THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-BASED MENTORING ON AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS USING AN ATTRIBUTION-RETRAINING CURRICULUM

by

Lance A. Robert

JOAN VERMILLION, PhD, Faculty Mentor and Chair

CAROL BECKER, PhD, Committee Member

DAVID KILMNICK, PhD, Committee Member

Curtis R. Brandt, PhD, Interim Dean, School of Public Service Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact that community-based group mentoring had on improving academic efficacy and personal efficacy of 31 African American male participants. The study measured the influence of the group-mentoring program, which was arranged around an attribution-retraining curriculum. Participants attended a summer academy where they were exposed to a series of attribution retraining seminars allowing them to engage in activities making connections to attribution retraining concepts. The study aimed to determine if the participant's perceptions about their intelligence would be positively influenced by the attribution-retraining curriculum administered over a course of the 2-week summer academy. Survey responses from a pretest and posttest as related to motivational dimensions of attribution were analyzed. The quantitative results revealed a marginally significant change noted by $t(29) = 1.82$, $p = 0.080$, (.05 = statistically significant) for the two-tailed t-test reflecting that the participants' perceptions changed slightly regarding their ability to grow their intelligence. A correlational exploration was also conducted, which revealed that the group mentoring seminars influenced the participants' motivation to make better choices and to feel better about their ability to control their academic and personal destiny. Implications of the study include establishing attribution-retraining curriculum as part of group mentoring models in nonprofit organizations. Also, using attribution-retraining curricula with African American males as a motivational concept for academic and personal success was determined a worthwhile endeavor to mitigate the challenges African American male adolescents face including broken family structure, poverty, poor academic performance, high dropout rates, and behavioral challenges.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First, I must dedicate it to those whose love I still feel even though they have passed on. Namely, I dedicate this body of work to my father, Peter Robert, Sr. and to my guiding light, my big sister, Nathalie Robert-Brembry, who passed as I was in the process of completing this study.

I must also dedicate this research to my mother, Elva Robert, who has been my self-esteem factory. Her love and support has always sustained me.

Finally, this work is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Sheri Robert, and our amazing son, Lance Robert, Jr. who told his classmates that he wanted to be just like me because I help people. Without them this work would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

A myriad of external obstacles exist that young African American boys face on a daily basis. The challenges range from alarming dropout rates, broken family structures, poverty, poor academic performance, which widens the achievement gap, exposure to crime and violence as well as large numbers of this demographic being placed in special education programs. These factors have all contributed to a downward spiral in academic achievement and personal success (Alexander, 2013; Canada, 1998; Hall, 2006; Kunjufu, 2010; Powell, 2008; Tatum, 2009; Thompson 2010; Wynn, 2007). This range of external, unstable conditions has erected barriers to academic and personal success for African American male youth. School districts across the country have implemented academic and extracurricular programs to help boost the achievement of this demographic despite the dismal conditions. However, many schools are struggling to meet the standards of proficiency set by federal No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top policies. The problems persist. In many cases personal and environmental factors adversely influence African American boys' achievement. For example, having been fed a barrage of negative media images about who they are and the potential they have, African American boys' prior beliefs and their ability to perform certain academic tasks can result in unsuccessful academic performance causing the achievement gap to become a racial gap (Noguera, 2003, 2008). Moreover, decreased academic performance is often accompanied by diminished motivation; therefore, it is

necessary to examine research to ascertain the underlying factors that may impact African American boy's motivation, and ultimately, their achievement.

Mentoring helps. It is widely known that mentoring and motivating African American boys helps the young men attach themselves to making better choices in spite of the external circumstances they face (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). This research study suggests that positive group mentoring models are good for this demographic, but it takes it one step further and offers the idea that African American male group mentoring programs that adopt attribution retraining models motivate participants to gain a level of control of their academic and personal destiny despite external barriers. Realizing that motivation and drive are essential components for personal success, attribution retraining empowers participants with attribution strategies to improve their perspective on potential success. If adopted, this construct interrupts the narrative that African American boys are doomed and chronic underachievers.

Background of the Study

The study postulated that schools and youth development programs are limited in their ability to attenuate the external environmental and social conditions, such as hunger, poverty, single parenting, crime, and even violence that plague portions of the United States' urban and rural neighborhoods. However, by using attribution-retraining techniques, teachers, mentors, and youth development workers are unfettered in their ability to motivate African American boys and thereby ameliorate African American boys' chances of success in school and in life, despite destabilizing personal conditions that might exist inside and outside of school.

The study centered on an African American male mentoring program located in southern California. The mentoring program operates as a nonprofit group mentoring organization, which utilizes an innovative curriculum focusing on building essential skills needed to become productive, confident, and successful adults. Young men who participate in the mentoring program are connected to positive role models, develop an appreciation and respect for cultural diversity, eliminate negative behaviors, and strive for academic achievement and character development opportunities. The program offers an array of interventions and enrichment opportunities. The specific intervention central to this study is the attribution-retraining curriculum.

Attritional motivational theory defines attributions as explanations regarding why particular behaviors occur. Explanations enhance an individual's ability to predict and control similar events in the future. Attribution theory is based on the research of Weiner (1986). Weiner's research focused primarily on attributions related to athletics; however, many of the concepts apply to academics as well. The three principal attribution dimensions are (a) locus of causality, (b) stability, and (c) controllability. Locus of causality refers to whether cause of a particular outcome is internal or external (inside or outside of the individual). Stability delineates whether a cause will (stable) or will not (unstable) change over time. The degree to which a cause is controllable or uncontrollable is determined by controllability. Weiner (2010) summarized,

> attribution intervention or reattribution training has resulted in behavioral change. This is in part because the interventions address the facts that self-doubt (attributions of failure to the self and success to external factors) and stable beliefs about the

causes of failure are important impediments to motivation, whereas unstable ascriptions for failure result in hope, which facilitates motivation. (p. 35)

Individuals have more control of their academic outcomes when the loci of control are internal, unstable, and controllable. Understanding the principal attribution dimensions is a primary step toward an individual having adaptive attributions that will lead to positive perceptions about intelligence, increased motivation, and improved academic achievement.

In 1975, Dweck determined whether altering attributions for failure would assist children exhibiting learned helplessness to cope better with failure. One of the first studies of its kind, Dweck (1975) found that students receiving Attribution Retraining Treatment demonstrated increased academic performance especially when previous failures were attributed to effort. This finding indicated that motivation could be positively influenced when participants made a correlation between increased effort and improved academic performance (Dweck, 1975). The relationship between motivation, effort, and academic performance is important to consider when assessing an attribution-retraining program (Dweck, 1975, 2007).

Encouraging effort is a necessary component of attribution retraining. Forsterling (1985) and Robertson (2000) both conducted a meta-analysis of attribution-retraining programs to examine design, implementation, and effectiveness. In his examination of the retraining programs, Forsterling initially set out to identify desirable and undesirable attributions but determined that a majority of attribution-retraining programs deems effort to be a key attribution for academic success. After reviewing the methodologies, implementation, and limitations of 15 programs, Forsterling concluded that attribution-retraining programs were successful in increasing both persistence and performance. By

indicating to program participants that academic failures were due to a lack of effort, which is a controllable attribute, the attribution-retraining programs worked to increase effort output and, consequently, increased achievement.

Statement of the Problem

In his 2014 initiative, "My Brother's Keeper" President Obama surmised the problems faced by boys of color are being disproportionately disconnected from education and from work. Obama touted the perils of this condition as a treacherous path for boys of color and for the nation. Obama insisted that, "We have got to give more of these young men access to mentors" (2014, p. 8). The current study supports the notion that African American boy's access to positive, caring mentors helps them meet developmental benchmarks to keep them on track for academic success (Rhodes & DuBois 2008). Moreover, the current study posits that adopting an attribution-retraining curriculum serves to combat maladaptive attributes characterized by factors that contribute to academic success are external such as luck, fixed ability, or static intelligence (Dweck, 2007b; Robertson, 2000; Weiner, 1986). The concept of learned helplessness, as espoused by Dweck (1975), further contributes to the mental disconnect that African American boys feel towards school. Helping African American boys overcome the paralysis inherent in learned helplessness, attribution retraining could modify maladaptive attributes significantly.

Across the nation a significant number of African American boys are labeled as a public problem. The basis of this view stems from statistics on low academic and social performance and disproportionately high numbers of African American male juveniles under court control. In schools across the United States, the presence of African American

male youth who are in special education, remedial classes, or on the suspension and explosion list is at a crisis level. Bailey and Paisley (2004) reported, "1 out of every 4 male African Americans is in jail or under court supervision and that there are more African American men in their 20s under court control than are enrolled in college" (p. 10).

There are implications that African American male youth across the nation are in crisis. According to the Schott Educational Inequity Index (Kunjufu, 2010), the African American male graduation rate in the state of California is only at "54%, this is a 21% gap in White male graduation rates" (p. 27). Kunjufu stated, "Only 29% of African American males graduate from college compared to 45% of African American females" (p. 39). Nationwide, "nearly 80% of Black male dropouts are concentrated in 20 cities and 2,000 schools" (Kunjufu, 2010, p. 35). This picture of the crisis in African American male academic achievement warrants that capable public service leaders devise, develop, and implement programs to curb the local and national academic and social achievement gap crisis.

Scholars and practitioners have done a great deal of work and research in the area of engaging African American males through mentoring programs. Lead scholars in this effort are numerous and all share a similar purpose. Among them are the works of psychologists Hare and Hare (1985) in their seminal book *Bringing the Young Black Boy to Manhood,* which outlines the development of Afrocentric rites of passage programs. Hare and Hare's work is significant since they are noted as leaders of the social change theory. Hare and Hare wrote the curriculum for the first Black Studies Program at the University of California, Berkeley (Taylor, 2010). Hare's research informed that the American Education System pre- and post *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had a detrimental effect on

alienating African American children (Taylor, 2010). Considering the antecedents of discrimination and the adverse generational impact of human and civil rights violations, government must lead in creating the space or more precisely the environment for historically disadvantaged communities to thrive. New Public Service and civic engagement, as espoused by Putnam (2000), claimed that alienation could be overcome by participation and involvement. Putnam explored the reciprocal benefits associated with social networking to build social capital, which then helps to solve social problems.

