

# GENDER, ETHNICITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND RISK: MENTORING AND THE CONSIDERATION OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

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*Individual differences shape the needs and characteristics of protégés, the processes through which mentoring may influence protégés' developmental trajectories, and the social networks into which the mentors enter. The literature on the influences of gender, ethnicity, and age on mentoring is reviewed and discussed as examples of how mentoring programs may have different influences on, and outcomes for, specific groups of youth. A focus on individual differences will help facilitate the development of mentoring programs that create a close fit between the needs of protégés and the services offered by the programs, as well as greater insight into what are the key elements of program effectiveness. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

At its core, the mentoring movement tries to foster relationships that promote positive developmental trajectories in protégés and, potentially, in mentors as well. Mentoring relationships are shaped by the unique qualities each partner contributes to the dyad.

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Recollections of mentoring experiences reveal their idiosyncratic nature—one protégé talking about how mentoring fostered her interest in dance, another how it sparked an interest in school, and another how it helped her end drug use and a series of bad relationships (Rhodes, 2002). These differences make sense, in that mentoring relationships grow out of the different needs of the individuals involved and the resources and opportunities available to them. In order for the matches made by formal mentoring programs to succeed, they need to increase the likelihood that this idiosyncratic melding of needs and resources will occur. To do so, they need to specify the needs or goals to be met and understand the processes through which the program and the relationship will work. This article focuses on three areas of individual difference that have implications for the design and implementation of programs: (1) gender; (2) race, ethnicity, and culture; and (3) development.

Understanding the individual characteristics of the population to be served is central to understanding both needs and processes. First, different populations (e.g., older and younger youth, male and female, and different ethnic communities) may vary in their normative needs and characteristics. Second, the protégés whom mentoring programs hope to serve are active agents in the mentoring process, and their individual characteristics shape their relationships with mentors. Third, protégés, as active agents, add the mentoring relationship to an already existing social network and social setting.

This article is structured in three sections. First, we outline the conceptual and theoretical issues relevant to an examination of individual differences. Second, we review research related to each of the three areas of individual difference. Finally, we offer conclusions and future directions for programs and research.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEORY

Optometry provides a useful analogy for thinking about the role of individual differences in the design and success of mentoring programs. Corrective lenses are an effective intervention aimed at improving vision that is based on an understanding of the processes underlying healthy vision: The lens of the eye focuses light on its back surface, which stimulates cells in ways that are interpreted by the brain as visual images. The most common reason for a poorly functioning visual system is that the focal length of the eye is incorrect—light is focused either in front of or behind the back surface of the eye. Corrective lenses change this focal distance.

There are several key points to this analogy. First, the intervention is based upon a clear understanding of how visual processes operate in a healthy system. Similarly, we argue that mentoring programs should be based on an understanding of healthy human development so that, as corrective lenses do, a mentoring intervention can help to facilitate the individual's development toward that state. Second, corrective lenses work best when they are fitted correctly. At their best, corrective lenses not matched to the needs of the individual provide some benefit but do not restore the visual system to normal functioning. At their worst, the wrong glasses make vision even fuzzier and can cause unintended negative consequences. It is possible that some of the weak and mixed findings in the mentoring literature (e.g., DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002) are caused by a lack of fit between the needs of protégés and program characteristics. Finally, corrective lenses only improve vision if there is a problem in the visual system. Similarly, the benefits of mentoring for youth who are already well functioning may be difficult to assess. Overall, understanding how gender, ethnicity, and development might influence

mentoring relationships will help researchers and practitioners develop mentoring programs that best meet the needs of youth.

### **Gender**

The social identities of boys and girls are different, and it is likely that these differences affect their experiences with mentoring. For example, girls may be more closely connected with family during adolescence, especially in more intimate, interpersonal matters (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996), and girls' relationships are more likely than boys' to be characterized by emotional closeness (Buhrmester, 1990; Clark & Ayers, 1993). Personal relationships take a more central role in the lives of girls (Chodorow, 1987; Jack, 1991; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991), and good-quality relationships are more likely to influence girls' than boys' psychosocial outcomes (Berndt & Keefe, 1995), including depression (e.g., Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Jack, 1991). Boys and girls also seek out friends and parents differently for support in solving interpersonal and other problems (Sullivan, Marshall, & Schonert-Reichl, 2002). Although there is no gender difference in instrumental or problem-solving support seeking when under stress, girls are more likely than boys to seek emotional support (Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998). Thus girls' natural social networks are more likely to be characterized by close emotional relationships, which they are more likely to draw on in times of need and which affect them more strongly than boys.

