Black Adolescents' Supportive Relationships with Parents and Close Adult Relatives

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ABSTRACT

Systemic models suggest that youths' intergenerational relationships are embedded in the context of mutually influential relationships (Keller, 2005) and that youth may actively develop and maintain relationships with adults in their network (Varga & Zaff, 2018). The studies in this dissertation centered on examining how parental relationships influenced and were influenced by Black youths' relationships with non-parental adult relatives and how youth made decisions about which adults to seek out for support when needed. Survey data included 216 Black youth (ages 11-17) and interviews were conducted with a subsample of 25 youth, their primary caregiver, and one non-parental adult with whom youth indicated being close. Results of the first study indicated that primary caregivers' relationships with adult relatives may have influenced their children's relationships with close adult relatives and subsequent familial mentor when these relational bonds were especially close. Findings also suggested that primary caregivers facilitated relationships between their children and non-parental through direct and indirect means. Results of the second study suggested that familial mentor support was consistently associated with youths' connectedness to parents across adolescence. Study findings also demonstrated how mentoring relationships may have strengthened parent-child bonds through both youth- and parent-directed means. In the third study, results indicated that youth appeared to go to their primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. Findings also indicated family issues as a notable exception wherein youth confided in their non-parental adult relatives almost exclusively. Taken together, the findings of this dissertation suggest the importance of multiple co-occurring relationships and youth agency for the formation and function of Black adolescents' close and supportive relationships with primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives.

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INTRODUCTORY LINKING DOCUMENT

During adolescence, young people must learn to navigate developmental changes in their physical, cognitive, and social functioning (Arnett, 1999). In addition to navigating normative developmental transitions, Black youth are exposed to a disproportionate share of contextual risk factors associated with anti-Black racism and structural inequality (Seider et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009). Despite their exposure to these cumulative stressors, Black youth continue to demonstrate positive adaptation in the face of such adversity (Cooper et al., 2009; Wittrup et al., 2019). Prior work suggests Black youths' relationships with supportive adults are a naturally occurring resource that supports their healthy development (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Travis & Leech, 2014). Specifically, strong bonds with parents/caregivers (Bynum & Kotchick, 2006; Cooper, 2009) and supportive non-parental familial adults (Hurd et al., 2012; Klaw et al., 2003) have been identified as key resources in helping Black youth achieve positive developmental outcomes during adolescence. A growing body of empirical findings indicates that Black youth benefit from close relationships with parents and non-parental adult relatives. Yet variability exists in the strength of parent-adolescent bonds and as many as one out of three Black youth do not seek support from non-parental adult relatives in their lives (Hurd et al., 2013). Accordingly, research is needed to better understand opportunities to bolster and strengthen these critically important intergenerational bonds. The purpose of this dissertation was to employ a holistic lens in understanding how supportive and close relationships developed between Black adolescents and their familial adults and the ways in which youth made decisions about which adults to seek out for support when needed.

Normative Adolescent Development in Black Families

Black youth development has traditionally been studied through a deficit lens emphasizing risk rather than cultural strengths (García Coll et al., 1996; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2012). Alternatively, much of the work on "normative" adolescent development has focused on majority White samples and assumed universality of experiences (Causadias & Umaña-Taylor, 2018; Skinner & McHale, 2017). In response to mainstream models overlooking cultural strengths of communities of color, developmental scholars studying the experiences of Black youth have sought to highlight developmental factors that may be unique to youth of color (e.g., cultural traditions, preparation for racial discrimination).

While racialized developmental factors have been studied more often in relation to Black youth relative to White youth (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown et al., 2010; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009), universal competencies like learning to negotiate relationships with parents and peers and how to seek out adults for support when needed have received less attention in the literature. Thus, more examinations of normative developmental factors in Black adolescents, such as how they utilize the supportive adults in their everyday lives, can provide a more complete understanding of Black youths' developmental experiences. Such examinations may also further establish the extent to which processes and experiences that have been documented in mostly White samples are applicable to youth of color.

Guiding Frameworks

Drawing on general and family systems perspectives (Bowen, 1974; Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985; Sameroff, 1983) Keller's advanced systemic model of mentoring (2005) provides a framework for investigating the multiple ways in which each individual in a family system contributes to child outcomes. First, properties of general systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997; Sameroff, 1983) shape our understanding of the family as an organized system. These

properties include: (a) wholeness and order, suggesting elements in a system are interconnected and interdependent; (b) hierarchical structure, suggesting that families are complex systems comprised of subsystems and that each individual may belong to several subsystems; (c) adaptive self-stabilization, suggesting that family systems are structured by rules and regularities for interaction; and (d) adaptive self-organization, suggesting that families are open, living systems in which change in the system is inherent.

Second, as guided by the above mentioned principles, the systemic model of youth mentoring (Keller, 2005) proposes that youths' intergenerational relationships are embedded in the context of a larger network of relationships. In this line, youths' relationships with close non-parental adult relatives, for instance, must be understood in the context of youths' parental relationships. Additionally, the systemic model emphasizes mutual influence within a system. Therefore, the systemic perspective would suggest that parental relationships influence and are, in turn, influenced by Black youths' relationships with close non-parental adult relatives. Understanding connections between adults in youths' network helps to shed light on the embeddedness of each relationship supporting youth development (Varga & Zaff, 2018).

While Keller's systemic model (2005) provides a foundation for understanding how multiple individuals in a family system contributes to youth outcomes, the model only considers how adults may inform the formation and function of important intergenerational relationships. The webs of support framework (Varga & Zaff, 2018) extends systems perspectives in considering youths' role in influencing their relationships with supportive adults. As active agents in their own development, youth may intentionally engage or disengage with adults in their family system (Varga & Zaff, 2018); however, this phenomenon has been understudied to

date. Thus, consideration of youth agency is an important addition to the literature examining intergenerational familial relationships.

Black Youths' Relationships with Supportive Adult Relatives

Intergenerational kinship support has historically been noted and existed as a central component of Black family systems (Billingsley, 1968; Stack, 1974; Stewart, 2007; Taylor et al., 2015). The centering of kinship support within Black family systems may stem from West African tradition of communalism passed down the ancestral line among Black individuals in the United States as a survival response to historic and continued oppression facing Black families today (Stewart, 2007; Taylor et al., 2015; Wilson, 1989). Among Black youth, supportive relationships with parents and close non-parental adult relatives may prove to be a key resource in promoting their healthy development during adolescence (Bynum & Kotchick, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Hurd et al., 2012; Klaw et al., 2003). Research suggests that Black youth reporting better relationships with parents demonstrate enhanced psychosocial well-being (Bynum & Kotchick, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Sagrestano et al., 2003) and fewer health-risk behaviors (Booth et al., 2010; Caldwell et al., 2010) relative to peers reporting more distant relationships with parents. Relatedly, Black youth who report having close non-parental adults who they seek support and guidance from (i.e., natural mentors) demonstrate greater social skills (Hurd et al., 2013), academic engagement (Hurd & Sellers, 2013), educational attainment, and racial pride (Hurd et al., 2012) relative to peers who lack these bonds. Moreover, Black youth overwhelmingly identify extended and fictive kin[1] as their natural mentors (Billingsley et al., 2020; Hurd et al., 2013; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Klaw et al., 2003; Raposa et al., 2018). Although the potential benefits of supportive intergenerational familial relationships among Black youth are well

[1] Fictive kin refer to individuals who are unrelated by birth or marriage but take on family-like roles.

documented (Hurd et al., 2012; Hurd et al., 2013; Hurd & Sellers, 2013), limited research has sought to uncover how Black youth develop and utilize these important relational ties. Such understandings may be leveraged to foster supportive intergenerational familial relationships among youth without such bonds.

Guiding Aims

The overarching goal of this dissertation was to understand how individuals within the family system contribute to Black adolescents' relationships with supportive adult relatives. Specifically, my dissertation centered on understanding how relationships among parents, non-parental adult relatives, and youth are interconnected to promote Black adolescents' close and supportive relationships with their parents and non-parental familial adults. My dissertation also considered the ways in which Black youth made decisions about which adults to seek out for support when needed.

Aim 1. Examine how parental relationships influence and are, in turn, influenced by Black youths' relationships with close non-parental adult relatives.

In Paper 1, I investigated whether primary caregivers' close relationships with adult relatives influenced their adolescent children's close relationships with adult relatives and formation of familial mentoring relationships. Additionally, I sought to better understand how primary caregivers facilitated relationships between their children and adult relatives. Paper 2 builds on Paper 1 by exploring the potential relationship between familial mentor support and parent-youth connectedness across adolescence. In Paper 2, I also sought to uncover how familial mentors promoted parent-youth connection and whether the nature of familial mentor support differed among early and middle adolescents.

Aim 2. Consider youth agency in Black adolescents' relationships with supportive adult relatives.

In Papers 1 and 2, I considered how adults influenced Black adolescents' relationships with supportive adult relatives. Paper 3 builds on Papers 1 and 2 by exploring how Black youth leverage relationships with parents and close non-parental adult relatives in concert to promote their own socioemotional well-being. Specifically, Paper 3 considered how Black adolescents made decisions to disclose information and seek advice from their parents and close non-parental adults in their family network.

Methods

For all three papers in this dissertation, I drew upon data from the Learning about Important Non-parental Kin (LINK) study. LINK is a cross-sectional, mixed-method study focused on better understanding how youths' social contexts (e.g., family, community) may influence the formation of supportive intergenerational relationships among Black youth and close non-parental adult relatives. The larger quantitative study sample included 216 Black youth ranging in age from 11 to 17 (59% female). Participants were recruited from six area middle schools, four area high schools, and one area community center in the Southeastern region of the United States during the 2015 – 2016 academic school year. A stratified random sample of 25 youth participants from the larger sample were selected for standardized, open-ended interviews. Stratification was implemented based on participants' gender, age, and familial mentor status. Open-ended interviews were also conducted with these adolescents' primary caregivers (one per youth) and one non-parental familial adult with whom the youth reported feeling close and lived within 20 miles of the youth. In total, 75 interviews were conducted between May and September of 2017.

Paper One

In Paper 1, "*Family closeness and mentor formation among Black youth,"* I examined the potential associations among primary caregivers and adolescents' close relationships with adult relatives and the presence of familial mentoring relationships among a sample of Black youth. According to Keller's advanced systemic model of mentoring (2005), youths' mentoring relationships are best developed and maintained with the support of adolescents' parental figures. Notably, research suggests that the quality of primary caregivers' relationships with other familial adults may either support or undermine adolescents' relationships with adult relatives and the relationship experiences of parents with non-parental adult relatives exerts influence on those of their own children (Monserud, 2008). Altogether, this suggests the importance of parents' relational behavior on adolescents' relational behavior.

Thus, the purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore whether youths' perceptions of primary caregivers' network of close family adults influenced the likelihood of youth developing familial natural mentoring relationships via increases in youths' network of close family adults. Quantitative findings suggested that youth reported more close relationships with adult relatives when primary caregivers had more close relationships with adult relatives. In turn, having more close relationships with adult kin was associated with youth having a familial mentor when these relational bonds were especially close. Furthermore, qualitative findings indicated that primary caregivers both directly and indirectly facilitated relationships between their children and adult relatives by modeling relational closeness and permitting interactions among their children and adult relatives. Overall, findings suggest that primary caregivers may play an influential role in shaping the nature of their children's relationships with adult relatives.

Paper Two

Paper 2, "*Familial mentor support and Black youths' connectedness to parents across adolescence"* explored how familial mentor support may influence the parent-child relationship during adolescence. As youth transition from early to middle adolescence, parents and youth often experience increased conflict as they attempt to negotiate youths' growing autonomy (Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989). However, a strong sense of connectedness to parents during adolescence may help Black youth navigate normative developmental transitions and race-related stressors during adolescence (Booth et al., 2010; Caldwell et al., 2010; Cooper, 2009; Hurd et al., 2012; Klaw et al., 2003; Sagrestano et al., 2003). Keller (2005) suggests that mentors may alleviate tension in the parent-adolescent relationship by providing direct support (e.g., advice, validation) to youth and/or parents.

Thus, the purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore whether greater familial mentor support was associated with youth reporting a greater sense of connectedness to parents. This study also examined whether familial mentor support would be more consequential for older youths' sense of connection to parents compared to their younger peers given that older adolescents may be more likely to experience strains in their relationships with parents. Quantitative findings indicated that familial natural mentor support was positively associated with adolescent-parent connectedness and that adolescents' age was negatively associated with adolescent-parent connectedness. Furthermore, qualitative findings suggest that mentors supported the parent-child relationship by acting as sounding boards, coaching positive communication and response strategies, and promoting understanding among youth and parents. Although quantitative findings suggested that mentor support did not have a differential impact on older and younger adolescents' connectedness to parents, qualitative findings indicated that familial mentors of older adolescents more often encouraged youth to perspective take or

advocate for themselves, relative to mentors of younger adolescents. Thus, while the impact of familial mentors may have been equivocal across adolescents' age, familial mentors may have been enacting support differentially in the context of adolescents' developmental stage.

Paper Three

Paper 3, "*Black adolescents' disclosure and advice seeking: Making choices between parents and adult relatives,*" examined how Black adolescents leveraged familial resources in an effort to meet their support needs. Prior literature establishes the importance of youth sharing information and receiving helpful guidance from supportive adults (Berke & Weir, 1979; Kogan et al., 2011; Wittrup et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2019). Less attention, however, has been given to youths' decision-making in the support process. Varga and Zaff's webs of support framework (2018) suggests that youth intentionally manage information shared with adults. By managing information shared, youth actively influence their relationships with adults in their broader network.

Building on this work, this qualitative study examined how Black adolescents made decisions to disclose information and seek advice from their parents and close non-parental adults in their family network. Disclosure and advice seeking were examined across multiple close family relationships to highlight the unique implications of these relational processes for each relationship. Moreover, consideration of multiple dyadic relationships facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of how Black adolescents utilized familial resources to meet their support needs. This study contributed to the field's understanding of how Black youth navigate multiple co-occurring familial relationships in concert rather that in isolation of each other, and accordingly, promoted a more holistic understand of Black adolescents' family life.

Conclusion

Taken together, these papers provide insight into the ways in which Black adolescents' experiences of support with multiple important family adults are interconnected and interdependent. Much of the work on adolescents' supportive intergenerational relationships has siloed discussions on parenting and natural mentoring, suggesting the importance of each adult separately, while less work has sought to link youths' multifaceted support networks. Additionally, findings from this dissertation identified and illuminated naturally occurring processes that may bolster supportive intergenerational relationships among Black youth and their familial adults. By highlighting intergenerational family support as an asset among Black youth, this dissertation documented normative and adaptive processes happening within Black family networks. Furthermore, findings from this dissertation shed light on opportunities to leverage assets within Black families to promote supportive intergenerational familial relationships among youth without such bonds.

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Family closeness and mentor formation among Black youth

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Abstract

The current study examined how primary caregivers' close relationships with adult relatives may have influenced their adolescent children's formation of familial mentoring relationships. Using survey data from 216 Black American youth (59% girls), quantitative findings indicated that when primary caregivers had more *really* close relationships with adult relatives, their children also reported more *really* close relationships with adult relatives. In turn, having more *really* close relationships with adult kin was associated with youth having a familial mentor. Interviews were conducted with a subsample of 24 youth, along with their primary caregiver, and an additional adult family member. Qualitative analyses were conducted to better understand how primary caregivers may facilitate relationships between their children and adult relatives. Qualitative findings indicated that primary caregivers both directly and indirectly facilitated these relationships by modeling relational closeness and permitting interactions among their children and adult relatives. Importantly, qualitative findings also highlighted the role of youth agency in creating and maintaining close intergenerational bonds. Overall, findings suggest that primary caregivers may play an influential role in shaping the nature of their children's relationships with adult relatives. Moreover, findings suggest that youth who lack close ties with adult relatives may benefit from intentional efforts by their primary caregivers to facilitate these relationships.

Natural mentors are close and caring non-parental adults who emerge from adolescents' preexisting social network and who youth seek out for support and guidance when needed. A growing body of empirical work has demonstrated links between natural mentoring relationships and positive outcomes among youth including greater psychological and emotional well-being (Drevon et al., 2018; Hurd et al., 2018; Whitney et al., 2011), physical health (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Stephens et al., 2018), and academic success (Christensen et al., 2019; Fruiht & Chan, 2018; Hurd et al., 2016; Sanchez et al., 2008). Among Black[2] youth, associations have been found between natural mentoring relationships and greater social skills (Hurd et al., 2013), academic engagement (Hurd & Sellers, 2013), educational attainment, and educational and racial identity beliefs (Hurd et al., 2012). Although the potential benefits of natural mentoring relationships among Black youth are well documented, limited research has been undertaken to better explicate factors that may influence whether or not Black youth develop these relationships. Given that anywhere from a quarter to a third of Black youth report being without a natural mentoring relationship (Hurd et al., 2012; Hurd et al., 2013), insight into factors that contribute to the onset of these significant bonds could be used to encourage the formation of natural mentoring relationships among Black youth who are lacking them.

Among Black youth who report having a natural mentoring relationship, the overwhelming majority identify extended family and fictive kin as their natural mentors (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Klaw et al., 2003). Fictive kin refer to individuals who are unrelated by birth or marriage but take on family-like roles. Black adolescents' frequent reporting of grandparents, aunts, uncles, adult siblings, and cousins as mentors may be due, in part, to the greater emphasis

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[2] In this study, "Black" as a descriptor refers to persons living in the U.S. who identify as Black/African American across the African diaspora.

that Black Americans tend to place on intergenerational kinship support (Klaw et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2015). This is seen particularly in the context of child rearing (Billingsley, 1968; Stack, 1974). Given the salience of family-based natural mentoring relationships among Black youth, the current study incorporated an analysis of familial factors that may influence whether or not Black youth develop a familial mentoring relationship (i.e., seek out a specific adult relative for support and guidance). In particular, this study considered how the number of close familial network ties held by adolescents' primary caregivers may shape the number of close ties youth have, which, in turn, may influence adolescents' likelihood of having a familial mentoring relationship.

Network Ties and Natural Mentoring

A social network refers to a group of individuals in a social environment and the extending ties that link each individual to one another (Keller & Blakeslee, 2014; Lewis, 2005). Network theory suggests that natural mentoring relationships among youth and non-parental adults are more likely to form when adolescents' networks are large, dense, and stable, with clusters of strong ties representing network cores (Keller et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 1997). The interconnection, or network density, among close family network members may facilitate regular communication and coordination among connected network members (e.g., primary caregivers and non-parental adults). Connections among members with strong ties, for example, may enable greater involvement from non-parental adults in adolescents' lives (Keller et al., 2014). Likewise, the network size, or number of weak and strong ties linked to one another within the network, provides an index of the breadth of available network sources from which youth have the opportunity to receive support.

Prior work on youth and network ties has often focused on relationships beyond the family and assumed that family relationships are equally interconnected, strong, and durable. However, this previous work has largely failed to acknowledge potential variability in the strength of familial ties. Notably, individual members within a family system may be connected by stronger or weaker ties. This is because the strength of network ties is determined by relational qualities such as emotional closeness, frequency in communication, and functional interaction and support between individuals (Keller et al., 2014). When family members are, in fact, strongly connected, youth may have greater opportunities to form meaningful intergenerational bonds with adult relatives. In turn, this may then increase adolescents' chances of developing a familial mentoring relationship (Keller, 2005). Given that the number and strength of familial bonds may be an important predictor of whether or not Black youth develop a familial mentoring relationship, and that primary caregivers may play a central role in facilitating familial connections, additional research is needed to better understand the role of primary caregivers in facilitating their children's close ties with adult relatives.

