UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF MENTOR FAMILIES IN THERAPEUTIC YOUTH MENTORING

Lindsey M. Weiler, Toni S. Zimmerman,
Shelley Haddock, and Jennifer Krafchick
Colorado State University

The fragility of youth-adult mentoring relationships requires innovative program components to support and sustain these relationships and enhance participant outcomes. The current study presents and explores the experience of a unique mentoring program component known as Mentor Families, in which three to four pairs of mentors and mentees engage in structured activities together. Grounded theory methods were utilized to explore the experiences of mentors (n = 212) and mentees (n = 87) involved in Mentor Families within a mentoring program for adolescents at risk for delinquency. Findings from the current study reveal that Mentor Families provides a place (a) for mentors to receive support and supervision, (b) for mentors and mentees to belong, and (c) for mentees to grow and learn. These findings suggest that Mentor Families warrants further investigation as to how they may positively affect mentoring relationships and programs. © 2013 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Youth mentoring programs are increasing in popularity and are associated with a wide range of positive outcomes across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic domains of development (e.g., DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Critical to the success of such programs is the quality of the mentoring relationship. A strong emotional connection between a mentor and their mentee distinguishes youth mentoring programs associated with better outcomes from those with neutral or detrimental outcomes (Rhodes 2002, 2005). Yet despite the critical nature of the mentoring relationship,

Please address correspondence to: Lindsey M. Weiler, Colorado State University, Human Development and Family Studies, 424 Behavioral Sciences, Fort Collins, Colorado. E-mail: lindsey.weiler@colostate.edu

as many as half of all mentoring relationships fail or dissolve prior to the end of their commitment (Freedman, 1993; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1990; Pryce & Keller, 2012; Rhodes, 2002; Styles & Morrow, 1992). The rate of relationship failure is even higher for more vulnerable youth with more complex problems (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

The potentially tenuous nature of the mentoring relationship requires intentional program components that encourage each individual relationship while offering additional opportunities that improve outcomes. The current study proposes and investigates a unique mentoring program feature known as Mentor Families, in which three to four individual pairs of mentors and mentees engage in activities together within a larger mentoring community. Embedding pairs in a Mentor Family may reduce feelings of isolation for the pair while increasing mentor confidence and commitment, which may lead to greater connectivity between the mentor and mentee (Alleyne et al., 2009; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger, & Lawrence, 2013). Furthermore, a relationship with one competent, caring adult can make a substantial difference (Masten & Reed, 2002), but a network of multiple positive role models may provide a more optimal environment in which beneficial peer and adult relationships are promoted (Deutsch et al., 2013). Therefore, the Mentor Family feature may increase the relationship of the mentor and mentee, lead to better outcomes for mentees, and provide multiple caring adults to each mentee in the Mentor Family.

As part of an existing collaboration between practitioners and researchers, the current study explores the experiences of mentors and mentees involved in Mentor Families within the *Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring for At-Risk Youth* intervention program for adolescents at risk for serious delinquency. Because the application of Mentor Families within youth mentoring is a new approach, grounded theory methods were utilized. Qualitative research can often reveal patterns and complexities of a phenomenon not otherwise captured by quantitative methods (Patton, 2002). To this end, the current study represents an important first step in beginning to understand the experience of participants in a systems-oriented youth mentoring program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth mentoring involves a complex system of individual youth, individual mentors, mentor-mentee pairs, other interpersonal relationships (e.g, mentor and parent, mentee and teacher), mentoring programs, and the larger policy context (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). At the center of this complex system is the mentoring relationship dyad. In the context of a successful relationship (i.e., a relationship viewed as meaningful by participants and one that fulfills the agreed-upon time commitment), participants may experience both the reduction of risk factors and promotion of protective ones (DuBois et al., 2011). Because many relationships end prematurely and may result in negative outcomes (Spencer, 2007), the mentoring field seeks to optimize mentoring initiatives characterized by meaningful relationships in order to maximize benefits for all.

Theoretical and Empirical Support for Quality Mentoring Relationships

The resilience literature has long supported the importance of a child's relationship with a competent, caring adult (Masten & Reed, 2002), and research on high-risk adolescents underscores the necessity of this protective factor for those at risk for serious delinquency (Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2010). Additionally, strong empirical evidence exists for the

role that supportive non-parental adults have in the lives of youth (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011). To date, Rhodes' (2002, 2005) model is the most prominent theory specifically of youth mentoring and represents a critical step in the effort to delineate the conditions by which mentoring is most effective. Rhodes' model theorizes that the positive effects of youth mentoring are derived from the quality of the mentoring relationship. She suggests that mentoring affects youth by (1) enhancing youth's social relationships and emotional well-being, (2) improving their cognitive skills through instruction and conversation, and (3) promoting positive identity development through mentors serving as role models. Changes in these three domains subsequently lead to positive outcomes (e.g., decreases in problem behavior; Rhodes, 2002, 2005). Rhodes posits that through the experience of an emotionally close relationship, youth modify their working models of interpersonal relationships (as described in attachment theory, Bowlby, 1988), and, as a result, the relationship serves as a catalyst for change.

Existing empirical literature supports the assumption that a strong emotional connection and sense of closeness between mentor and mentee distinguish mentoring programs associated with positive outcomes for youth from programs associated with less than desirable outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000; Parra et al., 2002; Sipe, 2002). In particular, Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne (2004) found that youth who described their mentoring relationship as involving support, activity, and structure experienced increased benefits such as better interpersonal relationships and improved academic competence. Spencer (2006) found that the presence of authenticity, empathy, collaboration, and companionship predicted emotionally close mentoring relationships. In addition, emotionally close mentoring relationships were found to be predictive of relationally based outcomes (e.g., disclosure to adults) for mentored youth (Thomson & Zand, 2010).

