 2012). This role model will help adolescents model value systems and experiences that adolescents will adopt in their life skills development. This growth and identification process is the foundation on which adolescents learn behavior, skills, values, other elements and interplays in their further transition to adult life.

### **Black Adolescent Male Development**

As mentioned in this chapter, Black males face challenges that affect their development; therefore, having the support, resources, and ability to navigate the development stages is critical. This development stage is significant because individuals will have to address a unique psychosocial crisis without the appropriate skills to overcome them. Optimally

this crisis is resolved before successfully navigating the next step. For Black, male youth, cultivating a pathway to adult competency is restricted by the challenges of navigating a social, political, and historical landscape grounded in systemic inequities and racism (Hughes et al., 2013).

Black youth's social and physical environments are often burdened with a host of inequities and disparities, create resource shortages in their neighborhoods and unequal conditions (Howard et al., 2012). Therefore, the Black youth must interpret the meaning of inequality and disparity, within the constraints of inequities and differences, in ways that do not harm the integrity of a positive sense of self, their cultural orientation, and beliefs about their future (Givens et al., 2016; Howard et al., 2012).

In development, Elmore and Gaylord-Harden (2013) identified additional socialization concerns and developmental circumstances that confront Black males during childhood and adolescence. They noted that the events directly influenced by race, ethnicity, and culture are a notable expansion of the traditional concepts associated with life skills development stages related to the adolescent stage (Elmore & Gaylord-Harden, 2013). In childhood, Black males operate in a society that presents contradictory messages about their identification. At the same time, society expects them to forge a healthy identification of self in the face of these social barriers (Goff et al., 2014).

Some Black males' inability to develop filtering and judging skills that navigate negative racial imagery often promotes a positive self-image. However, it impacts their development during the adolescent development stage (Goff et al., 2014). Research demonstrates that Black males face negative attitudes towards them which subsequently

places them at a developmental disadvantage (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014). Some Black youths have experienced discrimination; Fisher, et al. (2000) found that 75% of Black youths recounted harassment in a store. These perceptions of discrimination related to decreased self-esteem among Black youth (Okeke-Adeyanju et al., 2014). It is critical to promote a positive development process for adolescent Black males to identify a mechanism to counter the negative impact of stereotypes based on race and culture (Goff et al., 2014).

### **Mentoring**

Hodges et al. (2016) argued that positive social change in society needs to be an increased level of action from the community (family, faith-based institutions, and school systems) to eliminate the barriers and obstacles. Hodges et al. also found that education, employment, and health-related disparities continue to be prominent barriers and obstacles that affect Black men's overall life skills development. Hodges et al. also showed several initiatives in the Black Church that focus on life skills development, including working with governmental agencies, committees or councils, and other faith-based organizations to work collaboratively to effect social change in the Black community.

Givens et al. (2016) highlighted that faith-based mentoring programs offer participants a foundation for teaching and modeling values and life skills. Faith-based mentoring programs may involve intentional choices that favor religious tenets, teachings, and modeling. Faith-based approaches are mostly nonsectarian and rely on the mentors' principles, values, and experiences. Mentoring programs can act as a catalyst

that can aid in developing the participants. Mentoring case studies primarily focus on academic success and student attrition. Barbarin et al. (2019) found that mentoring relationships may affect student attrition. Research regarding faith-based mentoring for adolescent Black males' life skills development is limited; however, research on mentoring programs at professional and higher education levels exists (Barbarin et al., 2019).

Regarding the Black population, mentoring programs have been used since the 1970s in organizational settings as an affirmative action tool for recruitment (Barbarin et al., 2019). For example, Watson, et al. (2015) conducted research in Memphis that found a mentoring program with a culturally specific approach produced positive development among its Black adolescent male participants. In addition, there is comparative and experimental research about formal mentoring programs that demonstrates positive results; however, the limited study examines the benefit of mentoring programs on psycho-life skills development (Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

Positive nonfamilial interactions, like mentoring, have been found to help young people acquire psychosocial skills critical in adulthood (Washington et al., 2017). Adolescent Black males' cultural differences based upon ethnic and racial history influence the quality and access to mentoring relationships (Williams et al., 2014). This influence and cultural socialization and values play a significant part in how adolescent Black males relate to mentoring relationships (Williams et al., 2014). Considering the social barriers that Black men have faced historically in the United States, establishing a close relationship with adults can counter the lack of life skills development of these

youth. These relationships can encourage the positive effect of skills needed in adulthood (Williams et al., 2014).

Mentoring can help mitigate barriers that Black male youth face by providing psychological support from community members to meet their life skills development needs (Tough, 2015). Literature addressing mentoring programs for Black males suggests that they require unique cultural needs that prophetic activism programs can address (Williams & Deutsch, 2016). Historically, mentoring programs have been used in Black communities to address specific cultural needs (Givens et al., 2016).

The Baptist Church has produced many examples and positive Black role models, primarily civic leaders, activists, or other influential leaders who can guide the development of programs or policies to impact adolescent Black males (Taylor, 2016). Jordan and Wilson (2017) suggested identifying programs structured to address the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills. This study design explores the perceptions and activities of male Black Baptist Church leaders regarding their roles in providing support for the social skills development of adolescent Black males. Role models influence and cultural socialization and values play a significant part in how adolescent Black males relate to mentoring relationships (Williams et al., 2014).

### **Summary**

The study examined the perception of male Black Baptist Church leaders role as social support in adolescent Black males life skills development. Further exploration of male Black Baptist Church leaders role and influence in adolescent Black males life skills development is an area of research that needs further understanding. Williams and



Deutsch (2016) further discussed how the information could also be critical in supporting Black male education in developing essential life skills and providing meaningful interactions that instill social and moral development.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural development theory serves as the theoretical foundation to guide the study to understand better how Black Church leaders describe their mentoring roles in Black males' social and life skills development. Discussed in Chapter 2 where the history and background support the current study and an overview of literature examining the Black community's experience, the significance of the Black Baptist Church, and the relationship the church has with the Black community. Chapter 3 contains the methodology for this qualitative research and provides information related to the selected method, the study design, the process for selecting participants, the researcher's role, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions of their roles in supporting the life skills development of adolescent, Black males. The primary focus of this chapter is to present the design and methods used to conduct the study. In this chapter, I describe the research design, methodology, participants, and data collection procedures. I also explain the data analysis procedures, the addressed ethical considerations, and verification of the findings. There are five major topics addressed in this section: (a) design, (b) data collection/research design, (c) participants, (d) instrumentation, and (e) data analysis.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

I used a generic qualitative research design to explore male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions of adolescent, Black males' life skills development. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) explained that a generic qualitative design is an appropriate approach when a problem requires detailed exploration. According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research methods help discover people's meaning to their lived experiences through developing their perceptions.

This qualitative research study involved purposive sampling, semi structured interviews, and systematic and concurrent data collection and data analysis procedures (see McGrath, 2019; Williams & Moser, 2019). I used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to conduct the thematic analysis of the data collected during the participants' semi structured interviews (see McGrath, 2019). Jones et al. (2014) stated that qualitative research's intent is to conduct an in-depth examination that

can illuminate and lead to a better understanding of the rich lives of human beings and the world in which they live (Jahja et al., 2021). Lastly, the qualitative methods emphasize the researcher's role as an active participant (Raheim et al., 2016).

I collected research participants' descriptions of their perspectives through in-depth interviews. I analyzed these interview responses to answer the following research question: How do male Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their role in adolescent, Black men's life skills development?

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument in collecting and analyzing data rather than through questionnaires and inventories (Raheim et al., 2016). Researcher bias is a significant threat to the qualitative research validity of this study. In the data analysis process, assumptions, biases, and blinders can cause the researcher to fail to observe apparent data (Raheim et al., 2016). My background and identity were innately brought to the investigation and treated as my biases (see Jahja et al., 2021; Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, I maintained awareness of my personal biases and assumptions to manage the aforementioned potential researcher biases over the duration of the study. Raheim et al. (2016) also suggested, when necessary, to take a step back to adopt a new view of the research. As a qualitative research study that relies on the researcher's interpretation of the data, my beliefs and assumptions could have intruded on the analysis. To neutralize researcher bias, I used bracketing through full disclosure (see Husserl, 2001).

I participated in the research study as an observer-participant, including conducting in-depth, semi structured interviews with the participants. In this role, I acknowledged that my personal and biological background could influence my interpretation of data. As a Black male who is a member of a Black Baptist Church, these experiences have shaped my perceptions, beliefs, and view of the world. I minimized the researcher bias on the results of this study by completing member checks during and after the interviews to increase the credibility, validity, and dependability of the study results (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also used bracketing to reduce potential researcher bias and to suspend any judgment of the setting or environment before completing the analysis (see Husserl, 2001). I used a single interview instrument that I designed for all participants to reduce the risk of research biases being imparted into the study. All participant interviews were recorded with their permission, and the interviews were transcribed by an outside transcriber who has no affiliation with any participating Black Baptist Church, participants, or me as the researcher.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Strategy**

Participants for this study were Black, male leaders in Black Baptist Churches located in the southeastern region of the United States. The church determined the leadership status based on their nonprofit charter and participant volunteers' self-reporting. Although the overall intention of this study was to determine male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions regarding their role in the life skills development of

Black, male youth, all Black Baptist Churches in the southeastern region of the United States were eligible to participate.

I briefly discussed the study with a senior pastor to determine his level of interest and participation in the recruitment process. The pastor agreed to provide a letter of participation, agreeing to be a partner organization and contact his colleagues to support the snowball sampling process. The pastor provided his colleagues with an email that included the study invitation letter, recruitment letter, a study flyer, and my email address and phone number so prospective participants could reach me directly.