Bogat and Liang (2005) draw several implications for mentoring that may result from these differences in the social identities of boys and girls. First, girls and boys may need different types of mentoring relationships. For example, because of the high value that adolescent girls place on intimacy and connection, a close, warm mentoring relationship may be better received and more helpful. Second, the help-seeking literature suggests the importance of emotional support when girls are under stress. Many mentoring programs are directed at high-risk children and youth, and that emphasis may be an important factor in the success of the mentoring. Third, Rhodes (2002) suggested that a key mediator between mentoring and successful outcomes is "meaningful conversation." For boys, who tend not to engage in direct forms of help seeking (e.g., Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994), mentoring interventions that are more verbally based may not be as useful or helpful.

### **Race, Culture, and Ethnicity**

As does gender, differences in race, culture, and ethnicity are associated with differences in the composition and functioning of social networks. For example, in a study of natural mentors, black females reported more ties to significant adults than did white females or black or white males (Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002). In order to understand how mentoring programs work in different ethnic and racial contexts, we need to specify clearly why ethnicity matters (Betancourt & López, 1993).

Four critical factors in understanding racial and ethnic differences in mentoring processes are (1) the salience of ethnicity, (2) the difference between racial and ethnic identity, (3) the meaning of ethnicity within cultural context, and (4) culture. *Ethnic identity* refers to feelings toward, and a sense of belonging to, an ethnic group and tends to be more salient among minority youth than those in the dominant group (Phinney,

Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Ethnic identity may influence both the choice of natural mentor and the meaning of interactions within the relationship. Paying attention to the processes underlying ethnic differences focuses us on the difference between race and ethnicity. For example, mentors and protégés might share the same race (e.g., white) but have different ethnicities (Russian vs. American). It is plausible that a new Russian immigrant's ethnic identity might be very salient to him and a fourth-generation Chinese American youth's ethnic identity not be. The ethnic identity of individuals classified as black could be African American, Haitian, Dominican, Portuguese, or Kenyan. Failure to specify ethnic identity appropriately leads to poor model fit when trying to understand ethnic differences in program process or effectiveness.

The meaning of race and ethnicity is deeply embedded within a particular historical and cultural context. U.S. culture, which has a legacy of discrimination against, and prejudice toward, persons of color, provides an important context for mentoring relationships. Claude Steele (1997) identified stereotype threat and cultural mistrust as important influences on relationships between blacks and whites. For example, in an experimental study, black college students who received suggestions and were told of perceived weaknesses by a white evaluator rated the evaluator as more biased and were less motivated to revise their work than their white counterparts. The black participants might have thought that they were judged on the basis of race rather than merit. However, the difference in perception and motivation between white and black students disappeared when students were also informed that high standards were being used and were assured that the mentor believed they could meet those standards (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999).

Differences in values can have profound effects on the fit of protégés, mentoring programs, and particular cultural contexts. One of the most common distinctions made is that between collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is a worldview that underscores the needs, objectives, and perspectives of the in-group over those of the individual (Marin & Marin, 1991) and is relatively more common among Asian, Latino, and African American than among European American youth in the United States. Most mentoring programs focus on the one-on-one relationship between a child and a nonparent adult, ignoring the relationship between child and parent or other important adults. However, for those who value collectivism, the in-group is more important than a single individual.

There are several implications of race, ethnicity, and culture for mentoring. First, because youth differ in the perceived salience of their ethnic/racial identities, they may have different experiences with mentors from the same or different ethnic backgrounds. For example, it is likely that ethnicity will be less salient in pairings of native-born white youths and mentors than among pairings of white mentors with nonwhite protégés. One study found that black female adolescents whose racial identity was important to them named black role models more frequently than those who placed less importance on their racial identities (Jackson, Kite, & Branscombe, 1996, as cited in Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, & Williams, 1999).