Conversely, Chan and Ho (2008) found that program efficacy was negatively affected by unequal commitment and presence of conflict between parties. Keller and Pryce (2010) illustrated that mentors align with two hierarchies (i.e., vertical [one level above the youth] and horizontal [on the same level as youth]). In other words, mentors are both authority figures and friends. Keller and Pryce refer to this type of balanced relationship as "sage matches" characterized by flexibility around shared activities, attention to youth interests, and overall warmth and caring. Sage matches also provide explicit guidance by setting boundaries and expecting appropriate behavior from youth. Through this type of relationship, positive change is possible.

Theoretically and empirically, the mentoring relationship has been validated as the essential component to youth mentoring success. Without a high-quality mentoring relationship, youth are less likely to experience positive outcomes. Relationship quality is affected by content and diversity of activities, quality of communication, frequency of interaction, level of satisfaction, and commitment (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Pryce & Keller, 2012). In a study of school-based mentoring, Pryce and Keller (2012) found that half of the mentor-mentee relationships examined went in positive directions, whereas the other half followed a more negative trajectory. This suggests that one out of every two mentor-mentee relationships are characterized as more difficult than not. Given the implications of a high quality relationship and the fragile nature of each mentoring relationship, program components that better support this relationship are needed. However, questions continue to remain unanswered as to how to best provide this support.

To date, most research designed to improve the mentor-mentee relationship has focused on individual-level components, for example, by identifying best practices for training and supervising mentors. Such an individual-level focus has been warranted

because, in many programs, mentoring relationships occur in isolation (i.e., mentor-mentee engage in activities as a dyad only), and outcomes are almost exclusively dependent on the mentor and the quality of the relationship (Rhodes, 2005). However, mentoring may ideally occur in a community setting (i.e., with other mentor-mentee pairs); yet very little research has focused on setting-level components that can reliably enhance treatment effects and improve the mentor-mentee relationship. This is a promising area of study because setting-level components can be consistently implemented, resulting in more reliable and predictable outcomes, as compared to mentor-level factors, such as personality and skill, which may be less amenable to change. Liang, Spencer, West, and Rappaport (2013) advocated for the use of positive youth development and community psychology principles to further the reach and benefit of youth mentoring. In their charge to the youth mentoring field, they proposed an integration of systemic, strength-based, and social justice principles within youth mentoring programs. Setting-level components that strengthen the mentoring relationship while offering opportunities for additional role models and prosocial peer relationships are, therefore, warranted.

Innovative Programming to Support the Mentoring Relationship and Enhance Outcomes

Mentor Families integrates each dyad in meaningful, enriched relationships with additional mentor-mentee pairs. Unlike group mentoring programs that typically include one mentor with multiple mentees, Mentor Families maintains each mentor-mentee relationship within the smaller family group. Because of the powerful nature of these relationships, Mentor Families offers protection and support for the dyad. A recent study by Deutsch and colleagues (2013) found support for the use of a similar structure in which one-on-one mentoring is facilitated within a structured group format for female adolescents and female mentors. Findings from their mixed-method approach indicate moderate-to-high satisfaction with the group experience and high levels of social processes (e.g., sharing, trust building) that appear to be related to connectedness.

Rather than applying a traditional dyadic model of youth mentoring in which the mentor and mentee engage in activities in isolation, each dyad exists within a Mentor Family, which exists within a larger structured mentoring community, which exists within the larger mentoring community (See Figure 1). Thus, each mentor dyad is nested within a network of support. Each mentor-mentee pair in the Mentor Family participates in a structured mentoring program that incorporates a supportive structure led by an instructor who is a human service graduate student or professionally trained in systemic and relational theories. In the current study, the instructors are master's- or doctorate-level marriage and family therapy students.

Mentor Families, as illustrated in Figure 1, may uniquely promote a higher quality mentoring relationship, as well as improve outcomes for mentor and mentee participants. Because Mentor Families removes the mentor-mentee dyad from isolation and place them into a small supportive group, Mentor Families provides built-in programmatic support through the support of fellow mentors and an experienced mentor directly supervising the Mentor Family. Mentors who are properly supported are more likely to persist in the mentoring relationship and to positively affect their mentees (Herrera et al., 2000). Mentors may draw from the advice of other mentors in his or her family and this support translates to an increase in the mentor's sense of efficacy and creativity, an important component to mentoring success (Karcher et al., 2006). This level of support should translate to a strengthened relationship, strategies for helping youth achieve goals, and the development of a sense of belonging for the dyad.
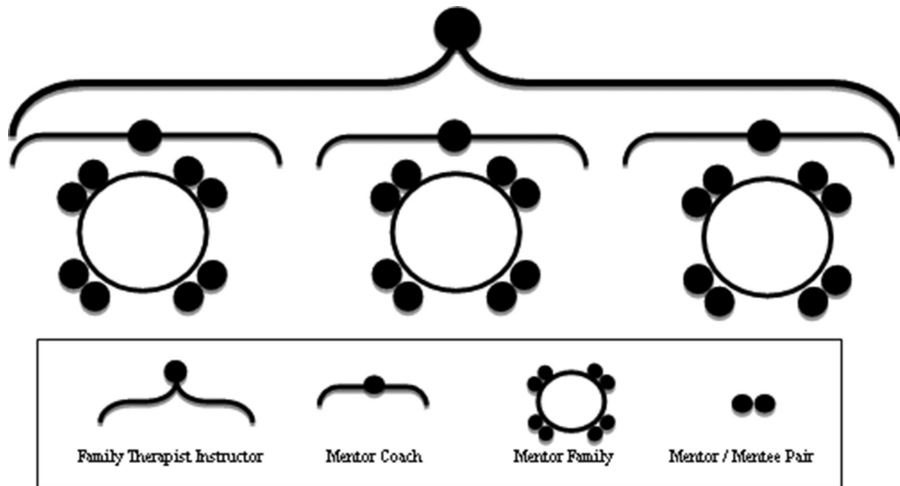
Figure 1. Campus Corps program structure.

