A Qualitative Case Study: Examining the Social and Cultural Impact of SISTERS Club

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A Qualitative Case Study:

Examining the Social and Cultural Impact of SISTERS Club

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy of Education with an emphasis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

May 2017

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Abstract

Adolescent girls face social and identity issues as they transition into adulthood and after-school programs are one venue that allows adults to help students deal with the difficulties encountered. This is a qualitative case study focused on the impact the SISTERS Club, an after-school program, had on a diverse group of middle school female students over the course of a five year period, from 2001 to 2006. This study described the impact on identity development, multicultural relationships, and the long-term impact of the after-school program on the female adolescents interviewed.

I investigated the racial, social, and cultural barriers that impacted the development of adolescent girls and how a strong after-school program brought about positive identity growth and feelings of “belonging” to a gender specific group. I initially investigated the social constructs of gender and race that are prevalent to adolescent girls. I also investigated the impact of mentoring and service learning on the identity development of participants. Finally, I investigated the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the girls involved and how this type of program can be utilized in other urban communities.
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to two men.

First, I dedicate this book to my loving and supportive husband, my Louie. With your encouragement and your constant, almost daily, reminders to keep working I was able to overcome the many obstacles life through my way. I will forever appreciate you not giving up on me.

I also dedicate this book to my brother, Roger L. McCoin, Jr.. He was taken far too soon but in his 39 years I was showered with love, his complete acceptance and the strength of knowing he always believed in me. He was a courageous, loving, and strong academic leader and I will strive to always continue his work in education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book would not have been possible without the guidance of Matthew Davis, Ph.D., my advisor. Through our conversations, his guidance and his continued support I was able to overcome and succeed.
# Table of Contents

Abstract...................................................................................................................................................iii  
Dedication..............................................................................................................................................iv  
Acknowledgments..................................................................................................................................v  
Chapter 1............................................................................................................................................... 1  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1  
    Researcher Background ....................................................................................................................... 4  
  Key Limitations .................................................................................................................................... 23  
  Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 24  
  Glossary of Key Definitions .................................................................................................................. 25  
Chapter 2 Literature Review ................................................................................................................... 27  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 27  
    Gender Specific Programs ..................................................................................................................... 30  
    Race Constructs .................................................................................................................................. 30  
    Identity Development Theory .............................................................................................................. 32  
    Mentoring .......................................................................................................................................... 36  
    Social and Cultural Impact ................................................................................................................... 37  
Chapter 3 Methods .................................................................................................................................. 38  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 38  
  Research Design ................................................................................................................................. 39  
  Research Ethics ..................................................................................................................................... 40  
  Site Description .................................................................................................................................... 41  
  Participants .......................................................................................................................................... 42  
  Instruments .......................................................................................................................................... 44  
  Data Collection ..................................................................................................................................... 45  
  Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 47  
  Limitations .......................................................................................................................................... 47  
Chapter 4 Data Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 49  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 49  
  Participant Background Information ...................................................................................................... 49  
  Findings ................................................................................................................................................. 49  
  Finding 1 – Participants and Feelings Associated with SISTERS CLUB ........................................... 50
Finding 2 – Participants Perceived Impact on Relationships ........................................... 52
Finding 3 – Participants Perceived Impact of Mentoring .............................................. 56
Finding 4 – Participants Perceived Impact of Volunteering ....................................... 60
Finding 5 – Participants Perceived Impact of Identity Development .......................... 61
Chapter 5 Conclusion .................................................................................................... 64
Appendices .................................................................................................................. 81

Appendix A

(Top: Easter celebration, SISTERS making jewelry, weekly SISTERS meeting) .......... 81
(Middle: weekly SISTERS meeting, weekly SISTERS meeting, one-on-one discussion).... 81
(Bottom: SISTERS at pumpkin patch with the Children’s Home Society, easter celebration, weekly SISTERS meeting) ............................................................................. 81
Appendix E - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto

Appendix F - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto

Appendix G - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto

Appendix H - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto

Appendix I - SISTERS Participant with Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix J- SISTERS Participants Meeting with Mentor at Monsanto

Appendix K- SISTERS Participants with Mentors at Monsanto

References
Chapter 1

Introduction

Adolescent girls face social and identity issues as they transition into adulthood and after-school programs are one venue that allows adults to help students deal with the difficulties encountered. A place where young girls feel safe and supported is optimal for positive identity development and to confront the tough issues of growing up (Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004).

In an interview, Kerry (Interview, October 13, 2015) discussed how being a member of the SISTERS Club program had an impact on her, “It really meant a lot to me. It was so impactful in my life. Because it was at a really rough time for me…” Tough issues that girls face include declining self-esteem, increased stress, depression, and aggressive behaviors. During the past thirteen years, researchers have begun to look at factors associated with positive youth development, the impact of organizations, and the identity formation process. Prior studies focused on the perceived deficits of the adolescent instead of teaching the necessary skills to promote positive identity development. Researchers argued that more attention should be focused on providing support for female adolescents, creating a sense of belonging and fostering positive identity development (Kroger, 2007; Gilligan, 1982).

Studies have shown that afterschool participation contributed to reduced drug use, decreased juvenile crime, lower dropout rates, and a decline in teen pregnancy rates among youth. Reported benefits from participation in after-school programs included higher standardized test scores, increased college attendance rates, better handling of conflicts, more cooperative relationships, better social skills, and improved self-
confidence (Fashola, 2002; Huang & Nam, 2000). The primary goal of after-school programs is to reduce risk factors associated with problem behaviors and to promote personal and social competence (Lecroy, 2004).

I developed the SISTERS Club program in 1999 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA in order to address the issues female middle school students faced within their everyday lives. Since 2001, SISTERS Club has been incorporated as a Missouri not-for-profit corporation and is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501(c) (3) organization. An urban middle school located in the St. Louis metropolitan area housed the SISTERS Club program for five years, during 2001-2006, and served approximately 75 to 100 girls. Seventh and eighth grade girls participated in the SISTERS Club program. The girls participated in weekly meetings for approximately one hour each week after-school and for several hours on specific weekends for volunteer or mentoring activities.

The SISTERS Club program allowed middle school girls a safe environment where they expressed their opinions and developed a sense of worth. The program served as a support group, a community volunteer program, mentor relationship, as well as a place where they received academic support from peers. The established environment fostered a mutual respect for all girls to have a voice. Girls explored the need to be accepted by their peers, their development of individual identity, increased self-esteem, and cultural diversity. The girls participated in meaningful conversations and learned skills necessary to enrich relationships with their fellow peers.

Julie (Interview, January 7, 2016) recalled, “I was very sorta closed down and I think having the girls gave me a chance to open up and to be more comfortable around
women and other girls my age, yeah I have really lovely memories of doing activities with the girls and learning and just feeling included. You know, it’s nice to feel like you have a group. And that’s something, especially at that age that can be very difficult. You don’t really know who you are yet, your person, what your interests are, and what I loved about SISTERS is that it had all of these different facets, you know. There was something in there that everyone would enjoy and things you would discover and things that you didn’t know before.”

The adolescent years are a time when girls are at a turning point, they have a desire for relationships, and for increased knowledge, which ultimately impact the development of their self-identity (Weis & Fine, 1993).

This study is a qualitative case study that researched the possible impact SISTERS Club, an after-school program, had on a diverse group of middle school female students over the course of a five year period, 2001-2006. The Harvard Family (2008) acknowledged benefits from increased academics, improved social interaction, and health benefits to participants in after school programs. Three critical questions were identified at the onset of the study; 1) how did female relationships impact the identity development of adolescent girls, 2) how did the components of the after-school program lead to improved social, behavioral, personal, and academic performance, and 3) what social and cultural impact did the SISTERS Club program have on the adolescent girls involved? The critical questions identified supported the identified purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to identify the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the adolescent girls involved.
**Researcher Background**

I grew up in the small town of Seminole, Oklahoma, USA, with a population of about 9,000. One main public school district served the larger community, however; numerous smaller public school districts served students outside of the city limits. Students who lived either on farms or in the country areas outside of the city limits attended the smaller public school districts. I attended one of the smaller school systems located outside of the city limits. I graduated high school in 1990 with 12 other students. My graduating class consisted of three Native Americans and 10 Caucasian students.

The Seminole name originated from a Native American tribe, the name is an offshoot of the Creek tribe (Chronicles of Oklahoma, 1924). Several of the surrounding towns also carried names of other Native American tribes such as Shawnee, Pottawatomie, Konawa, and Wewoka. Diversity is determined by the people living in the community. In retrospect, exposure to a diverse number of racial or cultural differences appeared limited growing up and while in college.

I graduated high school and immediately enrolled in a nearby junior college, Seminole Junior College. I took all of the classes required to earn my Associates Degree. At that moment in my life, I made the decision as to what career path I would choose; medicine or education. Before that moment I only knew I had a passion, a sense of urgency, to help other people in whatever way I could and by whatever means necessary. When I decided to pursue education as my career choice, several factors influenced my decision. The main influence on my decision derived from the fact that several of my extended family held positions in the field of education, most notably, my mother.
First Years of Teaching in Oklahoma

I began my teaching career as a seventh-grade math teacher at Western Heights Middle School, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. During my first month as a beginning teacher, I felt comfortable with the job responsibilities of lesson development, organizational tasks, and classroom management. Administrators, as well as my teaching peers, referred to me as a master teacher. During my free time, I conducted observations regarding the challenges and struggles the female students faced as they tried to find acceptance from peers. I decided an immediate need was evident. I addressed those challenges in order to provide support for the middle school girls. I focused on the positive identity development and increased self esteem of the girls enrolled in the middle school.

During my first year as a teacher, I recognized issues the adolescent girls faced at school. Some of the challenges I observed included; low self-esteem, social competence, difficulty problem solving, and lack of supportive relationships. I worked with teachers who taught in isolation and taught under the myth that all students learn the same way and face the same types of problems. Good intentions founded the actions and behaviors I observed; however, a systematic approach to address the challenges the 7th and 8th grade girls faced did not exist. Issues not addressed included the impact on self-esteem and the positive identity development of the middle school girls. I concluded, issues identified did not show signs of improvement based on practices in the building. Due to numerous observations conducted I created the SISTERS Club program and a role for myself as the SISTERS Club program facilitator.
During 2000-2001, I developed an after-school program, the SISTERS Club program, in order to bring the girls together as an organized group: exploration of the racial and cultural differences between the girls, and development of skills required to support others at this important time in the development of their lives guided the program. From the outset of the program, the girls exhibited a high interest in the goals and activities provided. Programs similar to SISTERS Club, structured as a single gender program, have been found to form communities characterized by building a sense of responsibility as well as a spirit of co-learning (Deak, 2010). As a math teacher, I fostered an environment that established and supported mutual respect; the relationships established during school hours carried over into the after-school program.

Participants in the SISTERS Club program were predominately Caucasian during the first two years; however, other races were represented as well. I found it important and crucial to the program to be involved as an advocate for the black students who participated in the program. I specifically wanted to provide support to African American students rather than to legitimize the location of a problem in the black student’s academic or social performance (Weis & Fine, 1993).

The definition of the term SISTERS is different dependent on the particular social situation or group of participants involved. The term can be heard in African American communities as a reference to one of color or acceptance by the group, for example: she’s a sister. The term sister in other situations could represent the acknowledgement of belonging to a particular group, but the meaning for me was slightly different. Participants in the SISTERS Club program represented several race categories: Caucasian, African American, Indian, Chinese and Native American. I did not intend for
the term sister to have a racial undertone. My mother used the term sister toward me while growing up. My mother used the term sister in conversation as endearment and acceptance toward me. Therefore, I named the after-school program the SISTERS Club program. I believed the term sister encouraged female friendships, supported developmental and identity issues, and provided an environment which fostered acceptance for all involved.

At the beginning of each meeting, the girls and I recited the SISTERS creed:

SISTERS

I am your sister

We are all different

We are all the same

I am your sister

The creed acknowledged the members’ differences, sameness, and how everyone involved in the program belonged. A comfortable environment provided acceptance and helped participants understand the underlying objective of the program; everyone was considered someone’s sister. In order to accept and understand race and the impact of racism, it was important to embrace differences and the experiences that those differences bring. The creed focused on how students are the same as well as different in many aspects of their lives.