I selected participants through purposeful selection, where the particular person or activities are selected deliberately to provide information aligned to the study's research questions (Guetterman, 2015; Jahja et al., 2019, p. 23). For a thick and vibrant descriptive analysis for this study, it was essential to include various leaders from within the church (see Raheim et al., 2016). In determining the recommended sample size for a qualitative study, Vasileiou et al. (2018) suggested no more than 50 subjects. As a generic qualitative study, I kept the sample size between 10 and 20 as in a grounded theory study (see Vasileiou et al., 2018).

An objective of qualitative studies is to keep the sample size small, as Benoot et al. (2016) found that after interviewing 10 participants, the researcher gained no new information, thereby reaching data saturation. They suggested that the sample size of research similar to the current study should range from five to 25. Benoot et al. indicated that qualitative studies using two to 10 participants as small sample sizes are sufficient to reach saturation. I recruited 13 church leaders to participate in the semi structured, in-

depth interviews to ensure enough participants could provide several perspectives of the leaders' perceptions of their role and reach data saturation (see Hammarberg et al., 2016).

### **Instrumentation**

Semi structured interviews served as the primary means for data collection for this qualitative research study. Qualitative interviews allowed me to address the research question by exploring, in an in-depth manner, matters that are unique to the interviewees' experiences. As the data collection method, interviews provided should provide access to participants' behavior and the meaning of such behavior (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As the interviewer, I was familiar with the researcher-created interview questions and the audio-recording equipment, which was essential to eliminate any researcher bias. I rehearsed with the interview protocol, practiced using the audio-recording equipment, and ensured predetermined questions were presented in the same order to all interviewees to elicit responses to the exact phrasing.

During the interview, it was vital for me to build a rapport and establish comfortable interactions with the participants (see McGrath et al., 2019). This development of rapport began in advance of the interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, I notified the participants that the discussion would be audio recorded for the data analysis process. The interview protocol included 15 open-ended questions aligned with the research question (see Appendix A).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I began recruiting participants after obtaining approval from the IRB of Walden University. I contacted the partner organization and provided the executive secretary with

all approved documents to forward to the senior pastor's colleagues. The pastor requested each contact to deliver the invitation to all personnel in their organization who met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for participants were: (a) the participant is a Black male and (b) the participant holds a leadership position within a Black Baptist Church. I provided my email address and phone number to include in this notification so that potential participants could contact me directly to express their interest in participating in this study. When I received contact via email or a phone call, I summarized the research and participation requirements for the possible subject.

I asked the participants to share their email information (or preferred method to receive the adult consent form). The adult informed consent form was transmitted to the participant via email and contained a description of the study's inquiry parameters, potential risks and benefits, procedures to maintain confidentiality, and selection criteria. From possible candidates, I selected 13 participants through purposeful sampling for this study. All participants reviewed the informed consent form and replied via email to participate in the research study. The original intent was to hold in-person interviews. I anticipated that the recruitment and interview process to take place over an 8- to 10-week time period. I asked the participants to consent to a single interview and allot 30 to 45 minutes for the session.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were the data collection technique for this qualitative research study. They allowed me to understand and interact with the participants. They also allowed the participants to describe their perceptions and explain their experiences in their own words

(see Young et al., 2018). This data collection technique allowed me to establish rapport and gain the participants' trust (Jahja et al., 2021; Patton, 2015). I initially planned to conduct the interviews at a public library or local community center, whichever was the most comfortable choice for the participant. I used a semi structured interview instrument, composed of a uniform set of open-ended questions to capture the participants' perceptions and experiences of the support they provided for Black, male adolescents' life skills development. The open-ended questions encouraged participants to respond freely and openly to the questions (see Ritchie et al., 2014; Weller et al., 2018). Follow-up or probing questions, when applicable, were also used to urge participants to elaborate on or clarify a response (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I reminded the participants I would record the session and explained that a professional, neutral, third-party transcriptionist service would transcribe the audio recordings obtained during the session.

During the interview sessions, I took detailed notes to engage with the participant fully and foster highly reflective behavior (see Oltmann, 2016). Taking notes during the interviews allowed me to focus my attention on the participant's perspective and responses to the interview questions. Taking notes also allowed me to identify and flag noteworthy quotes made by the participant, further enhancing the participant's contextual importance to be fully appreciated and noted (see Elliott, 2018). I used audio recording, note taking, and transcription in this study to build on each method's strengths while reducing their weaknesses to enhance the quality of data management for this study.



## **Data Analysis Plan**

The data collected from the in-depth, semi structured interviews were analyzed, organized, and transcribed using a descriptive framework (see Yin, 2014). Use of an explanatory framework in qualitative analysis and the data helped me describe and summarize the data in a meaningful way as well as identify patterns or themes that emerged from the data collected. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), qualitative data analysis aims to ascertain general statements about relationships among data categories. NVIVO helped with organizing the data and coding to identify patterns, emerging themes, and categories (see Zamawe, 2015). I used a deductive analysis process to identify emergent codes within the data (see Elliott, 2018). Elliot (2018) explained that emergent codes might be specific words from participants' responses or concepts that, as a researcher, I may have been sensitized to in reading the literature in preparation for my research. During the data analysis stage, I read and re-read the interview transcripts to analyze and interpret the data while keeping the research question in mind. This process leads to an analysis of patterns that have meaning within the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that a pattern or theme appears more than once across the data set.

Esterberg's (2011) open coding approach to data analysis and coaching served as the reference in data analysis and coding for this study. During this stage, I read through each interview transcript, line by line, and searching for recurring categories or themes to develop. Next, I highlighted participants' quotes and phrases from the interviews that were significant to the study. Analysis of qualitative data often works inductively

(Esterberg, 2011). Therefore, I developed coded categories using the constant comparative method identifying relationships within and across the data after reviewing the interview transcripts and notes. Finally, I tested the emerging coded categories that emerged against the data through refining my research using the descriptive framework to identify patterns and subsequent data collection (see Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The objective of trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to how others can replicate the findings of a specific study. For qualitative research, four criteria must be established to determine the trustworthiness of the study. These quality criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To promote trustworthiness in the findings, I provided a thick description of the participant recruitment and the research process (transferability). The data collected during the research process was aligned with thematic analysis and the qualitative research process established for semi structured interview protocols to promote the dependability of the findings. To increase the trustworthiness of the current findings, I relied on qualitative research data collection methods. For this study, the data and insights/interpretations enabled me to provide the results in a scholarly manner, thereby aiding in its dependability (Kallio et al., 2016). I conducted the study in a credible manner and consistent with qualitative research methods using data triangulation and member checks. Nowell et al. (2017) recommended that qualitative research studies use credibility procedures such as triangulation, member checks, or prolonged engagement to decrease threats to the trustworthiness of the findings. I provided a detailed description of

the data collection, coded categories that arose, and the rationale for decision-making throughout the process to increase dependability. With semi structured interviews as the primary source of this data collection, the data and findings' trustworthiness is foundational for its conformability (Nowell et al., 2017). I constantly compared and checked data to address researcher bias during the data analysis process creating an audit trail to address trustworthiness issues concerning confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I employed thick description and data triangulation as validation procedures for this study (Nowell et al., 2017).

Data triangulation was used to establish trustworthiness. First, I used field notes and artifacts to validate the information collected from participant interviews (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Korstjens and Moser (2018) explained that the confirmability of a research is to establish that interpretations and findings derived from the data collected. Therefore, my data interpretations and conclusion are represented in subsequent chapters to support the interpretations and conclusions (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Secondly, I documented the data analysis procedures throughout this study and provided reasons for the methodological and analytical choices (dependability). Finally, in addressing transferability and other researchers' ability to replicate the results, I used detailed, thick descriptions of the data collected from participants' semi structured interviews to articulate the information collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### **Ethical Procedures**

I adhered to the IRB requirements for data collection, participant recruitment, and confidentiality to address this research's ethical considerations and ensure authentic and

credible findings. All participants were older than 18 years of age and treated as autonomous agents. I informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty. I only used the participants' names were only used in my interview data log for contact and stored on a password-protected computer. All data are presented publicly except for the identification of the participants, which are confidential. I created pseudonyms based on the study participant pool of male Black Baptist Church Leaders, coded as PAS1, MIN1, or DEAC1. Identifying the specific church location in which the participants are leaders shall also remain confidential for this study.

I obtained Walden University IRB approval to conduct the semi structured interviews before beginning data collection. After this approval, a letter of participation and my contact information were transmitted by the partner organization's senior pastor on my behalf to colleagues at other Black Baptist Churches. This letter explained the study's purpose and requested participant recruitment assistance. In addition, I informed prospective participants about the study aspects, including potential benefits and risks. Before any data collection, all participants acknowledged they read the informed consent form and consent to participate in an email. The data collected are secured in a locked file cabinet at my home office. The audio recordings are secured, with only me and the third-party transcription service having access for transcription purposes. I maintained the dignity and respect of all participants in the data collection process by allowing them to answer the interview questions without judgment or interruption of their thought process. This study relies solely upon the participants' enthusiasm and participation in a voluntary role. No incentives were offered, thereby eliminating potential ethical issues.