Barber (as cited by Knack, 2003) adopted the malleability New Public Service through democratic governance when he commented, "Unless we create healthy democratic communities, people will find ways of creating unhealthy communities" (p. 40). Barber (as cited by Knack, 2003) called for participatory democracy, which essentially is civic engagement and community collaboration.

Education scholar and practitioner Kunjufu (2005) wrote extensively on closing the Black male achievement gap. Noted primarily for his book, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, Kunjufu explored the need for caring teachers as well as the need for individual responsibility. New Public Service figures prominently into the assertions of the eminent scholar on educating African American children. The concept of caring public servants matches ideas espoused in virtue ethics, whereby Thiroux (2009) citing Aristotle asserted, "Every art and every inquiry, every action and choice, seems to aim at some good . . . [and] the good has rightly been defined as that at which all things aim" (p. 71). The good, relevant to service delivery to youth in crisis, means putting their needs at the forefront of the agenda. In short, public servants have to care. Reamer (1982) properly added that

public service is a care profession. Reamer argued that those citizens being helped by government service have "to take responsibility for their own survival" and uplift (p. 65).

Perhaps one of the most prominent scholars on the subject of mentoring and closing the achievement gap among Black males is the University of Illinois's Assistant Professor of Education and Reading, Tatum. In Tatum's (2009) text, *Reading for Life: Rebuilding the Textual Lineage of African Adolescent Males*, he offers literary engagement as a means to enable and empower young African American males to take control of their academic destiny. As a practitioner Tatum conducted a youth mentoring program that used reading and writing as a vehicle to change young lives for the better.

Even though attempts to serve African American boys are abundant, youth development programs that implement attribution-retraining techniques for African American boys are almost nonexistent. There is a gap in this practice of motivation. The current study contributes to the body of literature in the field of youth development for African American boys.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceptions that African American boys, age 7-17 who participated in a group-mentoring program, have about their intelligence and their ability to grow their intelligence. Further, the study attempted to reveal how participant exposure to attribution retraining exercises influenced their perceptions regarding their intelligence and their ability to make changes to grow their intelligence through increased effort. The goal of the study was to be able to present quantitative data from African American male youth who participated in a group mentoring program to contribute

to the understanding of participants' beliefs, motivation, and learning. Consequently, the findings could be applied and replicated to other mentoring programs and contribute to an increase in academic performance of students in school and youth development organizations.

Rationale

The study is positioned in the field of public administration. Public administration is about providing service and solving public problems. Using the public administration's framework of New Public Service, the research project is an attempt to disrupt the notion that disparity gaps in African American boys' academic and social achievement cannot be alleviated due to the enormity of social and environmental challenges. President Obama signed the Executive Order 13560 (2010) in an effort to "support the social innovation and civic participation agenda of the Domestic Policy Council . . . by identifying the key attributes of effective community-development solutions to our national problems" (p. 1). The executive order established the White House council for community solutions. One of the major aims of the council was to offer solutions to get disconnected youth connected to education and employment. The current research study is a response to President Obama's Call To Service campaign. The momentum has allowed a framing of the current research in attribution retraining as a community-based solution to the issue of African American boy's achievement gap crisis. Research generated in the field of public administration and data collected in this study could rank this project among seminal studies attempting to bridge the achievement gap among African American boys in the United States through youth mentoring. The study attempted to rely on the foundational rudiments of public

administration theory to alleviate some of the suffering by African American boys that is attendant to disparities that exist in African American adolescent academic and social achievement.

Communities depend on schools and institutions that serve youth to solve problems from within their own structures using their own resources. However, the problems that youth face are not narrowly associated to these institutions (usually government institutions), so support must come from ancillary organizations. The study offered a nonprofit youth organization's mentoring intervention as a model to assist in closing the gap. The rationale behind the model is that too much of the popular media discussion is narrowly focused on punishing the teachers, closing schools, or even competing with schools by offering duplicated services associated with the charter school movement solution. Models of community support that school children, specifically, African American boys need in order to thrive are missing. The study offered the model of attribution retraining whereby mentors give African American boys motivational techniques to help them thrive. Using nonprofit organizations that work in youth development is what Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) call the soul work of New Public Service.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions guided the study.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum?

Hypothesis 1

$H1_A$. There is a difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum.

$H1_O$. There is no difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum.

Research Question 2

How have the participant's perceptions of their academic ability changed as a result of attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum?

Hypothesis 2

$H2_A$. The perceptions of the participant's academic ability changed as a result of attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum.

$H2_O$. The perceptions of the participant's academic ability did not change as a result of attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum.

Research Question3

Does the attribution retraining intervention have an influence on African American boys?

Hypothesis 3

$H3_A$. The attribution retraining intervention has an influence on African American boys.

$H3_O$. The attribution retraining intervention does not have an influence on African American boys.

Significance of the Study

African American male group mentoring helps participants achieve. However, not just mentoring centered around the participants' interests, but mentoring that centers on attribution retraining has been shown to be effective in boosting motivation and increasing academic performance of students in diverse populations (Forsterling, 1985; Robertson, 2000). Attribution retraining programs examined the relationships between persistence, expectancies, and self-efficacy as well as how these phenomenon influence student motivation. Based on results derived from meta-analysis, attribution retraining positively influences student's academic performance.

The study provides information to people who work in youth development programs to create a curriculum more relevant to African American boys and thus provide them with a greater motivation to achieve academically. The study offers a model of attribution retraining that can be adopted by institutions that serve African American boys. Using this study as a model can inform teachers, policy makers, and youth development professionals on ways to help African American boys mitigate the gap in academic performance that occurs in schools. Lastly, African American boys can gain a deeper understanding about the factors that drive their personal and academic motivation, as well as how these beliefs about effort and ability can be retrained to achieve prime academic performance.

Definition of Terms

Attribution retraining. Attribution retraining is a non-cognitive, motivational intervention through which maladaptive attributions is replaced with more adaptive attributions with the goal of changing them into strategic ones, which consequently improve

future persistence and performance. Attribution retraining programs attempt to enhance motivation and behavior by modifying students' attributions for successes and failures (Farrington et al., 2012; Smith, 2013).

Attributions. Attributions are the specific causes people use to explain an outcome or a behavior, which shape the development of individuals' expectancy beliefs and affective reactions to different experiences (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). Furthermore, explanations for causes of events enhance people's abilities to predict and control events in the future (Smith, 2013).

Growth mindset. Growth mindset is the concept that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. More precisely,

> students with a growth mindset believe that academic ability is changeable rather than being fixed at a particular level, and they tend to attribute their academic performance to the amount of effort they put into their work, rather than to innate ability, luck, or other factors beyond their control. (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 30)

Fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is entity or static intelligence. Moreover, characterized by the belief factors that contribute to academic success are external, such as luck or uncontrollable, such as fixed ability or static intelligence (Dweck, 2007b; Robertson, 2000; Weiner, 1986).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's perceived beliefs about their potential for learning and performing at specific levels. Students' self-efficacy for learning can include general abilities, task-specific skills, interests, and personality traits. Variations in student self-efficacy can be due to factors, such as prior academic experiences and support

for learning (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008; Smith, 2013). For the current study, self-efficacy is essentially the, *I can succeed in school growth mindset,* "which in turn is related to increased academic perseverance when schoolwork gets challenging" (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 39). Throughout this study, the application of the research will be referred interchangeably as attribution retraining and growth mindset curricula.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were several assumptions that motivated this study. The first assumption was that African American boys need assessable role models to help them meet developmental benchmarks (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). A community-based group-mentoring program could fill that role. Another assumption was that (a) a mentoring program curriculum that focuses on attribution retraining is a good motivation model for African American male students, (b) mentoring around attribution retraining increases achievement and awareness of the value of education and making good choices, (c) a mentoring program can effect a change in the achievement of this demographic, and (d) the mentors are competent and effective in motivating the participants. The final assumption was that African American boys' desires empowerment strategies that will help them improve in school and make better life choices. This creates an ideal setting for men who want to mentor African American boys in order to create a change.

There were two limitations in the study. First, the study required the use of a quasi–experimental design with a non-equivalent control group. Creswell (2008) posited that the weakness associated with this design is that "the researcher does not randomly assign participants to groups" (p. 314). Since this was a study of a mentoring program the study

comes with a fixed number of participants and was limited to those participants who choose to be a part of the study. This limitation can be problematic in that there was one unified group as opposed to two groups who received slightly different treatment to measure the effectiveness of the treatment. A lack of random assignment and nonequivalence between the groups being studied could lead to less certainty about the results in comparison to a true experimental design. The second limitation was that the findings of the study could not be generalized to a larger population. The researcher only had this community-based program to conduct research. This is an issue inherent in the study. The limitation was due to the sample size, demographics, and characteristics of the participants in the sample. Conclusions will be limited to this study and this demographic.

Theoretical Framework

Motivational theory was the central theoretical foundation for the study. Community-based mentors play a key role in helping to engage/motivate students, and mentors play a crucial role in providing strategies to help cultivate higher levels of achievement among their mentees. Therefore, the study injected aspects of motivational theory that centers on attribution theory.

Attribution theory, as espoused by Dweck (2006) and Weiner (1986), maintained that the main factors or causes for success are within the student's ability to control. Dweck (2006) offered that students must adopt a growth mindset allowing them to be more resilient to face personal and academic setbacks. Positive attribute can be adopted and trained. Thus, strategies can be adopted to bring about better results. Motivation theory works well with mentoring because it presents a construct whereby the participant can control their

academic destiny through efforts, good choices, and persistence in the face of setbacks despite environmental and social obstacles.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 1 provided a background for understanding the issues surrounding the problem being addressed. Chapter 1 revealed the research questions and the structure of the study that highlighted an area of African American male youth's perceptions, which have not previously been extensively reviewed in nonprofit organization mentoring research. Chapter 2 explores a comprehensive review of research relevant to the current study and examines factors that influence motivation, such as theories of intelligence and developmental assets.