Second, it is possible that youth and families who value collectivism are better served by mentoring programs that foster relationships of the child and numerous adults, the mentor and the child within the family, or between the mentor and the family as a whole. Third, cultural mistrust may negatively affect mentoring relationships, especially in their early stages, when group stereotypes are more prevalent. Because of cultural mistrust, minority youth in academic contexts may be less likely to seek out white mentors. African American college students rated African American mentors as more culturally competent than European American mentors, but this effect was greatest among students who

had a high level of cultural mistrust (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997). Cultural mistrust also may influence the interpretation of feedback provided by mentors.

### *Mentoring and Development*

A generation ago, developmental psychologists focused much of their attention on age-related trends and normative shifts in children's abilities (e.g., perceptual, motor, language, and reasoning skills), often making reference to developmental milestones, age-specific tasks, and qualitatively distinct stages. Less attention was given to understanding individual differences in developmental pathways, especially those of children who did not meet normative expectations. Theories of socialization tended to overemphasize parental influence, underestimate forces outside the family, and lack appreciation for the fact that children shape substantially their environmental experiences. Today, developmental science is characterized by a sophisticated array of investigative tools (e.g., person-oriented approaches; see von Eye & Bergman, 2003) and a large body of knowledge about factors that contribute to individual differences in human development (e.g., Bergman, Cairns, Nilsson, & Nystedt, 2000). Theories of atypical or disrupted development and person-centered analyses are seen as useful means for gaining knowledge of individual differences in developmental processes; models of socialization treat reciprocal influences and extrafamilial factors as a given; and long-term, multilevel designs are the standard for investigators who seek to explain developmental continuity and discontinuity. Thus, researchers who rely on current theory, methods, and findings from developmental psychology are better able to gauge the role of mentors in the lives of children and adolescents. Indeed, recent estimates that youth mentoring programs yield modest effect sizes (DuBois et al., 2002) are not surprising in light of what is known today about continuity and discontinuity in development, especially among individuals exposed to chronic and multiple risks (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Cicchetti & Hinshaw, 2002; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

At least four differences must be recognized by programs that are focused on individuals of different ages: (1) relationship content, (2) the protégé's ability to shape the relationship, (3) the generalizability of mentoring experiences, and (4) youth vulnerability. We take normative cognitive change as a focal example. Language is a fundamental aspect of mentor-protégé relationships that influences how mentors communicate with and what they know about protégés. For example, most of what mentors learn from younger protégés is gleaned from snatches of conversation or inferred from behavioral patterns. In contrast, adolescents tend to discuss a wide range of topics with their mentors (DuBois & Neville, 1997), allowing mentors to enter their lives more easily. The implication of these cognitive changes is that, in childhood, the verbal give and take that characterizes adolescent-adult interactions will have to be supplanted by activities such as sports, games, and arts and crafts.

Just as the cognitive transitions between childhood and adolescence have implications for mentoring programs, so, too, do contextual transitions. As youth move from childhood to adolescence, they experience normative changes in family, school, and peer contexts. Parent-child relationships change markedly (Larson et al., 1996), with a striking shift in the amount of time spent without adult supervision. At the same time, youth face increased exposure to peers involved in potentially problematic behaviors, such as drinking and sexual experimentation. The move from elementary to middle school is often accompanied by increased distance between teachers and students, increased

emphasis on social comparison and performance expectations, and decreased opportunities for creativity and abstract thinking within the classroom environment (Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996). This lack of fit between the developmental needs and capabilities of early adolescents and schools tends to result in increased alienation and decreased academic performance and school commitment, especially for girls, who change schools at the same time they are going through puberty and are becoming involved in cross-sex relationships (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). On a positive note, middle schools tend to offer a greater variety of extracurricular activities, and thus more opportunities to form closer relationships with school personnel outside the confines of a classroom. Darling (2005) suggests that the implication of these contextual, developmental changes is that programs directed toward middle and late adolescence may benefit more from a focus on instrumental goals.

In the context of theory and conceptualizations involving gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and development, we now review the literature on mentoring that explicates these individual differences.