## Summary

In this general qualitative study, I explored male Black Baptist Church Leaders' perceptions about their roles as a tool of support in adolescent Black males' life skills development (Hodges et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). The qualitative research design allowed careful selection of participants, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures to support efforts to answer the overarching research questions by employing semi structured interviews from the male Black Baptist Church Leaders.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of male Black Baptist church leaders' perceptions that contribute to the knowledge of their mentoring role of adolescent Black males' life skills development. Data collection and analysis performed supports the research design and methods. The research design, methodology, and data analysis strategies for this study were outlined in Chapter 3. The study results based on the research design will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the perception of male, Black Baptist church leaders about their role in the development of life skills in adolescent, Black males. In this chapter, I present the research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis methods, evidence of trustworthiness, and the findings from the thematic analysis of the data collected from semi structured interviews of 13 male, Black Baptist church leaders residing in the southwestern region of the United States. Seventeen coded clusters emerged during the data analysis that were refined into four emerging themes. Finally, I present these emerging themes along with excerpts from the respondents' answers to illustrate each theme along with their categories. The research question that guided this study was: How do male, Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their roles in mentoring adolescent, Black males' life skills development?

### **Research Setting**

After receiving approval from the IRB at Walden University, I contacted the partner organization's senior pastor to help me recruit potential participants through snowball sampling. The church's executive secretary sent an email to the senior pastor's male leadership colleagues, including a flyer that outlined the purpose of this study, participation requirements, and my contact information (i.e., email address). Interested participants were instructed in the initial contact email to respond to me directly via email if they were interested in participating in this research study.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, I had to change the data collection parameters to reflect the current state of events occurring during this study. The transition

to phone interviews required some minor adjustments when asking the interview questions. At the time of this research study, the world was amid a global health pandemic, necessitating communications with social distance and safety protocols in place. Therefore, I completed all conversations with each church's respective executive secretary and participants over the phone. The reliance on technology to conduct the participant interviews was an unforeseen condition that was not in the initial design. I utilized a blanket IRB approval for this change in the data collection procedures.

### **Demographics**

Consistent with the inclusion criteria, all participants self-identified as Black and ranged in age from 42 to 60 years old. I interviewed a total of 13 leaders, including four pastors, six ministers, and three deacons. I have not detailed individual demographics to ensure confidentiality of the participants' identities. Instead, I used the identification of roles and numbers corresponding to the self-identified leadership role (i.e., pastor, minister, or deacon) followed by a chronological numeric (1, 2, 3, etc.) assignment based upon the interviews sequential order; for example, the first pastor interviewed is identified as P1 (see Table 1).

### **Data Collection**

Upon receiving the initial response from the prospective participant, I contacted them requesting an informal introductory conversation. I conducted this casual conversation over the phone to reiterate the purpose of the study as well as afford them an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and review the informed consent form. After this conversation, the prospective participant read the form and emailed me whether they

would like to participate. Upon receiving the acknowledgment, I had a second phone call conversation with the study participant. I thanked them for agreeing to participate and scheduled the semi structured interview. I discussed using digital software (i.e., Skype) as the platform that would facilitate the semi structured interviews; however, many either did not have the application or were not familiar with it. Therefore, all interviews were conducted via phone and audio recorded.

I conducted individual, semi structured interviews with the 13 participants over the phone; these interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. Semi structured interviews were appropriate for this qualitative study because they are used when people are attempting to understand the meaning of their lived world (see Kallio et al., 2016; Kvale, 1996). Unlike the plan presented in Chapter 3, I did not complete conduct face-to-face interviews due to the safety protocols in effect during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Using the phone to complete the interviews allowed me to substitute the original in-person plan for the data collection and maintain a private, interactive experience. The participants were also able to participate in the interview from their chosen location, which helped ensure their comfort level during the interview. The platform used enabled the discussions to be audio recorded, as I originally planned for as part of the data collection process. These audio recordings were then transcribed by a third party per the IRB application and utilized in this data analysis portion. I followed the interview protocol for this study, which included 15 semi structured, open-ended questions.

The individual interview, audio file transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo and reviewed to identify connections and emergent themes. During the interviews, I manually



took notes that included topics the participant offered in response to the interview questions. These topics included their current role within the Black Baptist Church, particular events that participants recalled, relationship experience, and association with mentoring. These notes also contained points of clarification and connections between or among the participants' perceptions. In addition, during the interviews, participants offered and emailed artifacts to explain their active mentoring programs.

The notes and artifacts serve as additional data sources to help triangulate data collected in the interview sessions. They included observations about the participants' reactions and direct quotes that caught my attention. During the interviews, I made detailed notes, noting the participants' terminology and the wording of responses as they conveyed their verbal answers to the questions. For example, three participants mentioned that they were actively involved in youth mentoring programs pre-global pandemic and offered to share literature artifacts associated with these mentoring programs. These artifacts were emailed to me after the interviews took place and included mentoring program information, such as purpose, goal, and focus. These notes and artifacts allowed me to validate the interview data further.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected included notes from the sessions, artifacts, and narrative data from the semi structured interviews transcribed to text. The 13 recorded interviews were transcribed through a digital transcription service; reviewed for accuracy; and then uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative software coding application (see McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). NVivo provided a platform for qualitative data analysis that enabled

the recognition of emergent themes across large amounts of detailed data (see McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Williams & Moser, 2019). I coded each participant with their self-identified position (i.e., deacon, pastor, or minister) and position they were interviewed in (i.e., Deacon1, Pastor 2, Minister3, etc.). I closely evaluated the interview transcripts, notes, and the collected artifacts to code the data and identified themes that emerged from the triangulation of the data collected. Initially, I reviewed the interview transcripts several times, observing regularly recurring terms, phrases, or ideas within the participants' responses to the 15 interview questions. I highlighted the quotes and phrases from the participant interviews that were significant to the research question (see Williams & Moser, 2019).

I used the thematic comparative method to complete the coding process until categories emerged across the data sources collected (see Kiger & Varipo, 2020). Next, these categories were named and coded within the transcripts. I then confirmed the emerging themes that appeared against the collected data, refining and integrating them until solidified (see Merriam, 1998; Kiger & Varipo, 2020). As a result, four themes emerged from the data analysis to serve as foundational constructs surrounding the participants' perceptions regarding their role as social support in adolescent, Black males' life skill development. The four themes are role models for Black males, interpersonal relationships with Black males, representing social responsibility for Black males, and investing in the future of Black males. These categories were further refined by phrases and quotes from the interviews and field notes.

I reviewed the themes to determine how they relate to the research question exploring the male, Black Baptist Church leaders' perceptions of their role as social support (i.e., nonfamilial member, community leader, etc.) for adolescent, Black males. These themes fit within the role model, interpersonal relationships, social responsibility, and investing in the future categories derived from the interview questions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The research design incorporated multiple elements (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) to promote the trustworthiness of the findings. To establish the credibility of the findings, I used member checks in the form of participant transcript review (see Kortsjens & Moser, 2018). Semi structured interviews were selected as the data collection method to allow for a thick description of the participants' responses. During the interviews, I asked the participants a standard set of questions; however, when an interesting topic was presented, such as discussing the current mentoring program a participant was involved with, I had the liberty to pursue this line of new information. This ability affords the participants' behaviors and meaning to have meaning for an outsider, allowing for transferability of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Young et al., 2018).

### **Credibility**

As stated in Chapter 3, the trustworthiness of this study was promoted through the process I followed while collecting the data. The interview method changed from face to face to over the phone in response to the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. This method change in the interview approach did not reduce the credibility or the

integrity of the study. The interviews were still conducted individually, unencumbered, and in a private setting. I used triangulation by asking the same research questions to all the participants and sustaining prolonged engagement, with interviews lasting between 45 to 60 minutes each as recommended by Korstjens and Moser (2018). I reviewed the interview transcripts and field notes to improve reliability through additional data triangulation for the consistency and accuracy of the information and the extraction of themes to be compared and cross-referenced within the analysis process.

### **Transferability**

For this study, my careful confirmation that the participants fit the criteria to be the best sources of data and employment of thick description and data triangulation was in alignment with qualitative research transferability methods (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). The data collected were analyzed using thick descriptions to extract answers, incidents, and experiences from the participants that answered the research question.

The participants were interviewed individually in their chosen location, and there was no potential for any participant interactions such as discussing the interview questions outside of the interview setting. Conducting virtual interviews can lead to some transferability issues, such as I could not control distractions at the participant's location. In addition, I was not able to control external locational factors, like connectivity or participant familiarity with technology. During a few of the interviews, I experienced connection disruptions. Although it was disruptive, it did not deter the participants as they answered the 15 open-ended questions.

From a data analysis concern, the participant's answers rely on the individual's memory of facts. In addition, these responses reflect incidents and experiences that occurred over the years or decades in the past. To counter bias and/or reduce the level of uncertainty, I maintained prolonged engagement with individuals through holding two phone conversations with each participant before conducting the interview (see Hill, 2012; Kallio et al., 2016). These interactions were aimed at developing rapport with the participants and having familiarity at the interview time, so there was a general comfort level for the participants to share their lives and experiences. While the results cannot be generalized, the care taken in selecting appropriate participants and asking relevant questions contribute to making the results transferable to a similar group in a similar setting.

### **Dependability**

To increase dependability, I ensured the data collection steps for this study were logical and accurately documented in detailed data collection and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). In addition, open-ended semi structured interviews were conducted, thereby addressing any researcher bias in the data collection process and analysis (Young et al., 2018). I asked all participants the same set of core questions presented in the same order through this structure. These interviews served as the primary source of data collected in this study, and other data gathered from notes and artifacts enhanced the study's reliability.