Emanating from the foundational information provided in Chapters 1 and 2 is the research methodology discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 presents the research design, selection of participants, the method of data collection, and the attribution-retraining curriculum implemented in the design. Chapter 4 illuminates a description of the site and the sample. Chapter 4 also synthesizes the findings ascertained from the research. The themes that emerged and the procedures involved are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary of results and possible answers to the research questions as related to literature in the field. A summary with expressions of the limitations and recommendations for future studies are suggested.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Using the following databases from the School of Public Service Leadership, the researcher divided the topic into component parts of a controlled vocabulary. Databases used included SocINDEX, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete ProQuest Education Journals, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, ProQuest Psychology Journals, Sage Journals Online Science Direct, Dissertations and Theses Full Text. The combination of truncated terms used search included African American or Black, mentor or empower, attribution, attribution retraining, boys, and education or school, classroom, or community-based mentoring. Gaps in the literature were found noted by limited articles that precisely articulated the study topic. For instance, mentoring articles are wide in scope, but mentoring African American boys was less prevalent and even scarcer was scholarship on community-based mentoring programs for this demographic.

The literature unveiled a small number of scholarly articles centered on mentoring African American males in school settings, but the same concept was rare in community-based mentoring programs. The overriding gap in the literature was that there were no articles that addressed community-based mentoring relevant to attribution retraining intervention and enrichment for African American boys. Hence, the literature review was synthesized from component parts of the topic. In an attempt to substantially address the interrogatives framed in the study, the literature review explored scholarship on mentoring,

mentoring African American boys, attribution theory, and attribution change programs, both design and meta-analyses, as centered on attribution retraining for African American boys in community-based youth development programs.

Mentoring

An abundance of literature exists that promulgates the benefits of positive youth development programs. Scholars and practitioners have conducted numerous studies on the influence of youth mentoring and academic mentoring. In many studies, scholars have measured the influence of positive caring role models that help youth improve in areas of behavior, character, manners, and academic performance (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). The overarching findings were that youth involved in sustained positive youth development programs over time improved in their social and emotional development.

Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, and DuBois (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on mentoring scholarship that covered 15,131 peer-reviewed articles. Eby et al. found that being mentored produced more positive social relationships, higher academic performance, and less behavioral problems among the youth mentored. Synthesizing the scholarship on mentoring, Grossman, Roffman, and Rhodes (2002); Benson, Leffert, Scales, and Blyth (2012); and Geldhof, Bowers, and Lerner (2013) explored the utility of alternative practices associated with positive youth development programs. These authors concluded that most efficacious community-based mentoring programs help children thrive by focusing on six strands. The strands include (a) competence in areas of social, vocational, health life styles, and academic performance; (b) confidence in self and ability to adopt behaviors that lead to

success; (c) character to know what is right and to work for good; (d) connections to friends, family, and faith; (e) caring about others; and (f) making contributions to the community in positive ways. The model carries the idea that when positive youth development programs are intentional in seeking to help youth thrive, the programs will accomplish that goal (Geldhof et al., 2013). Hall (2006) trumpeted the idea that youth mentoring is not only a labor of love but is about "helping all youth understand who they are, assisting them in building a healthy self-concept, and supporting them in their dreams, visions, and goals" (p. 15). These studies focused on school based mentoring and one-on-one mentoring programs. For the most part, the results of the studies on mentoring looked at the efficacy of community-based mentoring models as associated with national programs, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that mentoring makes a beneficial influence by supporting youth through the maturation process.

Mentoring African American Boys

The study relied on information gathered from community-based mentoring programs focused on African American boys. Particularly instructive to this study was the100 Black Men of America's mentoring programs. The 100 Black Men of America have over 117 chapters across the nation. The organization has programs across the country established to mentor young African American boys. Mentoring the 100 Way addresses the (a) social, (b) emotional, and (c) cultural needs of children ages 8-18. Members of the 100 Way are trained and certified to become mentors, advocates, and role models for the youth within their communities. Through chapter-operated one-to-one and group mentoring efforts, members forge relationships that positively influence youth (Marbley, 2006; Wynn,

2007). The incorporated 100 Black Men of America has more than 100,000 youth participants annually in its mentoring and youth development programs (Dossman, 2014). Even though the organization is nationally incorporated, local chapters have autonomy in developing specific interventions and enrichment activities for the participants. This gives the program directors latitude when it comes to determining the efforts needed to match specific needs of the young African American men in their program. Marbley noted,

> The 100 Black Men are organized around the mission of improving the quality of life within our communities and enhancing educational and economic opportunities for all African Americans, with the vision of seeking to serve as a beacon of leadership by utilizing our diverse talents to create environments where our children are motivated to achieve, and to empower our people. They continue to be a strong force in the African American community and the world by confronting the cultural, educational, health, and financial obstacles that have limited the achievement of many African Americans, particularly young African American males. (2006, p. 10)

The efforts of the100 Black Men mentoring programs are well noted in African American communities (Marbley, 2006).

Other African American male youth development programs that informed the study were school-based programs developed by school counselors. Namely, the Kenwood Brotherhood established by Wyatt (2000) was created to encourage an Afrocentric curriculum culminating with a rite of passage program for boys in Chicago public schools. Specifically,

> the Nguzo Saba's seven principles were chosen because its rites of passage into the adulthood system support the transformation purpose of the Brotherhood. Umoja

> (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imnni (faith) are the seven principles that provide an Afrocentric approach to the male mentoring initiative. (Wyatt, 2009, p. 463)

The elements of Nguzo Saba, as expressed by Wyatt, are empowering for young African American males because they clarify their role and responsibility in shaping their own destiny (Kunjfu, 2010; Wyatt, 2009). Wyatt noted that results indicated that participation in a school-based mentoring program improved students' academic achievement and fostered personal and social growth and aspirations of success. Wyatt's study of African American high school boys in the Kenwood Brotherhood showed significant influence in academic performance noted by the boys being more accountable and more culturally aware. The indicator that Wyatt cited was an improvement in the student's grade point averages.

A great deal of mentoring young African American males involves motivation and culturally relevant empowerment training (Kafele, 2012). However, equally important are the strategies used to help this demographic produce improved outcomes. Johnson (as cited by Powell, 2008) maintained that young African American males must use their intellect, passion, and drive to "create sophisticated strategies that change things that we know [do not] work" (p. 30). Dweck (2011) supported this observation claiming that effort will activate our ability, good strategies, and choices to help students succeed.

Another agenda that informed the study was a school-based mentoring program developed by school counselors called Project: Gentlemen on the Move. This program was designed to develop and nurture academic and social excellence in African American male adolescents (Bailey & Paisley, 2004). The program assumptions serve as the foundation

and driving force for the Project: Gentlemen on the Move model. The assumptions are as follows:

1. African American parents want their children to succeed and will participate if opportunities are provided;
2. all are capable of learning;
3. all know right from wrong but may not know or understand the consequences for their behaviors;
4. all young people want to do what is right;
5. all are at-risk;
6. all deserve a quality education;
7. all have a right to fail, if they so choose (however, it is critical that the consequences for this choice are made clear along with the opportunities for personal growth);
8. all young people are worthy of forgiveness from others and themselves;
9. all are worthy of love, nurturing, guidance, support, and meaningful opportunities; and
10. stereotypes of male African Americans can only be changed by providing positive views of male African Americans. (Bailey & Paisley, 2004, p. 13)

The success of the Project: Gentlemen on the Move mentoring program was due to the strict accountability that the program placed on the students for their own behavior. Adult mentors wholly supported behaviors that led to good grades and positive outcomes. This is consistent with Kafele's (2012) notion that empowering young African American males consisted of adults helping youth to see themselves as learners who are focused on

achieving excellence through disciplined effort and by encouraging them to become "resilient after their setbacks" (p. 68). Personal effort is the key component for success.

Studies aimed at evaluating the efficacy of gender specific African American male mentoring programs are instructive. However, fewer studies have been conducted on African American community-based mentoring programs for boys, and even fewer studies have been conducted on the benefits of attribution retraining mentoring for African American boys. It is necessary to examine the potential influence that attribution retraining programs can have on this demographic.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is a psychological theory used to describe the way individual attributes effect outcomes. Lead theorist, Weiner (2010) summarized the causes of outcomes in five ways: (a) internal causes of success (e.g., high aptitude) pride, (b) internal controllable causes of failure (e.g., lack of effort), guilt, and regret, (c) internal uncontrollable causes of failure (e.g., low aptitude), shame, and humiliation, (d) stable causes of failure (e.g., unfair teacher), hopelessness, and (e) unstable causes of failure (e.g., bad luck, hope; p. 33). Weiner posited that understanding the causes of the academic outcome would enable students to better predict and then control the events in their lives.

In attribution theory, motivational drive is rooted in the youth's classification along the dimensions of attributions. More specifically, the three attribution strands are the locus of causality, which refers to whether the cause of a particular outcome is internal or external (inside or outside of the individual). Stability designates whether a cause will (stable) or will not (unstable) change over time. The degree to which a cause is controllable or uncontrollable is determined by controllability. According to Schunk et al. (2008), the

causal strands have the potential to greatly influence an individual's expectancies for success, self-efficacy beliefs, emotional disposition, and, ultimately, behavior. Understanding the attribution strands are a primary step toward an individual having adaptive attributions that will lead to positive perceptions regarding intelligence, increased motivation, and improved academic achievement (Smith, 2013). For an individual having adaptive attributes, the best outcomes are direct, and it is the choice of the individual to understand that they can retrain their thinking with strategies and choices that have been known to help other students achieve more (Dweck, 2006). For example, a student with maladaptive attributes would view the causes of failure as external, uncontrollable, and stable over time, which might lead to a sense of learned helplessness and difficulty persisting in the face of setbacks (Craske, 1988; Fowler & Peterson, 1981). This would cause a student to become less motivated to succeed in school.