The SISTERS Club program offered adolescent girls a safe environment where opinions were expressed, the participants developed a sense of worth, and authentic relationships were formed. Regina (Interview, October 15, 2016) shared during her interview, “I think it made it a little easier, like if someone was going through some
emotional issue you could kind of connect with them. To really understand where they are coming from. I think one you can probably tell is that I have started talking more to people, so I think SISTERS helped break up that little shyness shell a little bit. But I think…one of the biggest ones, getting confidence, comfortable to talk to people.”

SISTERS Club program provided an additional component to the after-school program established at the middle school. The SISTERS Club program environment fostered an atmosphere focused on respect for all girls’. I encouraged participants to voice opinions and feelings when difficult conversations occurred.

**Bringing the SISTER CLUB to St. Louis**

In 2001, I moved to St. Louis, Missouri USA and began teaching in an urban middle school located in University City, Missouri, USA. I continued the SISTERS Club program as a component of the pre-existing after-school program. This qualitative study was focused on the SISTERS Club program. Specifically, the research conducted focused on a five-year period, 2001-2006.

The major objectives of the SISTERS Club program ensured every girl felt accepted by her peers in a safe environment, free from discrimination, and judgment. Middle school girls’ need a sense of belonging; belonging to a peer group is vital to their identity development. If adults, specifically teachers, want girls to develop into well-adjusted and capable women, then the teachers need to help them figure out how they belong to social groups (Wiens, 2014). Studies have shown it is important for young girls to build strong female relationships, while developing and learning to understand their own identity. These female relationships assist in building positive self-esteem, the ability to negotiate needs, and form a basis for empathy (Gilligan, 1982; Kroger, 2007;
Leadbeater & Way, 2007). I believe positive female relationships during adolescence contribute to the formation of a person’s female identity and understanding of their femininity. The formation of femininity is defined through attachment and female relationships, but the female identity or femininity can be threatened through separation or discontinuation of female relationships as well (Gilligan, 1982; Kroger, 2007; Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

For example, Julie described herself in middle school as being a “late bloomer.”

“I was very sorta closed down and I think having the girls gave me a chance to open up and to be more comfortable around women and other girls my age, yeah I have really lovely memories of doing activities with the girls and learning and just feeling included. You know, it’s nice to feel like you have a group. And that’s something, especially at that age that can be very difficult. You don’t really know who you are yet, your person, what your interests are, and what I loved about SISTERS is that it had all of these different facets, you know. There was something in there that everyone would enjoy and things you would discover and things that you didn’t know before” (Julie, Interview, January 7, 2016). (see Appendices A)

This demonstrated how being a member of a gender-specific program assisted her in the creation of a positive self-identity and how the relationships formed during adolescence contribute to the formation of a person’s female identity and understanding of their femininity.

Brittany Woods Middle School (BWMS) is located in The School District of University City in the St. Louis, Missouri metropolitan area. The student population of
BWMS consisted of both 7th and 8th graders. The average enrollment per year during 2001-2006 was approximately 650 students. The average enrollment of female students during that time was 316 female students per year. SISTERS Club program served approximately 75-100 females during 2001-2006, this statistic represents approximately 24 to 32 percent of the female student population. Ethnicity breakdown of the data revealed that 90% of the Brittany Woods Middle School student population was black and 9% was white. This data is representative of the female participation in the SISTERS Club program as well. A majority of the female participants in the SISTERS Club program were black.

BWMS is a large three level school which served as the location of the SISTERS Club program. Three 7th grade and three 8th grade teams divided the building into isolated sections. During the tenure of the SISTERS Club program I held the position of team leader for one of the 7th grade teams, the Yale team. Team leader assignments carried more responsibility than a teaching position. Respect obtained from peers, due to my role as team leader, allowed me to build relationships with teachers as well as the student body that I might not have otherwise. I obtained the role of team leader because I displayed the ability to lead other teachers, kept organized records, knowledgeable of appropriate pedagogy, and had the ability to multitask the everyday challenges facing middle school environments. Team leaders worked in unique partnerships with building administrative personnel and regularly shared opinions and discussed confidential staff concerns.
Student demographic data for Brittany Woods Middle School represented an average enrollment of 650. The following table represents a breakdown of the student demographic data for the school years of 2001-2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Male Enrollment</th>
<th>Female Enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average enrollment at Brittany Woods Middle School from 2001-2006 was 650 students per year. The average enrollment of female students during that time was 316 female students per year. SISTERS Club program served approximately 75-100 females during 2001-2006, this statistic represents approximately 24 to 32 percent of the female student population. Ethnicity breakdown of the data revealed that 90% of the Brittany Woods Middle School student population was black and 9% was white. This data are representative of the female participation in the SISTERS Club program as well. A majority of the female participants in the SISTERS Club program were black.

SISTERS Club program met once weekly after-school for approximately one and a half hour sessions. We also met on Saturdays and Sundays for community and service learning activities and mentoring opportunities, which lasted for three to five hours depending on the specific activity. Participants met in my mathematics classroom to
begin each meeting. (see Appendix A). Depending on the agenda, the girls and I either stayed in the classroom or traveled to other areas of the school (gymnasium, outside, etc.) to participate in the planned activities.

The mathematics classroom had two large diner booths with tables along the north wall seating four students per booth. Traditional student desks lined the middle area of the class and provided seating for 20 students. Large windows faced west and a large grassy area covered by plants could be seen while looking out the window. Manipulation of desks into different formations provided arrangements conducive to group discussions and a variety of activities. The flexible seating arrangement made the environment comfortable and allowed for a sense of security to the girls in the program. The creation of a comfortable environment enabled girls to feel safe; they engaged in discussions and explored the struggles they faced in everyday middle school life.

The members of the SISTERS Club program were united through the activities conducted during the program hours but also during the school day as well. Each participant was given a blue t-shirt with SISTERS across the front and a blue baseball hat with SISTERS on the front. (see Appendix A). These hats and shirts were worn on the same day by all of the participants in the program. This effort brought everyone together and supported the efforts to help each participant to feel as though they belonged to a common group. I observed groups of girls with the SISTERS hats and shirts on together in the hall and at lunch, I observed their sense of belonging and my observations supported the continued need for the program.

During the five years, I observed an increase in self-confidence in the girls who participated as well as increased academic persistence. Increased self-confidence could
be seen when girls who previously did not talk to others were seen in conversations with their peers. I observed girls that walked taller, with more confidence and made eye contact with others when they passed each other in the hallway. The shy, introverted girls showed signs of being confident and I believe their fear of judgment by others diminished due to acceptance by the other members of the SISTERS Club program.

Academic performance was another indicator of the programs benefits; students were encouraged to complete classroom assignments in order to be active within the SISTERS Club program. I stressed the importance of both personal and academic growth on a regular basis to the females who participated in the program. Regina (Interview October 15, 2015) described the impact being involved in the SISTERS Club program had on her academically, “I think it helped keep grades steady”… “A lot of people watching out for me.”

Research has supported the notion after-school programs should focus on building social and behavioral skills, which ideally will help improve the adolescence social and academic performance in the classroom (Danish, Taylor & Fazio, 2003; David, 2011; Nicholson, Collins & Holmer, 2004). Several features of strong after school programs are strong leaders, clear goals, and the ability of the program facilitator to motivate and engage students in meaningful activities (David, 2011). I represented the sole certified teacher involved in the SISTERS Club program. My ability to motivate participation in the SISTERS Club program and the array of student centered activities reinforced high levels of weekly participation amongst the girls. Size limitations and financial necessities restricted the number of girls allowed to participate in the program. Two limitations of the program existed; 1) limited participation based on my classroom size and my ability
to facilitate and manage activities and 2) I provided the primary financial source needed to fund the program. The SISTERS Club program served female adolescents that showed signs of low self-confidence, low self-esteem, shy behaviors, and unformulated self-identity questions. Selected participation in the SISTERS Club program focused on the following four criteria: 1) at-risk status, 2) identity development needs, 3) overall attitude, and 4) academic performance. Approximately 20, 7th and 8th grade girls participated in the SISTERS Club program per year. SISTERS Club engaged girls during a two-year period, both middle school years. The SISTERS attrition rate was not noticeable because the 7th grade girls automatically became members during their 8th grade year. The SISTERS Club program impacted approximately 75-100 girls during its five year tenure in St. Louis. Approximately 24 to 32 percent of the female student enrollment of BWMS participated in the SISTERS Club program.

The 8th grade senior members of SISTERS assisted in the planning stages of the in-school activities, as well as the service learning activities within the community. The decision to include girls in the development of activities assisted in building leadership skills within the club and ultimately built a strong foundation for future members. Adolescent girls who are empowered by their school experience develop ability, confidence, and motivation to achieve academically (Weis & Fine, 1993). Volunteer and service learning activities needed to be planned out by all participants in order to be meaningful. A sense of ownership and program buy-in amongst the members increased due to involvement in stages of activity development. These types of activities often turn into character education experiences since it allowed the young members to teach and lead the adults (Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004). Several of the service learning
activities conducted by members of SISTERS Club included: 1) working with students from the Children’s Home Society of Missouri, 2) helping customers at a local grocery store by bagging and carrying out their grocery items 3) visiting residents at community nursing homes, and 4) the beautification of neighborhood buildings and lawns. It is reported that strong partnerships in the community support learning and identity development (Harvard Family, 2008).

The SISTERS Club volunteered at the Children’s Home Society of Missouri, a home for children with disabilities. The Children’s Home Society of Missouri “supports families raising a disabled child and provides a nurturing home to many children who have experienced abuse or neglect” (Children’s Home Society, 2011). Volunteer activities with the children living at the Children’s Home Society included; books were read aloud to children, participation in games, a visit to a pumpkin patch, and trips to a neighborhood park. My most memorable moments were the yearly visits to the pumpkin patch and the observations I made during those times. The SISTERS Club members assisted the children from the Children’s Home Society while at the pumpkin patch. (see Appendix A). The girls assisted with the children’s wheel chairs and helped the children avoid various obstacles; tables, animal pens, games and other people while there. The SISTERS Club participants engaged in multiple activities and the day was full of meaningful relationship building and life learning skills. Julie (Interview 7, 2016) shared her memories of the pumpkin patch, “As far as SISTERS goes the biggest memory I have, I don’t know why, but this memory really sticks out when we worked with the Children’s Home Society and we were on a field trip to the pumpkin patch. I don’t know if you remember this but I totally remember everything about this trip, and it was really
just getting to help people and moving around and it’s just one of those memories that’s just going to be there for me forever.”

After-school programs have provided activities utilized for increased social skills as well as increased academics in a safe, nurturing environment (David, 2011). I planned a variety of activities prior to weekly meetings in order to address issues observed during the school day. In my role as a classroom teacher I observed girl relationships, conflicts, peer disputes, and academic concerns. I observed peer issues that arose and utilized the SISTERS Club program as a venue to discuss the concerns and issues of the girls involved. The flexible environment of the SISTER Clubs environment allowed for activities to be modified if I felt a particular issue needed to be discussed.

One such activity conducted was based on artistic exploration. We traveled to a local jewelry workshop and the girls were given the opportunity to make earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. During this activity the girls were encouraged to be creative, engaged in positive dialogue with each other, and were given a positive environment where they explored their artistic side. Most of the girls made several pieces of jewelry and gave the additional pieces away as gifts. (see Appendix A). On other occasions we had social celebrations for the end of the semester or school year to applaud their academic success. We celebrated holidays throughout the year; Easter, Christmas, Kwanzaa, St. Patrick’s Day as well as individual birthdays.

Activities were also designed to facilitate conversations on important issues the girls faced in and out of school. We discussed issues that ranged from a girl having a pre arranged marriage, how to have acceptance for another student that was transgender, and
how to have healthy relationships with others. These are just a few examples of the many conversations that were explored throughout the SISTERS Club meetings.

Common discussions held during the SISTERS program focused on visible physical differences; color of skin, hair types, height, and weight. These conversations enabled the group to have discussions about race and how each person’s life is impacted by racial and social differences. Conversations started easily because of the trust and acceptance built and embraced during these session. I believe this ease started with the fact that the girls knew I genuinely cared about their well being. I listened without judgment and instilled the same patience in each of the girls that participated in the program. Listening to others and being patient are two life skills that when learned can lead to the development of positive, enduring, and authentic relationships. The relationships formed were a foundation in building the relationships that guided the identity development of the participants (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Rhodes, 2005).