### **Confirmability**

I established confirmability for this research study through my interpretations and findings derived from the data collected, which supported how conclusions and interpretations were developed (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). During the data analysis process, I attempted to control for bias by comparing the data constantly, reviewing the literature for affirmations of the findings, checking and rechecking the data. Throughout this study, I documented the procedures utilized during the data analysis providing reasons for the methodological and analytical choices. I used a rich, thick description to transfer data integrity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### **Results**

Participants' experiences and responses to the interview questions aided in addressing the research question posed for this study. In addition, I aligned the interview questions under four categories based upon recurring phrases and quotes in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Interview Question Categorization*

| Role model   | Interpersonal Relationships   | Social Responsibility  | Investing in the future   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>ÉHow long have you been in this role?</p> <p>ÉDuring adolescence, how did you develop what is called life skills; an ability for positive behavior and to deal with demands and challenges of everyday life?</p> <p>ÉCan you identify a time when a mentor helped you at a critical time in your life?</p> <p>ÉWhat was your most successful experience mentoring youth to help them develop life skills?</p> | <p>ÉDuring your adolescence, how did you learn to communicate with friends and people in the community?</p> <p>ÉHas your leadership role in the Black Baptist church prepared you to be a support system for adolescent black males in developing life skills?</p> <p>ÉDo you have any particular questions for me, or would you like to add anything about your total interview experiences?</p> | <p>ÉPlease can you tell me about yourself; your role in the Church?</p> <p>ÉWhat is your definition of a mentor?</p> <p>ÉWhat are the characteristics you believe a good mentor should exhibit?</p> <p>ÉPlease describe any activities you engage in as a mentor for adolescent black males to help them develop life skills. (If not, describe activities you would engage in)</p> <p>ÉHow would you describe your current mentoring relationship (if any) with adolescent black males? (In your Community, at your church)</p> | <p>ÉWhat challenges do you think adolescent black males face today that they need help with the most?</p> <p>ÉMentoring a young person is a big responsibility and can change the lives of both the mentor and the mentee. What do you hope to gain from experience, and what do you hope the mentee gains from the relationship?</p> <p>ÉHow can Baptist church leaders use their experiences in life to inspire, influence, or help adolescent black male's life skill development?</p> |

*Note.* Open-ended questions are categorized into four thematic categories based upon recurring phrases and quotes from participants' responses.

After manually coding all the data, I developed a frequency analysis using the participant responses from the interview transcripts data in NVivo. I found 17 coded clusters during the coding process and categorized them based upon frequency from the context of the participants' responses to the interview questions; those included have a minimum frequency count of three, meaning at least three participants mentioned the coded cluster in their response. For instance, four out of the 13 participants ( $4/13 = .307$  or 31%). These coded clusters that were identified included: approachability (31%), relationship (23%), leadership (31%), positive (54%), role-model (54%), candid (38%), communication (62%), availability (31%), honesty (31%), manhood (23%), trust (23%), interaction (62%), community (69%), wisdom (46%), responsibility (38%), experience

(46%), and morals (54%). Table 1 illustrates the coded clustered response frequency from the initial coded clusters.

**Table 1**

*Emerging Coded Cluster Frequency*

|                 | M1 | M2 | M3 | D1 | D2 | D3 | D4 | D5 | D6 | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 |
|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Approachability |    |    | X  |    | X  |    |    |    |    | X  | X  |    |    |
| Relationship    | X  |    |    |    |    |    |    | X  |    |    |    | X  |    |
| Leadership      | X  |    | X  |    |    |    |    |    |    | X  |    | X  |    |
| Positive        |    | X  |    | X  | X  |    | X  |    |    | X  |    | X  | X  |
| Role-Model      | X  |    |    | X  |    | X  |    | X  | X  |    |    | X  | X  |
| Candid          |    |    | X  |    | X  | X  |    |    |    | X  |    | X  |    |
| Communication   | X  | X  |    |    | X  |    | X  | X  |    |    | X  | X  | X  |
| Availability    |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    |    |    | X  | X  |    |
| Honesty         | X  | X  | X  |    | X  |    |    |    |    |    |    | X  | X  |
| Manhood         | X  |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Trust           | X  |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Interaction     | X  |    |    | X  | X  | X  |    | X  | X  |    | X  | X  |    |
| Community       | X  | X  |    | X  |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |    |    | X  |
| Wisdom          | X  |    | X  |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |    | X  |
| Responsibility  | X  | X  |    | X  |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    |    |    |
| Experience      | X  | X  |    | X  | X  | X  |    |    |    |    |    | X  |    |
| Morals          |    | X  |    | X  |    | X  | X  | X  |    | X  |    |    | X  |

*Note.* Participant coding: M1 = Minister 1, M2 = Minister 2, M3 = Minister 3, D1 = Deacon 1, D2 = Deacon 2, D3 = Deacon 3, D4 = Deacon 4, D5 = Deacon 5, D6 = Deacon 6, P1 = Pastor 1, P2 = Pastor 2, P3 = Pastor 3, P4 = Pastor 4; each hash mark indicates that the code appeared in the participant's response.

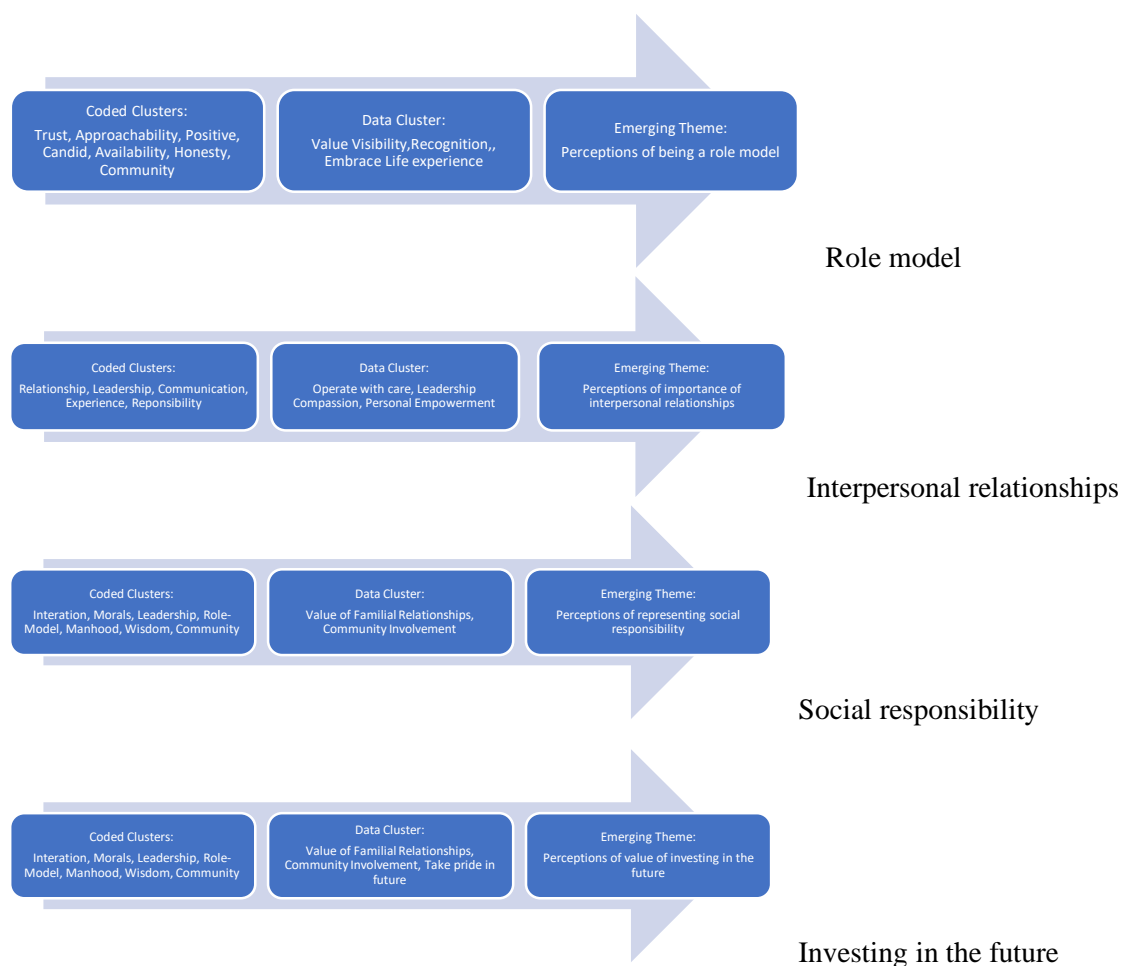
I further refined the 17 coded clusters from the data through additional coding cycles. As a result, the coded clustered continued to change as I refined the data. Finally, I refined the primary 17 coded clusters into nine data clusters representing the themes' evolving meaning. These data clusters included: value familial relationships, community involvement, operate with care, leadership compassion, embrace life experiences, take pride in your future, value visibility, recognition, and personal empowerment. Through triangulation analysis of the nine data clusters, four themes emerged in addressing the research question for this study. I synthesized data in the coding model for the interview



question categories, 17 coded clusters, and data clusters during the data analysis process (see Figure 2). I designed the following discussion to clarify and support the findings of this study. I offer direct quotes from interview transcriptions to represent best the participants' emerging themes and highlight, through their voice, how they experience and understand the phenomenon.

**Figure 2**

*Emerging Themes Coding Model*



*Note.* Figure illustrates the process of thematic analysis during data analysis to find the four emerging themes.