On the other hand, a student with adaptive attributes would view the causes of failure as internal, controllable, and unstable meaning that the individual can change the outcome with effort, strategies, and choices (Dweck, 2006). The current study attempted to evaluate the efficaciousness of implementing an attribution-retaining intervention for African American boys through a community-based group-mentoring model. According to Yeager et al. (2014), attribution retraining "tactics developed in a long line of past brief social-psychological interventions that affected consequential outcomes over time showed that a brief attribution-retraining intervention could improve struggling students' grades at the end of the following semester. Walton and Cohen (2011) showed that "a brief (1-hour) social belonging intervention could improve minority college students' academic

achievement 3.5 years post intervention" (p. 1447). Clearly, a small dose of intervention and attribution enrichment can have lasting effects.

Attribution theory, as espoused by Dweck (2006) and Weiner (1986), maintains that the main factors or causes for success are within the student's ability to control. Dweck (2006) posited that students must adopt a growth mindset (incremental intelligence) that allows them to be more resilient when it comes to facing personal and academic setbacks. This positive attribute can be adopted and trained. Thus, strategies can be adopted to bring about better results. Motivation theory works seamlessly with mentoring because it presents a construct whereby the mentee can control their academic destiny through effort, good choices, and persistence in the face of setbacks despite environmental and social obstacles.

In the field of developmental psychology, concepts involving effort and aptitude are called attributions (Dweck & Goetz, 1978; Horner & Gaither, 2004; Weiner, 1979). For the most part, a mentee's attributions are influenced by the belief that the mentee has regarding their intelligence. Mentees who believe their intelligence is fixed and unlikely to change are prone to exert less cognitive effort when faced with academic challenges. On the contrary, mentees who believe their intelligence is malleable recognize that cognitive ability or intelligence can be developed with effort (Dweck, 2006). Since attribution theory has to do with the way students explain the causes for outcomes, mentors must help mentees develop strategies for them to become lifelong learners so that they can improve in life and in school.

Attribution Change/Retraining Programs

Attribution research has shown that there is a need for attribution change programs that attempt to alter student's attributions for successes and failures thereby increasing motivation (Schunk et al., 2008; Smith, 2013). Attribution-retraining programs have been implemented with the purpose of altering maladaptive attributions to increase student achievement by changing their beliefs about ability and achievement (Horner & Gaither, 2004). According to Robertson (2000), attribution-retraining programs have several goals. One goal is to have students focus on the task rather than be distracted by fear of failure. Another goal is to encourage students to reflect upon undesirable outcomes and reflect upon their strategies to devise with alternate methods for problem solving instead of giving up. A third goal of attribution-retraining programs, according to Robertson, is to have students attribute failures to insufficient effort rather than a deficit in aptitude or intelligence. The current study centered on Robertson's the third point, which is the relevance and efficacy of an attribution-retraining curriculum that encourages African American boys to focus on effort and strategies for success.

Research supports the notion that attribution-retraining programs positively affect student attributions. The chief purpose of attribution retraining is to help the student replace maladaptive attributions, especially those related to failure, with more positive attributions that serve to improve academic performance (Jackson, Hall, Rowe, & Daniels, 2009). Attribution retraining programs are typically used for dispirited individuals who are unmotivated and therefore unlikely to achieve (Perry & Penner, 1990; Weiner & Sierad, 1975).

The best-case scenario in an attribution-retraining program would entail the individual adopting a different mindset or a growth mindset toward cognitive challenges. Schunk et al. (2008) and Smith (2013) claimed that attribution-altering programs could increase motivation by modifying student's attributes for successes and failures. When learning new content or a new skill, it is likely the student will encounter difficulty. If the difficulty is attributed to low ability, students will tend not to exert additional effort. Conversely, if students believe the difficulty could be decreased by a controllable factor such as study skills or effort towards mastery, they will exert that additional effort.

Attribution-Retraining Program Design

Attribution retraining for change programs can positively influence student performance outcomes; therefore, it is important to understand their design and how they work. Dweck was one of the first to conduct studies on attribution retraining in 1975. Participants in the Dweck study included children identified as possessing low expectancies for success and whose achievement behaviors diminished when a task was unsuccessful. The purpose of Dweck's study was to determine how a particular attribution retraining treatment might influence children's responses to failure in comparison to a previously utilized treatment that did not alter attributions (Dweck, 1975). The Success Only Treatment was hypothesized to increase children's expectations for success, which would consequently allow the child to maintain his or her performance despite failure. The Success Only Treatment consisted of math problems that the children could complete relatively easily and within a time limit on every trial. In the attribution-retraining treatment, 20% of the trials included more math problems than the children were able to

complete in the previous trial. In the attribution retraining trials, the experimenter attributed children's failures to a lack of effort and verbalized these attributions to the children (Dweck, 1975). Results indicated that attribution-retraining children (those who were told that failures were due to lack of effort) showed less decline on the results on subsequent tests than those students who were *success only* and given tasks at or below their ability level. Students who were part of the attribution-retraining treatment sustained or enhanced their academic performance (Dweck, 1975).

More recently, Blackwell, Trezesniewski, and Dweck (2007) conducted a longitudinal study and an intervention, which confirmed that

> adolescents who endorse more of an incremental theory of malleable intelligence also endorse stronger learning goals, hold more positive beliefs about effort, and make fewer ability-based, helpless attributions with the result that they choose more positive, effort-based strategies in response to failure, boosting mathematics achievement. (p. 258)

Blackwell et al. (2007) concluded that even though students have varying aptitudes for certain subjects, attribution retraining can help students by providing them strategies to reach their potential.

Meta-Analyses Attribution Retraining

The benefits and limitations of attribution retraining programs have been conducted through research meta-analysis. Forsterling (1985) reviewed 15 attribution-retraining studies and Robertson (2000) conducted a comprehensive review of 20 attribution-retraining programs. Both meta-analyses determined that attribution-retraining programs were

beneficial in increasing motivation and student performance. Forsterling (1985) pointed out that nine of the 15 programs used a persuasion technique whereby the experimenter stated the desired attribution outcome to the participants. Two studies employed modelS where participants viewed videos that depicted scenarios where people exhibited desirable attributions. The remaining studies utilized operant conditioning or gave participants attribution-related information conveyed through fabricated interviews on videotape Forsterling (1985) emphasized that an important distinction when designing attribution retraining programs is determining which attributions are desirable and which are undesirable. Forsterling's research supported that attributions classified on the attribution dimension as internal, unstable, and controllable are typically deemed more desirable because individuals have control over future outcomes.

Forsterling (1985) and Robertson (2000) highlighted limitations with the attribution retraining programs. One limitation was that very few studies assessed participants' changes in affect following the retraining. Another limitation was that none of the studies reviewed by Forsterling had examined the links between affects and expectancies. Forsterling asserted that these links would be helpful for testing various models of behavior. In addition, another limitation was that participants' attributions could be influenced by the attributions of the experimenter. For example, if the experimenter attributes participants' failures or lack of effort, those participants might perceive the experimenter's attribution as an instruction to try harder. As a result of this perception, participants' increased persistence following the retraining could simply be an attempt to comply with an instruction to try harder, rather than an attributional change. However, Forsterling cited evidence against this limitation, which included long-term follow-ups, changes in tasks and

experimenters, and finding the same results even when subjects were not directly encouraged to try harder.

Robertson (2000) also highlighted some of the limitations of the attribution retraining programs including the concerns of conducting the programs in classrooms, the inverse relationship between effort and ability, and the challenges related to researching attribution training in classroom settings. Robertson found that in many cases attributions were not implemented as fully in classroom settings as they would be in a laboratory because teachers had insufficient time. Because attribution retraining can be time-consuming, some participants believed that the programs might not be the most effective method for motivating students to learn.

Robertson (2000) reviewed research on the influence of attribution retraining used for students with learning disabilities to determine if attribution retraining was a useful intervention for this demographic. A comprehensive review was done so that the various methods, which included scripts, dialogues, and procedures, could be duplicated in classrooms (Robertson, 2000). Although the results of the 20 studies reviewed by Robertson were mixed, it was determined that attribution retraining was a worthwhile intervention for students with disabilities. When further examining the studies, Robertson determined that while the attribution programs may at first appear to be based on the simple concept of encouraging students, the process of attribution retraining is much more complex. Programs are not always practiced in a way that aligns to the theory of attributions (Robertson, 2000). Despite the mixed outcomes of the effectiveness of the attribution programs reviewed, Robertson asserted that overall attribution retraining was beneficial.

Attribution for African American Boys

Graham (1997) claims that attribution training is a worthwhile endeavor to assist African American boys with issues related to academic performance and aggression. Since Fosterling (1985) argued in his meta-analysis that attribution retraining promotes a slight altering in thinking to produce significant changes in behavior, Graham contended that attribution retraining was a fundamental theoretical construct for helping Black boys succeed. Case in point, in 1993, Hudley and Graham implemented an attribution change program in Los Angeles public schools with 66 African American boys. The aim was to help aggressive boys make better choices. The conclusions were consistent with the research predictions. An instructive component of the study was that it made a successful connection between behavioral change and cognitive development for African American boys in a school setting (Graham, 1997).

The limitations and barriers associated with attribution retraining for African American boys as noted in the literature and in a *Longitudinal Examination of African American Adolescents' Attributions About Achievement Outcomes* by Swinton, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, and Okeke-Adeyanju (2011) are that many African American boys adopt an oppositional stance toward school (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986: Ogbu, 2004). Graham (1997) and Kunjufu (2010) called this oppositional stance the cool pose. Ogbu made the case that African American adolescents adopt this oppositional stance toward school because they are rejecting the idea of assimilating to the dominant cultures middle class promulgation that school is a reliable pathway to future success. Ogbu argued that since the emancipation of slavery in the United States, African Americans have had a collective identity and fictive kinship (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) that often times rejects dominant

American or White cultural values towards school. Ogbu called this stance Resistance, meaning that

> some Blacks opposed adopting White cultural and language frames of reference or 'acting White' anywhere because they believed or feared that this would mean giving up their Black ways. It would also mean accepting White people's interpretation of the cultural and dialect differences between the two races. (2004, p. 16)

Conversely, Ogbu argued that many African American have not rejected the White cultural frame of reference but have accommodated or assimilated to them in order to maneuver successfully throughout American society.