Parental Influence on Youth Mentoring Relationships

Drawing on a family systems perspective (Bowen, 1974; Minuchin, 1985), Keller's advanced systemic model of mentoring (2005) suggests that mentoring relationships can only be developed and maintained with the support of adolescents' parental figures. Notably, the quality of primary caregivers' relationships with other adults in the family may either support or undermine adolescents' relationships with adult relatives. Research (Monserud, 2008) suggests that the relationship experiences of primary caregivers with non-parental adults exerts influence on those of their own children. Specifically, caregivers who experienced close relationships with non-parental family members model these adaptive forms of engagement and serve as

gatekeepers for intergenerational interactions with important support potential. Relatedly, prior empirical work (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2009; Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1998) has found that adolescents whose grandparents have frequent, positive contact with adolescents' primary caregivers are likely to develop closer ties to grandparents who have frequent and positive contact with adolescents' primary caregivers. For example, in their study of adolescents in Wales (n = 1478), Attar-Schwartz and colleagues (2009) found that youth were likely to develop closer ties to grandparents who were in frequent, positive contact with their primary caregivers. Additionally, primary caregivers may also facilitate adolescents' interactions with adult relatives by providing opportunities for intergenerational engagement. For example, Mueller and Elder (2003) found that grandparent involvement with their grandchildren was contingent upon parents' efforts to involve grandparents in their children's lives. Moreover, primary caregivers may shape their children's working models of connection by demonstrating the value of close relationships with others. For example, Markiewicz and colleagues (2001) found that adolescents' perceptions of mothers' interpersonal network relationships predicted adolescents' affective behavior in their own friendships. This finding suggests that adolescents' relational behavior may be shaped by their mothers' relational behavior. Consequently, close and supportive relationships among youth and adult relatives may be driven by the quantity of close and supportive relationships among their primary caregivers and adult relatives.

Discussions within the formal mentoring literature underscore the importance of considering youth mentoring relationships in the context of parental influence (DuBois et al., 2002; Keller, 2005; Spencer et al., 2011). Spencer and colleagues (2011) found that primary caregivers were active participants in their children's relationships with mentors. Additionally, Basualdo-Delmonico (2013) found that primary caregivers support formal youth mentoring

relationships by supporting the initial formation of the mentoring relationship, allowing their children to attend outings with mentors, and by providing mentors with information about their children. While formal mentoring scholars have begun to examine mentoring relationships beyond the mentor-youth dyad, attention to the role of parental influence is largely absent from the natural mentoring literature. This absence is striking considering that primary caregivers are likely to possess some form of a relationship with adults existing in adolescents' preexisting network, particularly when these adults are extended or fictive kin. Given that primary caregivers' closeness to other adult relatives may determine the strength of relationship ties shared among their children and adult relatives, research is needed to explicate if and how primary caregivers may shape the formation of close intergenerational relationships among Black youth and adult relatives. Moreover, further research is needed to determine if the degree of closeness within familial bonds matters for the development of Black adolescents' mentoring relationships with adult relatives.

Current Study

The current study explored the potential associations among primary caregivers and adolescents' close relationships with adult relatives and the presence of familial mentoring relationships among a sample of Black youth. I hypothesized that youth who perceived their primary caregivers as having more close relationships with adult relatives would themselves report more close relationships with adult relatives. In turn, I expected that youth reporting more close relationships with adult relatives would be more likely to report possessing a familial mentoring relationship. This is because mentoring relationships are more likely to form when youth have larger networks of close, intergenerational ties (Morgan et al., 1997; Keller et al.,

2014). Additionally, this study sought to examine how primary caregivers may have facilitated close relationships among their children and adult relatives.

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in which quantitative questioning was followed by a qualitative phase of exploration (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The explanatory sequential design of the study allowed qualitative data to explain initial quantitative findings. First, quantitative survey data were examined to assess whether the quantity of close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives was associated with youth possessing a familial mentoring relationship via increases in the quantity of close relationships youth reported with adult relatives. Mothers (including stepmothers or foster mothers) were primary caregivers for 78% of youth and fathers (including stepfathers or foster fathers) were primary caregivers for 10% of youth. The remaining youth listed adult relatives as their primary caregivers (e.g., grandparents, aunt, brother; 7%), or did not answer the question.

Adolescents' gender, age, socioeconomic status, and extraversion were also measured and included as covariates when primary analyses indicated that they were potential confounds. These variables were considered given the possibility that girls, more extraverted youth (Hurd et al., 2018), younger youth (Thomson & Zand, 2010), and more socioeconomically advantaged youth (Erickson et al., 2009; Putnam, 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2005) are more likely to have closer relationships with adults and natural mentoring relationships. In an effort to probe findings from the quantitative analyses, open-ended interviews were conducted with a subsample of 24 youth who completed surveys, along with their primary caregivers and one additional adult family member. The current study utilized data from interviews with youth and their primary caregivers in order to explore how primary caregivers' relationships with adult relatives may influence adolescents' relationships with adult relatives.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The Institutional Review Board at the authors' educational institution approved all procedures in this study. Participants were drawn from the Learning about Important Non-parental Kin (LINK) study[3]. Youth who identified as Black/African American and attended one of six area middle schools, four area high schools, or one area community center in the Southeastern region of the United States during the 2015 – 2016 academic school year were eligible for study participation. In regards to the Black population demographic for the region, it was largely African American with few recently immigrated African or Afro-Caribbean families. Recruitment letters inviting Black youth to participate in a study examining adolescents' daily home and school experiences were mailed home to Black students' primary caregivers directly from the schools and handed out to students by school counselors. Recruitment flyers were posted in area community centers and distributed via community listservs. Primary caregivers provided informed consent for their child's participation in the study and youth provided informed assent prior to start of the survey administration. In an effort to enhance youth participants' comprehension of survey questions, surveys were administered by research assistants who read the survey items aloud. To ensure confidentiality of responses and facilitate honesty in reporting, youth participants recorded their survey responses on an iPad and were compensated with a $40 Visa gift card at the completion of the survey. Two-hundred and sixteen Black youth ranging in age from 11 to 17 (mean age = 12.87, SD = 1.42; 59% girls) completed surveys.

Measures

[3] LINK is a mixed-method study focused on better understanding the role of Black adolescents' social contexts (e.g., family, school, community) in the formation of natural mentoring relationships

Table 1 includes descriptive statistics for quantitative study variables.

Parent and Youth Closeness to Adult relatives. To assess perceived parent and youth closeness to adult relatives, youth participants were given a sheet of paper and instructed to write down the names of all adults (i.e., individuals 18 years or older) who were family or like family with whom they had contact (e.g., in person, online, over the phone) at least three times in the past year. Next to the first names of adults, youth wrote the nature of their relationship to the adult (e.g., aunt, uncle, grandmother). Youth were then asked to use symbols to show how close they felt to the adults listed. Youth were instructed to put a star beside the names of the adults who they felt *really* close to, and were instructed to put a check mark beside the names of adults who they felt *kind of* close to. Youth were also asked to write down the name of their primary caregiver (i.e., the adult most responsible for taking care of the youth; this was their mother for 78% of the youth). To draw solid lines between their primary caregiver and the other adults on their paper, if youth perceived the relationship between their primary caregiver and the other adult to be *really* close. Youth were also asked to draw dashed lines between their primary caregiver and the other adults on their paper to represent *kind of* close relationships.

The number of stars on the sheet were counted to create a sum variable of the number of adult relatives youth felt *really* close to. The number of checks also were counted to create a sum variable for the number of adult relatives youth felt *kind of* close to. The number of adults youth felt *really* and *kind of* close to were then summed to create a variable representing the total number of adult relatives to whom youth reported feeling close. The same procedure was followed to create variables representing close bonds between primary caregivers and adult relatives.

Familial Natural Mentors. To assess for the presence of a familial mentoring relationship, youth were asked: "Is there an adult other than your primary caregivers or the people who are raising you who you can go to for support, guidance, and help making important decisions?" If youth participants responded in the affirmative, they were asked to indicate how they knew the adult. If youth participants indicated that they knew the adult from their family, they were assigned a value of "1." All other participants who either did not have a natural mentor or indicated that the relationship was with someone who was not considered family (e.g., a teacher, coach, neighbor) were assigned a value of "0."

Extraversion. To assess adolescents' level of extraversion, the eight-item extraversion subscale of the Big Five Inventory[4] (BFI: John & Srivastava, 1999) was utilized ($\alpha = .77$). Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements describing themselves as extraverted (e.g., talkative, energetic, assertive). Survey response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with three of the items being reverse coded so that higher scores on all items would reflect greater levels of extraversion. For this study's analyses, participants' scores were then averaged across the eight items to create a composite extraversion variable.

Demographics. During survey administration, youth participants provided information regarding their basic demographic characteristics including their age, gender identity, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch and primary caregivers' education level. Youth were assigned a value of "1" if they identified as a boy and a value of "0" if they identified as a girl. No participants self-identified outside of the gender binary. Adolescents' receipt of free or reduced-priced lunch and their primary caregivers' educational attainment were used as indicators of

[4] The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a questionnaire designed to measure five broad, empirically defined domains of personality including extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

socioeconomic disadvantage as prior research indicates that both assessments are strongly correlated with other measures of socioeconomic status (e.g., family income, Ensminger et al., 2000). A new variable was created to capture socioeconomic disadvantage. For this variable, youth were assigned a value of “1” if they indicated that they both received free or reduced-price lunch and that neither of their parents/guardians had completed a 4-year degree.

Youth and Primary Caregiver Interviews

Interviewers were a multiracial research team (n = 6; all women) consisting of one faculty member, one post-doctoral research associate, and four graduate students. Prior to the current study, the research team (4 women of color and 2 white women) had a strong professional relationship and specialized their work in the promotive experiences of marginalized youth. To ensure consistent implementation of interviews, the team members received extensive training in administering interviews and followed a semi-structured protocol of questions with each interview. Furthermore, the interviewers often went in teams of three to conduct the family interviews simultaneously, but separately. Following these interviews, and during weekly team meetings, team members discussed their interview experiences to ensure consistency in procedures and experiences across interviews.

A stratified random sample of 25 youth participants from the larger sample was selected for standardized, open-ended interviews. Sample stratification was implemented on the basis of adolescents’ gender, age, familial mentor status, and socioeconomic disadvantage status. In line with purposeful sampling strategies (Creswell & Clark, 2013), a small group of youth participants was identified in an effort to develop an in-depth understanding of their family experiences. The team sought to select 12 families of youth with mentors and 12 families of youth without mentors as it was expected that saturation would occur with responses from 12 of

each group. In weekly team meetings, interviewee responses were discussed to monitor whether saturation in responses was being reached or if there was a need to expand the sample size. Ultimately, the number of families of youth without mentors was expanded to 13. In all, a total of 75 open-ended interviews were conducted between May and September in 2017 with youth, their primary caregiver, and one adult relative with whom the youth reported feeling close. While close adult relatives could have been fictive kin, all adults participating in the interviews were extended kin.

The team of researchers developed the interview protocol with an interest in participants' family relationships, and broader family dynamics and interactions. Primary caregivers were asked questions regarding their experiences in facilitating relationships among their children and adult relatives. Questions included "Have you ever encouraged [your child/an adult] to spend time with [another adult/your child]?" and "Why did you recommend that specific adult." Both primary caregivers and youth were asked to describe their family interactions, including "When your family gets together, what does that look like?" Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted one-on-one by a team of six researchers in the participants' homes or the researchers' office. All interviews were audio recorded on an iPad, transcribed verbatim by a third-party service, and reviewed by a member of the research team prior to the audio files being destroyed. Each participant was compensated with an $80 Visa gift card at the completion of their interview. Given this study's focus on experiences within Black families, one family dyad consisting of a White mother and biracial child, where the child had very minimal sustained contact with her Black father or Black relatives, was excluded from this study's analyses.

Quantitative Data Analyses and Results

All quantitative analyses were conducted using R software (version 3.6.1). Bivariate correlations were conducted to assess for associations among the primary study variables (i.e., parent and youth closeness to adult relatives, familial mentor presence) and potential covariates (i.e., age, gender, socioeconomic disadvantage status, and levels of extraversion). A mediated path model (see Figure 1) was then conducted to test potential direct and indirect effects of quantity of close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives on the likelihood of youth possessing a familial mentoring relationship both directly and indirectly via the quantity of close relationships youth reported with adult relatives. I first wanted to examine the total quantity of close relationships to adult relatives to determine if the size of close relationships more generally matters for mentorship formation. I then examined the quantity of *really close* relationships youth and primary caregivers had with adult relatives to determine if degree of closeness matters for familial mentor formation. Quasi-Bayesian confidence intervals (CI) were constructed around the product coefficient. The indirect effect was deemed significant if the 95% CI surrounding the standardized Average Causal Mediation Effects (ACME) did not include zero.

Correlations among primary study variables and potential covariates were examined (see Table 2). Participants' socioeconomic disadvantage status and gender were not associated with the quantity of close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives, the quantity of close relationships youth had with adult relatives, or family mentor presence. Higher levels of extraversion were associated with youth being younger and having more close relationships with adult relatives. The quantity of close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives was positively associated with the quantity of close relationships youth had with adult relatives

and familial mentor presence. The quantity of close relationships youth had with adult relatives and familial mentor presence were also positively associated.

Given that youth participants' age, gender, and socioeconomic status were not correlated with any primary predictor or outcome variables, they were not included in the path analysis. Full results of this path model are reported in Figure 2. The quantity of close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives was positively associated with the total quantity of adult relatives youth reported being close to. However, the total number of adult relatives youth reported being close to was not associated with familial mentor presence. These analyses were then repeated using variables to represent the quantity of *really* close relationships as replacements for the variables representing total quantity of close relationships. Full results of this path model are reported in Figure 3. The quantity of *really* close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives was positively associated with the quantity of *really* close relationships youth had with adult relatives. The quantity of *really* close relationships youth had with adult relatives also was positively associated with familial mentor presence. Additional analyses confirmed that the quantity of *really* close relationships primary caregivers had with adult relatives was associated with a greater likelihood of familial mentor presence via a greater number of *really* close relationships between youth and adult relatives (AMCE = 0.12; 95% CI [.06, .19]).

Qualitative Data Analyses and Results

Given the explanatory sequential design of the study (Creswell & Clark, 2013), findings from the quantitative analyses informed the qualitative questioning. The quantitative findings suggested that primary caregivers who had more *really* close relationships with adult relatives had children with more *really* close relationships with adult relatives. Moreover, youth who had

more *really* close relationships with adult relatives were more likely to have a familial mentoring relationship. Accordingly, interviews of youth and primary caregivers were analyzed to better understand how primary caregivers may facilitate close relationships between youth and adult relatives. I was particularly interested in examining the ways in which primary caregivers may model close engagement with adult relatives and act as gatekeepers by either supporting or hindering interaction among their children and extended kin. I was also interested in understanding primary caregivers' attitudes toward and motivations for encouraging intergenerational interactions within their families. Furthermore, I completed additional analyses to facilitate comparisons across adolescents with the least versus the most *really* close relationships with adult relatives. I examined primary caregivers' facilitation behaviors and family norms comparing the three families of adolescents' reporting the most *really* close relationships with the four families of adolescents reporting the least *really* close relationships. The three adolescents with the most relationships reported between eight and fourteen *really* close relationships with adult relatives. The four adolescents with the least *really* close relationships reported between zero and two *really* close relationships with adult relatives.

Interview data from 24 parent and youth dyads were analyzed using thematic and modified analytic induction techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Interview transcriptions were uploaded into Dedoose software for analyses. The research team, composed of the six interviewers, met over a 12-month period to review and discuss transcripts before reaching agreement on predominant patterns and themes emerging within the data. The researchers then developed an initial codebook based on the emerging themes and patterns, and semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview was coded separately by two researchers who

would then meet together or with the larger research team to discuss and resolve any disagreement in the application of the codes (consensus coding; Harry et al., 2005).

Two themes were identified as related to primary caregivers' facilitation of close relationships among their children and adult relatives in this study: 1) indirect facilitation and 2) direct facilitation. A related theme that emerged was youth agency. Youth agency was a notable factor that emerged as an explanatory factor in dyads where primary caregivers engaged in no or minimal facilitation. A final relevant theme was family norms. Family norms emerged as potentially consequential to the facilitation of close intergenerational bonds. Key findings within each theme are presented below.

Indirect Facilitation

Indirect facilitation emerged as the most prominent means by which primary caregivers encouraged close relationships among youth and adult relatives. Primary caregivers passively encouraged close youth-adult relationships by modeling close behaviors with adult relatives in the presence of youth and by permitting youth to interact with adult relatives outside of parental presence.

Modeling Closeness. Fifteen of the 24 primary caregiver and youth dyads described ways in which the primary caregiver displayed close relationships and behaviors with adult relatives in the presence of the youth. These interactions often included time spent together on family vacations with extended kin, "hanging out" at either the home of the adult relative or the youth and primary caregiver, eating out at restaurants, talking on the phone, and taking trips to shopping malls. When mentioning how often he sees an aunt, one 13-year-old boy mentioned "We hang out together and stuff. We might go out to eat. Every weekend my mom and her go out to eat. I usually go with them." Another 13-year-old boy also shared how he and his parents

were in a group chat with his aunts, and that when he has a school project or "anyone has anything to do," everyone comes together to "figure out how to help them and make it better." Through primary caregivers own interactions with adult relatives, youth were presented with opportunities to witness close behaviors among adult relatives in their lives.

Permitting Interaction. Primary caregivers also allowed youth the opportunity to spend time and engage with adult relatives outside of the primary caregiver's presence. Twenty-three youth and primary caregiver dyads shared instances in which youth were frequently allowed to spend time at adult relatives' homes and go out with these adults for meals and other activities. Time spent together either served to provide youth with childcare or as a source of companionship. When discussing her sisters' relationship with her children, one mother of a 13-year-old girl shared that her children would stay with their aunts "for a week or a couple of days," and that her sisters would take her children "to movies or different places. To the mall, whatever [the children] want to do." This mother found it meaningful that her family would "actually spend time with [her children]" as a way to "stay relevant in their lives." In time spent with non-parental adult relatives, , youth were spending time one-on-one with adults or in some cases, were accompanied by their siblings or cousins. For example, one mother of an 11-year-old girl explained that her children were close with their grandfather as he would spend each weekday afternoon watching her daughters, nieces, and nephew while the parents finished their workday. Relatedly, one 11-year-old boy discussed the time he spent with his grandmother by sharing, "She'll pick [my siblings and I] up, but she likes to take the boys one day and then the girl… the next day, or two days from the day that she took the boys, but then she'll take one by one… She'll take me to Dairy Queen or she'll take my brother to McDonalds, or she'll take my sister out to go get her nails done or something like that." The mother of a 12-year-old girl also

shared how her daughter was "really comfortable" around her godmother as the mother would let her daughter spend a week with her godmother each year. Relatedly, the mother of an 11-year-old girl explained that her daughter would likely go to her grandfather if she were experiencing a problem as the daughter spent her weekday afternoons with her retired grandfather. By permitting time spent together, primary caregivers may allow youth additional opportunities to form particularly close relationships with adult relatives.

Direct Facilitation

Of the twenty-four primary caregivers, 13 stated that they had encouraged their children to spend time with adult relatives or encouraged adult relatives to spend time with their children. Ten primary caregivers encouraged their children to interact with adult relatives; while seven primary caregivers reported encouraging adult relatives to spend time with their children. For example, one mother shared that she would try to forge a closer bond between her father and her 11-year-old son by encouraging both to reach out to the other. She shared "With my dad, I'll tell my dad to call and check and see if [my son/his grandson] wants to come over sometimes, and then sometimes, I'll tell [my son/his grandson] to call and just ask him what he's doing." This mother also mentioned that she often encouraged her son to reach out to her brother by saying "won't you call Uncle and see what he's doing?" Elaborating on their interactions, this mother explained that her son would take her advice by calling his uncle, and that the uncle would then often stop by and pick up the son so that the two could "just go for a ride" and "just talk." Further, the mother shared, "I want them to do that 'cause sometimes [my son] needs that," as the time spent together alone afforded her son and his uncle an opportunity to "bond better."