Additionally, it is recommended that community programs for juvenile delinquents include opportunities for establishing responsible autonomy, competency, and prosocial peer relationships (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). Mentor Families provides a safe, prosocial network for youth to build relationships with peers while simultaneously gaining opportunities to practice and obtain feedback on social skills (Deutsch et al., 2013), an important socioemotional asset for youth (Sullivan, Farrell, Bettencourt, & Helms, 2008). Facilitating positive relationships with other youth is imperative for juvenile delinquents because of the strong link between friendships with deviant peers and problem behaviors (Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Mentor Families promotes positive outcomes while maintaining at least a one-to-one ratio of adults to youth to prevent and deter negative peer influence. Indeed, in a study group mentoring with ratios of adults to children ranging from 2:4 to 2:8 with 8- to 12-year-old children, participation in group mentoring significantly increased social problem solving skills while decreasing externalizing and internalizing behavior (Jent & Niec, 2009). However, more research on group mentoring is needed to better understand its potential impact.

In addition to the benefits of prosocial peer relationships for at-risk youth, having multiple adult role models may exponentially improve developmental outcomes. Hurd and colleagues (2010) examined the effect of role models on ninth-grade students and found evidence to support the additional benefits of having two or more role models during adolescence. Furthermore, community-based programming offers a safe context away from negative peer pressure in which opportunities to form relationships with caring, nonparent adults are available (Rhodes et al., 2002). Moreover, after-school contexts in which youth can authentically express one's self in the presence of adults have been described as "safe havens" by youth participants (Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010). Thus, promoting such experiences for youth at risk for serious delinquency during after-school hours in the context of Mentor Families within a mentoring community may be one example of a critical component for reducing recidivism. Equally as important, youth benefits may include increased sense of belonging and safety, improved peer relationships, and enhanced learning and support through additional role models.

Finally, the supportive, experienced staff that oversee the dyads and Mentor Families provides ongoing training, supervision, and support for mentors—key contributors to satisfying and effective relationships (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Herrera et al., 2000; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Professionals or students trained in systemic thinking have a unique and ideal knowledge set to contribute to youth mentoring programs. This unique expertise provides the mentoring community within built-in support for each individual, dyad, Mentor Family, and the larger mentoring community. Additionally, student therapists and similar professionals are equipped to train and assist mentors in managing challenging situations, difficult behavior, and crises involving safety concerns (e.g., suicidal ideation). Through this in-the-moment training, mentors are provided opportunities to apply what is learned in the course to the practice of mentoring.

Because of the development of positive youth-adult relationships, availability of peer support, and accessibility of supportive supervision within Mentor Families, this component may be helpful in overcoming some of the few known barriers to mentoring relationship success, which are as follows: (a) mentors becoming beleaguered by the needs and difficult life situations of mentees, (b) mentors being unprepared for the challenges inherent in building relationships with vulnerable youth, (c) mentors' lack of youth focus, unrealistic, or developmentally inappropriate expectations of the youth, (d) low awareness of personal biases related to cultural differences, and (e) inadequate agency support (Spencer, 2007).

Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring of At-Risk Youth

Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring of At-Risk Youth is a youth mentoring program at Colorado State University, informed by Rhodes' model of mentoring (2002, 2005). Campus Corps provides one-to-one mentoring within Mentor Families and a supportive mentoring community to youth at risk of entering the juvenile justice system and first-time offenders, aged 10–18 years. Youth are referred from community agencies involved with the juvenile justice system. Families of the youth are involved and supported. Prior to enrollment, all youth and their families participate in an extensive intake interview with a Campus Corps intake worker to review program requirements and connect the family to other community services, as needed. The program aims to prevent delinquency and recidivism, while addressing relevant correlates (e.g., substance use) and promoting important protective factors (e.g., academic success). Campus Corps was designed in direct response to a call to action from the local juvenile justice system. Faculty in a Marriage and Family Therapy graduate program were called upon because of their expertise in cost-effective prevention and intervention programming, and building and sustaining healthy relationships.

Campus Corps utilizes college student mentors to directly serve approximately 280 at-risk youth on campus each year. At the center of the program is a three-credit service-learning course in which college students are selected through a competitive application process, screened for work with at-risk populations, thoroughly trained, and closely supervised to maximize the effectiveness of their mentoring. The service-learning course combines 20 hours of training prior to mentoring and weekly mentoring sessions with academic readings and reflective assignments. Additionally, for one hour before and after the weekly meeting, students think critically and discuss relevant issues for at-risk youth and their families, analyze and apply models of adolescent development, strength-based approaches, and social justice to their own life experiences as well as their mentees' life, and discuss and apply theories of best practice mentoring. Finally, in line with service-learning best practices, students are assessed through weekly reflection journals

and group reflection activities, professional case documentation, activity planning and implementation, writing assignments, and direct observation of mentoring practices.

Campus Corps operates for 12 weeks during the fall and spring semesters for four sessions per week (Monday-Thursday) from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. Approximately 30 youth and 30 student mentors, eight mentor coaches (experienced undergraduate student mentors), and one family therapist supervisor participate each night. Each evening, Mentor Families participants first participate in intentional walks around the university campus. During this walk, youth learn about opportunities within higher education and various majors and careers while getting some exercise. This time is also important for mentees to catch up with their mentors about their week while building the mentoring relationship.

Next, mentors provide individualized tutoring for their mentee. Mentors help their mentees with school homework, study skills, goal setting, and career planning. Youth grades and attendance are monitored each week and communicated to family and referral sources in a weekly progress report. A nutritious dinner is provided by the local food bank and is enjoyed every night together within the Mentor Family. The remainder of the evening is broken into two one-hour blocks where mentor and mentee dyads engage with other dyads in a variety of prosocial activities (e.g., art projects, sports, writing, dance, and science experiments) designed to provide an alternative to delinquency. These activities support the development of new interests, hobbies, or social competencies and help youth gain confidence in a variety of skills. Throughout the evening, mentors serve as role models while empowering youth through fostering a sense of agency and purpose in their own lives. Liang et al. (2013) also discuss the importance of providing youth with such opportunities while also shifting the mentor's focus from solely the reducing problem behaviors to an appreciation of individual strengths and assets.

