

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF MENTOR EXPERIENCES: PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES, AND OUTCOMES

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To date, little is understood about the mentors' experience of mentoring at-risk youth. The current study sought to enrich this understanding by exploring how mentors within a structured mentoring community perceive their experience and determining what strategies they employ to optimally navigate their mentoring relationship. Due to the need to cultivate a deeper understanding, the present study utilized grounded theory methodology to uncover common themes within the experience. Data from focus group transcripts and written reflections of 123 mentors resulted in a comprehensive model of mentor experiences, including a largely positive experience in which mentors hold perceptions of themselves, their mentee, the mentoring relationship, and the mentoring program—Campus Corps: Therapeutic Mentoring for At-Risk Youth. Mentors described a series of strategies utilized during the experience and described potential outcomes of mentoring youth. Results hold important implications for mentors and programs struggling to recruit, support, or sustain mentors. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Despite the popularity of youth mentoring, systematic and rigorous evaluations of youth mentoring programs have begun only in the last two decades. A recent meta-analysis highlights the potential for mentoring to affect positive change for youth across many developmental domains (Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Despite the documented benefits for youth mentees, few studies have examined the unique

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experience of the mentor. Of those, most focus on evaluating benefits such as boosting self-confidence, increasing professional and character development, and increasing positive attitudes towards youth (Dubois & Karcher, 2005; Evans 2005; Hughes, Boyd, & Dykstra, 2010).

The current study builds on the extant literature by examining the overall experience of mentoring within a structured community, which has important implications. For programs struggling to recruit and retain high-quality mentors, creating a positive experience is critical. Generally, a mentor who is well trained, satisfied, confident, and supported is more likely to continue the mentoring relationship (Alleyne et al., 2009; Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011). Furthermore, the mentor's sense of self-efficacy is theorized to be related to more positive relationships (Parra, Dubois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002). Thus, a model of mentors' experiences may be equally beneficial for youth mentees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, there are few notable studies that have evaluated mentoring programs on behalf of the mentors' experience. For example, Trepanier-Street (2007) examined 941 college student mentors' involvement in Jumpstart, a children's mentoring program. Mentors reported increased confidence in public speaking skills, leadership, communication, teamwork abilities, and improved community involvement (Trepanier-Street, 2007). Schmidt, Marks, and Derrico (2004) found similar results through an evaluation of 20 college student mentors involved in The Learning Connection program. Content analysis of responses to open-ended questions elucidated several important benefits: (a) development of positive relationships, (b) desire to mentor in the future, and (c) an understanding of the importance of community involvement.

Beyond the positive experiences for mentors, Evans (2005) found that mentors of disadvantaged youth who entered the program with unrealistic expectations were more likely to report a negative experience. Similarly, Faith and colleagues (2011) reviewed 102 college student mentors' attitudes and personality related to mentoring highly aggressive youth. Findings demonstrated that mentoring was related to declines in mentor's sense of self-efficacy, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness.

Unlike mentor outcomes, mentor perceptions of themselves and the mentoring program have rarely been assessed in the literature. Notably, Hughes and colleagues (2010) did evaluate mentor's perceptions of helpful program components, revealing that college students appreciate frequent mentee contact and participation in activities, ongoing support and training for mentors from faculty, and ongoing completion of mentor reflection journals. Even less is known about the strategies that mentors use to be the best possible mentor to an at-risk youth. Sipe (2002) found that more successful and satisfied mentors tend to take responsibility for sustaining the relationship, respect youth's viewpoint, pay attention to youth's need for fun, and seek staff support. Relatedly, Allen and Mueller (2013) found that burnout mediates the relationship between volunteer's perception of voice and role ambiguity and the volunteer's intention to quit. Although the sample did not include mentors specifically, this new study provides support for the importance of eliciting feedback from volunteers regarding their experience and strategies for coping with stressful or difficult mentoring relationships.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In an attempt to better understand the mentor experience, the current study fills a gap in the literature by assessing the mentors' overall perceptions of mentoring within Campus Corps, a youth mentoring program. Enriching our present understanding of how mentors experience their role and the strategies they use may contribute to future program success and positive mentor experiences. Because of limited literature on the mentor experiences within a university-based, structured mentoring setting and the need for a more thorough understanding of mentoring, the present study utilized grounded theory methodology to develop a Model of Mentor Experiences.

Campus Corps

To understand the mentors' experience, the present study examined the experience of mentors involved in Campus Corps: a structured, time-limited (12-week) youth mentoring program for high-risk youth. Youth (aged 11-18 years) are formally referred to Campus Corps by local school districts and various community agencies (e.g., Probation Department, Office of the District Attorney). Youth referred to Campus Corps are at risk of reaching their full potential due to a variety of individual, familial, and environmental risk factors. Many of the youth involved in the program have been formally charged and are enrolled in a local criminal diversion program. The goal of Campus Corps is to promote the resilience and life success of at-risk youth through strengthening social bonds, increasing academic engagement and performance, decreasing substance use and delinquent behaviors, and improving sense of self via the mentoring relationship (Campus Corps, 2012).

An additional goal of Campus Corps is to prepare university students, serving as mentors, to become highly skilled, civically engaged human service professionals and community leaders. Mentors are recruited from a variety of majors and represent a diverse compilation of students. Mentors participate in 3 weeks of mentor training and are fully supported and supervised throughout a three-credit service-learning course (see Weiler et al., 2013 for details). For example, daily activities for mentor–mentee pairs are structured, which allows mentors to focus on building and strengthening their relationships. Mentors are trained extensively with regard to mentoring best practice and youth development as a way to cultivate confidence in their ability to communicate in a meaningful way. Additionally, mentors observe juvenile court, discuss the influence of youth systems (i.e., school, department of human services), and complete readings, reflection activities, and assignments.