**Theme One: Church leaders' perceptions of being role models to Black males (role model).**

The value of leaders' perceptions of being role models to Black males is the first emerging theme that encompasses the significance of the participants' individual life experiences and their role in their lives. This theme's essence relates to how the participant developed their life skills. Participants placed value on their ability to embrace these experiences, learn from their experiences, and be vulnerable and open about these experiences. In addition, participants who developed their social skills expressed appreciation for having a sense of knowing how it developed.

All participants expressed the significance that the willingness to share their life experiences was influential in shaping their perspective on life. Many participants shared that the desire of others to share their experiences was fundamental for their personal development, which led to the emerging categories for defining this theme. Participants shared observations of lived experiences and the influence of others' shared experiences on their lives. The participants acknowledged that the availability of an adult in their adolescence helped in their development. Deacon 1 offered a story that added to this theme by stating:

As a youth, I had a mentor who was someone that provided guidance with the willingness to share their life experience. I learned a lot from them sharing what has been positive about their lives. All the mistakes that they've made. I think this candor helps the person that you're mentoring doesn't make the same mistakes, hopefully.

Many participants acknowledged some level of impact that the sharing of others had on their lives. Many perceived the development of an intimate relationship relies on self-awareness and honesty. These relationships are a presence in their lives that aid with social development. Examples involving the impact of lasting impressions are signified by their sense of commitment and accomplishment when they have the opportunity to share their personal experiences and have positively impacted another's life. Most participants expressed an enduring value in their level of vulnerability and openness to help others as a recipient and contributor. The recognition of the power of being willing to share was expressed by Deacon 3:

You will get experiences and all that you will go through during those life challenges that you had to go through. For the youth, it is vital to have someone who would take the time to talk with them, you know, share some mistakes, share some values, share some morals, share some sort of structure in life, you know, someone who has been down that road, you know, I would say, you know, someone who was able to impart some life lesson, that can make a difference.

The first theme, Church leaders' perceptions of being role models to Black males, described how the participants viewed their life experiences and the lasting impact of their relationships along the way. It established that the participants valued their life experiences and understood the positive effects of sharing them with others on their lives.

**Theme Two: Leaders' perceptions of the importance of their interpersonal relationships with Black males (interpersonal relationships).**

The second theme, Leaders' perceptions of the importance of their interpersonal relationships with Black males, offers a perspective of personal interactions, resulting in

understanding how the participants perceive how this is used in their formal role and serve as social support as mentors. Finally, the theme describes the impact experiences through interactions with their familial relationship and community can impact one's perception. This theme explored how the participants reflected upon the interactions they experienced in their early years and how to assign meaning to them. Many participants indicated that they saw value in their childhood familial and nonfamilial experiences. These interactions occurred within the home and their community and impressed upon the participants a sense of belonging.

The participants understand that they are inspired to become more involved and describe feeling an enhanced connection to their community and an acute sense of hope. Interaction between family and community members can create a meaningful relationship with an individual's future aspirations. They noted that these relationships taught them about manhood and responsibility. The respondents suggested that these interactions form a connection and community sense. This sense of connection and community for many respondents shared the common thread of family and church nexus, and the response of Deacon 4 fully displayed this:

If it wasn't for my father who said to me, you know, God has got a signature purpose for you. You know, people do what they want to do. And, you know, you want to help, but you will want to help people. So given that statement from him, as far as finding your purpose early on in my life, I believe that does necessarily have tremendous influences on the future. I can still recall the things he said to me, they stick with me, and I still use them today.

Most of the participants identified familial and communal interactions as significant factors in their individual development and perceptions.

Participant responses regarding these formal and informal interactions throughout their lives influenced the emerging categories for defining this theme. The participants shared that they believed in the value of everyday interactions that provided them with a lasting sense of self-awareness, empowerment, and pride. Participants expressed their appreciation for the formal and informal interactions and how acknowledging these has helped shape how they carry themselves. These interactions imparted wisdom, and for some participants, they reflected on interactions with older male role models. In reflecting on these relationships, the participants noted that they could participate in a similar capacity in their role within the Black Baptist Church.

I developed the essence of this theme by applying the participants' relational experiences and how they can use them in their current roles. Lasting memories are formed by the participants when their family or community members recognize their effort and accomplishments. For the participants, this highlights the power of recognition from their social support system. This connection led the participants to see their role within the church community has the same potential impact. The leaders defined interactions' value by observing their family structure and reflecting on how that impacted their decisions throughout their lives. Many participants expressed that their family structure had a strong bearing on their life decisions, both personally and professionally, and shaped how they perceive themselves as adults. Some participants voiced support from other members outside of their family and Church. These

community-based interactions were also significant to the participants as sources of support. It is important to note a distinction between those reared in a single-parent household versus a two-parent home. This distinction was concerning the significance of the presence of a male support system for adolescent Black males. Deacon 1 and Pastor 1's commentary demonstrated how their parents made a purposeful effort to ensure there was male leadership influence in their lives as young Black males:

Deacon 1: I was raised in a single-parent family. It was just my mother and my grandmother. They thought it would help to bring in sports from the boys club, and I began playing every sport known to man. And learned the man's role by watching the coaches and assistant coaches. They helped me develop a great deal, and those lessons are now carried with me and participate in my Church as a culture and play ball in our church ministry. That program where there were pictures from the defense ministry at my Church, both mentors and guided us. Well, it received me in high school from all my parents into a whole lot of trouble. A part of their support programs and Church. All the parts were pushing me and let me just be myself.

The purpose of this observation is not about comparing a single parent and two-parent family unit, but rather the significance of the opportunity to have interactions with male role models for young Black males; this was also echoed by Pastor 1:

I was raised in a home with both parents, and my father was very important in my discipline and behavior and the criticism of my decisions. He would instill morals

and values and share his experiences. He made a point that it was more about communication and wisdom than just raising the children.

This shared observation of the significance of family interactions was expressed by Deacon 3:

Well, a lot of it had to do with my family structure; I grew up without a father. But I had a nurturing family. Growing up in a rural area, I grew up on a farm, and I had a strong will, so I knew the value of work. I knew the value of as far as learning a skill set. It also being everywhere with your hands and being able to figure certain things out. Later in life, the work and lessons I had learned growing up, you know, prepared me for the challenges of the job today. The environment that I grew up in prepared me for the challenges of life and destruction. As for my life skills and the skill set, I would say I learned them in the school of hard knocks, you know.

Pastor 1 and Deacon 3 expressed the significance of having positive male influences. The responses gave insight into how the participants reflect on their personal experiences and how it shapes their thoughts toward their current role in adolescent Black males. The first two themes describe how the participants' lived experiences assisted their personal development. These themes indicate that the participants' value of their lived experiences influences and that this impacts how they approach their leadership roles, especially when interacting with adolescent Black males. The third theme, Leaders' perceptions of their roles representing social responsibility for Black males (social

responsibility), will demonstrate what the participants believe are essential characteristics to have as mentors or when interacting with adolescent Black males.

**Theme Three: Leaders' perceptions of their roles representing social responsibility for Black males (social responsibility).**

The third emerging theme, representing social responsibility, demonstrates what the participants believe to be the responsibilities associated with being a leader in the Black Baptist Church. This theme highlights the participant's perception of crucial mentor characteristics and benefits. This theme's essence describes how the participants define leadership in terms of honesty, availability, and approachability as a servant leader. The participants suggested that servant leadership develops through compassion and vision. Using this lens helps enhance their support as role models by viewing it from a leader to a mentee lens. Participants comprehend their role as servant leaders as positive role models who are good listeners, operate with care and concern, and make a conscious effort to be transparent and build trust. The participant's responses recognize that young Black males should find comfort and confidence with leaders within their community social circle; this requires the leader to be available and candid.

This theme emerged from analyzing the data referring to the points where participants discussed their perceptions and their role in adolescent Black males' life skills development. The ideas that appeared to help define this theme came from a participant's commentary regarding the personal observations of leadership responsibilities. A consistent value emerged in the participant's responses that they viewed intimacy as an essential factor for leadership, especially when working with young people. The participant identified the need to reduce the wall of approachability



along with enhanced understanding. The participants shared stories about their leadership experiences while working with youth. Deacon 1 expressed this theme when he recounted how his Church makes a conscious effort to interact with its adolescent male members:

At our Church, it's just a matter of creating a social support system, making a physical effort to interact with the young men as they come in as we greet them every day, encounter them at the different services, run a church service that is specific for them, share with them are sincere compassion and concern for them; always you know, participating in the youth activities all that may come up or play and that they will see you as approachable, honest, and genuinely interested in them.

Many participants acknowledged the importance of envisioning a future for themselves. Next, participants expressed the impact of social support in a role model that a young person can approach. Here the participants identify the purpose of social support interactions in developing this approachability. Having this social support will help improve intimacy and comfort that can positively impact adolescent Black males. Finally, deacon 2 had a story with this experience, who before the global pandemic mandated quarantine, volunteered at a juvenile detention center; he retorts his experience in leading with compassion and being approachable:

Well, while mentoring in the juvenile detention system, I was conversing with the young men. Some of the young men I had built a relationship with and shared my experiences and hope for them. As this group became comfortable and recognized

me as a support, they advised me that some of their peers would get released from the center and had no plans for when they got out. I brought these peer groups together and was able to speak with them, and our program was going to get them a job that would help them.