Motivations for Direct Facilitation

When asked whether they had encouraged their children to spend time with adult relatives or encouraged adult relatives to spend time with their children, primary caregivers often shared their motivations for facilitating intergenerational interactions. Two overarching reasons emerged for primary caregivers encouraging interaction among their children and adult relatives: 1) primary caregivers valued positive contributions from adult relatives and 2) primary caregivers valued family connection.

Valuing Positive Contributions. In explaining their motivations for encouraging time spent and communication among their children and adult relatives, primary caregivers identified things they believed their children could gain from these interactions. One-third of the primary caregivers expressed that their child could gain wisdom or advice from informational support received from adult relatives. For example, one mother of a 12-year-old girl mentioned that she would often encourage her daughter to spend time with her grandmother as she saw her daughter having an opportunity to learn valuable lessons from her grandmother. The mother explained:

> I always tell [my daughter] my life would be so different if I had started listening to my mom this early on in life. I said it's not because [my mother] was telling me to do something because she wanted me to do it. She was telling me to do it because it was what was best. I didn't see that at the time. Now my life is 10 times harder because of that. But it's too late, I can only try to teach [my daughter] that grandma has some wisdom, you better listen while she still has it to give to you.

One mother of a 12-year-old boy also shared that she often asked her father to provide her son with advice so that he would have a "male perspective," while another primary caregiver shared that she would direct her 12-year-old daughter towards an aunt in the medical field given her daughter's interest in being a health professional. Relatedly, three primary caregivers noted that

they encouraged interactions among their children and adult relatives so that their children could learn new skills. One mother stated that she tried to have her 11-year-old son spend time with his grandfather so that her son could learn "those old school fundamentals that you need in life, like "I got to get these rocks out of the grass so I can cut them" … things that might not come like that for a kid in 2017." Another primary caregiver shared that she would encourage her 13-year-old year old son to spend more time with his older step-brother who works as a mechanic. This mother shared that "[my son] needs to start, in my opinion, needs to start developing his mechanical skills and start working a little more with his hands and so I would like for [his step-brother] to be a part of that."

Valuing Family Connection. One-fourth of primary caregivers communicated a desire for their children to spend time with adult relatives as primary caregivers believed that youth should be close to adult relatives and that adult relatives should be involved in familial adolescents' lives. One mother of a 12-year-old girl shared that she encouraged her daughter to spend time with adult relatives given her belief that "kids should know their family and get to talk to them, and just to be around family is good." Another primary caregiver of an 11-year-old boy shared that she tried to have her son spend time with her brother "just because…that's the only uncle he has." Other primary caregivers also mentioned that they would encourage their children to spend time with adult relatives so that close bonds could be formed while an opportunity was still present to do so. The father of a 13-year-old boy shared that he would encourage his son to talk with his great grandmother who lived in their home. This father shared, "Yeah. It's like, "Hey, make sure you stop in and talk to Grandma. She's in her bedroom and seen you leaving, going back and forth to school and stuff all week and she says she hasn't really talked to you." The mother of 13-year-old girl also shared that she would encourage her daughter

to get to know her two great-aunts as they were the last two living members from the father's side of the mother's family. These illustrations suggest that primary caregivers' valuing of close family ties led them to encourage interactions between their children and adult relatives.

Youth agency

Eleven primary caregivers stated that they had not directly encouraged interactions among their children and non-parental familial adults. Notably, all 11 indicated that they had not needed to encourage interactions, as youth would initiate interactions with adult relatives on their own. Such behaviors demonstrated youth agency (i.e., adolescents' active engagement in their development; Griffith & Larson, 2015). One mother of a 13-year-old boy shared that she had not felt the need to encourage her son to spend time with adult relatives given that "he does it on his own," while the mother of another 13-year-old boy shared that her son's initiation of contact with adult relatives is "a natural thing for him." The mother of a 13-year-old girl explained that she had not needed to encourage her daughter to spend time with adult relatives as her daughter would "invite them [adult relatives] herself." She explained that her daughter will "every now and then, be like, "Hey. We haven't done this in a while. Let's call auntie and grandma and see if they want to go," and so we'll do it." Primary caregivers acknowledged the agency in their children's decision making and often expressed feelings that it was not necessary for them to encourage interactions as they felt their children were fully capable of initiating interactions with adult relatives on their own.

Family Norms

When asked about their extended families, all of the interviewed youth and all but one of the primary caregivers described their families as being close-knit. One mother did not feel close to her extended family as she had moved to the United States from Jamaica when she was seven-

years-old and would rarely visit. However, her daughter reported feeling very close to her family members who live in the United States (e.g., grandmother, cousins). Overall, families were described as being close-knit given the affection showed by family members to one another and the amount of time spent interacting together. A 12-year-old girl shared, "[My mom's side of the family] is really close-knit. My mom talks to [her sisters] at least two times a week or three times a week. And so we're really close." Relatedly, one mother of an 11-year-old boy shared that she believed her family was close-knit "Just because we try to do things together, it might not be as often as we would like, but we do get together." Twenty-three primary caregiver and youth dyads detailed how the larger extended family would often come together to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and have summer cookouts. For these families, gatherings with extended kin in times of celebration were normative. For example, one mother of a 12-year-old boy shared, "I think we spend a lot of time together. We know, it's an automatic for holidays and birthdays that we're going to be together. It's not an "oh what are we doing," it's whose house are we going to be at… it's just a matter of organizing that. It's usually done by me and my sisters." When asked how he would describe his family, this woman's son shared, "I would just say that we all love each other so much. We always care about each other. And we're just a really good family." Overall, primary caregivers and adolescents' responses suggest that frequent interactions characterized by close relational bonds reflected shared familial norms.

Comparative Analyses

Comparative analyses (comparing those youth with the least versus the most *really* close relationships) only yielded one notable finding. Specifically, I found that in families where adolescents reported the most (compared to the least) number of *really* close relationships, families appeared to interact with each other more frequently. For instance, the mothers of

adolescents reporting the most *really* close relationships mentioned that their families would "spend lots of time," and "do everything together." Conversely, parents of adolescents reporting the least number of *really* close relationships with adult relatives mentioned that their families typically only spent time together during the holidays. Given that primary caregivers did not appear to be engaging in indirect or direct facilitation differently across the two groups, findings suggest that the provision of additional opportunities to engage with adult relatives may be a key facilitator of intergenerational relationships. Accordingly, even when parents work to facilitate these relationships in similar ways, youth need the opportunities for contact with these adults in order for their primary caregivers' familial connections to translate into their own personal connections. Thus, family norms that provide increased opportunities for these interactions may be key in driving the associations found in the quantitative analyses.

Discussion

Quantitative results of the present investigation suggest that primary caregivers' relationships with adult relatives may influence adolescents' familial mentor formation through adolescents' relationships with close adult relatives, but only when these relational bonds were especially close. This finding suggests that the formation of familial mentoring relationships is characterized not just by how many close relationships primary caregivers and youth have with adult relatives, but by the strength of those bonds. In short, youth who had a greater number of *really* close relationships with adult relatives were more likely to develop a familial mentoring relationship. Moreover, adolescents' quantity of *really* close relationships was shaped by their primary caregivers' quantity of *really* close relationships. Qualitative data then bolstered this finding in that primary caregiver and youth narratives demonstrated the ways in which primary caregivers directly or indirectly facilitated connections between youth and adult relatives.

Specifically, findings indicated that parental facilitation occurred most frequently through indirect methods. I found that primary caregivers not only modeled close behaviors with adult relatives, but also permitted their children to spend time with adult relatives. This finding is in line with previous work demonstrating that primary caregivers shape the nature of their children's relationships with adult relatives by setting examples and providing opportunities for positive interaction (Monserud, 2008). In this study, primary caregivers often modeled close behaviors by engaging in leisure activities (e.g., hanging out at someone's house, talking on the phone, and shopping) collectively with their children and a close adult relative. These interactions afforded youth additional face time with adult relatives and provided youth an opportunity to witness relational bonding behaviors shared among primary caregivers and close adult relatives. This socialization of relational closeness among adult relatives may act to shape adolescents' working models of connection (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Monserud, 2008).

Although much of the time spent among youth and adult relatives occurred in the realm of child care, there also were frequent instances of youth and adults seeking each other out to spend time together watching movies, shopping, visiting amusement parks, and going out to eat. These exchanges were described as meaningful and memorable by youth and adults alike, and supporting findings from the mentoring literature underscore the importance of "having fun" in building and sustaining meaningful intergenerational bonds (Parra et al., 2002; Spencer et al., 2004). Shared leisure activities may facilitate mutuality and a sense of companionship, which could be fundamental to the formation of mentoring bonds.

In addition to noting intentionality in the direct facilitation of intergenerational interactions between their children and adult relatives, half of the interviewed primary caregivers also elaborated on their motivations for facilitating these connections. One-fourth of primary

caregivers indicated that a primary motivation for facilitating intergenerational connections was their valuing of the positive contributions they believed adult relatives could provide their children (e.g., sharing their wisdom, teaching their children important skills). Prior work examining parents' hopes and expectations for their children's relationships with non-parental adults has often spotlighted formalized mentoring relationships and focused on attributes provided from individuals outside of adolescents' personal networks (Spencer et al., 2011). Qualitative findings from the current study suggest that primary caregivers were attuned to the strengths and positive contributions that adult relatives were positioned to provide their children. Many primary caregivers also actively sought out opportunities to nurture and bolster these relationships as a way to strengthen the development of positive attributes in their children. By recognizing adult relatives as important and often readily accessible resources, this study expands our understanding of the opportunities youth have to benefit from supportive intergenerational relationships in their everyday lives. Moreover, findings from the current study highlight how primary caregivers intentionally facilitated these connections as a way of supporting their children's development.

Primary caregivers also reported that family values and norms around strong familial bonds motivated them to facilitate connections between their children and adult relatives. Furthermore, youth and primary caregivers overwhelmingly acknowledged their family network as being "close-knit." Specifically, they described extended family networks who spent a lot of time together and regularly expressed affection toward each other. These findings are consistent with previous research documenting the central role of fictive and extended kin in the Black family system and the centrality of interdependence and familial gatherings in facilitating intergenerational bonds (Klaw et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2015). Although the collective

quantitative and qualitative findings suggest Black families are close-knit and that closeness may matter for familial mentor formation, quantitative findings also suggest that all familial bonds are not equally weighted. In network research, family relationships are often considered as one collective strong tie in adolescents' networks. By asking youth to categorize their relationships with individual adults in their familial network as either close or *really* close, this study was able to highlight the variability that exists in the strength of familial bonds. Moreover, quantitative findings indicated that degree of relational closeness was a factor that mattered in addition to family network size in terms of predicting familial mentor presence among Black youth. Additionally, comparison of adolescents with the most and least *really* close relationships with adult relatives indicated that family norms of frequent interaction may matter for youth forming more close bonds with adult relatives. Specifically, frequent family gatherings may provide youth with the needed opportunities to develop *really* close bonds with their adult relatives.

In regards to Black adolescents' familial mentor formation, future studies should seek to replicate the quantitative findings that adolescents' gender and socioeconomic disadvantage status were not associated with the quantity of close relationships youth had with adult relatives, or the presence of familial mentoring relationships within Black families. While previous research has found variation in natural mentor presence as a function of gender and socioeconomic status, this study focused specifically on the formation of familial mentoring relationships within the Black family. Findings from this suggest that gender and socioeconomic disadvantage status may be less consequential for the formation of close and supportive intergenerational bonds in the specific context of Black adolescents' family relationships. However, given that adolescents' level of extraversion was associated with their close

relationships to adult relatives and mentor formation, future qualitative work could investigate the role of personality disposition in this process.

Previous research has considered the impact of parents' quality of relationship with their own parents on the relationship their parents have with their children (i.e., grandparent-child relationship; Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1998; Markiewicz et al., 2001; Mueller et al., 2003), but, to my knowledge, no other study has looked more holistically at the role of bonds between primary caregivers and all of the adult family members in their networks. Accordingly, findings from our study extend previous research that has examined the role of parents in facilitating intergenerational bonds between their children and adult relatives. Findings from this study also are in line with Keller's advanced systemic model of mentoring (2005), which centers the role of parents in facilitating youth-mentor relationships. Collectively, this work suggests that any interventions designed to foster more supportive intergenerational bonds between youth and adults in their everyday lives should seriously consider the role that parents are positioned to play in facilitating these relationships.

While findings suggest that parental agency may serve an important role in the formation of close familial bonds, qualitative findings also suggest that youth agency should be considered. For example, in this study, a number of primary caregivers noted that they did not have to do anything to facilitate intergenerational bonds because their children actively initiated engagement with adult relatives on their own. Youth are active agents in their own development and intentionally engage with members of their social network (Lerner et al., 2015; Larson, 2006; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Youth autonomy and decision-making has not been centered heavily in the formal or informal mentoring research. Even the quantitative analyses in the current study did not attend to the role of youth initiative in the formation of familial mentoring relationships.

Fortunately, qualitative analyses allowed for this finding to emerge which speaks to the need for future studies on predictors of informal mentoring relationships to attend to youth agency. Another benefit of the qualitative line of inquiry was learning that all primary caregivers interviewed felt that their children were benefiting from intergenerational bonds within the family system. Notably, I learned that parents who reported not intentionally facilitating these bonds only reported not doing so because they felt that either their children or adult relatives were already actively working to establish and maintain these bonds. This finding highlights the importance of contextualizing parenting behaviors, rather than assuming a lack of action stems from a lack of attention or care. I found that all parents in this study were in support of their children having close connections with adult family members, and all children interviewed felt they had close relationships with adult relatives, even if not all of these adults were seen as mentors.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. First, this study's findings may be more representative of the experiences of mothers, as the primary caregivers in this study were almost all mothers (78% of the primary caregivers identified in surveys and 88% of the primary caregivers interviewed). As a result, the findings from this study may not extend to all primary caregivers. For example, previous research indicates that mothers and fathers have different approaches to parenting (McKinney & Renk, 2007; Yaffe, 2020). Fathers, for example, may implement different approaches to facilitating relationships among their children and adult relatives or may engage in the same approaches but to differing degrees. Moreover, this study focused on primary caregivers because they tend to be the most influential adult relatives in adolescents' lives (Bowlby, 1969; Liu, 2008). However, previous work has shown that Black

families are diverse in structure and that Black youth often live in multigenerational households (Deleire & Kalil, 2002; Tolson & Wilson, 1990). Notably, the scope of this study was limited in that only the adolescents' perceptions of their primary caregivers' networks were assessed. Future research should examine the network size and strength of bonds of all of adolescents' caregivers (not just the primary one) and also should collect information about network size and strength from the caregivers directly (as opposed to relying on the adolescents' perceptions of their primary caregivers' networks).

Second, the selection process for the subsample of youth participants who were interviewed may have led this subsample ($n = 24$) to include less variability in family closeness. Specifically, the subsample selected for interviews had to have at least one close relationship with an adult relative to be included as the design stipulated that in-depth interviews would be conducted with youth, their primary caregivers, and a close adult relative. While one youth in our larger sample did not report having any close adult relatives (meaning this did not yield much exclusion from eligibility in the current study), a study that was designed to include youth without close relationships with adult relatives might have expanded an understanding of barriers or challenges that may prevent or undermine relational closeness within the Black family system. Moreover, I recognize that there is ethnic diversity among the Black American population and that such cultural differences have the potential to affect participants' responses on measures of relational closeness to family members. Therefore, future studies should consider the ethnic diversity that exists within Black families and factors such as immigrant status when examining family dynamics. Nevertheless, the finding that relational closeness was normative in this sample of Black adolescents is consistent with previous research among ethnically diverse Black

families (Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 1993), and suggests that these findings may still provide an accurate characterization of norms within Black families.

Finally, findings from the qualitative analyses indicated that a number of additional variables could have been measured and included in the quantitative analyses. Although a measure of youth agency was not included in the survey, for example, the role of youth agency emerged as an important factor in the interview data. Notably, I did consider youth extraversion as a factor in the quantitative analyses (which did not end up being correlated with familial mentor presence), but this is in no way a precise measure of youth agency and more attention to youth-specific factors that may influence the formation of familial mentor presence would have strengthened the current study. In addition, given that the quantitative analyses relied on data collected at one time-point, it certainly is possible that some of the directions of associations could be reversed. For example, youth could facilitate primary caregivers' relationships with adult relatives. Yet previous research and the study design (which allowed us to leverage qualitative data to better understand the quantitative findings) both support the interpretation that primary caregivers are likely the drivers of relationship facilitation with adult relatives, rather than youth facilitating parents' relationships (Monserud, 2008; Mueller & Elder, 2003; Robertson, 1975).

Conclusions

Through its incorporation of an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, the current study sought to advance a more complete understanding of the role of primary caregivers in facilitating close relationships among their children and adult relatives. In addition, this study considered how the size and strength of adolescents' familial networks might have shaped whether or not they developed a familial mentoring relationship (one characterized by an

especially close bond and a willingness on the part of the youth to seek out the familial adult for advice and support when needed). Results of this study supported the idea that primary caregivers play an influential role in shaping the nature of their children's relationships with adult relatives and highlighted the specific ways in which primary caregivers facilitate these bonds. Findings also indicated that frequent family gatherings might be necessary to provide youth with opportunities to leverage their parents' close relational bonds and translate those bonds into their own. The results of our study bolster existing theory (Keller, 2005) and contribute to a growing body of literature exploring factors that foster natural mentoring relationships among youth of color (Monjaras-Gaytan et al., 2020). Findings also underscore the role of primary caregiver facilitation and suggest that more intentional facilitation efforts in the context of more frequent family gatherings may be of consequence among families where youth lack close ties with adult relatives. Similarly, youth interventions could include skill-building opportunities, encourage support-seeking behaviors, and otherwise work to enhance youth agency in establishing and maintaining mentoring relationships with supportive adults in their everyday lives.

Table 1.

Descriptives of primary study variables.

	Response Range	%	*M*	*SD*
1. % Male	-	41%	-	
2. % Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	-	53%	-	
3. Age	11 – 17	-	12.87	1.42
4. Extraversion	1 – 5	-	3.58	0.71
5. Quantity of Close Relationships PC had with Family Adults	0 – 29	-	8.56	4.68
6. Quantity of *Really Close* Relationships PC had with Family Adults	0 – 21	-	5.89	3.77
7. Quantity of Close Relationships Youth had with Family Adults	0 – 25	-	7.71	4.71
8. Quantity of *Really Close* Relationships Youth had with Family Adults	0 – 21	-	4.52	3.72
9. % with a Familial Mentoring Relationship	-	47%	-	-

Note. PC = primary caregiver

Table 2.

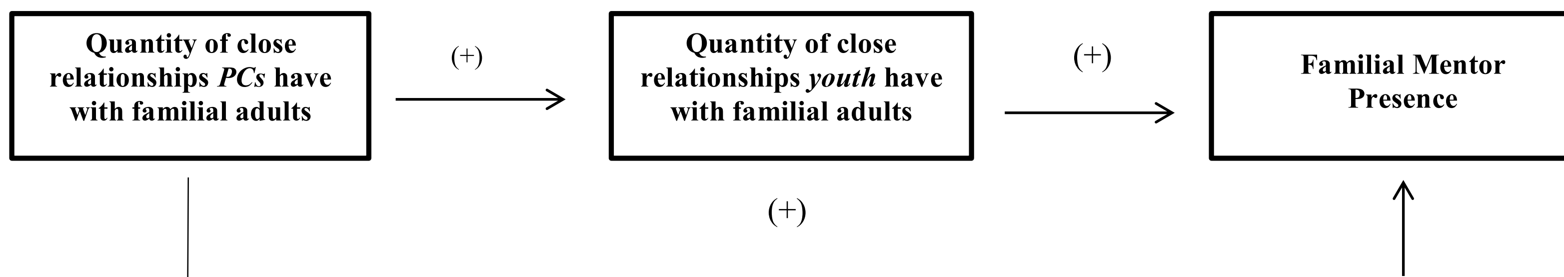
Correlations among primary study variables.