The Current Study

In sum, the primary benefit of Mentor Families is likely to be the support and opportunities provided to each dyad by way of the mentor, intentional mentoring community, and supportive hierarchy structure of Campus Corps. Through an examination of mentors' and mentees' experience of Mentor Families, we shed light onto one of the many social ecologies involved in mentoring practice, which has been recommended in the literature (e.g., Liang et al., 2013). Results from this preliminary, grounded theory study enable us to determine the potential of this novel mentoring component and whether it warrants further investigation.

METHOD

Participants

Youth. All youth participants were mentees enrolled in the Campus Corps program during fall 2010 or spring 2011. All participants of the Campus Corps program during these two sessions (111 youth from the fall program and 114 youth from the spring program) were recruited for the present study. In all, 87 youth participants entered the research study on a voluntary basis, upon obtaining parental consent and youth assent. Because of a greater proportion of male youth in the overall Campus Corps program, there were more male participants (64%) in this research study than females. Youth participants ranged in age from 10 to 18 years (mean [M] = 15.21, standard deviation [SD] = 1.93). The race

and ethnicity of the participants was similar to the racial demographics of the area, with the majority of the sample primarily identified as Caucasian (52%), with fewer Latino (37%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1.4%), African American (1.2%), and other (3.8%) participants. Some participants chose not to identify a race or ethnicity (4.6%). The demographic composition of the youth who volunteered to participate in the present study was similar to that of the overall Campus Corps program population.

Mentors. All adult participants were enrolled as mentors in the Campus Corps program during fall 2010 or spring 2011. Mentors entered the research study on a voluntary basis after obtaining consent for their participation. In all, 212 mentors of the possible 225 agreed to participate in the study, ranging in age from 18 to 50 ($M = 21.30$, $SD = 4.26$). Thirteen percent of the participants were male and 87% were female. The majority of the sample primarily identified as Caucasian (89.5%), with fewer Latino (3.8%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (2.6%), African American (2.2%), and Asian (1.9%) participants. Additionally, most participants (51.9%) were seniors, 45.6% were juniors, and 2.5% were sophomores. Finally, as can be expected given the nature of the program, a majority of the participants (42%) majored in psychology, with 29% majoring in human development and family studies, 14% in health and exercise science, and less than 5% in Spanish, family and consumer sciences, and other majors.

Mentor and mentee pairs. During the time of the current study, there were 225 pairs enrolled in Campus Corps. Of these 225 pairs, 213 successfully started and completed the program together (nearly 95%).

Procedure

Recruitment. After obtaining institutional review board approval, recruitment of both university students and youth took place during Campus Corps. Participants were recruited by a trained researcher, unknown to potential participants, who stressed the voluntary and confidential nature of participation in the study. It was highlighted that participation would not affect the course standing of any student, or the probation status of any youth.

Data collection and analysis. Grounded theory research seeks to move beyond description and into a more abstract analytical schema or process of a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Developed in the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to develop a methodology in which the data is central to the development of theory in a "ground up" approach informed by the actions, interactions, and social processes of people. Since its inception, grounded theory approaches have evolved to be less prescribed and more flexible. Charmaz (2006) aided in the evolution of grounded theory methodology by applying a postmodernist and constructivist approach to data collection and analysis. Thus, grounded theory is flexible and adaptable to the study at hand while staying within the spirit of its original intentions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory seeks to understand *how* individuals experience the process of interest and results from grounded theory research can provide a practical framework for explaining the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Staying true to grounded theory research, we followed relatively traditional guidelines for data collection and analysis, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). To improve on limitations of previous studies, we also included data from both youth and mentors. In-depth analysis of mentees' and mentors' perceived benefits of the program are justified by the subjective nature of the mentoring relationship.

Data collection. Youth participated in individual interviews, and university students participated in focus groups during the last week of Campus Corps for the purposes of gaining perspective on the overall experience in the program. Youth interviews were audio-recorded for purposes of ensuring accurate transcription at a later time. Interviewers asked questions from the interview script, but were allowed to deviate from the script as necessary and to ensure comprehension of the interviewees' statements. Interviews ranged in length from 16 minutes to 32 minutes ($M = 22$). Nineteen focus groups were conducted with mentors. Each focus group comprised 8–10 mentors and one trained facilitator. Each focus group was audiotaped and lasted between 50 and 65 minutes ($M = 55$). The focus groups were semistructured to guide the discussion as it related to the mentors' experience of mentoring. To facilitate participants' candid communication, no record of which statements were made by a particular participant was kept.

Data analysis. Simultaneously, and upon completion of data collection, data analysis occurred in the following stages and was stored and managed using *NVivo* software. First, open coding was used to form categories of information from raw data about youths' and mentors' experience of Mentor Families. Conceptual saturation was reached once no new open codes emerged from the data. Second, axial coding was used to assemble the data in new ways. Specifically, we identified central categories and explored causal conditions and contexts that influence the central categories. Last, selective coding was used to make sense of the categories and connections among them and in a sense, write the "storyline" (Creswell, 2007) of Mentor Families. Throughout data analysis, the primary author engaged in "memoing," a technique used to write down ideas about the evolving process through open, axial, and selective coding. Furthermore, a challenge of grounded theory research is to set aside theoretical ideas about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), and thus the literature review presented above was written in response to the inductive process of analyzing our data to provide a backdrop for the current study's place in the contemporary mentoring literature. As a result, preliminary knowledge regarding youths' and mentors' experience of Mentor Families was generated.