It is reasonable to assume that if African American boys adopt the cool pose or oppositional stance toward school, then they may be more apt to view the outcomes of their academic progress as something that they cannot control because the locus of causality would be placed on stable, uncontrollable, external factors (outside of the individual). According to Weiner (2010), individual perceptions of attributions that are stable, uncontrollable, external factors (outside of the individual) are more difficult for the individual to change and may lead to a decline in motivation and desire to actively participate in manufacturing a more favorable outcome. In fact, it may lead to a sense of learned helplessness whereby the patterns of learned perceptions lead an individual to see no connection between the behavior and outcomes leading to hopelessness and passivity (Dweck, 1975). The sense of learned helplessness then leads to individuals adopting maladaptive behaviors and assuming a lack of motivation. Canada (1998) advanced the notion that many teenaged African American boys create an emotional distance between

themselves and the rest of the world, which causes them to stop caring about what is important. Many times this stance is adopted because the individual's perceived locus of causality for failure is internal and uncontrollable, which may translate in to a low aptitude for the subject area. Dweck (2011) showed that effort will activate ability. Once African American boys understand the nexus between diligent effort and improved academic performance their ability to predict and control academic outcomes will be enhanced in the future.

Another factor that may inhibit academic motivation for African American boys thereby reducing the effectiveness of attribution retraining enrichment activities are stereotype identity threats (Steele, 1997, 2011). According to Steele (1997), an identity threat is

> a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self-definition. (p. 16)

The implications are that if African American boys internalize the identity threat it could hinder or even diminish the boy's aptitude in that particular domain (Steele, 1997).

This assumption was given credence in Steele and Aronson's (1995) study of African American college students. The research suggested that negative stereotypes questioning or second-guessing on the part of African American college student's intellectual abilities played a role in their underperformance. Moreover, awareness of these stereotypes can psychologically threaten African Americans, which can in turn produce

responses that impair both academic performance and psychological engagement with academics (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Further, according to Eccles et al. (1993) cultural stereotypes the teachers may have about students, particularly middle school students may also serve to contribute to negative student/teacher relationships. As a result, students have a difficult time trusting and cultivating positive relationships with middle school teachers who hold these stereotypes. This lack of support then contributes to a lack of motivation on the part of the student (Eccles et al., 1993). Steel (1997) offered that one way to attenuate influence of the stereotype threat has on the student is to have the student participate in attribution retraining exercises as designated by Dweck (1975).

In order to help African American males achieve, Harper and Davis (2012) supported the idea espoused by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) of using mentors to facilitate the counter narrative. Whereas mainstream narratives about Black boys in many cases point out their deficits feeding the stereotypes, the counter narrative highlights personal narratives and other people's victory biographies to show young African American males that like others, they too can become current achievers or future achievers (Harper & Davis 2012). Narratives constructed are around the notion that intelligence is malleable and that anyone who tries can grow their brain.

In order to mitigate the stereotype threat, Aronson, Fried, and Good (2002) conducted an attribution retraining experiment as a method of helping students resist maladaptive responses to stereotypical threats. More vividly, "students in the experimental condition of the experiment were encouraged to see intelligence—the object of the stereotype—as a malleable rather than fixed capacity" (Aronson et al., 2002, p. 113). This

growth mindset was predicted to make students' performances less vulnerable to stereotype threats and help them maintain their psychological engagement with academics both of which could help boost their grades. The African American students who were encouraged to view intelligence as malleable or easy to change reported greater enjoyment of the academic process, greater academic engagement, and obtained higher grade point averages than their counterparts in the control groups.

The Aronson et al. study of African American college students is instructive. Using an attribution-retraining curriculum, whereby the students were taught that intelligence can be developed with effort and persistence, helped the students improve in their academic performance. The students were inoculated with the concept that a growth mindset or an incremental intelligence mindset (Dweck, 2006) would help them through academic challenges and setbacks. The students engaged in numerous activities that encouraged them to set learning goals rather than performance goals (Dweck, 1975). The aim was to help the students' transition from an entity intelligence of a fixed mindset, to that of a growth mindset or incremental intelligence (Dweck, 2006). In short, Aronson et al. (2002) taught college students a growth mindset and taught the control group about multiple intelligence. There was also a no-training control group. The growth mindset group showed significantly higher grades than the control groups. This was particularly true for African American students who also showed a sharp increase in their valuing of school and their enjoyment of their academic work. The results were consistent with Aronson et al.'s (2002) prediction that African American students would improve their academic outcomes overtime. This prediction is also consistent with Weiner's (1985, 2010) theory that when the locus of

causality for academic outcomes is internal, controllable (effort), and unstable (changeable), the more likely the student will be motivated take charge of their academic destiny.

The literature explored thus far demonstrated that identifying attributions for better outcomes are key components to understanding the role motivation plays in academic performance. When academic success is attributed to something within the control of the African American mentee, such as effort, the mentee is likely to be motivated to persist when academic tasks are challenging. When academic success is internalized as something that is abstract and outside (external) the cultural realm or reach of the mentee, the mentee is more likely to become detached and unmotivated. In many cases, decreased student achievement among African American boys is accompanied by diminished motivation; therefore, it is important to examine relevant research to better determine the underlying factors that may influence African American boys' motivation to achieve. Increasing understanding about attribution retraining programs in community-based group mentoring settings may bring mentors and mentees several steps closer to improving academic performance for African American boys.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of the study was to illustrate the potential influence that a community-based mentoring program for African American boys would have by instituting an attribution retraining enrichment curriculum with exercises and activities aimed at encouraging a growth mindset among the participants. Implementing these strategies was an attempt to gauge if the participant's exposure to growth mindset concepts would have an influence on changing their perceptions of their intelligence and thereby empowering themselves to take control of their academic and personal destiny and improve their outcomes. The study was not meant to produce generalizations outside the program and population being studied. The study was conducted to measure the influence of the mindset attribution training on the participants during a two-week summer intervention and enrichment opportunity.

Sample

The sample was chosen from an African American male mentoring program. There were 31 participants, ages 7-17, who, with parental permission, agreed to take part in the study. All of the participants reported to be African American. All of the participants were members of the male mentoring program participating in the program's two-week mentoring, education, and leadership summer academy. Thirty-one participants took the

pretest, and 30 participants took the posttest. One participant was eliminated from the data analysis.

Setting

Site permission was granted by the site's board of directors with a letter of permission signed by the chapter president. Considering that some of the mentoring sessions would occur at an offsite classroom facility, site permission was also granted by the director of the outreach and relations with the participating school.

The attribution retraining or growth mindset-training curriculum was conducted using a group-mentoring model that took place in classrooms at the site. The participants were seated in a "U" shaped configuration. The mentors who introduced the concepts walked down the middle while both lecturing and engaging the participants in individual and group activities. The participants arrived to the classroom site in the morning and would receive two hours of intensive instruction aimed at motivating the participants to adopt a growth mindset regarding academics. The various mentors who delivered the lessons attempted to persuade the participants to adopt the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors of growth mindset (incremental intelligence) thinkers. After the intervention exercises, the participants were exposed to information delivered by mentors relevant to their literacy development and the study of law. Mentors who are practicing attorneys led moot court sessions. Most of the participants also participated in the moot court exercises. The additional mentoring activities helped keep the participants interested to complete the summer mentoring, education, and leadership academy and thereby receive the complete intervention associated with the study.

Instrumentation/Measures

Principal Component Analysis

The SPSS software showed the factors that were measured. Specifically, the two factors measured were fixed mindsets and growth mindsets. Given that a single factor solution performed nearly as well as the 2-factor solution and that the six items appeared to tap into the same construct, the researcher include all six items in a single scale assessing the belief that intelligence is malleable.

Three of the items on the scale were reverse coded so that higher scores on all six items reflected a greater belief that intelligence is malleable. A single scale comprised of the six items was created by summing the individual Measuring Your Mindset (Dweck, 2007a) questions yielding a single variable with possible scores ranging from 6 to 36. Examination of Cronbach's alpha showed a high degree of internal consistency (a = .73), with single-item deletions making negligible changes to the scale's overall alpha value.

Table 1. *Case Processing Summary*

Scales: All variables		
Cases	*N*	Percentage
Valid	31	100
Excluded	0	0
Total	31	100

Note. a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 2. *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	.729
Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	.735
Number of items	6

Table 3. *Item Statistics*

	Mean	Std deviation	*N*
Pre 1	4.1290	1.66817	31
Pre 2	4.5161	1.67075	31
Pre 3	4.3548	1.56095	31
Pre 4 Reverse Scored	4.9032	1.51338	31
Pre 5 Reverse Scored	4.8710	1.28431	31
Pre 6 Reverse Scored	4.9677	1.16859	31

Table 4. *Inter-Item Correlation Matrix*

	Pre 1	Pre 2	Pre 3	Pre 4 reverse scored	Pre 5 reverse scored	Pre 6 reverse scored
Pre 1	1.000	.657	.583	.111	-.039	.259
Pre 2	.657	1.000	.515	-.046	.048	.180
Pre 3	.583	.515	1.000	.297	.157	.664
Pre 4 Reverse Scored	.111	-.046	.297	1.000	.405	.488
Pre 5 Reverse Scored	-.039	.048	.157	.405	1.000	.464
Pre 6 Reverse Scored	.259	.180	.664	.488	.464	1.000

In order to assess whether participants' perceptions of the malleability of their intelligence was influenced from pretest to posttest, a repeated paired samples *t*-test was conducted.

Data Collection

Considering that the participants and their parents previously attended an orientation to learn about the research study and sign the consent forms, on day one of the male mentoring summer program, the participants were given a pretest. The pretest was administered before the students had any exposure to the attribution-retraining curriculum.