Little, Wimer, and Weiss (2008) identified three features for successful afterschool programs: sustained alliance, quality programming and staffing, and strong partnerships with schools, families and community. Mentoring became a valuable component of the SISTERS Club program. Mentoring relationships between the girls involved in the SISTERS Club and Monsanto began. Monsanto is a sustainable agricultural company with the headquarters being located in Creve Coeur, Missouri. The headquarters is located approximately three miles from the middle school where the SISTERS Club program took place.

Fortunately, my husband worked at Monsanto during the specified time period and had formed relationships with women in leadership roles within the company. I
believed the women acquainted with my husband at Monsanto had the potential to serve as mentors to the participants in the SISTERS Club. The first step in the creation of the mentoring relationships included being introduced to a manager in the Purchasing and Payables Department. During the introductory meeting I explained the goals and objectives of my program and we discussed the necessary steps to create a mentoring relationship between the women of Monsanto and the girls in the SISTERS Club. The manager contacted others on staff and assisted with the recruitment of interested mentors. Once sufficient mentors had been identified, I met with the mentor volunteers at Monsanto and explained the purpose of the SISTERS Club program and discussed the mentoring aspect of the program. Meeting with the mentor volunteers provided an opportunity to explain the role of a mentor, the program time lines, suggested mentoring activities and to answer any questions or concerns that arose. The mentors represented a range of diversity including; race, age, and position within the Monsanto organization. A proportionate number of black and white mentors, ranging in ages 25 to 50, participated in the mentoring program. The mentors held a wide variety of positions at Monsanto which included: administrative assistants, secretaries, office managers, and researchers. Each mentor had a unique perspective which benefited the participants involved in the SISTERS Club. All involved agreed the female executives provided a good addition to my program and we worked together to establish and support the mentoring component of the SISTERS Club program. Many of the women had never been mentors before and they expressed excitement to begin relationships with their mentee. Researchers pointed out that mentor relationships have positive effects, specifically with the transformation of a young girls’ perception of self, and the women of Monsanto eagerly engaged in
activities to make a positive impact on the girls involved in the program (Deak & Adams, 2010). Activities were facilitated on a regular basis and the continuity of the interactions supported the development of trust in the newly formed mentor/mentee relationships. Mentoring opportunities were held once a month and were scheduled either after school or on the weekend, dependant on the needed time frame required for the particular activity scheduled. Activities conducted to allow for open discussions and exploration of beliefs and self-identity were a common activity that was easily arranged and engaged in. The conversations shared between the SISTERS participant and assigned mentor created necessary bonds that allowed for meaningful conversations. Middle school girls who experience difficulties or problems in their mother-daughter relationships need these types of conversations during adolescence (Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Rhodes, 2005).

The women of Monsanto participated in community activities with SISTERS, social service activities, on-the job skills training, and they provided mentoring for the girls involved in SISTERS Club. The women executives at Monsanto participated as mentors for the next five years; they established relationships, provided opportunities for individual growth, and supported the formation of a positive identity development for the girls participating in the program. I assigned each girl who participated in the SISTERS Club program a big SISTER from Monsanto. Mentoring relationships contribute to positive outcomes for the youth involved including: improved social and emotional health, increased cognitive skills, and the development of identity (David, 2011; Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Rhodes & Dubois, 2008). Throughout the program the girls of the SISTERS Club program visited Monsanto to shadow their big SISTER and they explored career opportunities in the community. For example, on several trips to Monsanto the
girls shadowed their mentor and completed some of the job tasks typically done throughout a work day. I observed that the girls answered the phones, used computers, spoke with their individual mentor about skills and education needed for their particular career, and toured the campus to explore the other careers and positions available at Monsanto. (see Appendices B-K)

In December of 2003, I received a $980.00 grant issued by the University City Education Foundation (UCEF). The UCEF granted four monetary awards to University Teachers in order to further enhance the learning experience of students in the School District of University City. The funds assisted in the purchase of transportation for the girls in the SISTERS Club program, which enabled them to provide community services to the children at the Children’s Home Society of Missouri, a residential facility for children with developmental and physical disabilities. I funded the remaining transportation costs from my personal banking account, however; the buses used were contracted through the school district. The process I followed in order to request bus transportation required a two week notice. I notified my building administrator, completed the appropriate paperwork required by the district and waited for final approval. The building administrator approved the field trip, transportation was scheduled with the school district, and I wrote personal checks to cover additional expenses occurred.

Mentors and mentees spent time with one another one-on-one and in-group activities monthly. (see Appendices B-K). Best results come when the mentoring connection is sustained over time, and signs of improvement in self-esteem and performance are visible in the mentees (Deak & Adams, 2010). Transportation to
Monsanto allowed the girls in the SISTERS Club to shadow the women of Monsanto, their assigned mentor, for an entire workday. The girls answered phone calls and assisted in office tasks that arose throughout the day. (see Appendices G, H, and I). These types of job-embedded tasks enabled the girls of SISTERS Club to gain increased social competence while interactions with others assisted in acquired and refined thinking skills. Additional activities included; discussions on how to build friendships, how to advocate for self, picnics, academic pursuits, and a variety of celebrations throughout the program. Research has stated that these types of mentoring relationships contribute to positive social interactions, cognitive development, and identity development (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011; Henneberger, Deutsch, Lawerence & Sovik-Johnston, 2013; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

The mentoring relationships lasted throughout the two-year program and several of the mentor/mentee relationships surpassed that time period and are still ongoing. Delores and Monica have since remained in contact with each other without assistance or involvement from me. Delores stated that SISTERS

"was very important for me and for the other girls that were in the program as well. I felt like she (Monica) could be like a role model, our big SISTERS were like role models. I kinda took a lot from that program; I kinda felt like I have grown as a person as well I learned a lot”.

Delores credits Monica with teaching her “about being respectful, being a responsible adult.” Hennberger et. al (2012) asserted that mentor relationships that lasted more than one year have the highest success rates and provide the greatest benefit to those involved. Similar after-school programs maintained the benefits of consistent relationships built
with mentors. Components that produced positive outcomes included: meeting twice a week, primary goal was to build supportive relationship outside of school, and the mentor relationship lasted more than two years (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). These long-term relationships aid in the positive development of self-esteem within the girls, particularly in the areas of competence, confidence, and connectedness (Deak & Adams, 2010). On the other hand, mentor relationships that terminate within a year have the fewest benefits and relationships ending within three to six months suffered significant declines in the students’ feelings of self-worth and competence (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

The relationships formed with the girls and the women from Monsanto allowed for several unique opportunities for the girls involved in the SISTERS Club program. During the 2003-2004 school year, Tina, a pseudonym for an 8th grader involved in the SISTERS Club, told me she had decided what career choice she was interested in and she wanted me to assist her. Tina wanted to learn how to fly a plane; she wanted to be a pilot when she was older. When she first entered the program her grades were below average to average. Tina struggled academically and socially. She lived in a home, a place where girls lived when they could not live in their parents’ home for girls, due to her parents not being able to take care of her. Her low grades, inability to interact with others in a socially acceptable manner, and her lack of family structure had a negative impact on her self-esteem. Tina did not talk out in class and appeared reserved in her demeanor. Tina appeared quiet and withdrawn and unsure of the choices she made during the school day.

She seemed to always second guess herself, and not believe as though she could be right in her decision making abilities. Several girls involved in the SISTERS Club program had similar confidence issues and they found support from each other while engaged in
activities. One of the objectives of the SISTERS Club program focused on the support middle school girls need while in middle school. The support participants received initiated from three avenues: peers, mentors and myself.

Tina expressed her concerns to me regarding her future and how not knowing about her future impacted her sense of security. However, after two years in the SISTERS program, Tina appeared more confident and expressed and verbalized the dreams she had for herself. Developmentally based gender-specific programs have been found to have a positive influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the girls involved (LeCroy, 2004). The relationship with Monsanto lasted throughout the span of five years. The relationship formed with Monsanto allowed for her dreams to come true. I reached out to an official in the Monsanto organization and organized a time for Tina and me to travel to Monsanto. During this visit, Tina and I met with a Monsanto private airplane pilot. The Monsanto pilot proceeded to give her a flying lesson. I accompanied Tina during her lesson as it was allowed to be part of the entire training process. It began by our placement into a small private plane, enough room for four people. Tina sat in the co-pilot position and I sat in the back seat. We began the flying lesson by the plane taking off. The pilot remained in control for approximately 30-45 minutes and then he allowed Tina to take control of the plane, for an afternoon of lessons. Before the flight ended, Tina had successfully flown the plane and did a great job at it as well.

Key Limitations

I identified four limitations in this study. The first limitation in this study is participation contact. The study relied on interview data from participants involved in the SISTERS Club program during 2001-2006. Several participants lived in other states, so
access to technology enabled interviews to be conducted. I utilized technology, specifically the web based program Skype, in order to conduct interviews with the women who now reside outside of the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

The second limitation in this study is interviewee bias. Interviewee responses based on the interviewee perception of correctness has the potential to invalidate the interview data. Specifically, the potential of the females being interviewed to answer as they think I want them to during the interview process. Turnbull (1999) stated that a major concern the interviewer must battle is the ability to get to ‘the truth’ in regards to the interview process. I note this as one of my biggest obstacles in the research. The richness of this description is limited to the participants and their willingness to participate in the study.

A third limitation for the study will be the issue of passed time. Since the program ended in 2006 and nine years have passed, locating, contacting, and getting the girls to agree to participate in the interview difficult. Additionally, the participants’ might not remember the details of all the activities they participated in.

A final limitation to this study is the fact that I started the program, was the sole facilitator of the program, and also a math teacher to a majority of the females that participated in the SISTERS Club program. This last limitation had the potential to impact the programs perceived benefits during its tenure and also in the data collected from participant interviews.

**Summary**

I developed SISTERS Club to ensure adolescent girls had a safe environment where they could engage in discussions and explore the obstacles faced in their everyday
lives. SISTERS Club served as a support group, a place to learn about one’s identity, as well as examine the diversity of the participating members. The purpose of this case study was to examine and identify the social and cultural impact of the program on the adolescent girls involved. The identification of the impact on the identity development of the females involved is important to the duplication of this program in other urban middle schools. The two main components of the program that have future benefits to other after-school programs include; service learning activities and mentoring relationships.

The following chapters describe the existing literature, the study design, methods and results of the study. Chapter 2 will discuss existing literature and Chapter 3 will explain the data collection process, describe methodology, procedures, and instruments used for data collection. Chapter 4 will provide the data and analysis of the collected data and Chapter 5 will highlight the implications of the study and how the components of this program can be transferred to other urban schools implementing after-school programs for adolescent girls.

Glossary of Key Definitions

- **Ethnicity**- The culture, traditions and customs of a group of people.

- **Identity Development** – The development of the distinct personality of an individual, known as sense of self.

- **Instructional Leadership**- Instructional Leadership is identified by 4 characteristics; resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, visible presence.

- **Mentoring**- Process of someone teaching, advising or training someone less experienced and often younger. The objective is to support and encourage people
to manage their own learning in order that they maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be.

- **Prejudice**- A judgment based on previous decisions formed before the facts were known.

- **Race**- A socially constructed concept dividing the population into subgroups based on physical appearance, ancestors, language, customs, or experiences.

- **Racism**- The poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race; the belief that some races of people are better than others.

- **Self-Esteem**- Confidence and satisfaction in oneself, or one’s good opinion of oneself.

- **Service Learning**- A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities.

- **Social Identities**- A persons’ identity acquired through life experiences and activities within social groups, as seen by self and others.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

The theoretical framework for this study is formulated around the identity development of adolescent girls. Several theories serve as the foundation for the focus of this study. Marcia (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer & Orlofsky, 2012) stated that identity can be understood, explored, and committed to through a variety of situations, including relationships, friendships, and gender roles. Additional studies have found female identity formation is formed through relationships the young girl has with her mother or other female adults in her life. The female relationship formed occurs due to the fact females tend to experience the same issues throughout their lives and these experiences are the framework for life discussion (Deak, 2010; Gilligan, 1982; Rhodes, 2005). The “Positive Youth Development”, (PYD) perspective viewed sees all adolescents as having strengths. This framework formulated a set of ideas that enabled youth to be seen as resources, not problems, and states that if the strengths of adolescents are aligned with resources-home-school-community, then positive development in the social and physical environment will occur across time (Lerner, 2005).