Most participants expressed that there is a need for genuine interest in listening as a leader, along with compassion. These values add to the interactions to build a rapport that fosters a relationship between the mature and the less mature individuals. To be a good support relationship is foundational; Deacon 4 suggested:

A good mentor is definitely someone that tries to help individuals focus on what's important. One of the questions I'm always thinking about that was probably a long time ago is at the end of it all, what will you say that you wish you had done more of? Want to be making more money is not going to be, you know, procrastinating on doing things, or is it going to be about family. So, I try to help people focus on that; I think good mentors help people focus on service, focus on positive words for all positive thoughts. Once again, I'm not looking for perfection but looking for opportunities to help you perfect yourself or be as right as possible.

While the first theme, being a role model, explained how the participants viewed their lived experiences concerning how that affects them as leaders, the second theme, interpersonal relationships, offers personal interactions as an instrumentation of development. These two together result in how they perceive their role in adolescent Black males' life skills development. The third theme, representing social responsibility,

describes how the participants understand their role as leaders in their communities. It established essential characteristics such as availability, honesty, approachability, and sincerity for role models. These characteristics clarified the importance of the fourth theme's emergence of investing in the future.

**Theme four: Leaders' perceptions of the value of their roles as investing in the future of Black males (investing in the future).**

In this emerging theme, the participants described a deep appreciation for their interactions. They believe that, as a Black male, they can guide younger Black males by reflecting on their lived experiences. Many participants reflected on their childhood communities and early experiences and how that has impacted their outlook on life. They expressed that this generation's youth are growing up in a very different society from the one they experienced. They see that older Black males can bridge this gap through active support from external relationships. Deacon 2 offered:

Suppose they could find other role models instead of some of the men they see because of videos or what is on the television, or the guys they see selling drugs on the block. If they could find positive role models and we need to let them see them, we have a chance for that and have time to go back into the community to talk to some of these guys. And I think that it would be beneficial. Also, I think a lot of young Black men suffer from low self-esteem. If your self-esteem was not there when you were younger, it's kind of hard when you get to a certain age to find self-esteem.

In acknowledging the importance of helping young men develop self-awareness and manhood, many participants highlighted the need to make a conscious effort to reach

out to them. Many participants believe that being present, creating a space for an individual to feel heard, and sharing their experiences and interactions will encourage adolescent Black males. To support the participant's belief that they have to demonstrate care and concern, Deacon 4 explained:

In my mentoring programs, I am always open to how the youth want to communicate; they trust me a little bit more than being a mentor when we have those conversations. So, I've built relationships with what works for the young people by communicating and understanding where they are at that moment and how they feel. I also like to allow young people to listen to other individuals, whether through a book or art, to gain another perspective. So a lot of times, our young people are only getting one perspective. It's like the music that they listen to it. They're always listening to hard rap by introducing them to uplifting rap or listening to jazz or listening to gospel; they have another perspective.

Deacon 6 also offered a reflection that highlighted an impactful way to approach adolescent Black males. First, he understands the importance of acknowledging the challenges the youth are facing today, as he recalled:

They need help with the most is problem-solving and learning how to react. Because this a real stumbling block, either you will learn to solve the issue or walk away from it; by learning to problem-solve, you can find success. This is something that has to be learned. I try to talk to them about those kinds of things at the learning center. And these things can hold a lot of kids back; I appreciate

that I learned to play chess because I apply the lessons in my life now. I mean, without these skills, a lot of kids will not work out well.

The first three themes described how the participants believe their lived experiences impact their development from their early years into adulthood. And ultimately affect how they perceive their responsibilities in their current role regarding the life skill development of adolescent Black males. Many participants acknowledged the value of having family and communal interactions as a support source in their development and its influence on their perceptions.

Many participants shared those interactions created a level of connection and a sense of pride that has translated into their adult lives. In addition, participants' reflective nature caused an internal reflection on their development and the importance of their support. This reflection inspired them to consider the support level they provide to adolescent Black males to support their life skills development. With this revelation, they are encouraged about the role they can play through interactions with adolescent Black males; however, as the fourth emerging theme indicated, the value of investing in the future of today is fundamentally essential to growth and development.

### **Summary**

The findings for this study explored the perceptions of male Black Baptist church leaders have regarding their role in supporting the life skills development of adolescent Black males. For this study, I completed interviews with 13 participants who met the inclusion criteria. As discussed in Chapter 3, the participants were drawn from a

purposeful sample of Black Baptist churches in the United States' southeastern region, utilized the same interview instrument consisting of the same 15 questions.

The research decisions for this study were research-based and purposefully aligned with qualitative research methods designed to investigate the participants' perceptions. In the data analysis, 17 coded clusters emerged that were further refined through data triangulation into nine data clusters and refined into four emerging themes. In addition, I provided a narrative of the participants' responses and a demonstrated frequency based upon data triangulation. Finally, I discussed the coding cycles utilized during the data analysis, outlined the emerging themes, and discussed these emerging themes. I will present the recommendations after these findings in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I summarize the findings concerning the research question: How do male, Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their roles in mentoring the development of adolescent, Black males' life skills? The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of male, Black Baptist Church leaders regarding their role in providing support for the life skills development of adolescent, Black males. I interpret emerging themes related to the theoretical foundation and connected to literature reviewed for this research study in this chapter.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory served as the theoretical foundation. I considered the following concepts from the theory in this chapter relative to the study findings: (a) learning precedes development; (b) the basis of learning and development includes social interaction, and through this interaction, learning happens through the individual internalizing the skills and knowledge gained during the social interaction; and (c) the ZPD is the primary activity space in which learning occurs (see Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Interpretation of Findings**

I presented foundational literature in Chapter 2 for positioning the study within the framework of existing academic works. This foundational literature discussed social support for interaction (Chapman et al., 2017; Veresv, 2010); the Black Baptist Church as a social support institution (Barber, 2015; Buser & Buser, 2014); Black male experience (Goings, 2016; Phelps & Pager, 2016); adolescent, Black males' development (Elmore & Gaylord-Harden, 2013; Howard et al., 2012); and mentoring (Givens et al., 2016; Hodges

et al., 2016). Empirical studies spanning social interaction, the Black male experience, and development served as the literature lens for vetting the findings.

I used comparative literature to help develop the meaning of the emerging themes of this study. I identified a gap in previous research in which earlier researchers had not directly explored how male, Black Baptist Church leaders perceive their role in supporting adolescent, Black males' life skills development. The key findings identified four themes regarding church leaders' perceptions of being role models to Black males, the importance of their interpersonal relationships with Black males, their roles representing social responsibility for Black males, and the value of their roles as investing in the future of Black males.

The first theme emerging from the data analysis, church leaders' perceptions of being role models to Black males, speaks to how male, Black Baptist Church leaders reflected on their own life experiences connecting with others. The findings from this study parallel the research-based assertions that significant development evolves from shared interactions. Chapman et al. (2017) argued humans are wired to connect through social interaction and further suggested that individuals' desire or drive to seek others to understand their thoughts, behaviors, and other human attributes is innate. Chapman et al. also identified that people connect or interact with others, personalities, values, judgment, and behavior forms. Early familial and community-based social interactions created social and cultural connections that influenced many participants' development and life choices.



The literature identified these social and cultural connections that generated external rules internalized by the individual and become a part of their thinking (Chapman et al., 2017; Witte, 2005). This internalization transfers the responsibility of thought and behavior from the external other onto the individual (Pathan et al., 2018). Vygotsky's conceptual tools are culturally constructed and shaped in socio-cultural environments (Daniels, 1996; Shabani, 2016). The core principle of Vygotskian thinking is that a person does not construct the origin of knowledge solely in their mind; instead, it is an element cocreated between a more and a less knowledgeable individual (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shabani, 2016).

As the emerging theme indicated, the participants can use lived experiences to construct knowledge in a socio-cultural process (see Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Shabani, 2016). This socio-cultural process stems from personal interactions with familial and nonfamilial community members. Many study participants acknowledged that this study evoked a sense of understanding and appreciation for their communal (i.e., church) interactions and family relationships. This reflection on their lived experiences encouraged them to become more actively involved with adolescent, Black males within their collective sphere to impart the lessons they learned from life.

The leaders' perceptions of the importance of their interpersonal relationships with Black males emerged as the second theme from the data, and this theme captured the essence behind how positive encounters informed and shaped the Black Baptist leaders' life experiences. Lieberman (2013) offered an in-depth analysis and discussion of the physical and psychological attributes of human interactions between individuals,

explaining that these relationships are vital to the health and welfare of the individual, family unit, and overall community.

The study participants' responses demonstrated the significant impact these encounters had on them in their adolescent years. This theme aligns with Vygotsky's theory stating that learning is a socio-cultural process dependent upon interaction with others (see Cherry, 2010; Shabani, 2016). Therefore, knowledge is developed through social interactions constructed between a more and a less knowledgeable individual (Shabani, 2016). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that individuals' exposure to various thoughts and ideas occurs through this interaction with others, so there is a focus on human development from the start and explained the impact the environment has on the development process through socialization, culture, and relationships.

The third emerging theme was leaders' perceptions of their roles representing social responsibility for Black males, which was centered on how they experienced leadership. The study's findings aligned with the literature in that individual, group, and community values were shown to aid in understanding the roles of leadership and the individual (see Shabani, 2016). Evidence of collaboration, a consciousness of self, commitment, and consistency were noted throughout the participants' responses. Kondrat et al. (2017) suggested that having social support serves as the mediator to mitigate the detrimental impact of life experiences for adolescent, Black males. Some participants believed that the lack of a social support system in their life would be reflected in their values and choices. Deacon 1 stated his development was led by a single mother who made a conscious effort to involve him in sports to introduce him to male role models.