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	0.08	-0.08	-0.18*	-0.08	-0.13	-0.06	-0.13	-0.01
2. Male	-	0.10	0.13	-0.11	-0.05	-0.12	-0.06	-0.10
3. Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (yes/no)		-	0.02	-0.08	0.03	-0.08	-0.01	0.06
4. Extraversion			-	0.13	0.17*	0.15*	0.23*	0.11
5. Quantity of Close Relationships PC had with Family Adults				-	0.87*	0.86*	0.69*	0.28*
6. Quantity of *Really Close* Relationships PC had with Family Adults					-	0.76*	0.71**	0.22*
7. Quantity of Close Relationships Youth had with Family Adults						-	0.82*	0.29*
8. Quantity of *Really Close* Relationships Youth had with Family Adults							-	0.34*
9.Familial Mentoring Relationship (yes/no)								-

Note.* = p < .05

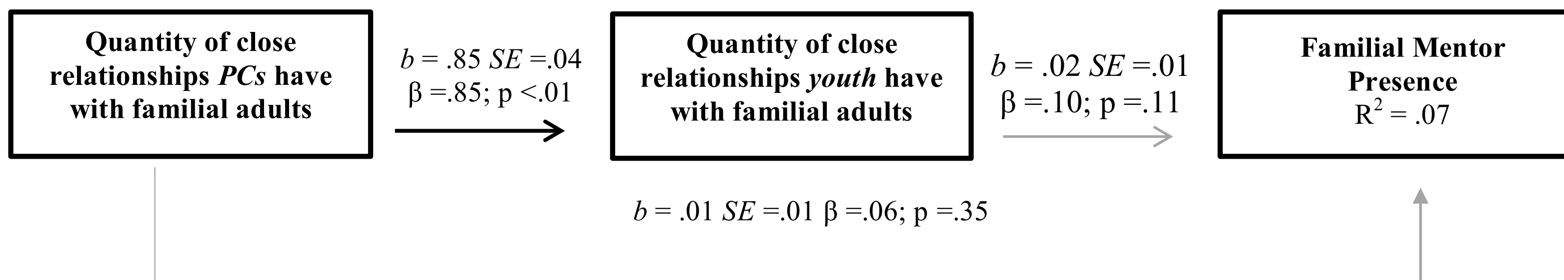
PC = primary caregiver

Figure 1. Conceptual model



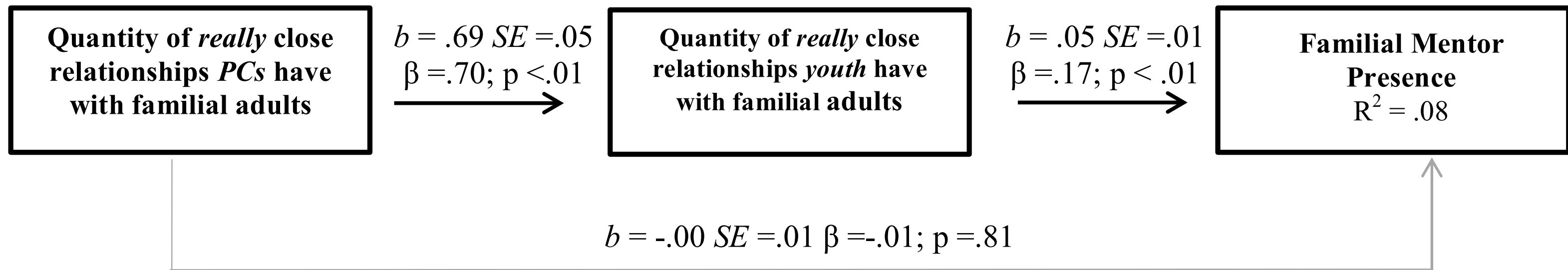
Note. PC = primary caregiver

Figure 2. Results of path analyses examining close relationships on familial mentor presence



Note. PC = primary caregiver. R^2 = McFadden.
Extraversion included as covariate examining PC relationships on youth relationships.

Figure 3. Results of path analyses examining *really close* relationships on familial mentor presence



Note. PC = primary caregiver. R^2 = McFadden.
Extraversion included as covariate examining PC relationships on youth relationships.

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Mentor support and Black youths’ connectedness to parents across adolescence

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Abstract

This study explored whether and how familial mentor support may have influenced the parent-adolescent relationship, and whether the impact of familial mentor support on the parent-adolescent relationship may have differed across adolescents' developmental stage. Findings from analyses of survey data from 216 Black adolescents indicated that familial mentor support may be equally beneficial for youths' connectedness to parents across developmental stage. Interview data from a subset of 12 adolescents, their primary caregivers, and familial mentors were analyzed to better understand how familial mentors supported the parent-adolescent bond and whether the nature of mentor support differed between early and middle adolescents. Qualitative findings indicated that mentors supported the parent-adolescent relationship by acting as sounding boards; coaching positive communication strategies; and promoting understanding among youth and parents. Additionally, findings indicated that familial mentors may be attuned to developmental changes experienced by their adolescent relatives.

During adolescence, Black youth must learn to navigate developmental changes in their physical, cognitive, and social functioning (Arnett, 1999) while also facing exposure to a disproportionate share of contextual risk factors associated with anti-Black racism and structural inequality (Seider et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009). Despite their exposure to these cumulative stressors, Black youth continue to demonstrate positive adaptation in the face of such adversity (Cooper et al., 2009; Wittrup et al., 2019). Prior work suggests that having close relationships with parents may promote healthy development and psychological well-being among Black adolescents (Booth et al., 2010; Bynum & Kotchick, 2006; Caldwell et al., 2010; Cooper, 2009; Sagrestano et al., 2003; Travis & Leech, 2014). Although strong bonds with parents have the potential to promote positive outcomes among Black youth facing contextual risks, there are normative changes in the parent-child bond during adolescence that may complicate parents' ability to provide such support to their children. The current study sought to further investigate the potential role of supportive familial adults in nurturing and bolstering the parent-child bond between Black adolescents and their parents.

Adolescent Age and Parent-child Relationships

As youth move through adolescence, they often experience an increased desire for autonomy (i.e., independent, self-reliant functioning; Holmbeck & Hill, 1986; McElhaney et al., 2009; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Adolescents' process of becoming autonomous from their parents is nuanced in that youths' own autonomy-seeking behaviors tend to manifest through decreases in youths' self-disclosure to parents and time spent with parents (Branje et al., 2012), often leading youth to report declines in their connectedness to parents (De Goede et al., 2009). Parents and youth also may experience increased conflict as youth increasingly seek independence and resist parental control during adolescence (Montemayor, 1983; Smetana,

1989), which may further compromise the parent-youth bond during adolescence (Conger & Ge, 1999; De Goede et al., 2009). Although youths' autonomy-seeking behaviors may strain the parent-child relationship (Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989), they are a normative and healthy part of adolescent development as youth ultimately transition from children who are completely reliant on their caregivers to independent adults (Brown, 2004; Steinberg, 2001, 2014). Yet variability likely exists in the extent to which parent-adolescent relationships are strained, and some dyads may experience substantially less strain than others. Moreover, Black adolescents may have a greater need to maintain strong bonds with parents relative to youth from other racial and ethnic groups given that Black adolescents tend to face a unique host of contextual risk factors stemming from anti-Black racism which they face in addition to normative developmental stressors. Thus, it may be important to consider how additional supportive relationships may differentially function to help preserve the parent-child bond in Black families during adolescence.

Familial Natural Mentor Support and Parent-child Relationships

Natural mentors are non-parental adults in youths' preexisting social networks who youth go to for support and guidance. Rhodes (2005) and Keller's (2005) theoretical models of youth mentoring can be used as frameworks for understanding how natural mentor support may promote parent-youth connection during adolescence. First, Rhodes' model of youth mentoring (2005) suggests that a primary pathway of mentors' influence on positive youth outcomes is through improvements in youths' social relationships with other important adults, such as youths' parents. Rhodes posits that youth may learn how to more effectively communicate with important adults in their lives, such as their parents, through their mentoring relationships. Relatedly, Keller's (2005) systemic model suggests that mentors may alter the parent-adolescent

dynamic by providing direct support to either the adolescent or parent. For instance, adolescents may confide in their mentors regarding difficulties with their parents or mentors could serve as a sounding board for parents to discuss difficulties experienced in parenting as their children transition through adolescence. Furthermore, mentors' role as a trusted source positions them well to help youth perspective-take and understand parents' decisions (with which youth may initially be in conflict). Given mentors' relationships with youth, mentors also may find that they are able to provide youths' parents advice on how they can best manage issues they are experiencing with their adolescents (Keller, 2005).

Previous research has yielded empirical support of these models of mentoring (Chan et al., 2013; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Hurd et al., 2013; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Thomson & Zand, 2010; Rhodes, 1994; Rhodes et al., 2000). For example, Hurd et al. (2013) found that Black youth with natural mentoring relationships were likely to report more positive relationships with their parents relative to their peers who lacked mentoring relationships. Similar findings drawing connections between mentoring and parent-child relationships have also emerged in the formal mentoring literature. For instance, longitudinal studies examining formal mentoring relationships have found that guidance and support from mentors was associated with youth reporting improvements in their relationship with their parents over eight (Thomson & Zand, 2010) and 18-month (Rhodes et al., 2000) time periods. This suggests that mentoring relationships may benefit parent-child relationships over time and potentially buffer against declines in the bond that tend to accompany the progression through adolescence.

While previous research findings suggest that youths' possession of a mentoring relationship may help to strengthen their bond with parents (Hurd et al., 2013; Rhodes et al.,

2000), there are also findings suggesting that indicators of mentor relationship quality may be driving this association (Chan et al., 2013; Thomson & Zand, 2010). For example, in a study examining formal mentoring relationships among middle and high school students, Chan et al. (2013) found that youth were likely to report closer relationships with their parents when they reported receiving more guidance and support from their mentors. Other studies characterizing the nature of natural mentoring relationships also indicate relationship quality, rather than mere presence, as being particularly meaningful in promoting positive youth outcomes (Albright & Hurd, 2018; Hurd et al., 2018; Wittrup et al., 2019). With regard to mentor support, it may be that more frequent provision of advice, encouragement, or a listening ear from mentors could better help youth navigate daily conflicts arising in the parent-adolescent relationship.

While prior work has considered the impact of youth-directed mentor support on the parent-adolescent relationship, less attention has been given toward understanding how parent-directed mentor support may influence the parent-adolescent relationship. Such consideration may be especially useful for understanding mentoring relationships among Black youth given that, on average, two-thirds of the adults serving as natural mentors to Black adolescents are extended family and fictive kin (i.e., individuals who are unrelated by birth or marriage but take on family-like roles; Billingsley et al., 2020; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Hurd et al., 2013; Klaw et al., 2003; Raposa et al., 2018). The tendency for Black youth to consider extended family as trusted adults they can go to for support and guidance may be rooted, in part, in the emphasis Black families tend to place on familial interdependence (i.e., the centering and relying on extended family for support; Billingsley et al., 2020; Stewart, 2007; Taylor et al., 2015; Wilson, 1989). Given the cultural valuing of intergenerational support in the Black community and the likelihood of Black youths' mentors being familial adults with a personal relationship with both

the adolescent and their parent, Black youths' familial natural mentors may be uniquely positioned to mediate parent-child conflict or provide perspective to both the adolescent and parent. Such support to parents and adolescents from familial natural mentors may be helpful in mitigating developmental strains facing the adolescent-parent bond.

Adolescent Age, Natural Mentor Support, and Parent-child Relationships

Although familial natural mentor support has the potential to mitigate strains in the parent-youth relationship, there is likely variability in the extent to which such impacts are realized. Though research in this area is scarce, there is reason to believe that familial natural mentor support may be especially consequential for parent-youth connectedness among older adolescents. This may be due to older youth being more inclined than younger youth to experience strains in parent connectedness (Branje et al., 2012; Conger & Ge, 1999; De Goede, et al., 2009). Given that the parent-child bond is likely more fraught as youth get older, the parent-child bond may reap greater benefits from the support natural mentors can provide to potentially ameliorate conflict and strengthen parent-child communication and understanding among older youth relative to their younger counterparts. Relatedly, increased maturity and emotional competence among older youth (Keefer et al., 2013; Mayer et al., 1999) may lead these adolescents to seek out and be more receptive to specific supports from their familial natural mentors that would strengthen the parent-child relationship. Given these considerations, research is warranted to explore whether the positive influence of familial natural mentoring relationships on the parent-child bond may be greater among older adolescents relative to younger adolescents.

Current Study

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) was used to explore whether having a more supportive familial natural mentor may have contributed to stronger parent-child bonds while also offsetting potential age-related declines in parent-child connectedness. This sequential design allowed quantitative findings to be probed using qualitative data from interviews, which facilitated a more complete understanding of patterns that emerged. Quantitative analyses focused on examining direct effects from familial natural mentor support on parent-child connectedness, as well as interactive effects between familial natural mentor support and age on parent-child connectedness to determine whether the impact of familial natural mentor support on parent-child connectedness may have been greater among older relative to younger adolescents. Demographic (i.e., gender) and personality (i.e., extraversion) factors were accounted for as these factors may have been associated with reported mentor support and parent connectedness among adolescents. Specifically, these variables were included as covariates given the possibility that relative to boys and adolescents who are more introverted, girls and adolescents who are more extraverted may be more likely to have closer relationships with their parents and receive more support from mentors (Bozionelos, 2004; Eby et al., 2006; Hurd et al., 2018).

Open-ended interviews were then conducted with a subset of participants and their families to expand on findings from the quantitative analyses (i.e., to better understand study findings). The current study utilized data from interviews with adolescents, their primary caregiver, and one non-parental familial adult who they identified as their mentor in order to explore how familial natural mentors were potentially supporting the parent-adolescent relationship and whether this support may have looked different or had differential magnitudes of influence as a function of adolescents' age.

Method

Quantitative Participants and Procedures

An Institutional Review Board at the authors' institution approved all study procedures. Participants in this study were drawn from the Learning about Important Non-parental Kin (LINK) study. LINK is a mixed-methods study focused on better understanding the influence of Black youths' social contexts (e.g., family, community) on the formation of natural mentoring relationships among Black adolescents and non-parental adults in their pre-existing social networks. During the 2015-2016 academic school year, participants were recruited from six local middle schools, four local high schools, and one local community center, all of which were located in central Virginia. Black youth aged 11 to 17 were eligible to participate in the study. Schools mailed recruitment letters to Black students' caregivers inviting their children to participate in a study examining Black adolescents' day-to-day experiences at home and school. School counselors also handed out recruitment letters to students, and the research team posted recruitment flyers in community centers and distributed them via community listservs. Students' caregivers provided informed consent for their child's participation in the study and youth provided informed assent. Research assistants administered surveys to 216 adolescents. To enhance participants' comprehension of survey items, research assistants read survey items aloud to participants. To facilitate honesty in reporting and confidentiality in responses, participants recorded their own responses to survey questions on an iPad. Participants were compensated with a $40 Visa gift card for completing the survey.

Quantitative Measures

Table 1 includes descriptive statistics for study variables.

Familial Natural Mentor Support. To assess the amount of support adolescents received from familial natural mentors, adolescents were first asked, “Is there an adult other than your parents or people who are raising you who you can go to for support, guidance, and help making important decisions?” If youth responded in the affirmative, they were asked to indicate how they knew that adult. Participants were then asked to think of the adult who they felt closest to (if thinking of more than one adult). Of all identified mentors, 71% were non-parental family members. Given that familial natural mentors may be uniquely positioned to impact the parent-child relationship, only youth possessing familial natural mentoring relationships were included in this study’s analyses (n = 106). Youth were then asked to answer a series of questions regarding the frequency of support received from that adult (i.e. their familial natural mentor) in the previous 30 days using a modified version of Barrera’s Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB; Barrera et al., 1981). The emotional, appraisal, and informational support subscales of the ISSB were used for the current study analyses as familial natural mentors’ provision of advice and a listening ear to the adolescent could strengthen the parent – adolescent relationship (Keller, 2005). Each subscale comprised four items with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*every day or almost every day*). Scores were averaged to create a composite variable of total support received from natural mentors. Items (α = .95) measured how frequently adolescents’ natural mentor offered the adolescent comfort (e.g., “Over the past 30 days, how often has this person listened to you talk about your private feelings), affirming feedback (e.g., “Over the past 30 days, how often has this person let you know you did something well), or guidance for problem solving (e.g., “Over the past 30 days, how often has this person suggested some action that you should take).

Adolescent Closeness to Parents. To assess adolescents' perceptions of their relational closeness with their parents, the five-item family-connection subscale of the Five Cs of Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al., 2005) measure was utilized (α = .86). Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about their relationship with their parents/caregivers, including "I get along with them." Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Participants' scores were averaged across the five items to create a composite score that was used in this study's analyses.

Extraversion. To assess adolescents' level of extraversion, the eight-item extraversion subscale of the Big Five Inventory (BFI: John & Srivastava, 1999) was utilized (α = .77). Adolescents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements describing themselves as extraverted (e.g., talkative, sociable, assertive). Response options ranged from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Three items were reverse coded so that higher scores on all items indicated greater levels of extraversion. Adolescents' scores were averaged across the eight items to create a composite variable that was used in this study's analyses.

Demographics. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their basic demographic characteristics, including their age and gender identity. Age was entered in number of years. For the current study, participants were assigned a value of "1" if they identified as male and "0" if they identified as female (no participants self-identified as being outside of the gender binary).

Quantitative Data Analyses and Results

All analyses were conducted using R software (version 3.6.1). Bivariate correlations were conducted to assess for associations among the primary study variables and covariates (see Table 2). Identifying as male was associated with higher levels of extraversion and greater reported

closeness to parents. Extraversion was positively associated with closeness to parents and mentor support, and negatively associated with adolescents' age. Adolescents' age and their reported closeness to their parents were negatively associated. Mentor support was positively correlated with closeness to parents. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were then conducted to examine the main effects of familial natural mentor support and age, as well as the effect of an interaction term comprised of these two variables on participants' closeness to parents, controlling for extraversion and gender. As expected, I found that familial natural mentor support was positively associated with adolescent-parent closeness. I also found that adolescents' age was negatively associated with adolescent-parent closeness. The interaction term between familial natural mentor support and age, however, was not associated with adolescent-parent closeness (see Table 3).

Qualitative Participants and Procedures

Standardized, open-ended interviews were conducted in the summer of 2017 with a stratified random sample of 25 youth from the larger study sample. Stratification was implemented based on youths' gender, age, socioeconomic status, and familial mentor status. Open-ended interviews were also conducted with all of these adolescents' primary caregivers (the majority of whom were youths' biological mothers) and one non-parental familial adult with whom the youth reported feeling close. Twelve of the interviewed youth considered their close, non-parental familial adult to be their familial mentor. Interviews typically lasted 60 - 90 minutes and each member of the triad (i.e., youth, parent, non-parental familial adult) was individually interviewed. Interview sessions were conducted in a private location selected by the participants (e.g., their homes, researchers' offices). Interviewers were a multiracial research team (4 women of color and 2 white women).

The interview protocol included questions inquiring about participants' relationships with members of their family and broader family dynamics. Primary caregivers were asked to describe instances in which the non-parental familial adult provided them support, including "What are some ways that [non-parental familial adult] helps you with parenting?" and "What conversations have you had with [non-parental familial adult] that you found useful in how you've raised your children?" Youth also were asked to describe instances in which the non-parental familial adult provided them support, including "What kinds of problems would you talk to [non-parental familial adult] about if you were having them?" and "Has there ever been advice that [non-parental familial adult] has given you that has affected the choices that you've made?" Non-parental familial adults were asked to describe how they had supported the youth and primary caregivers. Such questions included "Have you ever done anything to help [primary caregiver] with their responsibilities as a parent?" and "What kinds of things does [youth] talk to you about?" All interviews were audio recorded on an iPad and subsequently transcribed by a third-party service. Audio files were then destroyed after having been transcribed. Each participant was compensated with an $80 Visa gift card at the completion of their interview.