Black and white identity development theories offer another framework for this study. Educators with the understanding of these theories can intervene in their environment in order to promote the healthy identity development for participants as well as understanding social group dynamics. There are several identity models that discuss the identity of blacks, whites, as well as other ethnic groups. The following models support the discussion of race and the impact on the identity development of
adolescents and serve as a framework for this study; Cross (1987), Jackson (2001) and, Helm’s (1990). Additionally, the world view framework provided a foundation that applies to both black and white identity development and identifies the external factors that can impact identity development in both social groups (Helms, 1990).

Black and white identity models, specifically the Black Identity Development (BID) model, addressed the impact of racism on an individual and how acts of racism impact identity development (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). Cross (1987) and Jackson (2001) have noted five stages of Black Identity Development. The five stages identified described the transition a black individual goes through while they form their personal identity, from the identification with white culture and the rejection of black culture, to the internalization of black culture and fighting oppression (Helms, 1990).

The models are similar in the stages of identity development and have been used in the counseling and educational fields as an intervention and to help adolescence begin to formulate their black identities. The first stage, the pre-encounter, identified the current identity and the current image of one’s self as the person established an internalized identity. The second stage, encounter, referred to the experiences and events that served as challenges or crisis or caused an individual to question one’s pre-existing black identity. The third stage, immersion-emersion, represented the struggles individuals face as they destroy their old identity and a new identity is restructured. The new black identity is changed as future experiences arise and a greater understanding of one’s black identity individually and as a social group is developed. The fourth and fifth stages, internalization and internalization commitment, described the process a person undergoes at the individual level and in society in order to attain a strong black identity.
An individual in stage five is engaged in discussions with others in order to solve issues faced by the black community. Individuals in stage five have a clear understanding of their black identities. These individuals continue to research, protect, and serve as a social advocate for black history, black culture, and for the advancement of black equality (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

Helms (1990) described the transition a white individual goes through while their identity is formed; the initial phase included the person not seeing their personal white identity, to a shift where the internalization of a multi-cultural identity with non-racist views at the core is formed. Discussions during this transition included; race, racism, microagressions, discrimination, white privilege, and the meaning of being white to an individual and within the social context (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). Helms (1990) suggested that when the Black Identity Development Model and the White Identity Development Model are explored together research focused on the worldviews of each group simultaneously can occur. Helms went on to suggest that the diverse worldviews impacted the way a person related to information, perceived situations, adjusted to the environment and builds their personal identity.

The remaining literature review is divided into seven sections found to be supportive of the study. The seven sections are; Gender Specific Program, Race Constructs, After-School Programs, Identity Development, Mentoring, and Social and Cultural Impact.
Gender Specific Programs

There are too few spaces in existence for adolescent girls to have discussions and to explore obstacles faced at this important time in their life. Young girls are allowed to openly discuss a variety of topics in gender specific programs not discussed in mixed gender programs. Topics included in gender specific conversations are: female relationships, the opposite sex, personal fears and concerns, and other personal experiences without feeling judged by the opposite sex. Gender specific programs are useful for girls who tend to get lost in the shuffle if their needs are not a specific focus of attention (Leadbeater & Way, 2007). Girls tend to build stronger, more supportive relationships during the adolescent years, but these relationships are not enough to protect them from the negative issues that may arise. An objective of gender specific program should be to equip girls with the skills necessary to engage in healthy interactions in a variety of life situations (Bledsoe, 2013).

Race Constructs

Statistics state that a third of the black students will attend schools that are 90 to 100 percent black (Gates & West, 1996). Individual perceptions are different dependent upon an individuals’ understanding of vocabulary and the meaning of specific phrases. Discussions between white and black students are perceived differently and individuals’ different understandings of meanings can affect the outcome of those conversations. Black urban girls are frequently marginalized by ethnic and racial discrimination however; they show remarkable strength while facing adversity. With the help of teachers, mentors, and family members, young black girls
can challenge harmful stereotypes and create their own positive identities and nurture life-sustaining relationships (Leadbeater and Way, 2007).

**After School Programs**

David (2011) implied that after-school programs can offer environments that are safe and nurturing, as well as educational. Additionally, after-school programs provide activities that develop social skills and academics in a safe, nurturing environment. After-school programs are typically led by teacher leaders and it is important for school leaders to understand the influence they have in regards to promoting socially just processes and outcomes (Normone and Brooks, 2014). Key components of successful after-school programs include: a culture of acceptance and compassion, listening to others, help students find their “voice”, and to reveal their personal self. Mutual self-disclosure promotes trust and security, thus showing that relationships with adults can be positive and productive (Powell, 2011). Middle school girls typically lose their trust for adults during this time in their lives, which is why it is important to gain trust and to build mutual respect with the girls involved (Deak and Adams, 2010).

Young people benefit when they spend time in well-structured activities. The benefits of well-organized after-school programs include improving youths’ feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding, positive social behaviors, school grades, and achievement test scores. Well-organized after-school programs also reduce problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, noncompliance and conduct problems) and drug use (Durlak and Weissberg, 2007). Research has found that youth development programs, specifically gender-specific programs, provided adolescent
girls with safe environments where they are supported and valued and this promotes positive development (Lecroy, 2004; Roth and Brook-Gunn, 2003).

**Identity Development Theory**

Theorists typically follow the writings of Erikson (1994), who has been credited with defining the largely popular meaning of identity and identity development in adolescence. Erickson’s theory of identity development described the stages and process a person goes through as they form their version of self. The developmental process focused on identity development, relationships, and the role of society. Erikson referred to the development of one’s identity as being a conscious and unconscious process allowing adolescence, any person between the ages of 11 to 14, to discover and actualize their identity within a larger society (Erickson, 1994; Kroger, 2007). The identity development process begins during childhood, and continues throughout the life cycle however a large portion of one’s identity development occurs during adolescence. Identity may or may not change during the human life cycle; however developmental models described a pattern of sequence of events that form the foundation of one’s self-image leading up to pre and post adolescence. Events that influence a major part of the formation of an identity include; how individuals are perceived by others they interact with and how those interactions impact all parties involved. These experiences help develop a person’s self-awareness and the future stages of identity formation (Kroger, 2007).

Marcia (Marcia, et al. 2012) identified the identity status model, based off of the prior work of Erickson, which lead to the identification of the four stages of identity development that adolescence experiences while forming their identity, referred to as the
identity statuses. The identity statuses are: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion. The female adolescents involved in the SISTERS Club program were in the identity diffusion or foreclosure stages of Marcia’s identity status model upon initial participation. The female adolescents in the identity diffusion stage had not explored beliefs about their identity and were seemingly content to maintain their present course in school and life. The female adolescents observed to be in the foreclosure stage had clear beliefs and goals; however these beliefs and goals had not been explored but had been inherently passed down from adults around them. Throughout participation in the SISTERS Club program the female adolescents shifted from their current identity development stages into moratorium. The moratorium stage emerged due to the variety of thought provoking discussions as well as the mentoring relationships developed. The moratorium stage refers to the stage when adolescents begin to explore their beliefs, question their prior thoughts and identify goals for their future. The development of the ego identity is a major component in the development of one’s personality and incorporates the skills, beliefs, and previously developed identity. (Marcia, et al., 2012).

There are three aspects of identity development that researchers need to consider; structural, phenomenological, and behavioral. The structural aspect focused on growth occurring during adolescence dealing with personality, judgment, and efficacy. An advantage to using this type of framework in a study is the ability to specifically focus on prior and consequent conditions. The phenomenological approach refers to individuals either having or not having a sense of identity and the formation of an alternate or adapted identity. Identity is seen as having a core that enabled a person to give meaning to experiences and provided significance to an individuals’ environment. Identities are
labeled as either conferred (future experiences will fulfill expectations) or constructed (future is self-creating and unknown). Finally, the behavioral aspect referred to the observable components of a person’s identity development. This approach focused on the impact the social environment can have on a person’s identity development. This approach lends itself to the individuals’ identity being in a state of constant change dependent on the social situation experienced, and most readily supports the basis of this study (Marcia, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the process of adolescent identity development formation may not be completely fulfilled until adulthood, this gap in time lends itself to support the need for this and future investigations.

Researchers, such as Kegan (1982) also provided a theory focused on the transition within a person’s life cycle and the development of identity. Kegan (1982) focused on the structural stages of identity, identifying stages of development, referred to as meaning-making stages. These structural stages are focused on the interpretation of events and giving meaning to life situations and experiences. Another approach having a sociocultural approach, states people will create and define who they are based on the perceptions of the people they interact with on a daily basis. Relationships formed one-on-one or in small groups contribute to the formation of one’s identity. The development of one’s identity is an ever changing process and as experiences evolve so does a person’s formation of self, their identity (Kroger, 2007).

During adolescence relationships are in a constant state of change: relationships with parents, family members, teachers, and peers are constantly in a cycle of change. During these moments of change female adolescents are in need of additional support in order to maintain a healthy identity (Lerner, 2005). Lerner (2005) pointed out that prior
research rarely focused on what support or motivation benefits girls and enabled the girls to become successful young women. However, Lerner (2005) added that key components of positive identity development have been identified. In recent years, researchers have focused on the identification of the factors associated with positive youth development. Specific efforts incorporated into after-school programs geared toward the positive development of adolescents are important to the identity development of adolescents. A strong emphasis placed on providing continuity, predictability, and traditions are the key components in positive youth development. These programs should promote a sense of belonging, being connected, and membership in a specific social environment. Incorporating these components will provide the environment necessary to foster positive identity development (Danish, Taylor, and Fazio, 2003). Lerner (2005), stated that there are six C’s of Positive Youth Development (PYD), they are competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution (Leadbeater and Way, 2007). 

Female identity formation is formed through the relationships the young girl has with her mother or other female adults in her life. The female identity formation occurs due to the fact that females tend to experience the same issues throughout their lives and these experiences are the framework for future life discussions (Gilligan, 1982). The relationships shared by the application of a narrative approach to identity, sharing one’s life experiences, and important stories can be used in order to identify themes and therefore allowing future research to better understand the process of identity development. Additionally, the relationships can be analyzed in order to investigate assumptions and to make meaning from the stories and themes shared (Kroger, 2007).
Mentoring

Mentoring programs focused on relational and social skills have shown positive effects; improved social skills, improved self-esteem, and positive peer relations (Henneberger et al., 2013). Studies support the effectiveness of mentoring for improving self esteem, social skills, academic performance, and overall identity development. The studies also show a pattern of increased overall development for participants and decreased social development for adolescents not involved in a mentoring program (DuBois et al., 2011; Henneberger et al., 2013; Lampley & Johnson, 2010; Rhodes and DuBois, 2008). Many lower-income adolescent girls have limited personal contact with positive role models outside of their immediate family. Mentors can serve as role models for success, demonstrating qualities adolescent girls might want to emulate, and they are able to provide guidance and information to the girls about the necessary steps needed to reach long-term goals (Leadbeater & Way, 2007). Rhodes (2005) proposed well-developed mentoring programs that provide one-to-one mentoring for adolescent girls add several benefits in the developmental process: 1) enhance youth’s social relationships and emotional well-being, 2) improve cognitive skills through instruction and meaningful conversations, and 3) promote positive identity development by serving as role models and advocates (Leadbeater & Way, 2007; National Mentoring Working Group, 1991).

Research has shown that mentor relationships that last more than one year have the highest success rates and provide the greatest benefit to those involved (DuBois et. al., 2011; Henneberger et al., 2013; Lampley & Johnson, 2010). These long-term relationships aid in the positive development of self-esteem within the girls,
particularly in the areas of competence, confidence and, connectedness (Deak & Adams, 2010). On the other hand, mentor relationships that terminate within a year have the fewest benefits and relationships that end within three to six months suffered significant declines in the students’ feelings of self-worth and competence (Leadbeater & Way, 2007).

**Social and Cultural Impact**

Community service, volunteerism, and peer group membership are potential factors which influence the strategies learned and applied by female adolescence in social situations. Service activities provide structured outlets and enable female adolescents’ opportunities to develop social and cultural trust enhancing the development of identity. These types of activities help foster a sense of social engagement, moral interest, a sense of identity, a sense of being connected to a peer group, and development of cultural values (Kroger, 2007)
Chapter 3 Methods

METHODS

Introduction

This study described a qualitative case study focused on the impact the SISTERS CLUB program had on a group of middle school female students during the time frame of 2001 to 2006. Three critical questions were identified at the onset of the study; 1) how did female relationships impact the identity development of adolescent girls, 2) how did the components of the after-school program lead to improved social, behavioral, personal, and academic performance, and 3) what social and cultural impact did the SISTERS Club program have on the adolescent girls involved? The critical questions identified supported the identified purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to identify the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the adolescent girls involved.