The participants did not emphasize a hierarchical approach to the social support system but instead expressed an informal acknowledgment of support, shared power, compassion, and commitment. Pastor 3 shared that he adopted a boot camp program created by a group at an Indianapolis church. During this boot camp, young and older men have an opportunity to share their testimonies and experiences. Pastor 3 stated that "it provides a way for them a safe place to remove the mask or façade and support on another as equals." Deacon 3 demonstrated within his story as he recounted growing up without a father. However, his extended family was very nurturing, and older church members were available for advice and guidance and demonstrated this type of leadership. This story supports the idea that social support can positively impact the relationship between psychological and life skills development (see Kondat et al., 2017).

The participants indicated the significance of their lived experiences on becoming adults as Black males. Participants stated the value of having family and communal interactions and shared how these interactions created a level of connection and a sense of pride as Black men that translated into their adult lives.

Many study participants discussed critical areas of society (i.e., family, church, and school) that could deliver positive results to support individuals' development. The participants' acknowledgment of these areas speaks of community connectedness that they believe originates from the social interactions from these social connections. Participant anecdotes persisted, describing a community of involved familial and nonfamilial relations who imparted and encouraged the participants in their early lives. Pastor 1 recounted that it was more about community and higher personal development in

his adolescent years. As some of the participants acknowledged, the connection of acquiring higher personal development aligns with Vygotsky's theory that achieving a higher mental function requires social interaction with a specific social-cultural environment (see Shabani, 2016).

The Black Baptist Church's social nature lends itself as a social-cultural environment that can serve as a place where Vygotsky's (1978) theory would say learning and developing a higher mental function can reasonably occur. Jordan and Wilson (2017) discussed how a community could best support Black people's success through partnerships set up by the family, church, and public schools backed by research data obtained from their comparative case study of two churches. Several participants in the current study described developing a lasting impression from interacting with nonfamilial mentors within their church community in their adolescent years. For example, Deacon 4 offered how his high school coach saw that he was struggling and went out of his way to check on him; this helped him make better choices in his teenage years. Like Deacon 4, other participants' stories often included impactful examples where their communal support system provided guidance at a critical time in their life to help them overcome obstacles.

Some participants explained that these interactions were transformational and provided examples where the exchange left them with a greater sense of self-pride and awareness. Jordan and Wilson (2017) described the church's role as an educator and developer of critical life skills because of church and public education leaders' initiatives. Jordan and Wilson explained that prophetic activism (i.e., outreach programs, activities,

and benefits given to the community) supports and empowers Black males' life skills development.

Several of the participants interviewed indicated that their relationships with mentors influenced their leadership aspirations, which leads to the fourth theme of the value of investing in the future. The research and literature showed that Black males encounter obstacles and barriers during their development compared to their counterparts (Hodges et al., 2016). The participants discussed that it is essential to be sensitive to the needs of adolescent, Black males in today's world. Pastor 1 expressed that the world is challenging for young, Black males, and it makes mentoring challenging. He stated that there has to be a willingness to address these challenges. The participants acknowledged that the generational gap could impede today's Black community in that adolescent, Black males live differently.

Several participants expressed that they were active participants in mentoring programs for young, Black males. Deacon 6 worked with a mentoring program that taught chess to the youth, while Pastor 3 offers a program for young, Black boys that addresses being Black in the United States. These relationships primarily focused on high school-aged and young adult, Black males. One participant, Deacon 2, actively engaged in a mentoring role in the juvenile detention center, where he has role-playing and job-appropriate behavior conversations. This type of engagement leads to the fourth theme that emerged from the collected data, leaders' perceptions of the value of their roles as investing in the future of Black males.

Many participants acknowledge that the community and culture they experienced as adolescents differ from today's adolescents' experiences. They expressed a strong sense of community and positive influences that they experienced growing up. Even when they did not make the best decisions, the participants expressed a sense of knowing that they could rely on their support system. Jordan and Wilson (2017) suggested that the experience of people in the church, in collaboration with others, enables the development of programs or policies that increase individuals' critical life skills and, thereby, affect social change in the Black community.

Although many of the study respondents have participated in mentoring programs at their church, the focus primarily surrounded economic and academic growth concepts. These mentoring programs involved discussions of financial literacy, employment skills, and educational pursuits. By reflecting on the nature of their mentoring experience, the participants were mindful of the need for foundational skills for adolescents to help in economic and academic conversations.

The participants acknowledged that these programs are a means of sharing their knowledge with the participating youth. Like in Vygotsky's theory, these programs' focus is to have the learner imitate the lesson, duplicating another's action (see Shabani, 2016). The theory holds that constant interactions can simultaneously impact people and move their community (Shabani, 2016). Applying this type of interaction through vision and demeanor, leaders can transform organizational culture and motivate common goals.

The findings of this study provided impression-based examples of the Black Baptist leaders experiencing life skill development, character challenges, and individual

motivation through interactivity with mentors from their familial and nonfamilial support system. The participants' reflective observations demonstrated the achievement gaps for the Black population identified by Jordan and Wilson (2017) regarding the dominant culture of schooling (upper-income white racial category) and cultural awareness. These identified gaps are in areas in which Black Church activism's legacy can impact human development's essential life skills.

It is the psychology of change that an individual gets the skill set that will allow them to have the ability or the tenacity to become active participants within a community (Holbein et al., 2018). Some adolescent Black males lack this developmental opportunity to develop life skills and a critical understanding of their impact on life skills development (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Likewise, the participants shared statements demonstrating self-awareness, consciousness, and trust they developed due to these interactions. Many participants described impactful personal influence stemming from interaction with young Black males in the mentor's role.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In Chapter 1 a weakness was identified as a threat to credibility concerning the nature of the study in exploring male Black Baptist church leaders' perceptions of their role in adolescent Black males' life skills development. This threat originated from semi-structured interviews as the researcher performed the primary source of data collection. Therefore, I designed the interview instrument in alignment with the research question to address credibility and presented it in the same order to all participants.

I presented the findings of the study with narratives from the participants' responses during their interviews. I analyzed the responses without inference or interpretation. I used bracketing to reduce researcher bias's potential effect and bracketing the results during the data analysis process. My race or gender was a factor in the data analysis, not impeding or inferring any personal ideas into the participants' responses to the interview questions. As a novice researcher, I sought guidance and oversight from my faculty committee members to address the potential weakness of this study.

Participant interviews could not follow the original data collection protocol for this research study to be conducted in person. This change was due to external factors outside my control. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent stay-at-home restrictions altered the data collection process. Therefore, the interviews were conducted over the phone. An additional limitation of the study can be the data collection process. The information obtained during the interview depended primarily on the interviewee and what he was willing to share; their stories' nature was limited to their perspective and lived experiences. Therefore, threats to credibility, both substantive and ethical confirmability, were met as the findings in this study came from the participant and not the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Maxwell, 2015).

The transferability of the study did not consider activities and strategies that can help adolescent Black males identify or receive existing mentoring or access resources they have in their lives (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Semi structured interviews and thick descriptions of the participants' responses served as the transferability scope of this



study. To promote the trustworthiness of the findings, an audit trail is provided that addressed the dependability of the findings by describing the steps taken during this research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Areas that extend beyond the scope of the study include the perceptions of other faith-based organizations, non-leaders versus leaders, and males versus females. Furthermore, the research scope does not include experiences or different roles that participants may partake in that can serve as a means to influence adolescent Black males' life skills development.

### **Recommendations**

The nature of this study motivated the participants to reflect on their lived experiences through a social implications lens. Many participants shared stories about having influential encounters and relationships with mentors in their lives that aided in their development. However, they acknowledged not applying those experiences as motivation to actively participate in adolescent Black males' life skills development. Many participants' responses indicated that the generational difference in the community, family structure, and societal pressures was a factor in their development. While growing up, the participants said that when the Black church reinforced a large part of the community's morals and expectations, it was instrumental in community development. Along with the Church, their peers served as influencers as they were in the same circumstances, yet desired to improve their circumstances through the values of hard work, community engagement, and education.

The Black Baptist Church's role, interwoven in the Black community cultural setting, has a traditional place in communal worship, collectivity, and mediating the

Black journey in a broader social context (Logan, 2018; Taylor et al., 2014). Historically, the Black church's presence in Black communities has made a difference in advocating for equity, social justice, and cultural preservation (McIntosh & Curry, 2020). Therefore, it is likely that the Black church serves a vital role as a support resource for adolescent Black males to improve their life both now and in their futures. The Black Church and religion's importance are intertwined in the Black community and seep into the familial and community structure (Brown et al., 2015; Logan, 2018). For the participants, being a member of the Black Church extends into their family and cultural lives, making its significance beyond its primary role as a religious institution. As a central institution in the Black community, the Church is instrumental in molding the community's attitudes, expectations, and social mores (Logan, 2018). Minister 3 recanted how he and his sister called the Church their support system that helped prepare them for adult life through youth programs, conversations with older members, and biblical teachings.

In his discussion, Brock (2010) pointed out the social structure and its impact on marginalized groups' overall human development and how it has damaged their future ability to transition through life. Lozada, et al. (2017) further discussed the significance of socialization, who suggest that Black adolescents consider the importance of their race, their personal feelings about their racial group, and the experience of oppression for minority groups. Increasing dignity and respect in individuals' development process based on a fair and equitable level sets up a set of guidelines for programs and policies designed to improve individuals' attendance and success beyond the United States' educational institutions' walls.

Many participants indicated that this study was an exercise that inspired them to find courses of action that focused on how they can be active support for adolescent Black males. These efforts, according to the study findings, should include an attempt to understand the environment (physical and psychological), the community (people and resources), and life skills development (interaction with others) of adolescent males. Understanding these aspects can help apply how the Black Baptist church leaders can rely on their lived experience to impact.