Establishing trustworthiness. Several strategies were followed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. First, tactics to ensure honesty of participants were used. That is, participants were encouraged to be candid before the start of interviews and focus groups and the facilitator commented that there were no right or wrong answers (Shenton, 2004). Participants were reminded that their comments would have no bearing on their status in Campus Corps. Further, participants were assured that their names would not be attached to their statements. Second, a team approach to data analysis was used to ensure validity of the emerging codes (Creswell, 1998). In reporting the results of the study, a detailed description of the findings is recommended (Shenton, 2004; Creswell, 1998); therefore, a rich depiction of the findings is provided and supplemented with quotes that are representative of the responses.

RESULTS

Findings include a collective of three unique perspectives: the mentors' experience of Mentor Families, the mentors' observation of youths' experience, and the youths' experience of Mentor Families. Each perspective provides critical information regarding the systemic nature of Mentor Families, and therefore contributions from both mentors

and mentees are included. However, even with the unique perspective of mentors and mentees, there is considerable overlap and congruence among the themes revealed. That is, mentors and mentees reported similar benefits and challenges in relation to Mentor Families. Theoretically, the Mentor Family experience appears to support the mentoring dyad and increase satisfaction of participants, as a result of experiencing a supportive hierarchy and safe community in which one can belong and grow. Each theme revealed in the data can be described within the context of providing a place for mentoring relationship success; that is, mentors report that Mentor Families is a place in which mentees can receive support and supervision and belong. Similarly, mentees describe Mentor Families as a place where they can grow and learn and where they belong. Illustrative quotes are included to provide a rich description of the theoretical schema.

A Place to Receive Support and Supervision

Mentors uniquely described feeling supported by the supervisory nature of Mentor Families. Mentors expressed feeling encouraged by the communication between fellow mentors (i.e., peer supervision) and between mentors and direct supervisors (i.e., Mentor Coaches, therapist instructors). As a result, mentors felt relieved by the immediate support, advice, and guidance available to them. Mentors described feeling comforted by the availability of the Mentor Coaches and instructors. Mentors, therefore, felt more present and accessible to their mentees.

> If one mentor had to interject with another mentee, it was helpful. Having the "back up" from other mentors was really helpful. I loved my mentor family, and I can't tell you how many times it was helpful to have them there.

> It was so nice having my mentor coach there in case something went wrong, I didn't feel like the pressure was all on me. I knew I could talk to her or I could talk to an instructor, so there was like a hierarchy of command that really made me feel safe.

> We had so much support and help from our family and mentor coaches. It took pressure off and made it more fun. I think if we just had pairs, it wouldn't have been as successful. We all had something in common that we were all working towards.

> I don't know what I would have done without my Mentor Family. There were a couple instances when they really helped deescalate the situation and it was nice to have that support. I think the Mentor Family reduces the case-by-case aspect of this type of work.

> The mentor coaches were so approachable. I looked forward to the time when we were able to talk about our mentees. It was helpful to get feedback. It felt like a safe place to come. I forgot about other stuff and felt like I was able to be present. It was helpful to have someone to lean on and help with mentee issues.

A Place to Belong

The second theme revealed in the data was that mentors and mentees alike reported that Mentor Families provided them with a place to belong. The intentional community

of Mentor Families created an environment to which mentors and mentees could be connected. Mentors reported this feeling for themselves, as well as observations of the youth. Youth confirmed the feeling witnessed by the mentors. Each perspective is described.

A place to belong for mentors. First, mentors described feeling connected to the other mentors in their family, as well as other mentees. Mentors expressed that Mentor Families felt like "true families," and described some of their interactions akin to sibling relationships. Mentors described the support and encouragement felt within the Mentor Family and how the Mentor Family assisted them with personal struggles. Friendships built within Campus Corps were sustained outside of Campus Corps, and as a result, mentors expressed feeling a greater sense of belonging to the university and community.

> The family groups were incredible. It created such a cool dynamic and it really was just like a family.

> My mentor family was amazing. I had a lot of different struggles this semester and they were always there for me. I benefited from their input and their advice. I really do feel like I have a second family with them. The overall experience was great for me.

> I loved our mentor family, and the mentees loved it too. We kind of picked on each other like siblings and I think our mentees felt really comfortable in that environment.

> I had a really close-knit family. We all just really thrived in the situation. We just really cared for each other. It was a family for sure. We mentors really supported each other outside of Campus Corps too. I think there was so much support.

A place to belong for youth, as witnessed by mentors. Second, in addition to feeling a sense of belonging among mentors, mentors observed a community of belonging among all Mentor Family members. Mentors described positive relationships formed between mentees. Mentors witnessed mentees forming positive, prosocial relationships with similar youth in their family. Mentees demonstrated concern and care for other youth while engaging in fun and meaningful supervised activities. Mentors also witnessed the supplemental adult-youth relationships formed between youth and other mentors than their own. Through these additional positive relationships, mentees were exposed to further role modeling and support.

> I could say that the dynamics of our family throughout the program absolutely shaped the success of our relationships. It was a very unique group of kids. Even after the first week, they all just wanted to work together. It was a very tight bond and created a support system where if one kid in the group was struggling, the other kids would take initiative to say, "Hey what's going on?" For our family, that's what Campus Corps was, it was all about our Mentor Family.

> Mentor Families gives them a sense of belonging.

I think it kind of gave the mentees some "go to" people, if they didn't know anyone. Toward the end, my mentee cared a lot about the other mentees. If they were sad, he would ask them what was wrong.

You can tell that [the mentees] were trying to connect with each other and it was great to see that grow throughout the semester. My mentee really cared about the other mentees in the family.

I think [Mentor Families] were really helpful. You can only learn so much from one person. It helped to have different types of personalities and mentoring styles to impact the mentees.

Not only was I supporting my mentee, but she had eight other people around her age and a little bit older to support her with positive choices. She had multiple positive role models and wanted to make positive decisions like us.