Data collected from four participants and one mentor involved in the SISTERS Club program was analyzed. The primary focus during analysis centered on the identity development of the participants, multicultural relationships, and the program’s long-term impact of the program on participants. In particular, this study investigated the racial, social, and cultural barriers that impacted the development of adolescent girls in the era specified.

The traditional identity status interview relies on participants’ memories and previous decision making opportunities. However, the full influence of previous decision making processes may not be truly explainable until years later; this study is being conducted ten years after the conclusion of the program. The ten year time span enabled
specific data to be collected on the program’s long-term impact. I predict the potential impact of the program will be focused on increased self awareness, positive self identity, and continued practice in the area of social service. This time component supports the need for this study as it contributes to the existing literature focused on the impact of gender-specific after-school programs and the identity development of adolescent girls (Marcia et al., 2012).

**Research Design**

This study investigated the social and cultural impact of the SISTERS Club program on a group of female middle school students over a five-year period. The critical questions investigated in this study are; 1) how did female relationships impact the identity development of adolescent girls, 2) how did the components of the after-school program lead to improved social, behavioral, personal, and academic performance and 3) what social and cultural impact did the SISTERS Club program have on the adolescent girls involved? The design of this study is based on the recommendations of Merriam (2015). Merriam (2015) recommended the use of qualitative research when the research is focused on particular experiences and the meaning behind the experiences. I applied the guidelines for a basic qualitative case study and incorporated the use of semi-structured interviews in order to collect data. The qualitative research design lends itself to the collection of rich descriptive data, specific recollection of activities, and participant perceptions during the interviews. The participant interviews and the researcher reflections and narratives allowed for a meaningful understanding of each participants story. Each participant had the opportunity to share memories of activities they participated in and the personal connections that impacted their development. The stories
shared and detailed descriptions are a valuable means of collecting meaningful data. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews occurred in order to identify emergent themes in the transcribed interviews. Several participants were contacted for follow-up interviews to clarify researcher interpretations and to further explain the meaning of statements within the interview transcriptions. This process allowed for specific details to be identified and provided data to answer the research question; the long term impact of the program on the adolescents involved.

**Research Ethics**

There are several strategies incorporated into this study to ensure researcher trustworthiness and to ensure the research is conducted ethically. One strategy used in this study is the use of multiple sources of data including; participant semi-structured interviews, researcher narratives and reflections, and photographs. The researcher narratives and reflections provided thick descriptions of program activities and memories of the experiences shared during the tenure of the program. Researcher reflexivity is an important component and assisted with maintaining an element of honesty and validity within the study. Researcher reflexivity occurred when I paused for self reflection during interview transcription and data analysis and also when I reflected on the potential for researcher bias in my study. I am the founder and facilitator of the program discussed within the study and therefore; I had a tendency to look for strengths or positive items within the interview data and made a conscientious effort to not overlook areas of weakness or deficit. The knowledge and acceptance of researcher bias encourage me to look past biases to see the true meanings in the interview data. I incorporated member checks, to ensure data accuracy, after I transcribed the interviews. I asked participants to
review the transcribed interviews to clarify my interpretations of statements made. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcription and they ensured the true meanings of statements. Participant review ensured interviewer interpretation accuracy.

Table 3.1

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<td>Multiple Theories</td>
<td>Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Identity Development of Adolescent Girls</td>
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<td>Member Checks</td>
<td>Allow interview participants to read interview transcripts in order to clarify researcher interpretations.</td>
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<td>Participant interviews. Follow-up interviews as needed.</td>
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</table>

Site Description

Interviewees had the option of participating in the interview in one of three ways; in person, Skype, or Face Time. The variable of location of each participant determined the interview venue. Four of the five participants chose Skype as the interview method.
due to ease and travel demands. Two of the interviewees lived outside the state of Missouri. These participants resided in Texas and California, at the time of the interview. One participant chose to conduct the interview by using emails and phone calls. I conducted all of the interviews in my home at my dining room table. The participants choosing Skype as their interview method were in their home as well during the interview.

Participants

There were approximately 20 girls per year in the SISTERS Club. The program impacted approximately 75 to 100 girls, both 7th and 8th graders, during the five year duration. The participants in this study were carefully selected and represent only a small portion, 10 participants out of the 100 will be interviewed. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to after-school programs. However, their stories and narratives are extremely important and will add “objectivity” and provide understanding, feeling, and room for further interpretation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I identified 10 women who were involved in the SISTERS Club program and one mentor to participate in this study. I utilized purposeful sampling when identifying the females to be interviewed. Purposeful sampling occurred when I stated the criteria required for the study and then specifically chose members that met the criteria for participation in the study. The criteria used to identify the participants included: 1) required to have been members of SISTERS for at least two years 2) participated in the mentoring component of SISTERS, and 3) participated in community and service learning projects within the SISTERS program.

Initially, I utilized Facebook and LinkedIn to locate the identified participants. I could not locate all of the participants using the before mentioned social media platforms. Therefore, I contacted the data assessment coordinator for the School District of
University City to collect contact information for identified participants that had not been located. I contacted seven of the identified participants by phone, email or in person to reintroduce myself, since it has been approximately nine years since we have last spoken. I used the recruitment script approved by the IRB and explained the purpose of the study, my role as researcher, the role of the interviewee, and to request their participation. I sent a follow-up email and explained the purpose of the study and attached a consent form, to formally request their involvement. I also attached the interview questions and an information sheet to the email for participant review. I requested each participant to sign the consent form if interested in participation in the study. Additionally, I requested each participant to review the interview guide and to inform me of any questions they would like to remove or if they needed clarification of any interview questions.

Four students are black, two students are Asian, two students are white and one student is Native American. The mentor, as well as myself, is white. Seven individuals out of the ten identified for the study were located and contacted. Five out of the ten individuals agreed to participate in an interview and two individuals declined to participate in the study.
Table 3.2

Pseudonym and Ethnicity for Individuals Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym for Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Interview (Agreed/Declined)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delores</td>
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<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Declined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>Found but Not Contacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Not Found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Not Found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Declined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instruments**

The use of Skype allowed participants outside of the St. Louis, Missouri area to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were audio and video recorded through the use of Skype and those interviews were later transcribed. I watched the video recording of the interviews to observe body language, facial reflections, and additional visual cues. These observations allowed for a deeper understanding of the intended meaning behind participant statements. In several instances I contacted the participant by email to ensure my understanding of statements accurately represented their intent. Researcher analytical memos were added to the transcribed transcriptions and emergent themes in the transcriptions were identified. I conducted line by line coding on each interview.
transcription in order to identify the initial open codes within the data. The open codes were analyzed to create axial codes, emergent themes identified from open coding, and to ultimately create categories and subcategories from the collected data. Axial coding refers to issues or themes identified from coding, which require significant additional investigation in order to answer newly identified questions for future research. This analysis strategy is similar in concept to content analysis because they are both utilized in research in order to collect and organize data (Berg, 2007). The identified categories and subcategories provided a portion of the data needed to determine the impact of the program on the participants.

In the research conducted by Turnbell (2000), she gave the participants the interview guide prior to the interview and allowed them to choose the topics they wanted to discuss or not to discuss during the interview. In this study, allowing the girls to prepare their thoughts before the interview allowed me to collect authentic stories and assisted in building a level of comfort for the participants. Each participant received the interview guide prior to the interview were each given the opportunity to remove any questions they were not comfortable with. No participant requested removal of interview questions.

**Data Collection**

Purposeful sampling was used in order to identify interview participants. Semi-structured interviews were the tools used for collecting data. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described five interview skills that enabled the interviewer to encourage in-depth descriptive responses from respondents. The creation of a friendly and relaxed atmosphere promotes trust and ultimate cooperation throughout the interview process.
The ability of the researcher to ask good questions guided by the critical questions of the study provided appropriate data received, different types of questions will yield different types of information. An interview guide allowed for the researcher to conduct semi-interviews easily and allowed the researcher freedom to ask probing questions as needed. The ability to ask probing questions provided for in-depth descriptive answers and allowed for the expansion of ideas and clarification of the meanings of shared narratives. In order to ask probing questions effectively the researcher must have a clear understanding of the purpose of the study and stay aligned with the critical questions. Reflexivity and understanding researcher bias minimized conflict and provided the researcher with untainted information. A researcher should maintain a professional relationship during the interview and refrain from adding personal comments to the questions; this will assist in the elimination of response imitation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The researcher’s first priority is the development of a level of trust and openness; therefore I introduced myself briefly at the beginning of the interview and jumped into the questions quickly. Beginning the interview process without a period of lag time alleviated anxiety about the interview and allowed the respondent to relax and begin to answer questions honestly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The semi-structured interviews for each respondent lasted between one to two hours. I audio and video recorded the participant interviews and made transcriptions directly from the audio recordings. Audio-taping the interview instead of scripting respondents or taking jottings during the interview is an advantage; I maintained a relaxed atmosphere and asked probing questions for clarification when appropriate. I made eye-contact and remained an active
listener during the interview process. I promoted trust and openness throughout the interview.

**Data Analysis**

I conducted a video recorded interview through the use of Skype and audio recorded the interview as well. First, I transcribed the audio recordings and then I watched the video recordings to insert body movements or facial expressions that might lead to a better understanding of meaning. I used a highlighter and Microsoft Excel coded all prevalent themes that arose in the interviews. I applied the strategy of line by line open coding to identify themes or codes within the interview transcriptions. The themes and codes were analyzed to identify larger groups or themes in the data, axial coding. The identified themes were further analyzed to answer the research questions previously stated. Researchers assert that the cyclical processes of coding, identifying themes, comparison of data only to find new categories and themes is a natural part of the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006, Glaser, 1992).

**Limitations**

The first limitation in this study is contact of the identified participants and then agreement to participate in the interview process for the study. The richness of the description in this study is limited to the participants and their willingness to participate in the study. Several participants lived in other states, so access to technology enabled interviews to be conducted. I utilized technology, specifically the web based program Skype, in order to conduct interviews with the women who now reside outside of the St. Louis Metropolitan area.
The second limitation in this study is interviewee bias. Interviewee responses based on the interviewee perception of correctness has the potential to invalidate the interview data. Specifically, the potential of the females being interviewed to answer as they think I want them to during the interview process. Turnbull (2000) stated that a major concern the interviewer must battle is the ability to get to the truth in regards to the interview process. I note this as one of my biggest obstacles in the research.

A third limitation for the study will be the issue of passed time. Since the program ended in 2006 and nine years have passed, locating, contacting, and getting the girls to agree to participate in the interview was difficult. Additionally, the participants’ might not remember the details of all the activities they participated in while members of the SISTERS Club program.

A final limitation to this study is the fact that I started the program, was the sole facilitator of the program, and also a math teacher to a majority of the females that participated in the SISTERS Club program. This last limitation had the potential to impact the programs perceived benefits during its tenure and also in the data collected from participant interviews.
Chapter 4 Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the adolescent girls involved. Program participants were interviewed and the data was analyzed focusing on the identity development of the participants, multicultural relationships, and the program’s long-term impact. In particular, this study investigated the racial, social, and cultural barriers that impacted the development of adolescent girls in the era specified.

Participant Background Information

Table 4.1

General Background Information of the Individuals Contacted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th># OF SIBLINGS</th>
<th>HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA</th>
<th>COLLEGE DEGREE</th>
<th>AREA OF INTEREST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
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<td>African American</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delores</td>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Media/Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

The subsequent reporting of the data gained from the interviews follows a narrative approach to a thematic analysis. To protect the confidentiality of participating individuals, pseudonyms were assigned and used when quoting appropriate comments.
Finding 1 – Participants and Feelings Associated with SISTERS CLUB

Participants were asked about their feeling associated with being a part of SISTERS Club during their middle school years, 7th and 8th grade. Specifically, how they felt at the time they were actively involved in SISTERS and how those feelings were transferred into their high school experiences. The answers varied in delivery but a common theme of being accepted, valued and understood by others was identified.