This study could also guide their enactment of programs or policies to help young Black men increase their inclusion in the Black community and within the broader societal structure (Jordan & Wilson, 2017). Many participants acknowledge that they participated in mentoring activities in their respective churches. However, these programs were limited to academic and financial literacy natures. The study findings support the need to expand these mentoring programs to include active conversations, relationship-building, and social skill development.

### **Implications**

Baptist Church leaders can use this research data from this study to increase their knowledge to support adolescent Black males to improve their ability to seek employment, remove themselves from poverty, and understand their impact on others. Jordan and Wilson (2017) discussed the mission of the Church's outreach programs named prophetic activism, which are church activities that extend beyond the Church's physical walls. The purpose of this study was to explore Black Baptist church leaders' perceptions of adolescent Black males' social skill development. The Black Baptist

Church leaders who participated in this study can be used for future discovery, advancing the social change model of leadership development research in the Black Baptist Church.

This purpose of this study was to attempt to extend the understanding of the development process for adolescent Black males' life skills. Participants expressed appreciation for reflecting on these experiences and suggested that shared informal interaction leads to increased awareness and life skill development. The participants indicated that the interview and study parameters opened the conversation lead by several questions to include: How can male Black Baptist Church leaders effectively serve as mentors for Black men who may not share the same moral beliefs? How have mentorship opportunities influenced male Black Baptist Church leaders' life choices? How do Black Church leaders describe their role in Black men's life skills development? How do they reconcile their position regarding addressing the instabilities facing Black men in their communities?

### **Conclusion**

The exploration of the perceptions of male Black Baptist church leaders' role in adolescent Black males' life skills development was this study's purpose. I explored individual development from an external social-cultural lens of male Black Baptist church leaders' perceptions of male adolescent Black males' development. I identified four emerging themes from the data analysis, the leaders' perceptions of being a role model, importance of interpersonal relationships, perceptions of role to represent social responsibility, and perceptions of the value to invest in Black males' future.

I interpreted these themes using Vygotsky's theory, which includes social interaction as a form of cognitive development, the adult, and the ZPD. The theory's main assertions are that social interaction is vital in children's cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, Vygotsky (1978) argued that cultural development, via socialization, is the first stage of development, followed by personal development. Vygotsky developed his theory based on understanding individuals' social interactions and the subsequent social connection to the development of consciousness, behavior, and other human attributes to achieve higher psychological functions.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge and understanding by exploring male Baptist Church leaders' perceptions concerning their role as participants in adolescent Black males' life skills development. The findings of this study give insight explicitly on Church leaders' perceptions of their role and activities in the life skills development of adolescent Black males to facilitate their development of life skills. Faith-based institutions such as the Black Baptist church can be a mediator in addressing adolescent Black males' life skills development by male, Black, Baptist Church leaders recognizing the need to define and document the church leaders' role.

The current study considers the participants' perceptions yet does not expand to explain how they can translate them into actions. This present study explored efforts taken to define and document the role of church leaders and ultimately the mentoring of adolescent Black males' life skills development. It can serve as a reflective exercise to motivate the participating male Black leaders to become more active as social supports to adolescent Black males. I recommend that future research use this study as a foundation

for understanding how to address adolescent Black males' life skill development actively. Future research should consider the questions mentioned above as parameters of approach in determining how the bridge can be made between male Black Baptist church leaders' lived experiences and adolescent Black males' life skill development.

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## Appendix A: Partner Organization Pastor Letter

Grace be to you and peace from God our father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ,

A Walden University doctoral student and an active member of the church is currently conducting a study for his PhD Dissertation and is in need of individuals to conduct interviews and gather data for his study.

He is asking me to forward a letter of request for participation in the study to several of my colleagues; such as yourself. He feels this would be a tremendous opportunity to reach out to other churches and begin to identify some potential programs or policies that address concerns we may have in our churches.

It would be a great honor to have you and your male leaders participate in my member's study. Please contact him for further details.

Pastor

## Appendix B: Letter of Recruitment

Hello,

I am a doctoral student at Walden University pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services ó Social Policy Analysis and planning and seeking your help to complete my dissertation. While a doctoral student at Walden University, I have been exploring young black males' life skill development. As a result of this interest, my dissertation will focus on the role Black Baptist church leaders fill in this area, understand ideas about social relationships, and how this affects life skill development.

Currently, I am seeking black males who would be willing to participate in this study. In particular, I am seeking persons who are leaders in the Black Baptist church. Participants will engage in an interview lasting 30 - 45 minutes and held in a private setting (e.g., phone). I will provide participants an opportunity to review and corroborate their responses during the interview. The interview will be captured using audio-tools and transcribed. This study will follow all institutional Review Board rules and follow ethical guidelines for research, including obtaining Adult Consent and maintaining confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you may contact me. When you respond, please provide your contact information and reply "I consent" in your message.

Regards,

## Appendix C: Study Flyer



**RESEARCH STUDY  
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE**

**EXPLORING THE LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG  
BLACK MALES**

- **SEEKING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE BAPTIST CHURCH LEADERS, WHO WOULD BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**
- **PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ASKED TO ENGAGE IN A 30 - 45-MINUTE INTERVIEW AND HELD IN A PRIVATE SECURED SETTING**
- **THIS STUDY WILL FOLLOW ALL WALDEN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD RULES AND WILL FOLLOW ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH**

**Interested participants should contact me for additional information and to schedule an interview.**

#### Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Before beginning this interview, I want to thank you for your consent to participate in this study. I want to remind you of some necessary information about the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Black Baptist church leaders about the life skills development of young black males. The study will help understand how male Black Baptist church leaders perceive their role in young black male life skills development. I also want to remind you that the information you share in this interview will remain confidential. I will mask your real name with a pseudonym. Your pseudonym for the interview will be on the audiotapes and transcripts. If you have any questions regarding this study, interview, or any other query, please let me know.

Sincerely,

## Appendix E: Guideline Questions for Interviews

### **Research Protocol: Guideline Questions for Interviews**

#### **Research study: Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Mentoring Young Black Males' Development**

##### **Researcher:**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am exploring to find out how male Black Church leaders perceive their role in supporting and mentoring young black males develop some of their life skills**

**The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines life skills as the ability to respond and deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. These include skills in clear thinking, communicating with others, and being able to manage yourself in any situation.**

**I would like to ask you some questions about your personal experiences. If you do not want to answer the question, that is ok, please just say, "Next question," and I will move on.**

1. Please can you tell me about yourself; your role in the Church?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. During adolescence how did you develop what are called life skills; an ability for positive behavior and to deal with demands and challenges of everyday life?
4. During your adolescence, how did you learn to communicate with friends and people in the community?
5. What is your definition of a mentor?
6. What are the characteristics you believe a good mentor should exhibit?
7. Can you identify a time when a mentor helped you at a critical time in your life?
8. Please describe any activities you engage in as a mentor for young black males to help them develop life skills. (If not, describe activities you would engage in)
9. How would you describe your current mentoring relationship (if any) with young black males? (In your Community, at your church)
10. What was your most successful experience mentoring a youth to help them develop life skills?



11. What challenges do you think young black males face today that they need help with the most?
12. Mentoring a young person is a big responsibility and can change the lives of both the mentor and the mentee. What do you hope to gain from the experience and what do you hope the mentee gains from the relationship?
13. Has your leadership role in the Black Baptist church prepared you to be a support system for young black males in developing life skills?
14. How can Black Baptist church leaders use their experiences in life to inspire, influence, or help young black males' life skill development?
15. Do you have any particular questions for me, or would you like to add anything about your total interview experiences?

Thank you for your time. I will be conducting some more interviews. When I have completed the interviews, I will be analyzing the information and forming a conclusion. I will be happy to share a summary of the findings with you, and I can send them to you in an email if you like?

Again thank you for your time and participation.

## Appendix F: Adult Informed Consent

## ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

*Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Mentoring Young Black Males' Development*Principal Researcher:

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, *Church Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Mentoring Young Black Males' Development*, which is being conducted at the Walden University by a dissertation student. The purpose of this study is to describe and explore male Black Baptist Church Leaders' perception of their role in the life skill development of young black males.

Description of Procedures: The research will take place in the Southeast United States. The participant will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted over the phone or video conference and at a time and location convenient for the participant. The interview will be audio-video recorded to assure accuracy. All data will be transcribed and reported using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

After you have completed your participation, the researcher will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study, including loss of confidentiality. If at any time in the research process you decide you do not want to be part of the research, you may withdraw your participation or ask the researcher to make accommodations that will make you feel more comfortable. The possible conflict of interest associated with this study have been reduced by limiting the participant pool to those individuals without a pre-existing relationship.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you enjoy reflecting on your own experiences in life during adolescence through adulthood. The indirect benefit is that you will be contributing to a better understanding of the adolescent development of young black males. Participants will not receive gifts or monetary benefit for participation in this study.

Confidentiality: The researcher will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not associated with this research from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The email response consenting to participate in the study will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names, and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although I will make every effort to

protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached. All field notes and interview data will be kept using pseudonyms for participants rather than the real names of the participants.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with your church or any other entities. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation, you should contact the researcher.

If you have questions beyond those answered by the researcher or about your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, you may contact the Research Participant Advocate at Walden University.

Before you agree, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your email response must include the phrase: "I consent" which indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research. Ensure you maintain a copy of this document as well as your response to participate in the study.