The study utilized a quantitative research method approach. The participants were given a survey that consisted of six questions to be answered using a Likert-type scale. This same test was administered as both a pretest and a posttest. The participants were also given a progress assessment survey with three questions to be answered using a Likert-type scale. The pretest and the posttest allowed the researcher to examine the first and third research questions. Research Question 1 was, "Is there a difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum?" Research Question 3 was, "Does the attribution retraining intervention have an influence on African American boys?" The progress assessment allowed the researcher to make a correlating exploration to answer, "How have the participants' perceptions of their academic abilities changed as a result of an attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum?"

According to Dweck (2007a), the aforementioned Measuring Your Mindset (Dweck, 2007a) Likert-type questions were reliable, valid, and can be generalized. The measuring student mindset questions were retrieved form Dweck's (2007a) seminal work "Boosting Student Achievement With Messages That Matter." To further ensure the validity of the research questions, a factor analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The results of this test were described in the Principal Component Analysis section.

Data Analysis

Paired Samples *t*-Test

Using a repeated measure *t*-test, the data showed that all African American male youth participants attending the mentoring program marginally changed perceptions of their intelligence. The marginally significance was measured by $t(29) = -1.82$, $p = 0.080$. The data showed that the needle did move in a positive direction. The significance was denoted as marginal because shift in perceptions were slight. Based on the results of the pretest, participants for the most part already had an incremental or growth mindset view of their intelligence and therefore their ability to use effort, strategies, and help from others to improve in their academic performance. Most of the 31 participants were already members of the mentoring program prior to participating in the study, which leads the researcher to conclude that the mentees had at least at a cursory level exposure to the growth mindset principles and were familiar with the developmental concepts before they received formal exposure to the growth mindset curriculum. This prior exposure makes it reasonable to conclude that the participants were above baseline in terms of their perceptions of their intelligence before the actual treatment of the attribution-retraining curriculum was received.

Table 5. *Paired Samples Statistics t-Tests*

	Mean	*N*	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pair 1 pretest C	4.6389	30	.98366	.17959
Pair 1 posttest C	4.9222	30	1.12165	.20479

Table 6. *Paired Samples Correlation*

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 pretest and posttest C	30	.678	.000

Table 7. *Paired Samples T-Test*

				Paired differences	
	Mean	SD	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference	
				Lower	Upper
Pair 1 pretest and posttest C	-.2833	.85450	.15601	-.60241	.03574

Table 8. *T-Test Results*

Paired Sample Test	*T*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 pretest and posttest C	-1.816	29	0.80

Correlational Analysis

In addition to the *t*-test, the researcher conducted a midterm progress assessment, which allowed for an exploratory correlational analysis. Half way through the intervention the participants were asked to rate the level of instruction they were receiving and thereby rate the level of program efficacy. Using Pearson's correlational analysis the researcher found that the more growth minded the individual, the more likely they were to agree that

the activities in the program helped them make better decisions regarding important issues, $r(27) = 0.43$, $p = .022$. This is instructive. Participants acknowledged the value of learning from mentors as they acknowledge that the information provided by the program facilitators would help them make better decisions in school and in life.

Table 9. *Exploratory Correlations*

	Difference	PA1	PA2	PA3
Difference Pearson Correlation	1	-.093	-.181	-.040
Sig. (2-tailed)		.638	.357	.840
N	30	28	28	28
PA1 Pearson Correlation	-.093	1	.610	.491
Sig. (2-tailed)	.638		.001	.008
N	28	28	28	28
PA2 Pearson Correlation	-.181	.610	1	.445
Sig. (2-tailed)	.357	.001		.018
N	28	28	28	28
PA3 Pearson Correlation	-.040	.491	.445	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.840	.008	.018	
N	28	28	28	28

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 10. *Exploratory Correlations*

	PA1	PA2	PA3	Pretest C	Posttest C
PA1 Pearson Correlation	1	.610	.491	.137	0.45
Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.008	.486	.820
N	28	28	28	28	28
PA2 Pearson Correlation	.610	1	.445	.163	-.006
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.018	.407	.975
N	28	28	28	28	28
PA3 Pearson Correlation	.491	.445	1	.432	.355
Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.018		.022	.064
N	28	28	28	28	28
Pretest C Pearson Correlation	.137	.163	.432	1	.678
Sig. (2-tailed)	.486	.407	.022		.000
N	28	28	28	31	30
Posttest C Pearson Correlation	0.45	-.006	.355	.678	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.820	.975	.064	.000	
N	28	28	28	30	30

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Ethical Considerations

The priority of the researcher was to protect the identity of the youths who participated in the study. First and foremost, this is why a quantitative method of evaluation was chosen; quantitative methodology strayed away from individual narratives of the participating youth. Informed consent and assent forms were distributed to both parents and the participants. Parents were gathered separately for a meeting to discuss the nature of the study and the curriculum involved as well as to sign the consent forms and to have questions associated with the research study addressed. When all of the parents were clear on the nature of the study and aware the minimal risk associated with the study, they signed the

parental consent forms. The participants, all of whom were minors, were then asked to join the parents, mentors, and the researcher. The researcher discussed the consent forms and the nature of the research. A narrative was read and the risks were discussed. After all questions were asked and answered, the participants were invited to be in the study and the participants also signed consent forms.

To further protect the participants no names or personal information were disclosed throughout the research process. Each participant was represented by a randomized code. Further, the data collection process models a similar procedure that reflects,

> Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in the daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Daily life refers to the daily life of normal children. (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, 2014, p. 3).

The research study resembled other studies done in classroom settings. The questions asked essentially ask the participants if they are learning, which then helped the researcher determine the efficacy of the program and the influence of the attribution-retraining curriculum.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions African American boys who participated in the mentoring program have about their intelligence and their ability to grow their intelligence after they were exposed to a series of attribution training lessons taught by mentors. The link between dimensions of control, as espoused by Weiner (1985), were taken into consideration by the mentors to show the pariticpants that they could apply effort, make good choices, rely on strategies, and get help from others to improve their academic performance in school and in life (Dweck, 1975).

As developed in the problem statement, African American boys in general face a myriad of external societal barriers that hinder their success. Research that explored methods to help African American male youth combat external barriers with internal empowerment strategies is seminal. Further, the aim of the study was to gauge if the boys understood the importance of internal mechanisms of control as a motivator for success. Weiner's (1985, 2010) attribution theory advanced the notion that when the locus of causality for academic outcomes is internal, controllable (effort), and unstable (changeable), the more motivated the student will be to take charge of their academic destiny. The balance of this chapter explores the description of the sample and details the curriculum

intervention that the participants were exposed to over a two-week summer academy. The research questions and the results will also be revealed.

Description of the Sample

Initial authorization to conduct the study was sought by the researcher and granted from the leadership of the program. The mentoring program is conduct on two sites. Both organizations granted the researcher permission to conduct the study at their sites, respectively.

The sample was chosen from the African American male mentoring program being studied. There were 31 participants, ages 7-17, who along with parental permission agreed to take part in the study. All of the participants reported to be African American. All of the participants were members of the male mentoring program. All of the subjects participated in the program's two-week mentoring, education, and leadership summer academy. All participants took a pretest, and all but one took the posttest. Therefore, the final sample included 30 participants. The majority of the participants had participated in the mentoring program prior to the summer academy. The mentoring program is purported as a pillar of instruction strands of growth mindset empowerment training; therefore, participants with at least a cursory exposure to the growth mindset concepts were more likely to be operating above a baseline understanding of the concepts presented.

Background for Intervention

The introduction section of Unit 1, Module 1 in "The Power of Language" describes an early math study conducted by Dweck (1975) making a connection between the findings

of the study and the foundation for the English Language Arts pilot lessons. In the Dweck study, approximately 100 seventh graders who were struggling in mathematics were randomly assigned to two workshops on study skills. One workshop specifically provided strategies for studying more effectively. The other workshop taught students about the growth potential of the brain and its subsequent effect on intelligence. The students in the latter workshop learned that every time something new is learned, the brain makes new connections and, over time, this increases intelligence. The results of Dweck's (1975) mathematics study showed that students who received education indicating the growing potential of the brain had significantly higher math grades than the students who did not receive this growth mindset intervention.

Curriculum Intervention

The curriculum was based on two modules on participant motivation constructed for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) by Dweck (1975). The modules can be found in the LAUSD curriculum manual, "The Power of Language," Volume 1. The modules were modified by the program mentors and further adapted by the researcher. The curriculum included components that described the entity and incremental views of intelligence (referred to as fixed and growth mindsets) and how becoming self-aware of personal factors that influence motivation could serve as a launching point to improve participants' academic performance. Participants were given activities throughout the curriculum that encouraged reflection of their perceptions of their own intelligence, as well as using metacognition to identify and reflect on factors that influenced their motivation.

Unit 1, Module 1 was entitled "Brainology and Growing Your Intelligence." This unit's main objective was to engage participants on the effects of effort on the growth of intelligence. Participants examined current research on the brain while interpreting and evaluating the effects of the power of language via words and images regarding participant's opinions of themselves and others. After reading an article on how the brain can grow, the participants analyzed a visual text depicting a cartoon-like picture of a brain attempting to lift a barbell. The picture depicted the brain with a grimacing facial expression with drops of sweat coming down the face. Participants were asked to describe what they believed was taking place in the visual text. Participants then read a short expository text that discussed how the brain works and how the brain can be developed like a muscle. Mentors asked the participants a series of comprehension questions before referring back to the visual text of the brain and the barbell. The mentors asked the participants if their interpretation of the picture had changed after reading the expository text. Participants are then asked to reflect on why they may have changed their interpretation.

The culminating activity of Module 1 required participants write a *brain narrative* in which they were asked to incorporate new ideas learned from the texts and group discussions. Participants used their brain character to make a statement about whether or not they believed their brain could grow. In addition, participants were given the assignment to share their brain narratives with their family at home and reflect on how reading the article, writing the brain narrative, and sharing the information with others had supported their understanding of intelligence and effort.