“I was really awkward then, I still am but back then I was really quiet and being an only child I was really independent and I was very studious. Being in class versus a program like this was great because in class I was so focused on school but I felt like when I was in SISTERS it gave me a chance to grow social skills and bond with these girls and make friends that would stick with me. I think that was amazing and to think that I was able to do all of those things and learn skills on top of it, I think was pretty cool” (Julie, Interview January 7, 2016).

Julie like the other participants saw the value in being a part of the SISTERS Club because this was the only program of its type offered in the middle school. The program gave the girls a sense of inclusion and acceptance by others their age that during the school day was not so apparent. Being a part of the SISTERS program had a positive effect on her because she was able to make friends that during the school day she was not able to. My experience as a classroom teacher and program facilitator has allowed me to observe other girls in this same position, during the school hours they are focused on academics or wanting to quietly fit in, thus never having specific opportunities to make meaningful friendships. SISTERS allowed and encouraged such opportunities on a weekly basis and helped girls make those friendships through organized activities.
Regina (Interview October 15, 2015) stated, “I remember being really happy…. I just thought it was a really good opportunity to do, especially for some of the girls that probably wouldn’t have been able to do something like that”, “I started looking for opportunities to be able to do things with people that you probably wouldn’t normally do.”

I remember Regina was always very quiet in the classroom and in the after school program. The SISTERS program provided a safe place for her where she could voice her opinion without being judged. During the interview she made reference several times to the fact that she had trouble making friends and fitting in during her middle school years, but through her participation in SISTERS she was able to overcome those issues and is now more outgoing.

At one point during the interview Regina (Interview, 15, 2015) stated, “And I’m great at making friends (stated with degree of sarcasm in her voice) but I think SISTERS helped”.

The SISTERS group was intentionally diverse and gave students similar to Regina opportunities to meet other people similar in characteristics to her as well as students on the opposite end of the social spectrum. The activities and conversations that occurred in SISTERS were specifically designed to allow for conversations to occur that would help instill confidence in order for girls to reach out and expand their circle of friends.

Several of the participants involved in the SISTERS program were also students in my 7th grade mathematics classroom. These individuals had two opportunities to be engaged in a variety of activities developed to increase not only mathematical abilities but the confidence to engage other students in conversations. Kerry was one of
the students enrolled in my class and also a member of SISTERS, she was asked how being involved in SISTERS made her feel, and she stated:

“It really meant a lot to me. It was so impactful in my life. Because it was at a really rough time for me, I had just moved from Africa and the girls at Brittany Woods Middle School weren’t nice at all. They were so mean. Quite frankly I hated school. I hated coming to school every day, but I always enjoyed coming to your class. I think that made it…. I don’t know, for the longest time I told myself I loved math so much, not because I was really good at it but because I always had such a good experience and it made me want to love it” (Kerry, Interview October 13, 2015).

The participants all stated they had positive feelings associated with being a part of the SISTERS program. All participants made comments regarding the positive feelings associated with being involved and the positive impact the program had on their identity development. Delores’ statement about her feelings sums up the overriding theme with “I have positive feelings definitely, most definitely” (Delores, Interview October 26, 2015).

**Finding 2 – Participants Perceived Impact on Relationships**

Being involved in SISTERS had an impact on middle school classes (leadership, grades, and responsibility) as well as the students’ transition to high school. Several of the participants stated that their involvement in the SISTERS Club program helped them stay focused on passing classes, helped build self confidence, and helped them learn how to build and keep relationships.

With regard to passing classes and keeping grades at a certain level Regina stated,
“I think it helped keep grades steady”… “A lot of people watching out for me” (Interview October 15, 2015).

She further discussed that her memory of my expectation to participate in the SISTERS program was that homework needed to be done and that students were expected to be passing all classes. My expectation as well as her parents expectation at home helped her stay focused in middle school and to complete her homework assignments. She further stated,

“I think that making sure you had your homework done before you came to SISTERS reminded me that, oh yeah, I actually have to do it and turn it in.”

Although I remember having times that were set aside to help students with grades, her memory although different than mine. is extremely important. I did set the expectation for all of the girls to be as successful as possible and her take on it was to make sure her homework was done, in the long run to me that was a true sign of success.

The impact the SISTERS Club program had on participants can be heard in comments regarding the various activities they were exposed to and how those activities impacted their future development. Julie describes herself in middle school as being a “late bloomer.”

“I was very sorta closed down and I think having the girls gave me a chance to open up and to be more comfortable around women and other girls my age, yeah I have really lovely memories of doing activities with the girls and learning and just feeling included. You know, it’s nice to feel like you have a group. And that’s something, especially at that age that can be very difficult. You don’t really know who you are yet, your person, what your interests are, and what I loved about
SISTERS is that it had all of these different facets, you know. There was something in there that everyone would enjoy and things you would discover and things that you didn’t know before” (Julie, Interview, January 7, 2016).

She wasn’t really sure how she fit into other social groups; however because of her involvement in SISTERS she had increased her self confidence and her ability to reach out to others and she was able to find her social niche in high school. Julie went on to add that in high school she began to perform in choir and in all of the high school musicals and theatrical productions, that’s when she found the people interested in the same thing she was.

“That was my people, and I didn’t really have people really up to that point, but it was nice. I found my spot. And that got me into music; I was 16 when I started taking music lessons, so in about two years I completely changed what I thought I was going to do”.

A potential area of growth for this program would be in addressing situations or experiences such as the one that happened to Kerry during her 7th grade year. Although I had the best intentions I did not, possibly could not have prevented all negative issues or experiences that arise in middle school. Kerry had just moved to the United States from Africa and Brittany Woods Middle School was the first school for her to attend. I remember her being so enthusiastic about being in my mathematics class, always having a smile on her face, very energetic. As a teacher she was a joy to have in class and she and I formed a genuine relationship quickly. I observed students bullying her, and I always stepped in to address the situation as soon as I could. I tried to support Kerry in letting her know how special she was and that I thought she was an amazing person and I
truly enjoyed being able to work with her. However, I did not see the quiet turmoil she was facing on a daily basis. Even through SISTERS, the large amount of pain she experienced was undetected and was not truly understood until the interview. During her interview Kerry stated,

“I talk about teachers, the unsung heroes of the world. I’m so happy that you are doing this and I hope that it can impact others you know because relationships are so important. I keep talking about how female relationships can affect your ability to build relationships after middle school and it does. I will be quite frank with you. I have struggled with, after being in Brittany Woods, and having the majority of the population be like African American and females were the people that bullied me so badly. I struggled and I still struggle my entire life building female relationships especially with other African American females because, I am like, I was so traumatized back then and then I moved to a predominately white school. I mean all of my friends will be of other, I mean white, Hispanic or Asian background. It made it much easier and I can see actively in my mind trying to find friends who are of a specific race. I just find myself away from people that bullied me and it’s really horrible to say but I think that affects me a little bit” (Interview October 13, 2015).

She also stated that her experiences in middle school were extremely negative, she referred to her memories of middle school experiences as “a dark cloud”; however she stated being in the SISTERS program was a “huge positive” in her development.

When she transferred to a nearby school district she was able to use the skills learned in SISTERS to make female friends, join extracurricular activities, after school
sports and to become a successful educator helping other students in need. She currently is in a college level position and credits this to “the people in my life that have really helped me through difficult times and if I didn’t have those people I would not be where I am.” She is dedicated to mentoring the students she works with because she truly understands how important it is to have someone on your side as you try to achieve your goals. “I really love what I do, that includes helping them with goal setting, helping them with study skills and time management skills. She finalizes her thought by stating “You are very important to me. I talk about you to students. I feel like through you, because of what you did I am where I am today and I am helping students, to finish college, their first year transition. So through you, your helping even more students so there is a trickle effect..lots of people (she smiles and puts her hands in the air to demonstrate a lot), that is a lot of people you have impacted..a lot of lives you have shaped.”

**Finding 3 – Participants Perceived Impact of Mentoring**

Mentoring was one of the components of the SISTERS Club program. I incorporated mentoring into the program due to the fact I observed many of the girls with low self esteem, low self confidence and what I perceived as a lack of a female role model that could encourage them to improve their individual skills and abilities. The mentors were volunteers from Monsanto and prior to meeting the girls for the first time were given instruction and guidance on how the mentoring aspect would work. They were paired prior to the first meeting based on the mentors strengths and perceived compatibility to the girls involved in the SISTERS Club. The mentors were assigned for a two year period under my observation, although some of the relationships built under my
supervision were maintained for a longer period of time.

When participants were asked about their memories of their assigned mentor, or big SISTER, the responses included:

“I remember meeting Monica for the first time. We were kinda the same she was telling me how she used to be quiet and shy just like me. She was very outgoing; she was pretty easy to talk to” (Delores, Interview October 26, 2015).

Delores and Monica have since remained in contact with each other without assistance or involvement from me. Delores stated that SISTERS

“was very important for me and for the other girls that were in the program as well. I felt like she (Monica) could be like a role model, our big SISTERS were like role models. I kinda took a lot from that program; I kinda felt like I have grown as a person as well I learned a lot”.

Delores credits Monica with teaching her “about being respectful, being a responsible adult”. When asked about anything she wanted to share specifically about the mentoring part of the program, Delores stated

“Well, my advice for the younger girls, I think what was most important about the program that bond, that we have with our bigger SISTER and I think that’s about it. Bonding with them and it was probably something the girls didn’t have. I think it was a good experience for us all, for those that don’t know what it’s like to have an older sister, someone to look up to.”

Another participant remembered a positive memory of her mentor; however did not find this aspect of the SISTERS Club as meaningful as I would have intended. When asked about memories of her mentor, she responded:
“You know things that I thought made me weird or different, this woman thought were strengths. And also to just see someone in her field. A woman, a strong woman, an independent woman and working in a very high field. I think was impactful for a lot of girls, ya know, because you don’t, because when you are young you don’t necessarily know, oh I want, or I can do all of this you know there’s no reason I can’t be a scientist and do this kind of work. I think that was what I loved most about the mentoring program was that it gave girls a chance to see..ok I can do this if I really wanted to and for a lot of them that was probably not a part of their life.” When I questioned what was her least favorite activity in SISTERS, her reply was mentoring and she explained by stating “I think for me and it is only because I didn’t take advantage of it. The stuff we did with the mentoring program. I didn’t stick with it enough. I think it had a really great idea and message behind it. But I didn’t stick with it and write letters back and I wish looking back if I had done more to stay with that, it would have done more for me” (Julie, Interview January 7, 2016.

Another participant responded:

“I remember we took a trip to Monsanto and we all got a mentor, actually…. I don’t know if I actually read it or not, but my mentor Margaret Duram and she gave me a book and cause she did a genealogy on a project, so the book is called From the Bones of my Ancestors and she wrote something in it. It says:

“To Regina,

My SISTER to SISTERS, Have fun in all you do.

Margaret Duram, November 2004”
When discussed further about why she was given the book, Regina stated that she was given the book because during their conversation she had seemed interested and Margaret had wanted her to have it. Regina stated “I remember she made me feel like pretty good about myself…she thought I was super interesting”. Through their continued discussion Margaret also gave Regina a news article written about her research, *Genealogy Helps the Journey Through the Times*, which Regina stills has today within the pages of the book. Not surprisingly, Regina’s major interest of study in college was focused on anthropology and science. I can’t help consider the possibility that the discussions they shared as part of the mentoring component had a vocational impact on Regina and the future choices she would make as she entered high school and college. During the interview Regina did state that looking back she wished we had done more activities with the mentors, stating “But since we weren’t always together it didn’t have as much impact as it could have”, further questioning lead me to believe if we had done more activities with the mentors there could have been more potential impact to the girls involved. This thought although slightly modified supports the researcher that states that mentor relationships that last more than one year have the highest success rates and provide the greatest benefit to those involved (Henneberger et al., 2012). These long-term relationships aid in the positive development of self-esteem within the girls, particularly in the areas of competence, confidence and connectedness (Deak and Adams, 2010). On the other hand, mentor relationships that terminate within a year have the fewest benefits and relationships ending within three to six months suffered significant declines in the students’ feelings of self-worth and competence (Leadbeater and Way, 2007). The general idea would be
that extended contact for a several year period with the mentor and the SISTERS participant, whether it be weekly or bi-weekly, could have an increased potential for positive development in regards to increased self confidence and positive identity development.

Some participants did not recall their mentor or any of the experiences they might have shared as part of the mentoring experience. This in part was due as they stated in the interview to the fact they did not remember their mentor or they did not take an involved interest in the mentoring portion of the program due to other circumstances.