## RESEARCH

### *Gender*

Few studies have evaluated gender differences in mentoring. There is some indication, however, that girls and boys have different experiences in these programs. In an evaluation of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS), which makes only same-sex matches, termination of the match was more likely among girls than among boys (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). An early evaluation of Big Sisters (Seidl, 1982) found that 36% of the matches did not last a year. Among matches that last, boys' mentors also appear to be more important to them. In a 1-year study of BB/BS using repeated measures of outcomes, DuBois, Neville, Parra, and Pugh-Lilly (2002) found that boys were markedly more likely than girls to fall within the category of youth who nominated Big Brothers as significant adults in their lives at both time points (73.3% vs. 26.7%, respectively). Sixty-seven percent of girls did *not* nominate a program mentor as a significant adult at either time point, compared to only 33% of boys. Despite these indicators that boys and girls have different experiences in mentoring programs, a recent metaanalysis found that protégé gender was unrelated to program effectiveness (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). Can an understanding of process help us reconcile these findings?

Earlier research distinguished two types of mentoring relationships: instrumental and psychosocial (Flaxman, Ascher, & Harrington, 1988). Instrumental mentoring is problem focused and tends to help individuals reach particular goals. Psychosocial mentoring is process oriented and focuses on modifying the personal qualities of the protégé. In the corporate mentoring literature, there is some indication that female mentees tend to seek psychosocial support from mentors, and males are more likely to seek instrumental support (Gilbert, 1985; Ragins, 1989). Interestingly, however, some studies found no difference in the types of support that men and women actually receive (see O'Neill, Horton, & Crosby, 1999, for a review), whereas other studies found that female-female mentoring relationships offer a greater level of friendship, counseling, personal support, and sponsorship than other gender combinations (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000).

The few studies of these processes in the youth mentoring literature support the findings of Sosik and Godshalk (2000). Liang, Tracy, Taylor, and Williams (2002) found that

empathy, authenticity, and other relationship qualities in mentoring relationships between faculty and female college students predicted both higher self-esteem and less loneliness of the students. Sullivan (1996) suggests good relationships between girls and their female mentors were characterized by intimacy and closeness. Rhodes (2002) noted that girls want mentors who talk with them (psychosocial), whereas boys want mentors who engage in activities with them (instrumental). Thus, when mentoring programs focus on instrumental mentoring, males may derive more benefit than females. When mentoring programs focus on psychosocial mentoring, females might benefit more.

An alternative prediction could be derived from an examination of the match between protégé needs and mentoring programs. Females' social networks tend to be characterized by greater availability of psychosocial support than males' social networks. One way of conceptualizing formal mentoring is that it provides access to relationships that are unavailable in protégés' naturally occurring social networks. If girls already have adequate sources of social support in their existing networks, they may feel little need for the additional support offered by a mentor, and, therefore, let the relationship falter or value it less than do boys (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1993). Unfortunately, no research examining the fit between the functioning of protégés' existing social networks and the functional roles of mentors has been carried out to date (Darling, Hamilton, Toyakawa, & Matsuda, 2002).

Alternatively, it may be that even though boys and girls benefit equally from existing mentoring programs, selection factors make it more likely that mentoring relationships are more successful with boys. Girls are often referred because of problems in their relationships with their mothers, but boys are typically referred because of their need for a male role model (Rhodes, 2002). It is possible that troubled relationships with mothers make establishing mentoring relationships more challenging (e.g., because of insecure attachment). More concretely, mothers are important in making appointments, providing transportation, and supporting the formation of mentoring relationships. Because logistics can be a barrier to the maintenance of mentoring relationships, absence of strong maternal support may differentially affect the success of relationships in which maternal involvement has been an issue.

Relatedly, particular life circumstances may affect the social network or relational needs of the developing boy or girl. For example, Hetherington (1999) found that girls often have closer, more supportive relationships than do boys with their divorced mothers. However, when divorced mothers remarry, girls struggle more than boys in accepting this new person into their lives, perhaps viewing a stepfather as an intruder upon the previously close mother–daughter relationship. These situational factors might have implications for both girls' and boys' receptivity to mentors.

These alternative hypotheses are each plausible. In order to reconcile the contradictory findings in the extant literature and, more importantly, to improve the fit between the needs of males and females and the services provided by mentoring programs, more process-focused research is needed. This research will not be without challenges. In particular, given that mentor relationships may not just be different but have different meaning for males and females, it is incumbent upon researchers to assess whether the variables are actually assessing the same constructs (see von Eye & Bergman, 2003, for a discussion of dimensional identity).