The concept of motivation was the focus of Module 2. Participants began by completing a graphic organizer, which was a series of boxes with letters of the alphabet

heading each box. Participants were asked to think of the things that motivated them and list those things in the appropriate box according to the letter of the alphabet the word began with. Participants then read an autobiographical narrative text written by Brody titled, "How I Got Smart," which humorously depicted how the author was motivated to learn an abundance of information by memorizing an encyclopedia with the hopes of impressing a female student. Participants had the opportunity to discuss how the narrative reflected the attitudes and beliefs of the author. Participants composed a creative nonfiction narrative as they examine what influenced them to learn.

Additionally, the participants developed a video game project based on the researcher's design. The following outlines the culminating work that the participants completed relevant to attribution retraining and growth mindset development during the summer mentoring academy.

Game Design: Team Project

> Overview: This assignment asked your design team to create a video game based on the growth mindset principles discussed each day during the academy. There were several objectives to this assignment:
>
> 1. Identify the key concepts detailed in the growth mindset process.
> 2. Develop an outline for the elements of a video game that were based on the ideas of becoming a successful student.
> 3. Work with others to solve problems.
> 4. Demonstrate your understanding of growth mindset, effort, grit, hard work, and making good choices in school and in life.

Step 1. Identify the academic problem you wish to solve and determine what you wish to accomplish.

Step 2. Determine the main characters and setting.

Step 3. Organize your game/story in chronological order from one level to the next. Use the letters GRITS to determine the level of advancement of your characters/avatars.

Step 4. Describe the goal of the game as related to making kids better students. Detail the important features of the game. Show what it will take to succeed in the game.

Step 5. Develop a visual representation of the game in a storyboard format.

Step 6. Write a persuasive paragraph in the form of an ad campaign intended for a game company.

Step 7. Present your mindset game to the group. You have five to seven minutes to do so during which time you should tell us:

- What your game is about.
- Why we should invest in it.
- How it is different from other games that already exist.
- Who would love it and why.
- How it works.

You must include the following concepts:

1. It must have 5 levels
2. Effort
3. Good choices
4. Tutoring
5. Study groups
6. Asking for help–getting help form others
7. Multiple attempts at trying
8. Learning from failure
9. Rewards for learning and improving
10. Time on a task
11. Doing homework

Also, include distractions that might take the avatar out or cause the avatar to lose. For example, ignoring criticism, too much social media, friends, TV, etc.

Table 11 summarizes strategies for successes and distractions for failure.

Table 11. *Strategies for Success and Distractions for Failure*

Growth mindset strategies to advance success	Distractions that might cause failure
Effort	Ignoring criticism
Good choices	Too much social media
Tutoring	Friends
Study groups	Television
Asking for help	Bad choices
Multiple attempts at trying	Being lazy
Learning from failure	Not doing homework
Rewards for learning and improving	
Time on a task	
Doing homework	

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum?

Hypothesis 1

$H1_A$. There is a difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum.

$H1_O$. There is no difference in the participant's beliefs about his intelligence before and after attribution retraining in the mentoring curriculum.

The 2-factor solution addressed in the mindset assessment scale assessed the participants' beliefs that intelligence is malleable or easily changed and shaped. Based on the responses to the Measuring Your Mindset (Dweck, 2007a) questions, the participants already had a heightened belief that they could grow their intelligence. The Principal

Component Analysis as well as the two-tailed *t*-test revealed that participants felt they were in control of their academic destiny. Since the sample (participants in the program) were already participants in the mentoring program, it is reasonable to assume that they had exposure to the motivational concepts associated with attribution retraining before they participated in the study.

Research Question 2

How have the participant's perceptions of their academic ability changed as a result of an attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum?

Hypothesis 2

$H2_{A.}$ The perceptions of the participant's academic ability changed as a result of attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum.

$H2_{O}$. The perceptions of the participant's academic ability did not change as a result of attribution retraining conducted in the mentoring curriculum.

Using the Pearson two-tailed *t*-test, the posttest mean was higher; however, not largely statistically significant. The posttest mean was marginally significant and was measured by $t(29) = -1.82$, $p = 0.080$, (<.05 is statistically significant) for the two-tailed *t*-test. Specifically, participants moved slightly in their perceptions, but the confounding factor could be the fact that the participants were by and large already above baseline before the treatment associated with the intervention. Essentially, there was failure to reject each of the null hypotheses.

Research Question 3

Does the attribution retraining intervention have an influence on African American boys?

Hypothesis 3

$H3_A$. The attribution retraining intervention has an influence on African American boys.

$H3_O$. The attribution retraining intervention does not have an influence on African American boys.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, by using Pearson's correlational analysis, it was found that the more growth minded the individual, the more likely they were to agree that the activities in the program would help them make better decisions regarding important issues, $r(27) = 0.43$, $p = .022$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 rejects the null. This is instructive. The participants acknowledged the value of learning from mentors as they acknowledged that the information provided by the program facilitators would help them make better decisions in school and in life.

Statement of the Results

The results of the Pearson two-tailed *t*-test indicated a mild relationship between participants' exposure to the attribution retraining growth mindset curriculum and change in perceptions of their intelligence. The *t*-test revealed a statistically marginally significant increase in students' perceptions of the malleability of intelligence from the pretest. The factors that contributed to this marginal movement of the means led the researcher to postulate on the fact that most of the participants were above baseline before the study. Consequently, the participants were already believers in the concept of incremental intelligence.

Further, the exploratory correlation ensconced in the progress assessment revealed that the participants believed that the mentoring program helped them make better decisions regarding important issues.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The study examined the influence of an attribution-retraining curriculum with African American boys who participated in a nonprofit community-based mentoring program. Chapter 5 presents the results of the study relevant to the attribution retraining activities that occurred over a two-week period with the 31 African American male participants (ages 7-17) who attended the community-based mentoring program. A summary and subsequent discussion of the results as related to the literature in the field is presented. The implications for practice are provided for stakeholders to further implement attribution retraining activities. The limitations of the study are revealed culminating with a concluding discussion.

Summary of Results

The research was guided by the assumption that African American male participants' exposed to attributions retraining or growth mindset motivational activities would increase the perception that they could take charge of their academic and personal destiny by adopting an intelligent practice. Intelligent practice defined by Dweck (2006) is the notion of employing prodigious effort, proven strategies, and relying on help from others to achieve academic and personal success. Further, the implications of the study were that

the group mentoring model for African American boys, which centered on a growth mindset motivation would have a positive influence on the participants.

The results were instructive. The principal component analysis revealed that the degree to which a participant embodied the perceptions of a growth mindset thinker, the more likely they were to ascribe to the notion that they could change their intelligence through the intelligent practice of effort, strategy, and help from others. The data analysis showed that all African American male youth participants in the mentoring program marginally changed perceptions of their intelligence. Using the Pearson two-tailed *t*-test, the marginal significance was indicated by $t(29) = -1.82$, $p = 0.080$. However, all 31 participants started out with a tendency of having a growth mindset. Therefore, changes in their perceptions were deemed marginally significant. Specifically, participants' prior exposure to the mentoring program and growth mindset concepts had more than likely influenced them before they participated in the two-week study.

In addition to the Pearson *t*-test and the Principal Component Analysis, the researcher conducted a midterm progress assessment, which allowed for exploratory correlational analysis. The exploratory correlation was conducted half way through the growth mindset curriculum intervention. The participants were asked to rate the level of instruction they received and thereby rate the level of program efficacy. Using Pearson' s correlational analysis it was found that the more growth minded the individual, the more likely they were to agree that the activities in the program would help them make better decisions regarding important issues, $r(27) = 0.43$, $p = .022$. Participants acknowledged the value of learning from mentors as they acknowledged that the information provided by the program facilitators would help them make better decisions in school and in life.

In summary, the growth mindset curriculum positively influenced the participants. However, the participants were already growth mindset thinkers, but the study and the attendant enrichment activities helped solidify perception that participants could manufacture better life and academic choices from the mentoring they received in the program.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature in the Field

The literature in the field of attribution retraining and growth mindset strategies is abundant. However, more specific literature in relation to the influence of attribution-retraining curriculum on African American boys is scarce. In fact, the current study relied on broad concepts because there was a gap in the literature on how attribution retraining growth mindset strategies influence the lives of African American boys in the age 7-17 demographic. The two most prominent peer reviewed articles that came close to framing a construct similar to this study were Aronson et al. (2002) and Hudley and Graham (1993). Aronson et al. research focused on an attribution retraining experiment as a method of helping African American male and female college students resist maladaptive responses to stereotype threats. Albeit, the Aronson et al. study was instructive, it was also limited in that while being an ethnographic study on African American college students, it did not specifically address the African American boy ages 7-17.

The other study that broached the demographics of African American youth was by Hudley and Graham (1993) who implemented an attribution change program in Los Angeles public schools with 66 African American boys, ages 11-14. The aim of the Hudley and Graham study was to help aggressive boys make better behavioral choices. An instructive

component of the study was that it made a successful connection between behavioral change and cognitive development for African American boys in a school setting (Graham, 1997). Yet and still, the Hudley and Graham study applied the attribution-retraining curriculum to help improve the negative and maladaptive behaviors of African American boys labeled as behavior problems at their school sites. This study was conducted in a nonprofit group-mentoring program for African American boys. Additionally, the Hudley and Graham study did not focus on deficits the African American boys may have had in terms of chronic behavior problems. In fact, the study centered on helping participants make better choices in their academic pursuits. In summary, there was a gap in the literature pertaining to African American boys and attribution retraining and growth mindset curriculum enrichment activities in community-based mentoring programs.

Implications for Practice

The implications of the study for stakeholders in the field of positive youth development warrant additional study. The guiding principle of the study was that adults who work with African American male youth in schools and in youth development programs could have a positive, personal and academic influence on the youth they serve by using non-cognitive motivational techniques associated with attribution retraining activities to assist the young men in making better life and academic choices. The action research project will help program mentors know whether the enrichment and empowerment trainings associated with the program are having a positive influence and making a difference in the lives of mentee. Further the project developed the evaluation and assessment tools "needed to assess the future implementation and efficacy of the program,

along with ways to refine the program to ensure continued success and funding" (Hammer, 2008, p. v).