Qualitative Data Analyses

To facilitate the most precise comparison of familial natural mentor support across adolescence, this study's narrative analyses focused only on the families of youth with familial natural mentoring relationships. A total of 36 interviews were analyzed utilizing thematic and modified analytic induction techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Braun & Clarke, 2006) for the 12 families of mentored youth. To ensure accuracy and breadth of information in my findings, I employed triangulation by capturing data through different sources (parent, youth, and non-parental familial adult perspectives) and by utilizing multiple coders (Creswell, 2013; Patton,

2002). The team of six interviewers engaged in multiple readings of transcripts and weekly discussions over a 12-month period to reach agreement regarding predominant themes in the data. An initial codebook was developed based on these emerging themes, the interview protocol, and previous research. Each interview was coded separately by two researchers who would meet to reconcile any disagreement in the application of codes until consensus was reached (Harry et al., 2005).

Given that quantitative findings suggested a positive association between familial natural mentor support and adolescents' reported connectedness to their parents, qualitative analyses examined how adolescents' familial natural mentors supported the parent-child relationship through both youth- and parent-directed means. By examining multiple pathways of influence of familial natural mentor support on the parent-child relationship, a more holistic understanding of the mentoring relationships was captured. Excerpts initially coded as "social support" were assessed with focused attention given to mentor support on the parent-child relationship. After becoming familiar with the data, the six research team members reviewed the "support" excerpts of an initial 12 interviews. The research team read each excerpt line-by-line and named the concepts that emerged (open coding; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research team then organized the concepts into broader categories (axial coding; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and compared data between and within categories until thematic saturation was achieved (Green & Thorogood, 2004). Once the final list of categories was generated, two research team members coded an initial four interviews to verify clarity in the application of codes. The team members repeated this process while coding the remaining 32 interviews with disagreement occurring among less than 10% of the codes between the two researchers.

Although quantitative findings suggested that mentor support did not have a differential impact on older and younger adolescents' connectedness to parents, qualitative analyses also were undertaken to determine whether the enactment of mentor support toward the parent-child relationship varied as a function of adolescents' age. This was important to consider given that potential distinctions discovered in familial natural mentors' support of younger versus older youth could provide insight into the evolving function of familial natural mentoring relationships across adolescence. Experiences of familial natural mentor support to families of youth who were early adolescents (ages 11-13; $n = 4$) were compared to the experiences of youth who were middle adolescents (ages 14-15; $n= 8$).

Qualitative Results

Table 4 provides descriptive information of interview participants. All names reported are pseudonyms. The first qualitative research question sought to uncover how familial natural mentors supported the parent-child relationship through both youth- and parent-directed means. Three themes were identified as related to familial natural mentors' support of the parent-child relationship: familial natural mentors 1) acting as a sounding board, 2) coaching positive communication and response strategies, and 3) promoting understanding. The second qualitative research question sought to investigate how familial natural mentors' support of the parent-child relationship may have varied across age by comparing support received in families of early versus middle adolescent youth. Key findings addressing both areas of inquiry are presented in the following sections.

Mentors as Sounding Boards

Eight (67%) families shared how familial natural mentors would listen to youth and parents discuss the challenges they experienced in the parent-child relationship. The grandmother

mentor of Naomi, a 14-year-old girl, described how her granddaughter would turn to her when needing an outlet to voice frustrations she felt with her parents. This grandmother shared, "Naomi bring up stuff 'well momma don't understand or daddy don't understand.' So I said 'well, tell me your version of it.' So, we sit down, and I just listen to her talk." Naomi expressed similar sentiments by sharing, "I will tell my grandma like 'me and my mom had an argument' or something… or I might tell her about something maybe my mom did, something my dad did." Similarly, the adult brother mentor of Trey, a 14-year-old boy, also shared that Trey would "want to vent" about the frustrations he had with their mother from time to time. Through venting his frustrations to his older brother, this familial mentor believed that Trey was "finding a way to express how he feels." Likewise, the grandmother mentor of DeAndre, an 11-year-old boy, shared, "when [DeAndre's] upset about something, he and his mom get into a disagreement or something, he'll call me just to get it out of his system, talk to me about it."

Parents also utilized their children's familial mentors as a sounding board to process their thoughts and emotions when experiencing conflict in the parent-child relationship. Similar to what DeAndre reported, his mother also shared that she relied on DeAndre's familial mentor (her mother) to discuss challenges associated with raising an adolescent. She explained that with DeAndre "getting older," she would call her mother to "just talk to her about, 'Gosh [DeAndre], sometime his attitude…'" The familial mentor relayed similar sentiments by sharing that her daughter would reach out to her when she was "frustrated about something" and that the two of them would often talk about "family, the kids." Similarly, the mother of Brandon, a 15-year-old boy, shared that she often had conversations with her father (Brandon's familial mentor) "just to vent" about Brandon's behavior, while the mother of Thomas, a 14-year-old boy, found it meaningful when her mother (Thomas' familial mentor) "just listen[ed]." Speaking about the

grandmother's support, Thomas' mother explained, "she listens also without judgement. She's just listening to hear what you have to say and if you want her advice, she'll give it but she doesn't just throw it out there. She's really patient." In all, these illustrations suggest that parents and youth appreciated having a close familial adult who they could turn to when needing to process challenges they experienced in the parent-child dynamic. Moreover, by providing both youth and parents the space to talk through their emotions, familial natural mentors were likely helping them better understand and express their feelings, practices which may promote more effective parent-youth communication (Halberstadt et al., 2001; Kehoe et al., 2014).

Mentors Coaching Positive Communication Strategies

Eight (67%) families described how familial natural mentors suggested positive communication and response strategies to navigate conflict in the parent-child dynamic. Excerpts in this theme included reference to familial natural mentors advising youth to not become upset or argue with parents and for youth to follow parents' advice and instruction. Excerpts also included familial natural mentors encouraging parents to refrain from harsh discipline of youth. Naomi, a 14-year-old girl, shared that her familial mentor (her grandmother) would advise her to not "argue back" with her mom. She further shared, "I guess when I'm thinking about it now, I guess I would say I used to argue with my mom a lot more than I do now. After I talked to my grandma, I don't argue with [my mom] that much." The grandmother mentor of DeAndre, an 11-year-old boy, mentioned that her grandson would often become upset and "stomp off to his room" when his mom "fuss[ed] at him." This grandmother shared that she would tell her grandson "you know, honey, that's your mom, you got to do what your mom tells you." Relatedly, the grandfather mentor of Kiera, an 11-year-old girl, shared that he would "calmly" tell his granddaughter '"Your mom is right. You have to pay attention. You're the child. She's

the parent"' when he would see that she was "not really listening" to her mother. By using calm and supportive tones when speaking with youth, familial natural mentors were able to affirm parents' positions without having the youth shut down or resent their advice. Ultimately, this approach may have worked to help mitigate conflict in the parent-child relationship.

When discussing how he has helped his adult daughter with her responsibilities as a parent, Kiera's grandfather also shared that Kiera's mother would "get really upset with Kiera on this and that" and that he would tell Kiera's mother "you have to be calm and tell Kiera in a different way… you got to keep a calm voice. You have to calm down and they might get it rather than you screaming at them." The mother of Zachary, a 14-year-old boy, also mentioned how her sister (Zachary's familial mentor) would "challenge" her decisions around discipline. This mother shared, "if (my sister) feels I'm wrong on something, then she'll call me on it… if she give[s] me her input, I'll respect her and I'll listen to her because I could be making a decision out of anger." Similarly, the mother of Charity, a 13-year-old girl, shared how her mother (Charity's familial mentor) would talk her down from responding in anger when Charity abused her phone privileges. Ultimately, this mother felt the advice given to her by her child's familial mentor was the "right direction" in terms of discipline. By helping parents calibrate their reactions, it is likely that familial natural mentors were able to promote more effective parent-child communication strategies (Duncan et al., 2009; Gentzler et al., 2005; Jaccard et al., 2002).

Mentors Promoting Understanding

Four (33%) families highlighted how familial natural mentors promoted understanding in the parent-youth relationship by advising youth to perspective-take and share information with parents, while encouraging parents to give their children appropriate space and autonomy. For instance, the older brother mentor of Trey, a 14-year-old boy, shared that he would often try to

help Trey “[put] himself in other people’s shoes,” when Trey was upset with their mother. This mentor shared that he would explain to Trey that their mother works “at least eight hours every day and then gotta come home and take care of you” in an effort to help Trey understand how him “throwing fits” over material purchases (in this case, an iPhone) was unfair to their mother.

In other efforts to build understanding, families also mentioned familial natural mentors encouraging youth to keep their parents informed of issues they were experiencing. For example, Keisha, a 15-year-old girl, shared that her familial mentor (her aunt) would encourage her to tell her mother about problems she was experiencing in school. Relatedly, the familial mentor of DeAndre, an 11-year-old boy, mentioned that she would tell her grandson ‘“you’ve got to call your mom and let her know that too” when he would share the issues he experienced in his afterschool program. By encouraging youth to consider their parents’ perspectives and share their concerns with parents, familial natural mentors may have helped facilitate understanding among youth and parents (Lundell et al., 2008; Van der Graaff et al., 2014).

This theme also included familial natural mentors encouraging parents to give their adolescent children appropriate space and autonomy. Specifically, familial natural mentors helped parents understand the importance of granting their adolescents greater independence. The mother of Shay, a 12-year-old girl, shared how her adult daughter (Shay’s familial mentor), would provide advice that she found helpful in raising Shay. This mother shared that her adult daughter would often say ‘“you can’t do Shay like this… You’ve got to let her do this. You’ve got to let her do that.” Likewise, the mother of Thomas, a 14-year-old boy, mentioned that her mother (Thomas’ familial mentor), is her “chill button.” This mother shared, “[my mom] reminds me that I cannot protect Thomas from everything. I can give him advice but she’s really the one trying to get me to release a little bit and relax and let him make his own way… [she

reminds me] that he is a young man and to let him be young man even with all my fears and worries. Not to stifle that." By advising parents to "relax," "stay calm," and give their children space and autonomy, familial mentors may have helped to relieve tension in parent-child interactions (Long & Adams, 2001; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014).

Comparative Analyses

Although quantitative findings did not suggest that mentor support differentially impacted older versus younger adolescents' sense of connectedness to parents, the second qualitative research question sought to determine whether the enactment of mentor support toward the parent-child relationship varied as a function of adolescents' age. Comparative analyses (comparing the enactment of familial natural mentor support to families of youth who were early adolescents versus youth who were middle adolescents) yielded one notable finding: three of the four (75%) families of early adolescent youth reported that familial natural mentors encouraged obedience when youth disagreed with parents, compared to just one of eight (13%) families of middle adolescent youth. Instead of scaffolding obedience and suggesting that youth "just listen" to their parents, familial natural mentors of middle adolescent youth more often encouraged youth to perspective-take or advocate for themselves. For instance, the grandmother mentor of Naomi, a 14-year-old girl shared that she would encourage her granddaughter to voice her concerns to her father when she disagreed with him. She mentioned that she would tell her granddaughter, '"Well, you know, you have a right to speak up, and you should speak up and say 'daddy, you know, I didn't appreciate what you did.' You just have to know how to say it." Differences in the advice communicated to younger and older youth suggests that familial natural mentors may adjust their messaging to be developmentally appropriate. As youth get older, familial mentors may encourage more independent thinking,

balanced communication, and negotiation with parents, whereas this may not have been as possible or desirable when youth were younger.

Discussion

Findings from the current study contribute to an understanding of normative support processes happening in Black families. First, quantitative results of the present investigation suggest that greater natural mentor support of Black youth may lead them to feel a greater sense of connectedness to parents during adolescence. This finding suggests that natural mentors may be an important resource for helping youth maintain close bonds with parents during a period typically marked by increased relational distance. This finding is in line with theory (Rhodes, 2005) and prior empirical work (Chan et al., 2013; Hurd et al., 2013; Thomson & Zand, 2010); however, the current study also provided the opportunity to build on previous research by investigating how natural mentors may be supporting the parent-adolescent relationship within Black families.

A central way familial mentors may be supporting the parent-adolescent bond is through coaching parents and youth on effective communication and conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, in the current study, I found that familial natural mentors often provided adolescents and parents advice on effective communication skills and emotion management when experiencing conflict or disagreement with one another. For instance, families indicated that familial natural mentors often discouraged parents from using harsh punishment of youth, and advised youth to follow their parents' instruction and refrain from arguing with their parents. This finding not only builds on work in the mentoring literature suggesting that mentors may help youth manage negative emotions and develop emotional competence (Brady et al., 2015), but also expands our understanding of family communication processes by highlighting the ways

familial mentors directly intervened to intentionally support and strengthen the parent-child relationship. This is one of the first studies to date to document the specific ways in which familial mentors leverage their position in the family to meaningfully engage both members of the parent-adolescent dyad to promote healthy communication and conflict resolution.

In addition to familial mentors' coaching of positive communication, families also discussed the ways familial mentors served as a sounding board, or listening ear, for parents and adolescents. Specifically, participants described how familial mentors provided parents and youth a non-judgmental space for processing challenging parent-adolescent exchanges. This finding is in line with previous work demonstrating the prevalence of emotional support provision within the Black family (Lincoln et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2015), and underscores an important and potentially unique opportunity available to non-parental adult family members who are well-positioned to support the parent-adolescent bond from either side. My findings also pointed to the specific ways in which parents and adolescents intentionally sought out trusted familial adults to confide in them and seek their advice.

I also found that familial mentors encouraged parents and youth to consider each other's points of view. The suggestion to step outside of one's own experience to consider the thoughts and feelings of others is of particular importance given prior work indicating that perspective-taking may improve adolescents' feelings of closeness to other individuals (Peterson et al., 2015; Schröder-Abé & Shütz, 2011). Research also has shown that when parents engage in more perspective-taking, it may positively influence youths' emotional openness and perceptions of parental warmth (Stern et al., 2015). Moreover, by encouraging adolescents to share their life experiences with their parents, more generally, familial mentors may have been facilitating increased opportunities for parents to be informed about the types of challenges and exciting

activities in their adolescents' lives. Such encouragement from familial mentors may have provided opportunities for youth to develop a stronger sense of connection to their parents, as previous research findings indicate that youth feel closer to adults following self-disclosures (Donovan et al., 2016). Furthermore, this may have better positioned parents to give meaningful and appropriate advice to their adolescents (Tokić & Pećnik, 2011).

Findings from the current study also are consistent with previous research that has documented less strong parent-child relational bonds among older adolescents relative to younger adolescents (Branje et al., 2012; De Goede et al., 2009; Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989). Yet I did not find any evidence that mentor support may be more consequential for older adolescents' connectedness to parents relative to younger adolescents' connectedness to parents. Instead, my findings suggest that familial mentor support may be equally consequential for youths' connectedness to parents across developmental stage, but that familial mentors may be engaging in different types of supportive practices with older adolescents and their parents in order to maintain the equivalent effectiveness demonstrated with younger adolescents and their parents (where tension may be lower, on average). For example, I found that familial mentors of younger adolescents were more likely to encourage youths' obedience of their parents' instructions whereas mentors did this less with older adolescents and instead focused more on helping older adolescents advocate for themselves or try harder to consider their parents' points of view. This difference in familial mentors' approaches shows a responsiveness to developmental changes youth experience during adolescence. In particular, familial mentors seem to be factoring in older adolescents' increased cognitive maturity and emotional capacity (Keefer et al., 2013; Mayer et al., 1999) when giving them advice about how to more effectively communicate with their parents.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the current study are worth noting. First, the limited age range captured in the qualitative sample (11 – 15 years old) may have curtailed my ability to identify differences in familial mentors' approaches to supporting parent-adolescent dyads across adolescence (e.g., 10-18 years old). My comparisons centered on early adolescents relative to middle adolescents but if my study had also included late adolescents, I may have found greater or more substantial differences in familial mentors' influence on the parent-child relationship or in the specific approaches familial mentors implemented to support the dyad. I also noted that, on average, youth in my study reported relatively high familial mentor support and connectedness to parents (i.e., scores were heavily concentrated above the mid-point of the scale). The fact that I detected positive associations in spite of this suggests that my findings may underestimate the true strength of familial mentor influence. Future research that captures more variability in parent-adolescent connectedness and includes a greater proportion of dyads with weaker bonds may provide a better sense of the true magnitude of the associations tested in the current study.

Given that all parent interviews included in the current study (n =12) were mothers, it is possible that study findings may not generalize to other parents or caregivers. Fathers, for example, may experience different challenges in their relationship with children during adolescence (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997; Phares et al., 2009). Accordingly, familial mentors may implement different strategies to support the father-adolescent relationship. Future studies should seek to examine familial mentor support to all of adolescents' caregivers. Additionally, half of all familial mentors interviewed in the current study were grandparents. Prior literature examining grandparent-parent-child dynamics has often considered how the grandparent-parent

relationship affects the grandparent-child relationship (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2009; Billingsley et al., 2021; Brown, 2003; Monserud, 2008), or has examined intergenerational transmission of relationship qualities (e.g., emotional closeness, conflict) from the grandparent-parent relationship to the parent-child relationship (Birditt et al., 2012; Hank et al., 2017; Savelieva et al., 2017). The current study contributes to the literature on family dynamics by providing insight into the ways that grandparents' relationships with both youth and parents may support the parent-child bond during adolescence. Moreover, this study looks beyond grandparent-parent-child dynamics to consider support received from other important non-parental adult relatives in the family network (e.g., aunts, adult siblings). Notably, though, the scope of this study was limited in that I focused on determining whether mentors' enactment of support varied as a function of adolescents' age. Future work should employ a generational lens to determine whether mentors' familial role may influence their enactment of support toward parents and youth.

Finally, given the cross-sectional nature of this study, I interpreted my quantitative findings with caution. For instance, family cohesion and values of interdependence may have influenced mentor dynamics and shaped how close adolescents were with their parents (Billingsley et al., 2020; Klaw et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2015). While overarching beliefs and orientations toward family are likely to influence mentor support and parental relationships, I intentionally leveraged the mixed method design to probe the study's correlational findings. As a result, the qualitative findings bolstered my confidence in my directional interpretations suggesting mentor action as a potential pathway for promoting close parent-adolescent bonds. For example, this pathway of influence was further documented through participants' descriptions of instances in which familial mentors helped parents and adolescents better

understand and communicate with one another. Nevertheless, given the likely reciprocal nature of the associations investigated in the current study, future research that implements a prospective longitudinal design and that follows youth across the full span of adolescence will be better positioned to speak to the reciprocal influences that may unfold and change over time.

Conclusion

The current mixed method study sought to uncover the role of familial natural mentors in promoting connectedness between Black adolescents and their parents. Findings of this study support existing theory (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2005) and are consistent with empirical findings on mentoring relationships and family processes that point to familial natural mentors as a potentially important resource to the parent-adolescent relationship (Chan et al., 2013; Hurd et al., 2013; Thomson & Zand, 2010). Moreover, my findings build on previous research by further illustrating *how* familial mentors intervene to support and strengthen the parent-adolescent bond among early and middle adolescents in ways that may yield similar effectiveness as youth age. Collectively, my findings shed light on normative developmental processes occurring in Black families and suggest that interventions aimed at improving parent-adolescent relationships should consider opportunities to involve familial mentors as a way to improve intervention effectiveness. Given that my findings may speak to more universal familial processes (at least within a U.S. context), future research could examine similar questions with racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse samples to determine the extent to which the current study findings may replicate.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for primary study variables.

	Response Range	*M*	*SD*
1. Percentage of male participants	-	41%	-
2. Extraversion	1 – 5	3.58	0.71
3. Age (in years)	11 - 17	12.87	1.42
4. Natural Mentor Support	1 – 5	3.68	0.70
5. Closeness to Parents	1 - 5	4.42	0.67

Table 2.
Correlations of primary study variables.