Extant research cannot differentiate whether the findings reported here are caused by youth gender, mentor gender, or some combination of both. Because few programs match male mentors with female protégés, balanced research designs that cross gender of mentor with gender of protégé are not likely to be conducted. Bogat and Liang (2005)

suggest turning to the natural mentoring literature to answer these questions. And, finally, findings by Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, and Lee (2002) indicate the importance of race, as well as gender, in understanding the effectiveness of particular combinations of mentor–protégé matches.

### ***Race, Ethnicity, and Culture***

Most naturally occurring mentor–protégé pairs are of the same race/ethnicity (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Cavell, Meehan, Heffer, & Holladay, 2002; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Rhodes, Contreras, & Manglesdorf, 1994; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992; Sánchez & Reyes, 1999). One factor contributing to this phenomenon is that youth are typically in environments in which adults tend to have the same racial/ethnic background they have. Are mentor–protégé matches more successful when they are ethnically homogeneous? All studies attempting to answer this question compare white mentors paired with ethnic minority youth to matched pairs who share ethnicity (e.g., Ensher & Murphy, 1997, Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2002), implying a complex set of underlying processes that might include identification, shared cultural background, perceived similarity, or cultural mistrust.

The findings from these studies are mixed, but would be difficult to interpret in any case, because the specific underlying processes are rarely specified or measured. One exception is a study by Ensher and Murphy (1997). High school students paired with adult mentors who differed in ethnicity from them were more satisfied with the relationship and more likely to continue the relationship after the program ended if they perceived themselves to be similar on other dimensions to their mentors. Research on processes such as these is needed if we are to understand how mentoring relationships might be successful regardless of ethnic composition. What might these other processes be?

Natural mentoring processes reveal both similarities and differences across cultural contexts (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; Claes, Lacourse, Bouchard, & Luckow, 2001; Darling et al., 2002). For example, compared to adolescents in the United States, Japanese adolescents were more likely to describe adults and relatives as mentors than as peers (Darling et al., 2002), but Japanese youth were less likely to name their parents (especially mothers) as mentors and less likely to describe their relationships with mentors as fun and supportive. Chinese adolescents were more likely than their U.S. counterparts to identify older individuals and teachers as significant others (Chen et al., 2003), a finding that the authors note is consistent with Chinese cultural values for education, the family as a collective, and a respect for authority figures. Another study found that Italian youth had the most frequent encounters with extended family when compared to youth in Canada, France, and Belgium, consistently with the value on family present in Italian culture (Claes et al., 2001). It should be noted, however, that the differences found in these three studies were assumed to be caused by culture, but that assumption has not been tested. Betancourt and López (1993) argue that without the direct measurement of cultural factors, it is difficult to know the aspects of culture, or even whether it is cultural differences and not other differences between samples that determine these findings.

Differences between ethnic/racial groups are also found within the United States. For example, most mentors named by urban Latino and African American youth tend to be extended family members, whereas white college students identify both nonrelatives and relatives as mentors (Cavell et al., 2002). Attention to cultural values suggests that

family members might be more likely to play a mentoring role for Latinos and African Americans given the importance of the extended family in these communities (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Hirsch et al., 2002).

The mentoring literature is only in the beginning stages of its understanding of the role of race, ethnicity, and culture. Overall, researchers need to specify hypotheses about the way in which race, culture, or ethnicity is thought to influence the functioning or effectiveness of mentoring relationships, and these processes must be measured directly. In addition, researchers should recognize that within-group differences are often larger than between-group differences. Given the diverse populations that mentoring programs serve across the United States, advancing our knowledge about the roles of ethnicity, race, and culture would only benefit programs and youth.

### *Mentoring and Development*

We began this article by stating that a fundamental goal of mentoring is to promote positive developmental trajectories in protégés. Yet, a focus on development is strangely absent from basic research on mentoring and the evaluation of mentoring programs. Few mentoring programs have been designed solely for children (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; Smith, 2002), and those designed for adolescents only rarely distinguish between the needs of older and younger clients (Darling, 2005). There are reasons to expect differences in the nature, meaning, and impact of mentoring for children, adolescents, and young adults (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). For example, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that children aged 10–12 years were less likely to terminate mentoring relationships than were youth aged 13–16 years. There are age-related differences in protégés' cognitive and verbal abilities, their ability to shape the relationship and its manageability, their activities and skills, and their social networks. In addition, the normative tasks they face, the contexts in which they spend their time, and the potential for successful prevention and intervention should be framed in developmental terms.