I think that it provided the mentees with stability. I think having a set family that you can come to each week, it helps them. It's good for them to have many role models.

A place to belong for youth. Third, consistent with mentor observations of the youth experience, youth described the Mentor Family environment as a place to belong. They described the Campus Corps community as safe, comfortable, and fun. The Mentor Family became a place in which they mattered, and a place in which they felt free to express themselves. Mentees also reflected on the fun, good-natured experiences of being in a Mentor Family.

When I come here, talking to my mentor, the other mentors and all the kids, they're really nice and everything and they're different in their own ways. I'm usually a little down, like depressed and everything, but they make me happy when I come here and when I leave here I'm a lot happier. It makes me more self-confident, and less lonely.

[The mentors and mentor coaches] were all really cool. At dinner time, we'd all sit down with our little family, and we'd all have conversations about movies or whatever. We all connected like we were actually a family.

I've had a lot of fun and I love my mentor and my mentor family and we've been really close the entire time and I feel like I can tell her anything and I can trust her.

I felt a lot safer here than with other friends. I felt pretty comfortable here, like pretty close to being at home.

A Place to Grow and Learn

The third theme is a place to grow and learn. Mentor Families, as described by mentors and mentees, appear to provide an environment by which change can come. Both mentors and mentees noticed distinct changes in youth participants and were able to recognize

the opportunities for learning and growth with the mentoring relationship. Mentors and mentees also recognized the added benefit of multiple adult role models, positive peer networks, and opportunities for social interaction.

A place to grow and learn for youth, as witnessed by mentors. Mentors observed and reported progress and challenges for youth related to social competence, self-regulation, responsibility, and empathy. Mentors expressed that some mentees thrived in Mentor Families, describing increases in respect, social skills, and confidence. In particular, youth learned to overcome barriers related to feeling withdrawn or shy. Youth also demonstrated an increase in the ability to act more appropriately.

> For my mentee, one of the mentees in our family tended to trigger his anger, and it helped us work through his anger and learn to deal with people who frustrated him.

> [Mentor Families] helped my mentee, who struggled making friends. It was really good for him to be able to talk to the same kids every week.

> My mentee was kind of shy the first few weeks she came in. But you would have never known she was shy by the last few weeks of our meetings. She was very outgoing, especially in our group. She realized that this wasn't only a one-on-one thing and that she was actually surrounded by more people that care for her.

> For the mentees, they were able to learn how to communicate with a group and see what healthy communication looks like among people.

For a smaller portion of youth, however, Mentor Families did not always support the development of the individual mentor-mentee relationship. The Mentor Family environment seemed especially challenging for extroverted youth seeking attention. Mentor Families provided a barrier to relationship development when youth sought attention at the expense of the dyad's relationship or when some youth dominated the group.

> My mentee was really outgoing, and sometimes it took away from us being able to build a relationship

> The only downside to [Mentor Families] was that outgoing mentees or attention-seeking mentees tend to take away from the other mentees

A place to grow and learn for youth. Mentees not only concurred with the observations of the mentors, but also reported additional information on how they believed they were changing as a result of participating in Mentor Families. Many of the mentees described what they learned through conversation with other mentees and mentors. Mentees reflected on their appreciation for observing how mentors interact with others. Mentees described the other mentors as role models and expressed the change they noticed in their own attitudes and behavior.

> [My mentor] is an inspiration to me. She makes me want to be a better person, makes me want to do something with my life. Hanging out with her and everyone else it just lightened me up 'cause I went from doing drugs, not doing school,

getting in trouble and hanging out with bad influences, to getting put on probation, coming here and hanging out with people who keep me out of trouble. So it kind of helped me with a new lifestyle you could say.

I dealt with a lot of different people here at Campus Corps, so I kind of know what to expect and how to react to certain situations. Because my family group is really different and everyone in my group is really different, I got used to all the different personalities. It's challenging but it really helps.

It was helpful just being around kids and mentors that were doing something with their lives. It's a very positive environment in my opinion.

I learned I can prove to other people what kind of person I am. [The mentors] help you mature and make smart decisions. I look up to them–they're in college and they're doing all this good stuff.

Hearing a couple of mentors say [drugs] are stupid to do and me knowing that I have to stay clean. Just seeing how much fun it could be being sober. That's what I learned.

Being with my mentor and my little family group helped build and strengthen friendships. It makes stuff easier. I'm better with teamwork now.

I came in here thinking I don't really know if I want to go to college, I don't really know what I want to do yet. And then hanging out here … everyone's talking about what it is they want to go for in college. So I actually think now I want to go to college, and I actually want to get a career.

At first I wanted to go [to college] for something easy so that I don't have to work a lot, but after talking to my mentor about what she's coming [to college] to do and learning about what other people in my Mentor Family are doing in school, it is making me think and opening my mind up to different ideas. It has brought my attention to "there is more than just easy." If I work hard for what I want, then I'll get a job that I really like. I want to do something with the law.

Theoretical "Storyline"

Mentor Families provides a safe, supportive environment for both mentors and mentees in which to succeed. Mentors benefit from the support and encouragement of the hierarchy in place at Campus Corps, as well as their interpersonal relationships with each other. Because Mentor Families relieves some of the pressure of one-on-one mentoring, mentors have increased self-efficacy when mentoring youth. Consequently, mentees benefit from increased mentor confidence. In the Mentor Family, mentees benefit from relationships with multiple positive role models and practicing prosocial relationships with peers. As a result, they are experiencing shifts in attitudes and behaviors that extend beyond Campus Corps into school, home, and community.

DISCUSSION

As illustrated by previous literature, when mentor relationships are successful, the potential for positive outcomes is immeasurable (e.g., Dubois et al., 2002). Mentoring, in all its forms, can provide youth with unique opportunities to build a positive, caring relationship with an important adult. Yet the fragility of such relationships calls for innovative program components that can support the longevity and success of mentor-mentee relationships. Findings from the current study support the potential for a supportive, programmatic structure component, Mentor Families, which may help the mentor-mentee pair succeed from the initial match to the end of the commitment. Supporting these relationships successfully holds important implications for current and future programming, as well as research.