	2	3	4	5
1. Age	-0.02	-0.24*	0.08	-0.18*
2. Natural Mentor Support	-	0.28*	0.05	0.24*
3. Closeness to Parents		-	0.18*	0.29*
4. Male			-	0.14*
5. Extraversion				-

Note.* = $p < .05$

Table 3.
Main and interactive effects of familial mentor support and adolescents' age on adolescents' reported closeness to parents

Predictors	*B*	*B(SE)*	β	*t*	*p*
Male	0.10	0.12	0.10	0.79	0.43
Extraversion	0.19	0.09	0.19	2.11	0.04
Age	-0.09	0.04	-0.13	-2.34	0.02
Natural Mentor Support	0.15	0.06	0.15	2.64	0.01
Age x Natural Mentor Support	-0.05	0.04	-0.07	-1.41	0.16

$F(5, 105) = 5.38$, $p < .05$, $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .16$

Table 4.
Interview participants' pseudonyms and characteristics

Youth	Youths' age	Parents' position to youth	Mentors' position to youth
DeAndre	11	Mother	Maternal grandmother
Shay	12	Mother	Older sister
Charity	13	Mother	Maternal grandmother
Kiera	13	Mother	Maternal grandfather
Thomas	14	Mother	Maternal grandmother
Byron	14	Mother	Older step-brother
Naomi	14	Mother	Maternal grandmother
Trey	14	Mother	Older brother
Zachary	14	Mother	Maternal aunt
Destiny	15	Mother	Paternal second cousin
Keisha	15	Mother	Maternal aunt
Brandon	15	Mother	Maternal grandfather

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Black adolescents' disclosure and advice seeking: Making choices between parents and adult relatives

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Abstract

This study examined Black adolescents' decision-making processes around disclosure and advice-seeking with their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives. Interview data from 24 youth, their primary caregivers, and one non-parental adult relative with whom youth reported having a strong relational bond were analyzed to investigate who youth were deciding to confide in and what information youth were choosing to share with these adults. Findings suggest that youths' decision to confide may be topic dependent rather than based on a general disposition among youth for whom they share most of their concerns. Importantly, findings indicated that youth appeared to go to their primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. Findings also indicated family issues as one topic that youth would almost exclusively discuss with their non-parental adult relatives. Overall, findings suggest the centrality of primary caregivers in the lives of Black adolescents and the important role non-parental adult relatives fill in helping youth navigate family conflict.

Adolescence is a transitional period in which young people must learn to navigate developmental changes in their physical, cognitive, and social functioning (Arnett, 1999). Fortunately, Black youths' social relationships are a naturally occurring resource that supports their healthy development during this time (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Travis & Leech, 2014.) Specifically, Black youth benefit from supportive intergenerational relationships with parents and non-parental adults such as grandparents, aunt, uncles, and adult siblings and cousins (Cross et al., 2018; Hurd et al., 2012; Hurd & Sellers, 2013). One way that youth may benefit from these supportive intergenerational familial relationships is by having opportunities to disclose information and receive advice in the context of these disclosures from trusted adults (Kogan et al., 2011; Wittrup et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2019). Disclosure refers to the voluntary sharing of information related to one's personal thoughts and feelings (*self-disclosure*; Derlega et al., 2008; Jourard; 1971), and daily activities and whereabouts (*routine disclosure*; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2014). Additionally, advice is conceptualized as the recommendation of a specific course of action (Goldsmith, 1994; Heritage & Sefi, 1992). By disclosing information to supportive adults, youth may position themselves to receive advice that can help them navigate new challenges arising during adolescence (Almas, 2009). Moreover, prior work suggests that adolescents' overall well-being is enhanced when they have space to discuss their emotional states with others (Ahrens et al., 2011; Berke & Weir, 1979; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010).

While prior literature establishes the importance of youth sharing information and receiving helpful guidance from parents and other supportive adults (Berke & Weir, 1979; Kogan et al., 2011; Poulin et al., 2012; Wittrup et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2019), less attention has been given to youths' decision-making in which adults to seek out for specific support needs. It could be, for instance, that some youth see their parents (or another adult) as their go-to person

for any issues they have, while others may make distinctions in which adults they feel comfortable discussing specific concerns with and thus, have a more strategic approach to getting their support needs met. Some adolescents, for example, may feel more comfortable discussing certain topics (e.g., dating and relationships) with an adult relative outside of their immediate household given that these types of disclosures to parents may also lead to negative consequences for adolescents (Grossman et al., 2018; Teitelman et al., 2009). In either case, there are likely factors that youth consider when choosing to utilize familial support sources (Marshall et al., 2005; Rivens et al., 2021; Smetana et al., 2006). The current study sought to explore Black adolescents' decision-making processes around disclosure and advice-seeking with important adults in their family network.

Disclosure and Advice-seeking During Adolescence

Systemic perspectives (Bowen, 1974; Cox & Paley, 1997; Keller, 2005; Minuchin, 1985; Sameroff, 1983) and webs of support framework (Varga & Zaff, 2018) can be used as guides for understanding adolescents' decisions to disclose or seek advice from adults in their family network. First, general systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997; Sameroff, 1983) consists of four properties that help to shape our understanding of the family network as an organized system: *wholeness and order*, *hierarchical structure*, *adaptive self-stabilization*, and *adaptive self-organization*. The concept of *wholeness and order* suggests that elements in a system are interconnected and interdependent. *Hierarchical structure* suggests that families are complex systems comprised of subsystems and that each individual may belong to several subsystems. Further, the concept of *adaptive self-stabilization* suggests that family systems are structured by rules and regularities for interaction, while *adaptive self-organization* suggests that families are open, living systems in which change in the system is inherent.

Guided by the above mentioned principles, the systemic model of youth mentoring (Keller, 2005) proposes that youths' intergenerational relationships are embedded in the context of a larger network of relationships. Keller (2005) further suggests that any given youth-adult relationship may be informed by other relationships outside of the dyad. The webs of support framework (Varga & Zaff, 2018) extends systems perspectives by considering youths' role in influencing their relationships with supportive adults. Varga and Zaff's webs of support framework (2018) suggest that youth are active agents in their own development and therefore actively develop and maintain relationships with adults in their broader network. As active agents in their own development, the webs of support framework suggests that youth may intentionally engage or disengage with many adults in their family system (Varga & Zaff, 2018), choosing whether to disclose information either directly or through the solicitation of advice (Marshall et al., 2005). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that youth regulate and adapt their behaviors based on feedback or circumstances within a particular context (Lerner et al., 2005a,b). Conceptualizing youth as active agents in their development, rather than passive recipients of information, helps explicate how youth experience adults in their support networks and how these experiences are transformed into youths' decisions to disclose information or seek advice.

Adolescents' disclosure and advice seeking may serve particularly important roles in helping them navigate through uncertainties and developmental transitions likely experienced during this time (Minuchin, 1991; Vijauakumar et al., 2020). Having adult relatives who youth can share their thoughts, feelings, and everyday experiences with has been shown to promote positive social and emotional adjustment in youth (Grotevant & Cooper, 1983, 1986; Lester et al., 2019; Smetana, 2008). However, the decision to disclose information or seek advice from

others is a complex process influenced by contextual factors such as youths' comfort and trust in potential support sources (Smetana et al., 2006; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Given these considerations, adolescents may be highly selective about their disclosure and advice outlets (Almas, 2009; Campione-Barr et al., 2015; Grafsky et al., 2018; Papini et al., 1990).

Disclosure to and Advice-seeking from Parents

Prior research examining adolescent disclosure and advice seeking in the family context has primarily focused on the parent-child relationship. Research suggests that adolescents seek parental advice on a regular basis (Poulin et al., 2012; Tripathi et al., 1986), and often disclose or inform parents about difficult experiences in an attempt to receive comfort (Almas, 2009). Poulin and colleagues (2012) noted that advice sought from parents helped adolescents manage problems they encountered and promoted their positive social and behavioral adjustment. However, as they do with other potential support sources, adolescents assess potential costs and benefits when deciding to disclose or ask a parent for advice. Specifically, adolescents consider the topic of disclosure, their level of need for support, and the potential consequences of sharing information with parents (Marshall et al., 2005; Sprague, 1999).

Frequently cited reasons for adolescents' non-disclosure to parents include youths' attempts to avoid negative consequences (Darling et al., 2006; Marshall et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2018; Smetana et al., 2006; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008), and increased desire to handle situations without parental support (Darling et al., 2006; Finkenauer et al., 2002; Marshall et al., 2005; Sprague, 1999). Although non-disclosure to parents has been found to promote emotional autonomy among youth (Finkenauer et al., 2002), less adolescent disclosure also has been linked with youth demonstrating less constructive coping with negative emotions (Miller-Slough et al., 2016) and poorer psychosocial functioning (Finkenauer et al., 2002; Hamza & Willoughby,

2011; Smetana et al., 2009). While it is normative for adolescents to go to parents less as they seek greater autonomy and independence (Brown & Larson, 2009; Gould & Mazzeo, 1982), collective results of previous research suggest the importance of youth having close relationships with supportive adults, such as their parents, with whom they can confide and from whom they can receive feedback (Poulin et al., 2012; Smetana et al., 2009). However, it also is likely that adolescents may increasingly seek non-parental sources for additional guidance and support (Brown & Larson, 2009; Gould & Mazzeo, 1982; Smetana et al., 2009). Non-parental familial adults may be a valuable source for adolescent disclosure and advice-seeking given that these adults have long-standing relationships with youth (Hirsch et al., 2002; Hurd et al., 2014), and may strike a balance of providing youth affiliative bonds and knowledgeable advice from lived experience (Arbeit et al., 2019; Sterrett et al., 2011).

Disclosure to and Advice-seeking from Non-parental Adult Relatives

Among Black youth reporting the presence of a non-parental adult who they can go to for support or guidance, the overwhelming majority identify extended and fictive kin (i.e., individuals who are unrelated by birth or marriage but take on family-like roles) as trusted adults they seek out (Billingsley et al., 2020; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Klaw et al., 2003). Black adolescents' frequent naming of non-parental adult relatives as important support sources may be due, in part, to the high cultural valuing of extended family involvement in many Black families (Klaw et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2015). This emphasis on intergenerational kinship support may provide opportunities for Black adolescents to disclose and seek advice from non-parental familial adults.

Intergenerational extended family support often entails a listening ear to youths' disclosures (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002) and advice giving (Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007; Rosenthal,

1987). Studies have shown that youth report discussing situations with non-parental adults that they would not tell parents about out of fear of punishment or embarrassment (Beam et al., 2002; Marshall et al., 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). For example, findings from Teitlelman and colleagues (2009) suggest that youth may perceive extended family members as trusted alternatives to parents for conversations about sex and relationships. However, such work on adolescents' disclosure and advice-seeking with non-parental adult relatives is limited in that less is known about the complementary nature of youths' disclosure and advice-seeking to non-parental familial adults relative to their parents. In addition, less is known of how youth make decisions about which non-parental familial adults to disclose to and seek advice from, or the range of topics youth are choosing to discuss with these adults (for exception see Rivens et al., 2021). Extending research on adolescent decisions around disclosure and advice-seeking beyond the parent-child dyad may help facilitate a more complete understanding of how youth leverage familial resources to meet their support needs. Moreover, examining disclosure and advice-seeking across multiple close family relationships will highlight the unique implications of these relational processes for each relationship with specific attention to parents and non-parental familial adults.

Current Study

Much of the research on adolescent development has taken a somewhat isolated approach to understanding intergenerational relationships (Varga & Zaff, 2018). With few exceptions to note (e.g., Pilkauskas & Dunifon, 2016; Teitelman et al., 2009), adolescents' relationships with parents and supportive non-parental adult relatives largely have been studied separately and without consideration of each other. Thus, less is known of how dyadic youth-adult familial relationships are interrelated and concurrently function to support youths' needs. The current

study utilized data from 24 youth, along with one primary caregiver for each youth (*n* = 24) and one adult relative with whom youth reported having a strong relational bond (*n* = 24) in order to explore how Black youth leveraged relationships with parents and close non-parental adult relatives in concert to promote their own socioemotional well-being. Specifically, this study considered how Black adolescents made decisions to disclose information and seek advice from their adult relatives by examining who youth were deciding to confide in and what information youth were choosing to share with these adults.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The data for this study draws from a larger mixed-method study focused on better understanding the role of social contexts (e.g., family, community) on Black adolescents' formation of close and supportive intergenerational relationships. Youth were eligible for participation if they identified as Black/African American[5] and attended one of six area middle schools, four area high schools, or one community center in the Southeastern region of the United States during the 2015 – 2016 academic school year. Recruitment letters inviting Black youth to participate in a study examining adolescents' daily home and school experiences were mailed to Black students' homes directly from their schools, handed out to students by school counselors, posted in area community centers, and distributed via community listservs. Parent/guardian consent and youth assent were obtained prior to the administration of the initial survey. Two-hundred and sixteen Black youth ranging in age from 11 to 17 (mean age = 12.87, SD = 1.42; 59% girls) completed surveys in the first phase of the study. A stratified random

[5] The Black population demographic for the region was largely African American with few recently immigrated African or Afro-Caribbean families.

sample of 25 youth from the study's first phase were then selected to participate in qualitative interviews during the summer of 2017 for the study's second phase. Stratification was implemented based on youths' gender, age, socioeconomic disadvantage status, and reporting of them having a familial adult to whom they disclosed their thoughts and feelings in an effort to seek out support and guidance when needed (i.e., familial mentor).

Interviews and Data Analysis

Interviewers were a multiracial research team (4 women of color and 2 white women). The research team specialized their work in the promotive experiences of marginalized youth and had a strong professional relationship prior to the start of the study. To ensure consistency across the implementation of interviews, the research team received extensive training in interview administration and followed a semi-structured protocol of questions and probes with each interview. Additionally, the researchers often went in teams of two or three to conduct the family interviews simultaneously, but separately. Team members would discuss their experiences interviewing participants following these interviews, and during weekly team meetings, to ensure consistency in procedures and experiences across interviews. Seventy-five open-ended interviews were conducted between May and September of 2017.

The research team developed the interview protocol with an interest in participants' family relationships and broader dynamics. Youth, their primary caregivers, and their close non-parental adult relatives were asked questions regarding the topics youth disclosed and sought advice for. Questions to youth included "What kinds of things do you/would you not talk about with [primary caregiver/non-parental adult relative]," while adults were asked "What kinds of things has [youth] come to you for advice about?" and "Are there things that [youth] would not want to talk to you about?" On average, interviews lasted between 60 – 90 minutes and were

conducted one-one-one in a location of the participants' choosing (e.g., participants' home, researchers office). All interviews were recorded on an iPad, transcribed by a third-party service, and reviewed by the researcher who conducted the interview to ensure accuracy of the transcript prior to the audio files being destroyed. Given the proposed study's focus on support experiences within Black families, one family triad consisting of a biracial child, White mother, and White grandmother (where the child had very minimal sustained contact with her Black father or Black relatives) was excluded from this study's analyses. Interviews of youth, their primary caregiver, and one non-parental adult relative who the youth identified as close were analyzed to better understand how Black youth were making decisions around disclosure and advice-seeking from adult relatives. Non-parental adult relatives were familial adults aged 18 years or older. Interview data from 24 youth, primary caregiver, and non-parental adult relative triads (72 total interviews) were analyzed using consensual coding (Harry et al., 2005) techniques. Two members of the research team read through excerpts addressing youths' relationships with their primary caregivers and close non-parental adult relatives. Focused attention was given to youths' disclosure and advice-seeking considerations and behaviors with their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives. The researchers developed a codebook based upon coding excerpts from a subset of 30 interviews (14 youth, 8 parents, and 8 non-parental adult relatives). The researchers read each excerpt line-by-line and identified relevant concepts (open coding; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Concepts were developed based on patterns identified from participant responses (inductive; data driven) and previous research on disclosure and advice-seeking (deductive; theory-driven). The researchers then organized the concepts into broader coding categories (axial coding; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Once the list of coding categories was finalized, the two members of the research team independently applied the codes to excerpts of an initial six interviews to verify clarity in the application of codes. The team members then met to discuss and resolve any disagreement in the application of codes (Harry et al., 2005). The research team repeated this process while coding excerpts from the remaining 66 interviews. Youth were considered to had discussed a topic with an adult in their family if the youth, adult, or both the youth and adult mentioned having a conversation about the topic. To enhance confidence in the accuracy of reporting, instances of contradiction (i.e., inconsistent expression between two reporters; n = 7) were omitted.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive information of the interview participants. All names reported are pseudonyms. The following five topics of youth disclosure and advice-seeking were identified: youths' activities and interests, schooling, peer relationships, dating relationships, and family relationships. In sharing about their activities and interests, families reported that youth discussed their extracurricular activities, after-school involvements, and personal interests. Youth also sought advice from adult relatives to help further their athletic skill development and would share when they experienced conflict with their coaches. Families noted that conversations about schooling included youth sharing their school-related achievements and difficulties, including troubles with their coursework or teachers. Youths' discussions about their peer relationships included youth sharing about instances of bullying, disagreements with friends, and situations youth witnessed their friends navigating. Relatedly, conversations pertaining to dating relationships included youth sharing about their romantic "crushes," seeking advice for how they could navigate dating relationships, and confiding in their adult relatives once a relationship

ended. Lastly, families reported that youth shared their feelings about family interactions and conflict when discussing their family relationships.

Trends in Youth Disclosure and Advice-seeking

To better understand how youth made decisions to disclose to and seek-advice from adults in their family network, I first examined whether there were trends among youth regarding the adult(s) with whom they would typically confide. Specifically, I examined whether there were youth who primarily disclosed to or sought advice from both their primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative about most topics; just their primary caregiver or their non-parental adult relative; or neither of these adults (Table 2).

Youth and their families reported that three (13%) youth primarily disclosed to and sought advice from both their primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative about most topics. For instance, Byron mentioned that he felt comfortable sharing almost anything with both his mother and his step-brother, Micah. Two (8%) youth appeared to exclusively confide in their primary caregivers (mothers and fathers) for most of their concerns. For example, Nia shared that she was more likely to go to her mother (or father) for advice or help with a problem than her grandmother. Nia explained, "I …feel like it's really not [my grandmother's] place. Honestly, I feel like it's my mom's and my dad's place… I tell [my grandmother] some things, but not the major things because I feel like it's my mom's place to handle situations like that and everything." Only one (4%) youth appeared to prefer going only to their non-parental adult relative to discuss most topics as Trey shared that he felt more comfortable talking with his adult brother D'Angelou than he did with his mother.

Five (21%) youth appeared to be less likely to go to either their primary caregiver or their non-parental adult relative across most topics. These youth indicated a preference for sharing

information with their peers or handling situations on their own. For instance, Ayesha shared that she “never really talk[s] to the adults, unless it’s like crucial” and that she would “just go to google” if she had a problem. She shared, “I wouldn't talk to anybody about me personally… I'm just like, I try and be like a closed book. I probably tell my best friends more than I tell my parents, because I can trust them more.” When asked what she meant in saying that she trusted her friends more, Ayesha explained, “Like it's just more ... the things that I would tell my best friends, they're more like things that happen at school. That they know the people, they understand, they feel it too.” When asked if she ever tried talking to her aunt Tamela, Ayesha added, “I just don't really like talking to adults like that…I don't really try, because [Tamela]'s like the same thing as my mom. They'll just bring up a story so I can try to understand it and they go too deep, and then I'm just like, ‘Where did we start from?’” While Ayesha noted that she would likely seek advice from her friends, rather than familial adults, Adam shared that he preferred to handle situations on his own. He added, “I just like to think for myself.” Youth like Adam felt they were capable of making decisions on their own and navigating challenging circumstances without input from their primary caregivers or non-parental adult relatives.

Although some youth noted a preference for keeping information to themselves, families indicated that all youth discussed at least one topic with their primary caregiver or non-parental adult relative (or with both). Furthermore, youth and their families reported that most youth (*n* = 18; 75%) demonstrated different patterns of preferences for who to confide in based on the topics. This suggests that youths’ decision to confide may have been topic dependent rather than based on a general dispositional preference among youth for whom they would share most of their concerns.