Developmental differences have significant implications for selecting mentors to work with children and youth of different ages. For example, Cavell and Hughes (2000) trained college student mentors to use child-directed play when mentoring highly aggressive children in Grades 2 and 3. Mentors were trained to follow the child's lead during play, to parrot or paraphrase any comments made, to describe ongoing play activities, to identify and label expressed emotions, and to summarize the overall pattern of behavior both within and across visits. Maintaining this type of interaction can be a struggle for some mentors, especially those who are verbally oriented or who tend to take control over play activity. Other mentors struggle with feeling bored by the child's repetitive play and impatient about the prospect of building a meaningful relationship through "childish" activities. For those who persevere, however, the challenge can shift as children begin to express needs that are not apparent at the outset of the relationship. In these cases, mentors must find ways to manage the discomfort of being in a relationship with a child who is desperately seeking relationship security, emotional closeness, or physical affection. Mentors who are comfortable and effective with young children may thus be quite different from those who are comfortable in establishing relationships with adolescents or young adults.

Younger protégés are also less able to articulate their desires and needs to mentors and, thus, are less capable of shaping mentoring relationships. Similarly, the ways that younger children express stress (noncompliance, bedwetting, etc.) may be more difficult

to recognize for mentors who expect a higher level of verbal skills (Larson, Raffaelli, Richards, & Ham, 1990). This expectation may explain why researchers found that mentor dyads' involvement in recreational activities predicted mentoring benefits for younger versus older protégés (mean age = 11.57 years vs. 15.37 years; DuBois & Neville, 1997).

Appropriately, a great deal of attention is focused on the possible harmful effects of mentoring (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). These findings (from a study of pre- to middle adolescents) suggest that harm stems from mentoring relationships that end prematurely, although the exact extent of this harm (e.g., feelings of abandonment, a sense of unworthiness, memories of previously broken promises) is currently unknown. Premature endings of mentoring relationships may differentially affect younger and older children and youth. Consider that when adolescents' relationships with mentors end abruptly, these endings could well be caused by adolescents' own actions. Adolescents who refuse to participate in certain mentoring activities or make visits intolerable for their mentor are acting with considerable agency. We would expect that children are less capable of ending the mentoring relationship. In addition to being less able to communicate their needs verbally, younger children are also less sophisticated in guarding themselves from harmful relationships or conveying these dangers to parents or other caring adults. Young protégés could also be more susceptible to the kinds of "grooming" strategies (e.g., false praise, bribes) that are used by adults who intend to victimize young children sexually.

The social support offered by mentors may differentially affect protégés at disparate developmental stages. The rapid and simultaneous nature of change during early adolescence puts social support at a premium (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). This finding fits well with the dominant models of youth mentoring (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2000), which focus on psychosocial support. Both interview and survey results indicate that close emotional relationships are central to what mentors and protégés value about their relationships (DuBois & Neville, 1997). In fact, a positive relationship is often seen as the key indicator of mentoring success and can lead to longer relationships and more frequent contact. However, as noted earlier, the need for certain types of support may differ by gender.

Although youth who have supportive parents are more likely to name adults among their significant others (Darling, 1991), developing autonomy and new cognitive abilities may encourage early adolescents to develop relationships with unrelated adult mentors that are quite different from the ones they have with their parents—especially when relationships with parents are difficult. Unrelated adults may fill a unique role in adolescents' lives in that they have greater experience than youth and thus represent an "adult" point of view but are less judgmental than parents (Darling, Hamilton, & Shaver, 2003), a view supported by qualitative analysis of the characteristics youth are looking for in an ideal mentor. Studies of natural mentors suggest that most nonparental mentors are relatives (Greenberger et al., 1998). On the other hand, most nonrelative unrelated adults named are school-related personnel, such as teachers and coaches (Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994). Therefore, teachers may be a promising source of potential mentors, and it appears that mentors who are involved in a helping profession are particularly effective in that role (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002). In addition, research on school climate indicates that mentoring within the school may be particularly beneficial in terms of academic performance and lower levels of dropout (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).