“I feel like with Brittany Woods especially I think I was so traumatized by all of it that my brain just kinda shut down from everything that happened there”, and “It’s been such a long time, I wish I could tell you more about the program…but I just mean all I remember maybe it’s just muddled together both of being in your classroom and being part of the program its kinda like fused together into one experience” (Kerry, Interview October 13, 2015).

**Finding 4 – Participants Perceived Impact of Volunteering**

SISTERS Club was involved in a variety of ongoing volunteer activities. I tried to organize monthly activities either on campus or within the community to help instill in the girls the importance of giving back to others and to instill the need for public service.

Julie spoke about her family and how they had always donated to the Children’s Home Society but she never really understood who the boxes of donated supplies were being sent to or who they were trying to help. When we started partnering with the Children’s Home Society as a volunteer group she was able to learn more about the goals of her family as well as her community and the people around her.
“As far as SISTERS goes the biggest memory I have, I don’t know why, but this memory really sticks out when we worked with the Children’s Home Society and we were on a field trip to the pumpkin patch. I don’t know if you remember this but I totally remember everything about this trip, and it was really just getting to help people and moving around and it’s just one of those memories that’s just going to be there for me forever. SISTERS, we were certainly a very diverse group of people. You had people from all different background, and I LOVE the fact that it made us come together and encouraged us to make lifelong friends. It was amazing and I also think that being girls sometimes we don’t also express our feelings. And I love that having SISTERS was a way to have family. It felt comfortable opening up to. And I think that is really an amazing thing. To do those and all the volunteer work that we did that was just the icing on the cake for me. I feel like really positive and that was something really great. I think I was always a very naturally giving and open person but I learned how many different ways you can be that and I think that was huge, and how rewarding it was to give back and the warm fuzzy feelings you get from that and for some reason that was especially important to me at that age”.

Finding 5 – Participants Perceived Impact of Identity Development

Participants were asked to discuss activities or memories they had of SISTERS and how the event impacted their identity development. Both positive and negative experiences were shared but ultimately all participants did acknowledge that being involved in the SISTERS Club provided them with a safe environment where they were allowed to explore their identities and were encouraged to grow without fear of judgment
by the others involved in the program.

Regina stated that it was a “very safe environment, everybody could speak very freely and you gave everybody enough chances to do it. Like, if someone was kinda quiet in the corner you would be like ‘what do you have to say?’ , it was nice, especially for me being such a quiet kid. I definitely think SISTERS gave me some confidence like as a lady, a woman…because we did talk about women’s issues”. She went on to share that she remembered us discussing transgender people and the impact judgment towards them could be hurtful and how accepting people for their differences was important. During the interview she discussed the importance of having empathy and how she learned that from being a part of SISTERS.

“I think it made it a little easier, like if someone was going through some emotional issue you could kind of connect with them. To really understand where they are coming from. I think one you can probably tell is that I have started talking more to people, so I think SISTERS helped break up that little shyness shell a little bit. But I think…one of the biggest ones, getting confidence, comfortable to talk to people, hmmm… what’s some other ones (long pause as she is thinking), I guess the empathy thing. You can’t make friends unless you’re empathetic with them somehow.”

Delores stated that through SISTERS, she was able to “build my self esteem. I had very low self-esteem. I feel like a different person than I was before”. This is in part to her participation in SITERS during middle school but also largely due to the fact that she has remained inconstant contact with her mentor throughout the past 10 plus years. They are in constant contact via email, Facebook, phone calls and the occasional get together.
for coffee or lunch.

It was previously stated that the events that influence a major part of the formation of a persons’ identity include how they are perceived by others they interact with and how those interactions impact parties involved. These experiences help develop a person’s self-awareness and the future stages of identity formation (Kroger, 2007). This becomes apparent in the answers provided by the participants in this study.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

When I initiated this study I identified three critical questions to guide my investigation. The critical questions were: 1) how did female relationships impact the identity development of adolescent girls, 2) how did the components of the after-school program lead to improved social, behavioral, personal, and academic performance, and 3) what social and cultural impact did the SISTERS Club program have on the adolescent girls involved? The identification of the impact on the identity development of the females involved is important to the duplication of this program in other urban middle schools. The two main components of the program that have future benefits to other after-school programs include; service learning activities and mentoring relationships.

The participants were members of the program approximately 10 years ago, therefore this study focused on the long term impact of the after-school program on the participants. The underlying purpose of this study is the identification of the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the adolescent girls involved. I focused on the long term impact due to the potential impact the information gained could have on the development of future after-school programs. To understand the long term impact the program had could bring about meaningful, positive, and impactful decisions while in the development process of future after-school programs.

During the data collection and analysis stages of the study I identified several positive and beneficial impacts of the program to the female participants. The interview process allowed for the identification of positive benefits and identified key components of the program the participants felt impacted them in their development of self identity. Ultimately, I determined that the findings of this study suggest gender specific after-
school programs do provide the support needed to lead to the positive identity development of the participants.

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews and this allowed for the same questions to be asked of all participants. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for additional prompting questions as necessary in order to gain full understanding of participant responses. The interview format is designed as a free flowing conversation in order to allow participants to experience a comfortable flowing style of conversation. I hoped this comfort level would enable me to get in depth detail of the participants memories.

For each interview, I had a set of questions to ask of each participant. The questions ranged from the basic questions of age, number of siblings, vocational questions, etc. to questions regarding their memories of activities in the SISTERS Club program, mentoring and volunteer memories and, the overall impact the program had on their identity development. The questions deliberately asked focused on finding the answers to the underlying purpose of this study. The focus of the questions is on the identification of the social and cultural impact the SISTERS Club program had on the adolescent girls involved. These were several of the questions I asked:

During the course of data analysis, specific themes appeared and the positive impact on participants is evident. During the final step in the data analysis stage, I specifically coded the interview transcriptions for the identification of key terms and phrases found in all of the interviews. This critical analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed for the development of underlying themes observed by all participants and is useful in the overall analysis of the interview data. What follows are
some general statistics on the interviews that I had with the study participants:

Interviews:  5
Total time: approximately minutes 200 minutes

Number of occurrences for selected words and/or phrases:

Role Model/Mentor/Mentoring: 15
Self-Esteem/Self Confidence/Social Skills: 14
Female Relationships/Friendships/Connections/Bonds: 18
Good/Positive/Safe: 22
Volunteer/Volunteering/Helping Others: 16
Peer Pressure/Bullying: 5
Identity: 13
Diversity: 7

The participants described specific experiences that impacted their individual and social growth. They cited increased self awareness, increased self confidence, and increased self-esteem as being benefits they received due to their participation in the SISTERS Club program. Each of the participants identified themselves as shy, quiet or awkward during their middle school years and the SISTERS Club program allowed them to learn how to talk to others, they gained a sense of empathy, and were able to communicate effectively as they matured into adulthood. Their participation in the program during their middle school years allowed them to develop the necessary skills to acclimate successfully into high school, college, and adult life. They each described their path to their current vocational choice and gave credit to the SISTERS Club program for assisting in their identity development. Several of the participants found employment in
fields of public service: mentoring, teaching, guidance, or participation in volunteer activities.

The cultural impact the program had varied based on each of the participants. The participants spoke of the diversity in the program, the specific ways in which the program impacted them in regards to cultural themes; however the experiences varied between participants. One participant, Kerry, discussed her individual battle with the formation of female relationships with people of a particular race. Specifically, she is a young black woman and due to bullying issues faced while in middle school does not easily form friendships with other black women. The black middle school girls targeted her due to her darker skin color, her African dialect, and her families’ recent relocation to the St. Louis area from Africa. Kerry explained that the girls at Brittany Woods weren’t nice to her during classes, in the halls, or in the lunchroom. They were extremely mean and she hated school. She further explained that this time in her life was a dark cloud and caused her to be traumatized emotionally. Kerry in turn developed a negative view towards the black girls in her classes and rejected them as potential friends.

When Kerry entered middle school she was in the second stage of her identity development. Helms (1990), suggested that stage two of identity development is determined when an adolescent is faced with a challenge or a crisis forcing the individual to question their own pre-existing identity. Kerry voiced her concern that while in middle school she learned negative imagery about herself from others, before that time in her life she had no reason to doubt herself or to be negative or judgmental about herself. Kerry expressed the ways in which the SISTERS Club program helped her to be comfortable and confident, and how the skills learned enabled her to accept herself.
Kerry noted that the positive benefits she gained during her middle school years came in two parts; participation in the SISTERS Club program and enrollment in my pre-algebra class. The interview lead me to believe that Kerry tied both of those situations together as one memory and I noted that she had a difficult time separating the after-school activities from the activities done within the math classroom. Overall, she contributed her development of self-identity to be positively impacted from the activities she engaged in while under my guidance.

Kerry transferred during her 8th grade year into a predominately white high school nearby and throughout her high school years shifted into stage three of Helm’s (1990) Identity Development Model. The third stage of Helm’s (1990) model is immersion-emersion and represented the time in her life when she faced the inner conflicts formed while in middle school and began her process of creating a new self-identity. Kerry’s participation within the SISTERS Club program enabled her to build female relationships as she matured and assisted her with the creation of a new positive version of self. During this process she established meaningful relationships with other females and those relationships have continued for the past ten years. She expressed concern during the interview that the friendships she made and continued to make after middle school tend to be outside of her race.

The tendency to form friendships outside of her race has significant cultural implications for future research in regards to effective after-school programs. The questions that arise are focused on the acceptance of cultural diversity and the long term impact bullying can have on the identity development of an adolescent. Through this interview process I did not identify how participation in the SISTERS Club program
affected her acceptance or understanding of the experiences she faced while in middle school. I am left knowing that she benefited from participation but questioning if the program could have done more to be a support system against the bullying and negative after-effects of being targeted by members of her own race.

Delores and Julie both experienced the creation or modification of their current self-identity while in middle school. Delores is a black female and Julie is a white female, both experienced the development of their self-identities however went through slightly different processes and faced different social conflicts. Cross (1987), Jackson (2001) and Helm (1990) described identity development models focused on both ethnic groups. The models are similar in the stages and have been used in the counseling and educational fields as an intervention to help adolescence begin to formulate their black identities.

Cross (1987) and Jackson (2001) discussed the five stages of Black identity Development (BID). These stages described the transition a black adolescent goes through while their personal identity is formed. Delores spoke of the difficulties she faced while in middle school; being shy, unsure of herself, and having low self-esteem.

While in the SISTERS Club program I made consistent efforts to engage her in activities intent on her discovery of self. While in middle school, Delores was in stage two of her identity development. She was unsure of herself and did not appear confident while making decisions that others could evaluate. She was soft spoken and even during organized activities had to be prompted to participate.

I had the opportunity to teach at the high school Delores attended while she was in the eleventh and twelfth grades. During those two years I was able to observe her beginning transition through the following stages of her identity development. She
became more outgoing, joined several after-school programs, and had a consistent
group of friends that she hung out with on a daily basis. In the hallways she seemed
happy, confident and more aware sure of whom she was becoming on an individual
level. I observed her to be at ease while making conversations with other students’, she
made more eye contact than she had done in middle school, and seemed to walk with a
sense of self-confidence in the hallways.

Based on the stages of BID, I categorized her to be in the fourth and fifth stages
while being interviewed, the internalization and internalization commitment stages.
These stages described the process a person undergoes at the individual level as well as
in society in order to attain a strong black identity. An individual in stage five is
engaged in discussions with others in order to solve issues faced by the black
community. Individuals in stage five have a clear understanding of their black
identities. These individuals continue to research, protect, and serve as a social
advocate for black history, black culture, and for the advancement of black equality
(Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

Delores is graduating in the spring of 2016 from her chosen university and is an
active advocate for the healthy depiction of black women in the media. She discussed
her desire and tendency to seek out opportunities for discussions pertaining to race,
racism, and discrimination against women of color. When questioned further, she
discussed her overwhelming desire to focus on media specifically. She had spent time
focused on black women in the practical arts, the news industry; written and televised,
as well as in political venues. Her participation in this type of discussion has evolved
tremendously since middle school. She stated that her ability to speak with confidence
about racial discrimination and stereotyping was influenced by participation in the SISTERS Club program and through the ongoing relationship built with her mentor.