Trends in Youth Disclosure and Advice-seeking by Topic

Given findings suggesting the topic of discussion may have driven youths' decision to confide in their familial adults, I then analyzed who youth were going to for disclosure and advice-seeking by topic. Percentages are reported as a proportion of youth who discussed each topic with each source (i.e., primary caregiver, non-parental adult relative, or both; see Table 2). When analyzed by topic, it appeared that youth were frequently going to primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. This was most prominently seen in youths' sharing about their peer and dating relationships. Youth and their families reported that half of all youth who discussed dating and peer relationships with any adults discussed these topics with just their primary caregiver. For example, Keisha said she would only go to her mother to discuss problems she experienced in her friendships. Regarding discussions about dating, Zachary mentioned he would rather discuss the topic with just his mother. He shared, "I only like to talk to my mom about that. That's personal… My mom is the closest person I know… The only person I would talk to about that type of stuff." Like Zachary, Naomi explained, "I wouldn't talk to [nana] if I had a boyfriend or anything… It's just like a thing you would just tell your mom. You just wouldn't just go and tell your nana." Other youth like Naomi also felt that their peer and dating relationships were too personal to discuss with their non-parental adult relative and preferred to go to their primary caregiver exclusively.

With regard to discussions about schooling and their activities and interests, youth appeared most likely to seek out both their primary caregivers and their non-parental adult relatives. Nearly half of the youth who appeared to discuss their schooling went to their primary caregiver in conjunction with their non-parental adult relative (an additional 37% of these youth discussed schooling exclusively with their primary caregivers). Similarly, most (n = 12; 60%)

youth who appeared to discuss their activities and interests went to both their primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative. For example, Thomas shared that he sought advice from both his mother and grandmother to help him decide whether he should play football at the varsity level. Thomas shared, “I found out I was playing varsity a while before and I asked [my mom] what she thought because I was nervous about it because normally people my age don't play varsity… I didn't really want to, because the size difference, I'm afraid of getting injured. [My mom] talked to me and explained the pros and cons.” While his mother believed that playing football at the varsity level could help prepare him for a future career in football, Thomas noted that his grandmother shared a different perspective when he sought her advice. He shared, “My grandmother didn't want me to [play at the varsity level] because of the size difference, that was the main thing she was focused on.” In sharing concerns with both their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives, youth were able to benefit from collecting multiple perspectives to inform the decisions that would be best for them.

Although primary caregivers appeared to be central figures youth felt comfortable turning to (either exclusively or alongside other adults) across most topics of discussion, the topic of family relationships served as a notable exception. Among the youth who reportedly discussed family relationships with any adults, nearly all (92%) discussed this topic with their non-parental adult relative exclusively. Only one youth went to both their primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative, while none had reportedly confided in their primary caregiver exclusively about family relationships. For some youth, non-parental adult relatives may have served as impartial sources for discussing parental and sibling conflict. For instance, Naomi mentioned that she would go to her grandmother, rather than her mother, when she argued with her sister. Naomi explained that her grandmother stayed calm and was not quick to anger, whereas she felt her

mother would become upset when she and her sister argued. Clara, the grandmother of Naomi, also shared that Naomi would vent to her when she was upset with her mother. These findings suggest that non-parental adult relatives may provide youth a safe and supportive space to talk through and process challenges experienced in their parental and sibling relationships. Additionally, while youth primarily confided in their primary caregivers about dating and peer relationships, all youth who reportedly discussed these topics with just their non-parental adult relative did so when this adult was their sibling. For instance, Trey shared that he felt more comfortable talking to his adult brother, rather than his mother, about his girlfriend. Trey explained, "I don't really talk to my mom about those stuff. I talk to my brother.” It is possible that some youth may have perceived their adult siblings as an ideal source for confiding about their peer and dating relationships given their near-peer relationship with these adults. It also may be that some youth could see adult siblings as the only option for confiding about these topics out of fear of embarrassment or punishment from their parents and older familial adults such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents (Grafsky et al., 2018; Teitleman et el., 2009; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008).

Discussion

Findings from the current study revealed that Black adolescents often disclosed and sought advice from their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives across a wide range of topics. This finding is in line with the webs of support framework (Varga & Zaff, 2018) suggesting that youth may rely on several adults within their personal network to fulfill their support needs. Moreover, youth appeared willing to tap into familial support sources as needed, as all youth in this study appeared to discuss at least one topic with either their primary caregiver or non-parental adult relative. Collectively, these findings indicate that primary caregivers, in

particular, and non-parental adult relatives remain important sources of guidance and support for Black adolescents during a developmental stage when youth tend to seek greater autonomy and independence from adults (Brown & Larson, 2009; Smetana, 1989). This is important as prior work has found that youth benefit socially and emotionally from confiding in and receiving advice from supportive adults (Poulin et al., 2012; Smetana et al., 2009).

Findings indicated that primary caregivers (either exclusively or in combination with non-parental adult relatives) were frequently sought out by adolescents across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. Moreover, for some more intimate topics, such as dating and relationships, their primary caregivers were youths' preferred choice for disclosure. This finding was surprising given previous research suggesting that youth may prefer to discuss their relationships with non-parental support sources (e.g., near-aged siblings) due to concerns that such disclosures may lead to negative parental reactions (Grossman et al., 2018; Mapes & Cavell, 2021; Teitelman et al., 2009). This finding suggests that researchers may be underestimating the parent-youth connection during adolescence, which may remain strong, and overestimating factors (e.g., fear of punishment) thought to deter youth from confiding in their primary caregivers. Much of our understanding about parent-adolescent relationships has been informed by studies conducted with predominantly White samples with little representation of Black families or other families of color (Skinner & McHale, 2016). Thus, cultural differences in parenting may mean that research with predominantly White samples may be less relevant for understanding parent-adolescent relationships in Black families (Mandara et al., 2010). Given that this study was one of few focused specifically on this phenomenon within Black families, continued exploration is needed with ethnically (e.g., African American, Caribbean, African), socioeconomically, and geographically diverse Black samples to better understand the

heterogeneity of youths' confiding preferences in Black families and to determine whether these findings generalize beyond the studied sample. Furthermore, future studies with large samples that are representative of racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse families will further our understanding of potential similarities and differences that may exist within this relational process.

Additionally, findings from this study advance an understanding of how adolescents' relationships with their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives are interrelated and function concurrently. Although some research has conceptualized non-parental adults as compensatory figures offsetting shortcomings in the parent-child relationship (Barrera & Bonds, 2005; Spencer & Liang, 2009), I found that Black adolescents most often utilized their non-parental adult relatives in conjunction with their primary caregivers (i.e., in ways that were complementary). This was especially true for topics related to youths' schooling and their activities and interests, where my findings indicated that youth often discussed these topics with both their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives. Findings from this study suggest that youths' relationships with their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives may be more complementary in nature (Klaw et al., 2003; Williamson et al., 2019), with youth making intentional and calculated decisions about when and who to seek out for which topics and how to weigh discrepancies in advice they may have received across sources. Youths' confiding in both their primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative may be especially ideal in cases where youth see both adults as supportive and trustworthy (Griffith & Johnson, 2019; Tokić & Pećnik, 2011).

One instance in which non-parental adults appeared to fill a gap in parent-adolescent communication was with regard to the topic of family relationships. Almost all youth who

discussed family relationships reportedly did so exclusively with their non-parental adult relative. It is possible that youth may prefer to discuss family relationships (i.e., challenges experienced with their siblings and their parents) with non-parental adult relatives since these adults likely possess an insider perspective into the family's dynamics, yet they also may be distant enough from the conflict to provide a neutral, outsider perspective. For instance, youth may choose to discuss family conflicts with their non-parental adult relatives as doing so may allow youth the opportunity to process challenging parent-adolescent exchanges without the same concern of potential punishment that could arise from sharing similar frustrations with their primary caregivers. This finding is in line with prior work suggesting that non-parental adult relatives may be uniquely positioned to support youth as they navigate familial conflict (Billingsley et al., 2021).

One interesting finding that emerged from my analyses was that each of the youth who reportedly discussed peer and dating relationships exclusively with their non-parental adult relative did so when that adult was their sibling. It is possible that some youth may feel especially comfortable discussing dating and peer relationships with adult siblings given that youth may share affiliative bonds with their siblings that are similar to the bonds youth share with their same-aged peers. Compared to their same-aged peers, youth may benefit from disclosing to and seeking advice from their adult siblings as these adults would be able to provide guidance that is informed by lived experience and expertise (Sterrett et al., 2011). It is also possible that some youth may have seen adult siblings as the only option for confiding about peers and dating due to fear of embarrassment or punishment resulting from confiding in their primary caregivers or older adult relatives (e.g., grandparents; Grafsky et al., 2018; Teitleman et el., 2009; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). This pattern of findings contributes to our

understanding of the important role adult siblings may play in supporting their younger siblings during adolescence.

While findings from this study suggest that Black adolescents disclose to their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives about many topics, findings also suggest that a smaller number of youth may have a proclivity for keeping information to themselves and handling challenging situations on their own. For instance, some youth reported sharing less information with adults in their family network, as they did not feel that the adults would provide helpful advice, while other youth noted they preferred to make decisions for themselves without input from adults. While autonomy seeking behavior is a normative and healthy part of development during youths' transition into adulthood (Brown, 2004), complete self-reliance is likely disadvantageous to youths' well-being (Poulin et al., 2012; Smetana et al., 2009). Thus, interventions designed to promote adolescents' support seeking may consider helping youth recognize how they can utilize their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives for support and guidance in ways that would not undermine their developing sense of autonomy.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a few limitations of the current study worth noting. First, although some youth offered insight into their decision to disclose to or seek advice from their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives, this study was limited in that youth were not asked to explain why they would discuss a particular topic with one familial adult rather than the other. While I am able to speculate reasons for youths' decisions to confide in specific adults about particular topics (e.g., youth going to non-parental adult relatives to discuss family relationships given their insider/outsider perspective) based on the patterns that emerged across families, future work should examine the reasons motivating youths' decision to confide in specific adults by asking

youth this question directly. Understanding youths' reasons for sharing may shed light on effective ways to encourage disclosure and advice-seeking among youth less likely to confide. This may include intervening with familial adults to help them be more responsive to youths' needs (Rivens et al., 2021).

Secondly, participants were asked about youths' disclosures and advice-seeking broadly, rather than being asked directly about specific topics of discussion that occurred. It is possible that participants may have reported on discussions that occurred most frequently, rather than addressing each and every topic of disclosure and advice-seeking that occurred between youth and their familial adults. Relatedly, this study relied on participants' accurate recall of discussions. However, one strength of the study's design was the employment of triangulation by capturing data through different sources (i.e., youth, primary caregivers, and non-parental adult relatives; Patton, 2002), which helped facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of youths' disclosure and advice-seeking within the family. Nevertheless, future studies should inquire about specific experiences and employ prospective designs (e.g., daily diaries) to observe youths' sharing and support seeking behaviors as they occur over time.

Finally, the study's focus was limited to primary caregivers (88% mothers) and a non-parental adult relative (38% grandparents; 33% adult siblings) whom youth indicated feeling close. This approach did not permit analysis of youth disclosure to and advice-seeking from secondary caregivers or multiple non-parental adult relatives in youths' family network. It is possible, for instance, that my findings may not extend to all of youths' caregivers given prior suggestion that youths' confiding in their mothers differs from their confiding in fathers (Coakley et al., 2017; DiIorio et al., 2006). Future studies should seek to examine youth disclosure to and advice-seeking from all of adolescents' caregivers and non-parental adult

relatives who youth have frequent contact. Given that peers and adults outside of the family (e.g., teachers, coaches) also may serve as important sources for adolescents' confiding (Fehler-Cabral & Campbell, 2013; Wicklund & Coatsworth, 2020; Ungar et al., 2009), future research should examine youths' confiding to all important persons in their personal networks to better capture youths' complete webs of support (Varga & Zaff, 2018).

Conclusion

The current study seeks to advance the field's understanding of how Black youth utilize adults in their family network for informational and emotional support during adolescence. This study extends the literature on supportive intergenerational familial relationships by being one of the first to consider how dyadic youth-adult familial relationships function concurrently to support youths' needs. Findings from this study support existing theory (Varga & Zaff, 2018) suggesting that youth intentionally decide if and how they will engage with adults in their personal networks. Findings also are consistent with prior work suggesting the importance of familial adults in the lives of Black youth (Cross et al., 2018; Hurd et al., 2012; Hurd & Sellers, 2013). Moreover, this work expands our understanding of the centrality of primary caregivers in the lives of Black adolescents. Findings indicate that youth frequently go to their primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. Furthermore, findings suggest that non-parental adult relatives may fill an important role in the context of family issues as youth appeared to discuss family relationships almost exclusively with these adults. Based on these collective findings, interventions designed to promote adolescents' support seeking could work with youth to help them determine which adult(s) may be well positioned to address their specific support needs. My findings suggest that many youth already demonstrate sophisticated thinking and intentional

decision-making in this domain, indicating that youth with more experience in this domain could support their peers who may have less experience or feel less comfortable seeking out adults. Interventions could also work with primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives to ensure that these adults feel equipped to support youth when sought after and deploy suitable responses.

Table 1. Participant Pseudonyms and Characteristics

Youth	Youths' age	Youths' gender	Primary caregiver	Primary caregivers' position to youth	Non-parental adult relative	Non-parental adult relatives' position to youth
Adam	16	Boy	Abby	Mother	Erik	Adult brother
Amari	13	Boy	Anita	Mother	Sandra	Aunt
Ayesha	13	Girl	Tamela	Mother	Tamela	Aunt
Brandon	15	Boy	Teresa	Mother	Steven	Grandfather
Byron	14	Boy	Vanessa	Mother	Micah	Adult stepbrother
Cayla	12	Girl	Sonya	Mother	Deja	Adult sister
Charity	13	Girl	Tanisha	Mother	Elizabeth	Grandmother
DeAndre	11	Boy	Janee	Mother	Carmine	Grandmother
Demarkus	14	Boy	Valerie	Mother	Brianna	Adult cousin
Destiny	15	Girl	Rebekah	Mother	Lauren	Adult cousin
Jocelyn	13	Girl	Melissa	Mother	Karen	Aunt
Jordan	16	Boy	Solomon	Father	Olivia	Adult sister
Keisha	15	Girl	Caroline	Mother	Jackie	Aunt
Kendra	17	Girl	Phil	Father	Sam	Adult brother
Kiera	13	Girl	Michelle	Mother	David	Grandfather
Moriah	14	Girl	Grace	Mother	Yolanda	Adult sister
Naomi	14	Girl	Tameka	Mother	Clara	Grandmother
Nia	13	Girl	Bonita	Mother	Ida	Grandmother
Noah	14	Boy	Paul	Father	Abe	Grandfather
Raquan	15	Boy	Tracey	Mother	Janice	Grandmother
Shay	12	Girl	Shirley	Mother	Latoya	Adult sister
Thomas	14	Boy	Amanda	Mother	Gloria	Grandmother
Trey	14	Boy	Brytney	Mother	D'Angelou	Adult brother
Zachary	14	Boy	Tina	Mother	Linda	Aunt

Table 2. Youth Confiding to Primary Caregivers, Non-parental Adult Relatives, Both Adults, or Neither Adult

	Topics of Disclosure and Advice Seeking				
Youth	Activities and Interests	Schooling	Peer Relationships	Dating Relationships	Family Relationships
Adam	Both	Both	-	-	-
Amari	-	PC	-	PC	-
Ayesha	-	NPA	PC	-	-
Brandon	NPA	-	-	-	-
Byron	Both	Both	Both	Both	NPA
Cayla	PC	PC	Both	NPA	NPA
Charity	NPA	Both	-	-	NPA
DeAndre	Both	NPA	PC	PC	NPA
Demarkus	Both	NPA	Both	Both	NPA
Destiny	Both	Both	PC	PC	Both
Jocelyn	Both	Both	PC	-	NPA
Jordan	Both	-	PC	Both	-
Keisha	NPA	Both	PC	-	-
Kendra	Both	PC	Both	NPA	-
Kiera	NPA	PC	Both	-	NPA
Moriah	NPA	-	NPA	-	-
Naomi	Both	PC	PC	PC	NPA
Nia	PC	PC	Both	PC	NPA
Noah	Both	-	-	-	-
Raquan	-	Both	-	PC	NPA
Shay	PC	Both	Both	-	-
Thomas	Both	PC	PC	-	NPA
Trey	-	-	NPA	NPA	NPA
Zachary	Both	Both	-	PC	-
Total	20	19	18	14	13
Both	12 (60%)	9 (47%)	7 (39%)	4 (29%)	1 (8%)
PC	3 (15%)	7 (37%)	9 (50%)	7 (50%)	-
NPA	5 (25%)	3 (16%)	2 (11%)	3 (21%)	12 (92%)

Note. PC = Primary caregiver only; NPA = Non-parental adult relative only; Both = Primary caregiver and non-parental adult relative; “-” = Neither adult

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CONCLUDING LINKING DOCUMENT

Keller's advanced systemic model of mentoring (2005) suggests that youths' intergenerational relationships are embedded in the context of a larger network of mutually influential relationships. In this line, parental relationships may influence and be influenced by youths' relationships with close non-parental adult relatives. Relatedly, webs of support framework (Varga & Zaff, 2018) suggests that youth also may influence their intergenerational relationships by intentionally engaging or disengaging with adults in their personal network. However, consideration of multiple co-occurring family relationships and youth agency has largely been overlooked in the literature examining intergenerational familial relationships. Having a holistic understanding of the formation and function youths' intergenerational familial relationships may be particularly important among Black youth. This is because strong relational bonds with parents and supportive non-parental adult relatives may help Black youth achieve positive developmental outcomes in the face of adversity (Bynum & Kotchick, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Hurd et al., 2012; Wittrup et al., 2019).

Summary of Findings

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to examine how dynamic interactions between youths' primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives co-occurred to support Black adolescents' social development. This dissertation also considered youths' agency in their utilization of primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives for support. In my first dissertation study, I examined if and how primary caregivers' relationships with close adult relatives may have mattered for youths' own relationships with close non-parental adult relatives and, in turn, youths' possession of a familial mentoring relationship. This was one of the first studies to consider whether parental influence or the degree of closeness within familial bonds

would matter for the development of youths' familial mentoring relationships. Findings indicated that primary caregivers' relationships with adult relatives may have influenced their children's familial mentor formation through their children's relationships with close adult relatives, but only when these relational bonds were especially close. In examining how primary caregivers may have facilitated close relationships between their children and non-parental adult relatives, I found that primary caregivers modeled relational closeness and encouraged and permitted their children to spend time with non-parental adult relatives. By centering the role of primary caregivers, this study advanced a more complete understanding of familial factors that may shape youths' supportive relationships with close non-parental adult relatives.

Considering that youths' parental and mentoring relationships may be mutually influential (Keller, 2005), I then sought to examine if and how Black adolescents' mentors may have supported adolescents' relationships with their parents. In my second dissertation study, I examined whether familial mentors would improve adolescents' sense of connectedness to parents, especially among older adolescents, and how familial mentors may have supported the parent-child relationship across adolescence. Findings indicated that familial mentor support was consistently associated with youths' connectedness to parents across adolescence. Study findings also indicated that familial mentors intervened to support the parent-adolescent relationship in ways that also may have yielded similar effectiveness across adolescence. Though prior research had indicated youth-directed mentor support as a potentially important resource for the parent-adolescent relationship (Hurd et al., 2013; Rhodes et al., 2000), findings from this study demonstrated how mentoring relationships may have strengthened parent-child bonds through both youth- and parent-directed means. Findings from this study also helped to facilitate a more

comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how mentoring relationships may strengthen parent-child relationships during adolescence.