Youth Development Workers

Imbedded in the curriculum associated with the study was the notion promulgated by Farrington et al. (2012). Farrington et al. noted that motivational attributes require:

1. good academic behaviors including going to class, doing homework, organizing materials, participating, studying;
2. academic perseverance such as grit, tenacity, delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-control; and
3. academic mindsets such as my ability and competence grow with my effort;
4. learning strategies study skills metacognitive strategies self-regulated learning goal-setting. (2012, p. 30-39).

The motivational attributes are non-cognitive factors that contribute to helping youth make their lives a success. If community-based mentors working with African American boys adopt the attribution retraining and growth mindset enrichment activities as part of their curriculum, then they could help guide their mentees in making better choices by using intelligent academic practice. This places the responsibility on the mentee to make his life a success while supplying the young men with some of the tactics and tools to achieve that purpose. Perhaps, even minimal exposure to attribution retraining would produce meaningful and substantial positive results for community-based programs.

Further significance of the study in the field of public administration is that President Obama recently signed a Presidential Memorandum establishing, "My Brother's Keeper

Task Force." Essentially, the aim of President Obama's task force was to encourage programs, such as the youth mentoring program, to institute practices that improve outcomes for African American young men and boys. The research generated in the field of public administration and drawing form the data collected in the current study could rank this project among the seminal studies attempting to improve the outcomes among African American male adolescents locally and throughout the United States. Additionally, if adopted by other nonprofits and community-based organizations, this model could stand out as a template to help adolescents in other communities.

Recommendations for Education Policy Makers

School districts across the nation are teaching the common core standards because high-stakes testing is constructed on common core skills. Yet, this study revealed that including non-cognitive motivational strategies could help students make healthier academic choices. Perhaps, education policy makers could support integrating attribution retraining enrichment activities into school curriculums across the nation. Aronson et al. (2002) concluded that even low doses or even minimal exposure to attribution retraining strategies had a lasting influence on African American college students. Motivating students to become lifelong learners is an essential component of student success. Even if education policy makers at local school boards implement low doses of attribution retraining programs, the impact might prove to be infinite.

Recommendations for Schools

In southern California schools are looking for ways to reach all of their students and ostensibly African American boys in positive ways. One way to reach this demographic is to provide African American boys with additional motivational non-cognitive strategies to help them succeed inside and outside of the classroom environment. The researcher recommends that school administrators provide professional development and in-service activities that begin with allowing faculty to reflect on their own perceptions about intelligence and mindsets. Then introduce the concepts of fixed (entity view) mindsets and growth (incremental view) mindsets of intelligence (Dweck, 2006). These concepts of intelligence could then be incorporated as an avenue to provide value and context for an attribution-retraining curriculum. School administrators must to provide ongoing support for implementation and follow-up so that the training becomes a part of the school culture.

While the current study focused on African American boys ages 7-17 as a demographic, the researcher recommends that the concepts of growth mindsets and attribution retraining motivational strategies be considered for use with all students, both male and female from elementary to secondary levels. Dweck and Leggett (1988) revealed that elementary age children tend to exhibit more adaptive attributions for effort, which can have a profound influence on present and future academic success.

Limitations

There were two limitations in the study. First, the study required the use of a quasi–experimental design with a non-equivalent control group. Creswell (2008) posited that the weakness associated with this design is that "the researcher does not randomly assign

participants to groups" (p. 314). Since this was a study of a mentoring program the study comes with a fixed number of participants and was limited to those participants who choose to be a part of the study. This limitation can be problematic in that there was one unified group as opposed to two groups who received slightly different treatment to measure the effectiveness of the treatment. A lack of random assignment and nonequivalence between the groups being studied could lead to less certainty about the results in comparison to a true experimental design. The second limitation was that the findings of the study could not be generalized to a larger population. The researcher only had this community-based program to conduct research. This is an issue inherent in the study. The limitation was due to the sample size, demographics, and characteristics of the participants in the sample. Conclusions will be limited to this study and this demographic.

Recommendations for Further Research

Larger groups

Utilizing a quantitative structured research approach, the study revealed that attribution-retraining curriculum enrichment activities had a marginally significant influence on helping participants adopt a growth mindset toward perception about their intelligence. Noting that the influence registered as marginal necessitates the need for additional research to be conducted with groups of young men who participate in youth development programs who have not had prior exposure to the motivational strategies.

The researcher's primary recommendation is to repeat the study with a greater number of participants. Increasing the sample size would increase the generalizability of the results. Larger samples could be obtained from after school programs amenable to allowing

the teachers and youth development workers to be trained on how to implement the enrichment exercises. The 100 Black Men of America, Inc. have 117 chapters around the nation that focus on community-based mentoring for children of color (Dotson, 2012). This study could be repeated in each of the 117 locations. Increasing the sample size would be beneficial to better inform the development of subsequent attribution-retraining curricula for African American boys. Stringer (2007) simplified the process of data analysis as the "process of distilling large quantities of information to uncover significant features and elements that are embedded in the data" (p. 95). Embedded in the data is that attribution retraining works. What is needed are ways to make it work better.

Poor Children.

Another recommendation would be to repeat this study with young men of poverty. Since the study was aimed at African American boys in a specific youth mentoring program, the findings were limited to this group and its demographics. Gans (2009) advanced the notion that when society blames the poor for their condition they tend to exclude the poor form bridging into vital social networks. Gans posited, "They are often condemned for their own poverty and exclusion by failing to follow the rules of mainstream American culture. Poor young men are the main targets of blaming because older adults view them as dangerous" (2009, p. 81). The individual has the option to use their resources or strengths to change their present condition. Attribution-retraining curriculum could provide a strategy to keep boys focused on making a difference on the controllable factors in their lives.

Payne (2004) made the case that poor children have to be taught strategies that contribute to their success in school and then in work. Payne argued, "Students from generational poverty are going to need direct teaching to build cognitive and non-cognitive

structures necessary for learning. Secondly, the relationships [with mentors] that will motivate them to learn need to be established" (2004, p. 171). Clearly, individuals have to accept responsibility for helping themselves, but the community/agency has to accept responsibility to develop the necessary competencies to become highly effective in the delivery of the service. In order to operate from a position of strength, individuals must be able to use the resources they have. The study repeated with poor African American boys would help provide strategies for boys to operate from a position of strength.

Another recommendation would be for the *My Brother's Keeper* programs to implement a small dose of the curriculum from the current study. As President Obama continues to launch the *My Brother's Keeper* program for African American boys this researcher suggests implementing similar attribution retraining enrichment activities to augment the program.

Finally, a way to analyze the effectiveness of the attribution-retraining curriculum would to be to conduct an experimental study using a control group. A control group would have the same quantitative measures, such as a pre- and posttest survey, but would not participate in the attribution-retraining curriculum. Responses would be analyzed and compared to participating student groups that engaged in the curriculum. Utilizing a control group would show the true influence of an attribution-retraining curriculum. As with all research, in order to ensure validity and reliability of results, future studies are needed to retest and expand the findings.

Conclusion

The study was guided by the notion that African American boys in a community-based mentoring program would benefit from attribution retraining enrichment activities. It was supported by the idea that this demographic faced a myriad of personal and environmental factors that might impede their progress. The researcher determined that from prior exposure to the concepts in the program, the participants were ready to learn and improve.

Civic engagement is participatory democracy. Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) and Crosby and Bryson (2005) made the case relevant to New Public Service that civic engagement of key stakeholders can mitigate social problems and provide citizens who serve others a chance to become more significant. In fact, the whole invention of government is designed to help citizens solve collectively what cannot solve alone. African American boys do not have the capacity or the resources to close the achievement gaps themselves. It takes a village of mentors to assist them. Barber (as cited by Knack, 2003) espoused the malleability of New Public Service through democratic governance when he commented, "Unless we create healthy democratic communities, people will find ways of creating unhealthy communities" (p. 40). Barber (as cited by Knack, 2003) called for participatory democracy, which essentially is civic engagement and community collaboration. The influence of the study represents these principles and the need for a paradigm shift.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) position the New Public Service theory as the soul of public administration theory; a call to action; a call to peruse a significance and worth that moves the public servant from exhausting themselves with managing for effectiveness and

efficiency to utilizing community solidarity to solve problems. The New Public Service is efficacious collaboration. The study matches the spirit of the soul work attendant to New Public Service.

The former National Chairman of the 100 Black Men of America Inc., Dotson (2012) published his findings relevant to the value of mentoring, stating,

> The more that we embrace mentorship as a necessary duty, the more we can cultivate an emerging leadership that will sustain our respective organizations, carry on and improve our corporate cultures, and enhance the quality of life for future generations in our community. (final paragraph)

Apprenticeship guidance has worked decidedly well in all major industries and innovations. It is time to make a concerted effort to direct mentoring efforts at the demographic who need it most, our youth.

Further significance of the study in the field of public administration is that President Obama signed the Executive Order Executive Order 13560 (2010), and in 2014 he signed the White House memorandum, *My Brother's Keeper*, both aim to "support the social innovation and civic participation agenda of the Domestic Policy Council . . . by identifying the key attributes of effective community-development solutions to our national problems" (p. 1). The executive order established the White House council for community solutions. One of the major aims of the Council was to offer solution to get disconnected youth connected to education and employment.

The current study was a response to President Obama's Call To Service campaign. This momentum has allowed a framing of the research as a community solution through mentoring African American boys. The research generated in the field of public

administration helps bridge the achievement gap among African American male adolescents in the United States through community-based youth mentoring.

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APPENDIX. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

> Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)
>
> Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

> Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy (3.01.01) and Research Misconduct Policy (3.03.06), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the APA *Publication Manual*.

Learner ID and e-mail	
Mentor name and school	Dr. Joan Vermillion Capella University
Learner signature and date	Lance Robert 12/10/14