During the time of the current study, 95% of the mentoring relationships were sustained through the program and it appears that Mentor Families may play a role in aiding in this success. Specifically, mentors and mentees report that Mentor Families provides a place in which they can (a) receive support and supervision, (b) belong, and (c) grow and learn. Consistent with Rhodes (2002, 2005) theory, mentees report positive change (e.g., increased confidence, motivation for college) and give credit, in part, to their mentor and relationships with others at Campus Corps. These results, of course, need to be explicitly tested through further analysis, including quantitative evaluation of program outcomes. Nevertheless, Mentor Families appears to be an enjoyable, satisfying, promising, and innovative way to support mentoring relationship and warrant further investigation.

The themes revealed in the current study point to the importance of a "place." Specifically, Campus Corps and Mentor Families occupy not just a physical space (e.g., campus, classrooms, family tables) but also an emotional space (e.g., warm, trusting relationships). Youth mentoring is often a solitary activity that occurs in isolation, away from other mentor-mentee pairs. Mentor Families and a structured mentoring community may provide additional support for the pair by having a consistent physical and emotional space youth and mentors can come to week after week.

Practical Implications

This type of program structure is transferable to other youth programs in which a relationship between adults and youth are central to the success. Many mentoring programs, in particular, struggle with the practical issues of maintaining successful relationships. For example, mentors do not fulfill the commitment, or youth drop out of the program. Thus, a supportive structure, such as Mentor Families, may ideally remedy these issues by providing a safety net for both mentors and mentees. Given the importance of youth-adult partnerships in community-based programming (Camino, 2000), fostering these relationships is necessary for building a reciprocal relationship that results in mutual learning, collaborative decision making, and effective activism or social change (Jones & Perkins, 2005). Mentor Families may be able to provide this for youth programs, although further research is needed.

Additionally, many graduate programs such as couple and family therapy, psychology, and social work are located at large universities and have access to undergraduates who can serve as mentors (i.e., through a service-learning course). In this situation, faculty and graduate students may serve as the clinical facilitators and supervisors, while undergraduate mentors provide high-quality supervised mentoring. It is our impression that students or professionals with a working knowledge of family systems and general systems

paradigms can benefit and offer something unique to youth mentoring programs. Additionally, many students from these disciplines are seeking experiences to increase their professional skill set and make a difference in their communities, which may motivate them to participate in this type of program.

Thus, Mentor Families has the potential to add value to an existing program (i.e., Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club) by embedding the youth-adult relationships in a small group. Through intentional changes in the programs existing structure, the positive relational experience of youth and adults may be enhanced, encouraged, and, ultimately, maintained. (For communities interested in the Campus Corps program, in particular, more information is available at http://www.hdfs.chhs.colostate.edu/students/ undergraduate/campuscorps/).

Future Directions

Although this study represents an important step in understanding the experience of participants involved with Mentor Families, much more research is needed. Namely, the current study suggests that mentors and mentees are satisfied with this type of program component and that benefits are likely. However, it is critical that an evaluation of program outcomes is completed to determine the effect of Mentor Families on relationship quality and youth outcomes. We anticipate quantitative support from our program evaluation for these findings.

Additionally, it would be important to further study this structure within other mentoring programs. Is it a structure that is transferable, and, if so, what processes provide the most optimal environment for relationship support (e.g., supervisory hierarchy, peer mentor support, network of positive adult role models)? Finally, a small portion of mentors observed some difficulty with mentees engaging in Mentor Families. Therefore, exploring for whom, and through what group dynamic, is this type of mentoring structure most helpful would be an important research agenda.

Others have noted that the complex organizational processes involved in mentoring could inform research in community psychology (Tebes, 2005), and this study further highlights the potential for examining the individual, interpersonal, and community contexts involved in youth mentoring. In the same way, the mentoring field has much to learn from community psychology and positive youth development fields, including the importance of contextual variables, in addition to individual and relational ones (Liang et al., 2013). Beyond Mentor Families, there are other systems of influence at work in youth mentoring. For example, Keller (2005) proposed a systemic model of mentoring in which he considered relationships among youth, parent/guardian(s), and caseworker(s). Undeniably, these relationships (and many others) are ultimately influencing the success of the mentoring relationship and, ultimately, youth outcomes. Additionally, factors such as the mentoring setting (e.g., school-based, community-based), community partnerships (e.g., juvenile justice system, human services), and policy changes are also affecting the mentoring relationship and participant outcomes. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the more complex organizational processes and systems at play.

Conclusion

Utilizing a more structured and supportive hierarchy within youth mentoring programs may be relevant for addressing some of the challenges in today's mentoring, such as failing relationships. Findings from the current study suggest that Mentor Families provides a

place to receive support and supervision, belong, and grow and learn that may enhance the success of youth-mentoring relationships. Meaningful relationships, along with providing an intentional community of positive youth-adult relationships, may provide a catalyst for change in vulnerable adolescents. Therefore, working to further our understanding of how to promote positive outcomes beyond intervening at the individual level is a much needed effort.

REFERENCES

Alleyne, S., Horner, M., Walter, G., Fleisher, S., Arzubi, E., & Martin, A. (2009). Mentors' perspectives on group mentorship: A descriptive study of two programs in child and adolescent psychiatry. Academic Psychiatry, 33, 377–382. doi:10.1176/appi.ap.33.5.377

Beam, M. R., Chen, C., & Greenberger, E. (2002). The nature of adolescents' relationships with their "very important" nonparental adults. American Journal of Community Psychology, 30, 305–325.