Julie took on leadership roles within the SISTERS Club program while working with the children at the Children’s Home Society of Missouri. The ethnicity of the children living there is diverse, and Julie voluntarily engaged in activities with persons outside of her race. Service learning and volunteer activities provide a structures outlet and enable female adolescents’ opportunities to develop social and cultural trust enhancing the development of identity. These types of activities help foster a sense of social engagement, moral interest, the development of cultural values, and a sense of identity (Kroger, 2007).

Helms (1990) described the transition a white individual goes through during the formation of their self-identity. The initial phase included the person not seeing their personal white self, to a shift where the internalization of a multicultural identity is formed. Julie’s elementary school demographics were predominately white. While in middle school her class demographics changed to predominately black. According to Helms (1990), the initial phase of her identity development occurred when she did not see her personal white identity. However, she recognized her membership as part of a group identity, the SISTERS Club program.

Middle school is the time, during adolescence, were non-racist views are formed and discussions addressing race, racism, discrimination and the meaning of being white were shared. Participants in the SISTERS Club program engaged in these types of discussions regularly and shared both positive and negative experiences aligned to their specific race. Julie shared during the interview that she developed a deeper sense of self
and confidence through these discussions and volunteer experiences. These experiences and the skills learned carried over into adulthood and provided her strengths to continue working in diverse volunteer situations.

The mentoring and volunteering components of SISTERS Club have positive implications toward the identity development of the girls participating. Both of the previous mentioned program components allowed participants exploration of their identity and encouraged participants to act out of their comfort zone. Middle school is the time when most adolescents lose their trust for adults. It is important during this crucial time for adults, specifically teacher, mentors and family members to build and nurture positive and productive relationships (Deak and Adams, 2010; Powell, 2011).

Leadbeater and Way (2007) explained that many lower-income adolescent girls have limited personal contact with positive female role models outside of the immediate family. Mentors can serve as role models for success, demonstrating qualities adolescent girls might want to emulate, and they are able to provide guidance and information about necessary steps to reach long term goals. This information is invaluable to structuring an after-school program for middle school girls.

Regina participated in the mentoring component of the SISTER Club program for two years. Similar to the other girls in this study, she was shy and lacked self confidence while in middle school. The organized times she had with her mentor had a lasting impression on her while in high school and also while choosing her career path. Regina’s mentor was involved in scientific research, the study of history, and documentation of past events. While deciding what career path to follow, Regina mirrored several of her mentors interests and traits. Regina chose to major in
archeology and minor in education. I have observed her substitute teaching in the past several years, specifically in the science content classrooms.

The middle school girls participating in the SISTERS Club program, generally speaking, came from lower-income homes and did not have observable structures in place to accommodate their social needs. The mentor relationship was established in order to promote a sense of belonging and being connected to a role model. These relationships had the potential to assist the adolescents in forming a positive self-identity and to begin to articulate and develop future goals.

The mentor relationships with Monsanto provided positive effects on the participants in the SISTERS Club program, especially with the transformation of one of the participants in the study. Delores provided specific memories of the relationship formed with her mentor, Monica. Delores shared that the relationship formed with her mentor provided her opportunities for individual growth and supported her formation of a positive identity.

Mentoring relationships contribute to positive outcomes for the youth involved including: improved social and emotional health, increased cognitive skills, and the development of identity (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008; David, 2011). The mentors to the participants involved in the SISTERS Club program involved the girls in specific tasks to encourage individual growth. The mentors provided job-embedded tasks on visits to Monsanto and enabled the girls of SISTERS Club to gain increased social competence while interactions with others assisted in acquired and refined thinking skills. Additional activities included; discussions on how to build friendships, how to advocate for self, picnics, academic pursuits, and a variety of celebrations throughout the
program. These types of mentoring relationships contribute to positive social interactions, cognitive development, and identity development.

Marcia, et al., (2012) reported three aspects of identity development, one being the behavioral aspect. The behavioral aspect of identity development referred to the observable components that make up an individuals’ identity. This approach focused on the impact the social environment can have on a persons’ identity development. An individuals’ identity is always in a state of constant change dependent on the social situation experienced. The experiences shared with the mentors at Monsanto is an example of one activity that engaged the SISTERS Club participants in a social, job related setting that impacted the identity development of several members.

Julie affirmed that the experiences at Monsanto were life changing for many of the girls participating. She noted that many of the SISTERS Club participants were not associated with women in the science or technology field. The ability to engage with women in those fields was an incredible experience which allowed many members to see their future possibilities. This is true in regards to Regina, who choose a field similar to the one her mentor had and continued to work in the science field after graduation. Leadbeater and Way (2007) discussed the need for adolescents’ to have a connection with a female role model, a mentor. The Monsanto mentors provided appropriate guidance, structure and information needed to support the girls in the development of identity and setting their future goals. The connection made with the girls of the SISTERS Club program and the mentors provided a rich science and business/technology aspect which impacted their career choices.
Mentor relationships that last more than one year have the highest success rates and provided the greatest benefit to those involved. These long-term relationships aid in the positive development of self-esteem within the girls, particularly in the areas of competence, confidence, and connectedness (Deak & Adams, 2010). Several participants suggested that the mentoring aspect could provide additional benefit if extended over a period of time. They reported that monthly activities and only two years was not a significant amount of time to build relationships for future growth. However, it was shared by several participants that a lack of benefits was in large part due to the SISTERS Cub participants’ active engagement in the mentor/mentee process and commitment to attend all organized activities in order to be successful.

Community service, volunteerism, and peer group membership are factors influencing the strategies learned and applied by female adolescence in social situations. Service activities provide structured outlets and enable female adolescents’ opportunities to develop social and cultural trust enhancing the development of identity. These types of activities help foster a sense of social engagement, moral interest, a sense of identity, a sense of being connected to a peer group, and development of cultural values (Kroger, 2007). Julie reported that the community service and volunteering components of the SISTERS Club program had a major impact on her identity development. She discussed how her involvement with the Children’s Home Society provided her with the knowledge and ability to give back to others around her. She shared during the interview that she has continued activities of community service and volunteerism during her adult years and how this activity has had a positive impact on her identity development.
The SISTERS Club program provided a safe environment where participants expressed their opinions without fear of being judged. The participants verified during the interview process that through participation in the SISTERS Club program they were prepared to overcome the issues faced during the middle school years. The SISTERS Club program structure allowed students who were shy or quiet a variety of opportunities to meet other people similar in characteristics to themselves. A strong emphasis was placed on providing continuity, predictability and promoting a sense of belonging. Lerner (2005) explained that programs that emphasized belonging, being connected to a group and provided ownership into a specific social group promoted positive youth development.

Lerner (2005) identified the six C’s of positive youth development (PYD) that impact the identity development of adolescents’. The components identified by Lerner (2005) included; competence, confidence, connection, character, caring and confident. When I facilitated the SISTERS Club program I was not aware of the six C’s, however; during the literature review for this study I have identified the components of his developmental theory that I incorporated weekly into the SISTERS Club program. The specific components included on a regular basis were activities focused on improved self-confidence and self-esteem, character enhancement, and personal connection with peers.

The activities that occurred in SISTERS allowed conversations to occur that helped instill confidence and increased self-esteem within the participants. Increased confidence and self-esteem impacted the ability of the participants to reach out and expand their circle of friends. The conversations allowed the girls to form relationships, some of which are still in existence today. The SISTERS Club provided an environment
that encouraged the participants to be accepting of others. We recognized, embraced, and celebrated the similarities and differences of each participant. The established environment fostered a mutual respect for all girls’ to have a voice. Girls explored the need to be accepted by their peers, their development of individual identity, increased self-esteem, and cultural diversity. The girls participated in meaningful conversations and learned skills necessary to enrich relationships with their fellow peers.

During adolescence, female relationships contribute to the formation of a girls self identity and as discussed in the interviews provided needed support as they transitioned into high school (Deak, 2010). The female relationships formed enabled each of the interview participants to make decisions that positively impacted their future. It was stated by several of the participants that the decision making process became easier because of the support provided while involved in SISTERS. Several of the participants reported that the ability to talk through potential vocational choices with their mentors or with other participants in the program made their future decisions easier.

Leadbeater and Way (2007) discussed the importance of meaningful conversations during adolescence. The conversations helped form the self-identity of both the white and black students. Discussions about race, discrimination, and the meaning of being white challenged the white students to see and understand racist and non-racist views, allowing for their positive self identity formation. Simultaneously, black students engaged in the same conversations were navigating their way through stage 1 and stage 2 of the Black Identity Development model.

Black female adolescents’ can challenge harmful stereotypes and create their own positive identities and begin to nurture life-sustaining relationships.
Authentic conversations allowed for the open discussion of challenges and crisis occurring and how they were impacted by other people and discriminatory actions. The ability to conduct these types of open conversations allowed all participants to have an opportunity to explore their identities, to learn about other people and their struggles, and to come together in order to support each other as their female identities were transitioned into a stronger form.

Events that influence a major part of identity formation include; how individuals are perceived by others, how they interact with their peers, and how those interactions impact all parties involved. These experiences help develop a persons’ self-awareness and the future stages of identity formation (Kroger, 2007). Relationships formed one-on-one or in small groups contribute to the formation of one’s identity. The development of one’s identity is an ever changing process and as experiences evolve so does a persons’ formation of self, their identity (Kroger, 2007). These programs should promote a sense of belonging, being connected, and membership in a specific social environment. Incorporating these components will provide the environment necessary to foster positive identity development (Danish, Taylor, and Fazio, 2003).

Female identity formation is formed through the relationships the young girl has with her mother or other female adults in her life. Gender specific programs promote the formation of female friendships and support discussions not had in mixed gender programs. These discussions equip female adolescents’ with skills necessary to engage in healthy interactions. The female identity formation occurs due to the fact that females tend to experience the same issues throughout their lives and these experiences are the framework for future life discussions (Gilligan, 1982; Bledsoe, 2013).
5.2 RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

After school programs do provide a benefit to those participating. What is not clear is potential long-term impact the mentors could have had on the girls participating. The participants in this study had limited memories of the mentors assigned to them while in middle school. The time span from participation in the program to the interview is considered a limitation in this study. Participants had a difficult time recalling specific memories that included their mentor. However, they had positive feelings when they discussed the role of the mentor while in SISTERS.

There is a need for additional research in regards to the impact a mentor has on the identity development of female adolescents. Research should focus on looking at gender specific after school programs that allow for a consistent means of activities on and off campus between the mentor and mentee. Regularly scheduled activities over a two-three year period would have the potential to offer increased benefit to the participants. Data collected from long term mentor relationship could support the need for mentoring programs in middle schools. Additionally, the data provided could be a major reason to implement mentoring into after-school programs for girls.

Future research could focus on programs with established mentoring programs in middle schools versus after school programs that do not provide mentoring to the participants. The focus of research to be based primarily on studying the impact mentoring has on the identity development of the adolescent girls involved. A longitudinal study focused on the impact of mentoring may provide sufficient data to impact the structure of after-school programs.
The formation of friendships outside of an individual's race has significant cultural implications for future research in regards to effective after-school programs. After-school programs that are diverse and that teach skills necessary to increase diversity awareness would be optimal. Diversity awareness training could potentially have an impact on the bullying that arises during the middle school years. Questions for future research are focused on the acceptance of cultural diversity and the long term impact bullying can have on the identity development of an adolescent.

Additionally, the process a female adolescent goes through during the formation of their self-identity shifts through many stages as they experience life situations. Therefore; the identity development formation may not be completely fulfilled until adulthood. The gap in time from middle school to adulthood lends itself to support the need for future investigations on the impact an after-school program can have on participants. Questions for future research could include: What experiences did individuals’ face after middle school that shaped their current self-identity? Did the skills developed while participating in the after-school program assist them with overcoming any crisis or challenge they experienced after middle school?
Appendices

Appendix A

(Top: Easter celebration, SISTERS making jewelry, weekly SISTERS meeting)

(Middle: weekly SISTERS meeting, weekly SISTERS meeting, one-on-one discussion)

(Bottom: SISTERS at pumpkin patch with the Children’s Home Society, easter celebration, weekly SISTERS meeting)
Appendix B- SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix C- SISTERS Participants with Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix D- SISTERS Participant With Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix E - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix G - SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix H- SISTERS Participant Shadowing Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix I- SISTERS Participant with Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix J - SISTERS Participants Meeting with Mentor at Monsanto
Appendix K- SISTERS Participants with Mentors at Monsanto
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