While I considered the roles of familial adults in promoting youths' supportive intergenerational familial relationships with my first two dissertation studies, I sought to center youths' agency in the support process with my third dissertation study. Specifically, I investigated how Black adolescents made decisions to disclose to or seek advice from their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives. Although prior work has considered adolescents' confiding in their parents and non-parental adult relatives separately, this was one of the first studies to consider youths' decision-making around confiding in multiple adults about a range of topics. Findings from this study indicated that youths' decision to confide in familial adults may have been topic dependent rather than based on a general dispositional preference among youth for whom they would share most of their concerns. Findings also indicated that youth appeared to go to their primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. However, youth and their families reported that youth went to their non-parental adult relatives almost exclusively when discussing family issues (e.g., parental and sibling conflict). In demonstrating youths' strategic approach to having their support needs met, this study advanced an understanding of primary caregivers' role as a confidant to Black youth during adolescence. Findings also revealed non-parental adult relatives' distinct role in supporting youth as they navigated family issues.

Directions for Future Research

Based on this body of work, I now outline directions for future research. While the current set of studies were drawn from a cross-sectional mixed method study, future research that

implements longitudinal designs will be better positioned to assess how these processes unfold and change over time. For instance, studies could follow youth over the middle and high school years to examine how youths' utilization of familial support sources change as youth transition through adolescence. Multiple data points would also allow researchers to establish temporal precedence when examining familial adults' influence on youths' social relationships. Additionally, studies could employ ecological momentary assessments, such as daily diary reports, to better observe supportive interactions as they occur in real time (rather than relying on participants' accurate recall of experiences from the past).

While my dissertation studies primarily focused on interactions among youth and familial adults with whom youth reported relatively close relational ties, future studies could be designed to capture greater variability in relational closeness among participating youth and their families. In addition to sampling youth who report close and supportive bonds with familial adults, future studies should seek to also include youth who do not report having close and supportive bonds with their primary caregivers or non-parental adult relatives. Examining family dynamics among youth who report greater variability in family support and relational closeness may further our understanding of potential facilitators and barriers to the development of supportive intergenerational relationships within Black families.

Rather than focusing on primary caregivers and one non-parental adult relative, future studies should also assess interactions between youth and all of the important persons in their support network. This may include familial adults (e.g., caregivers, non-parental adult relatives), non-familial adults (e.g., teacher, coaches), and youths' close peers. Studies could have youth report all of the persons who they confided in over a two-week period and name the topics that were discussed with each person. Follow up interviews could then ask youth to detail their

reasons for either confiding or not confiding in available supports. Additionally, future studies could collect quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources. For example, both youth and their close supports could complete measures on youths' support utilization and then complete subsequent interviews detailing their perceptions of supportive interactions. This approach would help ensure the accuracy and breadth of information in the study's findings.

Conclusion

With this set of dissertation studies, I sought to build the field's understanding of how Black youths' parental relationships may have influenced and been influenced by Black youths' relationships with close non-parental adult relatives. I also sought to examine how Black adolescents made decisions to disclose to or seek advice from their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives. This is a departure from much of the research on adolescents' supportive relationships which has often siloed scholarship on youths' parental and non-parental adult relationships. Findings from this dissertation indicate that primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives helped strengthen each other's bonds with adolescents and that youth often mobilized both adults when seeking support for issues they faced. These findings demonstrate how multiple co-occurring family relationships in combination with youth agency may have contributed to Black adolescents' close and supportive relationships with familial adults.

Though their relationships with youth were interrelated, primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives uniquely contributed to Black adolescents' social development. For instance, this dissertation indicated that Black adolescents frequently went to their primary caregivers either exclusively or in conjunction with their non-parental adult relatives across most domains of disclosure and advice-seeking. This finding not only suggests the centrality of primary caregivers in the lives of Black adolescents, but also challenges assumptions of minimal

parental involvement during adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009; Gould & Mazzeo, 1982). Further, prior research examining youths' natural mentoring relationships has largely overlooked the role of parental influence in shaping these relationships. However, findings from this dissertation demonstrated how primary caregivers intentionally sought opportunities to bolster relationships between their children and non-parental adult relatives as a way of supporting their children's development. Dissemination of this information may motivate parents to create space for their children to spend time with close non-parental adult relatives in an effort to increase opportunities for youth to develop supportive intergenerational relationships.

Relatedly, findings across my dissertation studies indicate that non-parental adult relatives may be uniquely positioned to help youth and primary caregivers navigate challenges experienced in their family relationships. Youth and their families reported that youth discussed family relationships almost exclusively with their non-parental adult relatives (rather than with their primary caregivers). Families also shared how non-parental adult relatives helped youth and primary caregivers calibrate their reactions and find ways to effectively communicate when they were upset with one another. Based on these findings, interventions designed to strengthen parent-adolescent bonds could include non-parental relatives in a mediating role to help parents and youth talk through their disagreements and understand one another's point of view.

Furthermore, youth autonomy and decision making had not been heavily centered in research examining supportive intergenerational relationships. However, findings from this dissertation indicate that youth initiated engagement with their non-parental adult relatives and intentionally decided if and how they engaged their primary caregivers and non-parental adult relatives for disclosures and advice-seeking. Future research should continue examining adolescent development through a lens of youth agency as such exploration provides valuable

insight into how youth experience adults in their personal networks. In line with this finding, interventions designed to promote youths’ social development could work to enhance youth agency by providing youth strategies for initiating contact with close adults in their lives. Youth who have already demonstrated expertise in this area could be leveraged to support their less experienced peers. Such scaffolding could help youth feel prepared to seek out adults for support when needed.

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Appendix

Measure: Mentor Social Support (Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors; Barrera et al., 1981)

Instructions: In the past 30 days, how often has [familial mentor]…

Scale:
1 = Not at all
2 = Once or twice
3 = About once a week
4 = Several times a week
5 = Every day or almost every day

Appraisal support subscale:
Let you know that you did something well
Talked with you about some interests of yours
Given you a compliment
Given you feedback on something you were working on

Emotional support subscale:
Showed that they cared about you
Told you that they would keep things that you talk about private – just between the two of you
Let you know that they will always be around if you need anything
Listened to you talk about your private feelings

Informational support subscale:
Taught you or given you some information on how to do something
Suggested some action that you should take
Told you who could help you with a problem you were having
Given you some information to help you understand a situation you were in

Measure: Connectedness to Parents (Family connection subscale of Five C's of PYD; Lerner 2005)

Instructions: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parents or people who are raising you?

Scale:
1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

I get along with them
They give me help and support when I need it
They often tell me they love me
I have lots of good conversations with them
In my family I feel useful and important

Youth Interview Protocol [PC = parent; NPA = non-parental adult relative]

1. Can you tell me more about who the people are and what is going on in the picture?
2. What's your family like?
    - Probe: Can you tell me more about them?
    - What's something you did with your family recently?
3. Some families spend a lot of time together and some families spend a little time together. How would you describe your family?
    - Prompt: Would you describe your family as close-knit or not so much?
4. When your family gets together, what does that look like?
    - Probe: For example, who is usually there and what types of things do you do together?
    - Prompt if they only talk about immediate family: Do you spend time with any other family members regularly? What does it look like when all of you get together?
    - Do the adults spend a lot of time with the kids or do the adults kind of do their own thing while the kids do their own thing?
5. Do family members usually get along with each other or do people disagree, argue, or fight with each other?
    - Probe: Can you tell me more about that?
6. Can you tell me more about your relationship with (insert PC's name)?
    - What kinds of things do you do together?
    - Prompt: Even if we get along really well with our [PC] most of the time, there can be times where it's hard to get along. Is that true for you and PC?
    - Probe: How so?
    - Would you say that the two of you are close?
    - Probe: What does that mean to you? OR What makes you say that?
    - Is (insert PCs name) generally there for you when you need them?
    - Can you give me some examples of times when they have been there for you?
7. What kinds of things do you talk about with (insert PC's name)?
    - What's a recent conversation you had with (insert PC's name)?
    - Probe: Can you tell me more about it?
    - Do you ever go to (insert PC's name) when you have a problem or need
    - advice?
    - Why not
8. Can you tell me about the last time (or a recent time you remember) when you asked (insert PC's name) for advice?
    - What did you want advice about and how did it go?
    - What was the advice?
    - Was it good advice?
    - Did you take it?
9. Are there things you would you not want to talk to (insert PC's name) about?
10. How are you related to [NPA]?
    - As far as you can remember, have they been a part of your life since you were little?
    - Is your relationship any different now compared to when you were younger?]
    - About how often do you see them?

11. What is [NPA] like?
    - Would you say that you and (NPA) have a lot in common or not so much?
12. Can you tell me more about your relationship with them?
    - Do the two of you ever hang out?
    - Prompt: What types of things do you do together?
    - Would you say you two get along?
    - Probe: What makes you say that?
    - On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being not close at all and 10 being extremely close, how close would you say you feel to them? Why do you say this?
    - Prompt: Do you feel like you are closer to them than to other members of your family?
    - Is it ever hard to get along with them?
    - Probe: What makes you say that?]
    - Are they usually there for you when you need them? Can you give me some examples?
13. What kinds of things do you talk about with (NPA)?
    - What's a recent conversation you had with (NPA)?
    - Does (Adult's name) ever tell you things about their personal life?
    - Prompt: What kinds of things have they shared with you?
    - Are there things you would not want to talk to (Adult's name) about? [If YES ask: Like what?]

<u>No mentor participants (14 -15)</u>

14. When you did the survey on the iPad, you put down that you don't go to any adults other than your parents for advice or help with a problem you may be having. Can you tell me more why you wouldn't go to (NPA) for advice or help with a problem?
    - In the past did you try to go to them for something?
    - Probe: If so, how did that go?
15. Sometimes relationships with adults make a difference in our lives and sometimes they don't. Do you think your relationship with (NPA) has had any influence on you?
    - [IF NO], why not?
    - [IF YES], in what ways has the relationship influenced you?

<u>Mentor participants (16 - 20)</u>

16. Can you tell me more why you go to (NPA) for advice or help with a problem?
17. Tell me about the last time you asked (NPA) for advice. What did you want advice about and how did it go?
    - What was the advice?
    - Was it good advice?
    - Did you take it?
18. What kinds of problems, if any, would you talk about with (NPA)?
    - What kinds of problems, if any, would you not want to talk to them about?
19. Can you remember the first time you ever went to (NPA) for advice or to talk about a problem you were having or decision you were trying to make?
    - Prompt: How old were you at that time?
    - Probe: Can you tell me more about it?

    a) What made you decide to go to them in that situation?
20. Do you think your relationship with (NPA) has had any influence on you?
    - [IF NO], why not?

- [IF YES], in what ways has the relationship influenced you?

Now I'd like to switch to ask you some questions about important events in your life over the past couple of years

21. Tell me about this hard time.
    - What did you do to get through it?
    - Did you talk to anyone about it?
    - [IF NO], why not?
22. [IF YES to question 21b ask], Who did you talk to?
    - What did they say?
    - Did you feel better after you talked to them? Why or why not?
    - Did you talk to anyone else?
23. Can you tell me about this high that you wrote?
    - Did you to talk to anyone about it?
    - Who did you talk to?

Parent Interview Protocol [NPA = non-parental adult relative]

1. Tell me about (child's name).
2. Would you describe them as easy to get along with?
   - How do they get along with their teachers at school?
   - Has it always been this way?
3. Are they more comfortable around teenagers (people their own age), younger kids, or adults, or equally comfortable around anyone (no matter the age)?
   - Have they always been this way?
4. Tell me about your relationship with (child's name).
   - Are there things you do together?
   - Tell me about a recent conversation you had with (child's name)
   - Some parents let their kids make lots of decisions about where they go, how they spend their time, and who they hang out with, but other parents want to make these decisions for or with the child. Tell me about how you handle this with (child's name).
   - Some parents want to know what their kids are doing at all times and others don't feel like they need to know what their kids are doing all the time. Tell me about what it's like for you and (child's name).
5. Some teens are really open with their parents and some teens are not, how would you describe your relationship?
   - Has your relationship with (child's name) always been this way?
   - Does (child's name) come to you for advice?
   - Probe: Tell me more about a recent time – what did you talk about?
   - Are there things you think (child's name) would not want to talk about with you? Tell me more about that.
6. Are there other adults (child's name) goes to talk about problems they may be having?
   - Probe: Who else?
   - Probe: Anyone else?
   - Probe: Ask about each: what types of problems does (child's name) go to them for?
7. How do you think (child's name) feels about adults, in general?
   - Do you think they trust most adults?
   - Do they think adults are helpful or not so much?
   - Why do you think this is?
8. Some teens seem like they have a lot of adults who support them and other teens have fewer adults who support them. How would you describe (child's name)?
   - Has it always been like this or did things change over time?
9. Sometimes a really positive or a really negative relationship with an adult can change how teens feel toward most adults; can you think of any really positive or really negative experiences your child may have had like that?
   - Probe: For example, an adult who goes out of their way to do something kind or show a special interest in them or an adult who hurt or let them down like it could be someone in the family, a teacher, or another adult they know?
   - Can you tell me more about that?

10. Some parents believe it takes a village to raise a child and some parents want to be the only ones involved in raising their child. Tell me how you feel about this and if you have other adults who play an important role in (child's name)'s life.
11. When (child's name) starts spending time with an adult, what kinds of things do you want to know to feel comfortable with them spending time together?

- Does it matter to you if they are family or does them being related to your child not matter as much?

12. When making decisions about how your child spends their time after-school or on the weekend, what types of things do you think about?

- Do you feel like you have a lot of options of things for your child to do when they are not at school?

13. Have you ever encouraged (child's name) to spend time with another adult? [
[If YES] Tell me about a time when that happened.

- Probe: Is that someone in your family?
- Why did you recommend that specific adult?
- [If they didn't mention the NPA, ask what about (adult's name)? Have you encouraged (child) to spend time with the NPA]

14. Have you ever discouraged (child's name) from spending time with another adult?

- [If YES] Tell me about a time when that happened.
- Why did you discourage them?
- Have you discouraged (child) to spend time with the NPA?

15. Have you ever encouraged any adults to spend time with your child? [If yes, say,] Tell me about a time when that happened.

- Probe: Who were the adult(s)? Someone from your family, school, coach?
- What made you ask that specific adult?
- Do you have any other adult/s you've asked?

16. Tell me about (NPA).

- Tell me more about your relationship with (NPA)?
- On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being not close at all and 10 being extremely close, how close would you say you feel to them? Why do you say this?
- Prompt: Do you feel like you are closer to them than to other members of your family?
- How would you describe the level of trust between you and (adult's name)? What types of things do you trust them for?
- How often would you say that the two of you disagree about stuff or argue?
- Probe: Can you tell me more about a recent disagreement/argument?

17. Are there ways that (NPA) helps you?

- Have you ever had conversations with [adult's name] about your child that you found helpful in how you raise them?
- Probe: [If YES], can you give me an example of a conversation?
- [If NO], have you ever had conversations with any other adults in your family about your child that you found helpful in how you raise them?
- Probe: [If YES], can you give me an example of a conversation?
- Thinking about all of the ways (adult's name) supports you, is there one way that has been most meaningful to you? Can you tell me why?

18. How do you feel about (child's name) spending time with (NPA)?

- What types of things, if any, do you think your child gets out of spending time with (NPA)?

19. Some families spend a lot of time together and some families spend a little time together. How would you describe your family?

- Prompt: Would you describe your family as close-knit or not so much?
- When your family gets together, what does that look like?
- Probe: For example, who is usually there and what types of things do you do together?

20. Do family members usually get along with each other or do people disagree, argue, or fight with each other?

- Probe: Can you tell me more about that?

21. In your family, do the adults spend a lot of time with the kids or do the adults kind of do their own thing while the kids do their own thing?

Non-parental Adult Interview Protocol [PC = parent]

1. Can you start by telling me more about (child's name)?
2. How are you related to them?
   - As far as you can remember, have you been a part of their life since they were little?
   - [IF NO] Prompt: When did you start to become part of their life?
   - About how often do you see them?
3. Can you tell me more about your relationship with them?
   - Do the two of you ever hang out?
   - Probe: What types of things do you do together?
   - Would you say you two get along?
   - Probe: Tell me more about what makes you say that.
   - Is it hard to get along with them sometimes?
   - Probe: What makes you say that?
   - Would you say that the two of you are close?
   - Probe: What makes you say that?
4. What kinds of things do you talk about with (Teen's name)?
   - What's a recent conversation you had with (Teen's name)?
   - Do you tell (Teen's name) things about your personal life?
   - [IF YES] Prompt: What kinds of things do you share?
   - Are there some things you wouldn't want to tell (Teen's name) about?

<u>NPAs who are not mentors (5a – 7b)</u>

5a. Do you think (Teen's name) would go to you for advice or help with a problem?
   - Probe: Why or why not?
   - Do you think they have other people who they could talk to instead? Prompt: Who do you think they might go to?
   - In the past have they ever tried to come to you for something (like with a problem or asking for advice)?
   - Prompt: If so, how did that go?

6a. Was there ever a time when you suspected (Teen's name) needed support or help from an adult but didn't seek it out?
   - Prompt: What did you think they might have needed help with?
   - What do you think got in the way?
   - Do you think there is anything you or another adult could have done to make it easier to provide help or support to them in that situation?

7a. Are there any (other) teens in your family or outside your family who seek you out for support or advice?
   - Tell me about the last time a teen came to you for advice.
   - Probe: What did they want advice about and how did it go?
   - What was the advice you gave them?
   - Do you think they took your advice?

<u>NPAs who are mentors (5 – 7)</u>

5b. (Teen's name) indicated that you are a person who they can go to for advice or support with a problem or difficult decision. Why do you think that is?

- Do you do anything on purpose to make it easier for (Teen's name) to come to you for support or advice?

6b. Tell me about the last time (Teen's name) came to you for support or advice.
Prompt: What did they want to talk about and how did it go?

- Did they ask you for advice?
- [IF YES], did you give it to them and what was the advice you gave them?
- Do you think they took your advice (for example, if you told them to do something, did they do it)?

7b. Can you remember the first time (Teen's name) ever came to you for advice about something important or to talk about a problem they were having or decision they were trying to make?

- How old were they at the time?
- Can you tell me more about it?
- Why do you think they came to you in that situation?

8. Do you think your relationship with (Teen's name) has had any influence on them?

- [IF NO], why not?
- [IF YES], in what ways do you think the relationship has influenced them?

9. Has your relationship with (Teen's name) had any influence on you?

- [IF NO], why not?
- [IF YES], in what ways has the relationship influenced you?

10. Tell me about (child's PC).

- Tell me more about your relationship with (child's PC).
- On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being not close at all and 10 being extremely close, how close would you say you feel to them? Why do you say this?
- Prompt: Do you feel like you are closer to them than to other members of your family?
- How would you describe the level of trust between you and (child's PC)? What types of things do you trust them for?
- How often would you say that the two of you disagree about stuff or argue?
- Probe: Can you tell me more about a recent disagreement/argument?

11. Have you ever done anything to help (child's PC) with their responsibilities as a parent?

- Prompt: For example, have you ever talked to them about how they are raising (child's name)? Or have you ever supported them by helping out financially, watching their child, giving their child a ride or any other ways?
- [If YES] Can you tell me more about a time when you did that?

12. Some families spend a lot of time together and some families spend a little time together. How would you describe your family?

- Prompt: Would you describe your family as close-knit or not so much?
- When your family gets together, what does that look like?
- Probe: For example, who is usually there and what types of things do you do together?
- Do family members usually get along with each other or do people disagree, argue, or fight with each other?
- Probe: Can you tell me more about that?

13. In your family do the adults spend a lot of time with the kids or do the adults kind of do their own thing while the kids do their own thing?

14. Do you generally like (or feel positively toward) most of the young people in your family?

- What about teenagers more generally?

- Would you say you have pretty close relationships with any other teenagers in your family? Outside of your family?
- [IF YES], why do you think that is?
- Do you seek out the relationships or do they seek you out or a little bit of both?

15. When you were younger what kinds of relationships did you have with adults?
    - Were they mostly positive or negative or a mix of both?
    - Did you go to adults for support or advice?
16. Do you have any older adults like that in your life now?