Camino, L. (2000). Youth-adult partnerships: Entering new territory in community work and research. Applied Developmental Science, 4, 11–20. doi:10.1207/S1532480XADS04suppl_2

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Darwin, A., & Palmer, E. (2009). Mentoring circles in higher education. Higher Education Research & Development, 28, 125–136. doi:10.1080/07294360902725017

Deutsch, N. L., Wiggins, A. Y., Henneberger, A. K., & Lawrence, E. C. (2013). Combining mentoring with structured group activities: A potential after-school context for fostering relationships between girls and mentors. Journal of Early Adolescence, 33, 44–76. doi:10.1177/0272431612458037

Dishion, T. K., McCord, J., & Poulin, F., (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. American Psychologist, 54, 755–764. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.54.5.755

Dodge, K. A., Dishion, T. J., & Lansford, J. E. (2006). Deviant peer influences in intervention and public policy for youth. Social Policy Report, 20, 3–19.

DuBois, D. L., & Neville, H. A. (1997) Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. Journal of Community Psychology, 25, 227–234. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199705)25:3

DuBois, D. L., Neville, H. A., Parra, G. R., & Pugh-Lilly, A. O. (2002). Testing a new model of mentoring. In J. Rhodes (Ed.), New directions for youth development: A critical view of youth mentoring (pp. 21–57). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

DuBois, D. L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J. E., Silverthorn, N., Valentine, J. C. (2011). How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 12, 57–91

DuBois, D. L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005). Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study. American Journal of Public Health, 95, 518–524.

Freedman, M. (1993) The kindness of strangers: Adult mentors, urban youth and the new voluntarism. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. New York, NY: Aldine.

Grossman, J. B., & Rhodes, J. E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. American Journal of Community Psychology, 30, 199–219.

Hamilton, S. F., & Hamilton, M. A. (2010). Building mentoring relationships. New Directions for Youth Development, 26, 141–144.

Herrera, C, Sipe, C. L., & McClanahan, W. S. (2000). Mentoring school-age children: relationship development in community-based and school-based programs. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Hirsch, B. J., Mekinda, M. A., & Stawicki, J. A. (2010). More than attendance: The importance of after-school programs. American Journal of Community Psychology, 45, 285–293

Hurd, M. N., Zimmerman A. M., & Xue, Y., (2010). Negative adult influences and the protective effects of role models: A study with urban adolescents. Journal of Youth Adolescence, 36, doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9296-5

Jent, J. F., & Niec, L. N. (2009). Cognitive behavioral principles within group mentoring: A randomized pilot study. Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 31, 203–219. doi:10.1080/07317100903099258

Jones, K. R., & Perkins, D. F. (2005). Youth-adult partnerships. In C. B. Fisher & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), Applied developmental science: An encyclopedia of research, policies, and programs. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Karcher, M. J., Kuperminc, G., Portwood, S., Sipe, C., & Taylor, A. (2006). Mentoring programs: A framework to inform program development, research, and evaluation. Journal of Community Psychology, 34, 709–725.

Keller, T. E. (2005). A systemic model of the youth mentoring intervention. The Journal of Primary Prevention, 26, 169–188, doi:10.1007/s10935-005-1850-2

Keller, T. E., & Pryce, J. M. (2010). Mutual but unequal: Mentoring as a hybrid of familiar relationship types. New Directions in Youth Development, 126, 33–50.

Langhout, R. D., Rhodes, J. E., & Osborne, L. N. (2004). An exploratory study of youth mentoring in an urban context: Adolescents' perceptions of relationship styles. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33, 293–306.

Liang, B., Spencer, R., West, J., & Rappaport, N. (2013). Expanding the reach of youth mentoring: Partnering with youth for personal growth and social change. Journal of Adolescence, 36, 257–267.

Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. J. (2002). Resilience in development. In C. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), Handbook of positive psychology (pp. 74–88). New York: Oxford University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pryce, J. M., & Keller, T. E. (2012). An investigation of volunteer-student relationship trajectories within school-based youth mentoring programs. Journal of Community Psychology, 40, 228–248. doi:10.1002/jcop.20487

Rhodes, J. E. (2002). Stand by me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rhodes, J. (2005). A Model of Youth Mentoring. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karcher (Eds.), Handbook of youth mentoring. (pp. 30–43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rhodes, J. E., Bogat, G. A., Roffman, J., Edelman, P., & Galasso, L. (2002). Youth mentoring in perspective: Introduction to the special issue. American Journal of Community Psychology, 30, 149–155.

Rhodes, J. E, & DuBois, D. (2008). Mentoring relationships and programs for growth. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 17, 254–258.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Education for Information, 22, 63–75.

Sipe, C. (2002). Mentoring programs for adolescents: A research summary. Journal of Adolescent Health, 31, 251–260.

Spencer, R. (2006). Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. Youth & Society, 37, 287–315. doi:10.1177/0743558405278263

Spencer, R. (2007). "It's not what I expected:" A qualitative study of youth mentoring relationship failures. Journal of Adolescent Research, 22, 331–354.

Steinberg, L., Chung, H., & Little, M. (2004). Reentry of young offenders from the justice system: A developmental perspective. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 1, 21–38.

Sterrett, E. M., Jones, D. J., McKee, L. G., & Kincaid, C. (2011). Supportive non-parental adults and adolescent psychosocial functioning: Using social support as a theoretical framework. American Journal of Community Psychology, 48, 284–295.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Styles, M. B., & Morrow, K. V. (1992). Understanding how youth and elders form relationships: A study of four Linking Lifetimes programs. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Sullivan, T. N., Farrell, A. D., Bettencourt, A. F., & Helms, S. W. (2008). Core competencies and the prevention of youth violence. In N. Guerra & C. Bradshaw (Eds.), Core competencies to prevent problem behaviors and promote positive youth development. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 122, 33–46.

Tebes, J. K. (2005). Community science, philosophy of science, and the practice of research. American Journal of Community Psychology, 35, 213–230.