In contrast to the developmental needs of early adolescents, middle- and late adolescents may derive more benefit from mentoring that emphasizes instrumental goals, such as introducing them to new opportunities and helping them to develop new skills

(Darling et al., 2003). One possible explanation for the weak relationship between participation in mentoring programs and outcomes in middle and late adolescence (DuBois et al., 2002) may be that the emotional focus of many programs may not meet the needs of these youth. Unrelated adults named by high school and college students as having had an important influence on their lives were described as markedly more instrumental and less “fun” than either parents or peers (Darling et al., 2002; Hamilton & Darling, 1989). As with young children, joint activities (rather than social support) may offer good opportunities for this type of exploration and development.

Because of these needs, work-based mentorships and apprenticeships (e.g., Hamilton & Hamilton, 2000) may be more developmentally appropriate and successful for older adolescents. Previous programmatic research has focused on introducing youth to work through participation in relatively more complex and developmentally instigative work settings than is typical of youth employment situations. It is possible, however, that mentoring opportunities might be developed within the context of the kinds of places that youth are more likely to work—such as retail establishments and fast food restaurants. Mentoring programs in colleges aimed at increasing recruitment and retention of historically underserved populations have found that those programs that focus on skill development and interests are successful (Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000). Because scheduling can be a difficult part of establishing and maintaining a mentoring relationship (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), and older adolescents have busier social lives than younger youth, an instrumental focus may provide a “hook” for the mentoring relationship.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Although many issues have been raised, several appear especially promising for future research and practice in the field. First, we recommend, whenever possible, that programs operate from an empirically sound and conceptually clear articulation of the conditions and processes that give rise to the problems to be prevented (Coie et al., 1993). The costs of lack of a clear vision of the risks and goals are not limited to time, money, and effort spent on programs that produced negligible gains; also important is the possibility that mentoring could harm those it tries to help (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). For example, McCord (1978) found that high-risk, antisocial boys paired with a mentor/counselor fared worse as adults than children in a no-treatment control group. Missing from the investigators’ model of the problem was an appreciation for the powerful role that peers can have on the growth of antisocial behavior over time (e.g., Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999). In this intervention, high-risk children (and their counselors) gathered together for summer activities on several occasions. Later analyses suggested that long-term negative effects were significantly related to children’s level of involvement in these summer gatherings of deviant and near-deviant youth (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999).

Prevention researchers, therefore, have the task of specifying not only the mechanisms by which problems arise, but the precise pathways by which their intervention programs will have their effects. Applied to mentoring, such models must go beyond vague statements about children’s benefiting from mentoring relationships or their exposure to positive role models. Needed are detailed conceptualizations and valid ways of assessing the proximal changes that mentoring produces, along with clearly stated hypotheses regarding how targeted changes will affect children’s immediate and long-term adjustment.

We further recommend that researchers consider all three types of individual differences discussed in this article. They provide fertile ideas for hypotheses about expected changes and ways of measuring this change. For example, will mentored children acquire or improve their capacity to use certain skills above and beyond that which we would expect naturally with maturation? Will psychosocial mentoring lead to corrective attachment experiences that serve to counter maladaptive internal representations of close relationships? Will these changes be more pronounced for girls or boys? Are one-on-one mentoring programs as effective as other models for children whose culture values collectivism?

## CONCLUSIONS

As this review has made clear, individual differences in gender, ethnicity, and age can shape the needs and characteristics of protégés, the processes through which mentoring may influence protégés' developmental trajectories, and the social networks into which the mentors enter. A focus on individual differences will help facilitate the development of mentoring programs that create a close fit between the needs of protégés and the services offered by the programs, as well as greater insight into what are the key elements of program effectiveness. Moreover, in our optometry analogy, we noted that successful intervention requires a clear understanding of process. Similarly, future investigators would be wise to recognize that prevention research requires two kinds of conceptual models (Hughes, 2003). The first is a model of the problem, and the second is a model of change. In this review, we have suggested that individual differences related to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and development may influence a youth's experiences of mentoring. Future research examining process and outcomes of mentoring programs needs to articulate the influence of each of these differences more clearly, as well as the ways in which groups defined by more than one of these variables differ from other groups.

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