Mentors are also supported through social interactions with other mentor–mentee pairs in a group mentoring setting called Mentor Families, comprising three to four mentor–mentee pairs. A Mentor Coach then supervises each Mentor Family, providing additional support and role modeling. Mentor Coaches are students who have previously completed the Campus Corps service learning course and re-enrolled in Campus Corps to serve as student leaders. This structure provides an avenue for mentors to gain support and advice from students who are going through, or have gone through, similar situations. Campus Corps instructors who are graduate students and faculty who are involved in a marriage and family therapy graduate program offer support and supervision to mentors. This provides students with in-the-moment supervision during the mentoring experience. Campus Corps instructors provide additional therapeutic expertise when further clinical assessment is needed (e.g., suicide assessment, drug, and alcohol assessment). For further

information on the intentional, multilevel mentoring community of Campus Corps, please see Weiler, Zimmerman, Haddock and Krafchick (in press).

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 123 mentors enrolled in Campus Corps for the Spring 2011 semester. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 50 years (mean [M] = 21.07, standard deviation [SD] = 3.11), and the majority of mentors were female (89%). Participants primarily identified as White (83.7%), with 8.9% Hispanic or Latino, 3.3% Black or African American, 2.4% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, and 1.6% Asian American. Human development and family studies was the dominant declared major of the participants (32.5%), followed by psychology (23.6%) and health and exercise science (12.2%). The remaining majors represented a variety of disciplines (e.g., education, engineering, international studies, biology, and social work). Most mentors were in their senior (44.7%) or junior (34.1%) year. Students' grade point averages ranged from 2.00 to 4.00 (M = 3.27, SD = .462).

Although the focus of this study was the mentor's perspective, depicting their experience would not be complete without describing the youth they mentored. Mentees enrolled in Campus Corps during the Spring 2011 semester were between 11 and 18 years of age (M = 15.47, SD = 1.84), with 64.9% male. The majority of youth participants identified themselves as White (56.1%) or Hispanic (30.7%), followed by 3.5% Black or African American, 3.5% other, 2.6% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1.8% Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, and 1.8% as Asian American. Many (83.4%) of the mentees received a criminal charge prior to the program, with the other 16.7% of youth identified, by a referring agency, as at risk of offending but did not have a formal charge. Of those with a charge, 32% were charged an alcohol- or drug-related charge.

About 95% of the mentor–mentee matches were retained over the 12-week period. Only four youth participants discontinued the program prematurely because of noncompliance with his or her diversion program, and two youth participants started the program late. Three of these participants attended for 5 weeks, and three of them for 6 weeks. No mentors were exited from the program and all mentors attended the full 12 weeks. Of the 117 mentor–mentee pairs who participated from beginning to end, 32 were present all 12 weeks, 30 were present for 11 weeks, and 25 were present for 10 weeks, 15 for 9 weeks, and 15 for 8 weeks. Because we were interested in all types of mentors' experiences of mentoring within Campus Corps, all mentors were included regardless of the length of their match.

Procedure

Recruitment. Upon institutional review board approval, recruitment of university students for this study took place prior to the start of the Campus Corps program. Participants were assured that their decision regarding participation in research would have no impact on their academic standing or status in the course. Participants provided consent for all of their course assignments to be utilized for research purposes prior to participation in the study. In an effort to reduce bias in participant responses, students were not aware of which assignments would be utilized for research.

Data collection and analysis. Grounded theory practices are useful in the exploration of social phenomenon, of which little is presently understood (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Cozby & Bates, 2012). To generate a model that accurately portrayed mentor experiences, the methods involved four interwoven yet specific stages within a qualitative approach. Codes, categories, and themes emerged naturally through an inductive, recursive process. The first stage involved an exploratory qualitative study of the mentor experience and the ways in which the mentors were personally affected by mentoring at-risk youth (Haddock et al., in press). The aforementioned study served as an initial observation by which we began to conceptualize themes embedded in the mentor experience.

Stage two of the study began by asking mentors to respond to a series of open-ended questions in a weekly reflection journal (e.g., In what way has mentoring affected your sense of identity, if at all? How have you changed, as a result of mentoring, if at all? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned from your mentee?). The mentors' responses were used to further our understanding of the mentor experience. Each week, 10–12 student reflection responses were randomly selected and read to guide the conception of subsequent journal questions. Throughout the journaling process, students were unaware of which journal prompts were used for research purposes. Concurrent with this process, we gained a working understanding of how mentors perceive themselves, their mentees, and their relationships. Data from the prior Campus Corps studies and the literature led to the development of a working model of mentor experiences.

During stage two, two of the authors attended a mentoring session and elicited feedback from the mentors in the form of a mentoring reflection activity (mentor model assignment). Specifically, we presented a blank template with the major section headings (i.e., mentor perceptions, strategies, and outcomes) of our emergent model. However, to avoid the potential for demand characteristics, emergent themes (i.e., results) within each section heading were not provided to the mentors. The model was not presented as research, but as a mentoring reflection activity. We then created a hard copy version of the template and requested that the participants input their own individual experiences in the blank spaces provided. The weekly reflection journals continued throughout the course of the semester and culminated with a final reflection paper after Week 12. At the end of the semester, the students also participated in a final focus group session. Data from all sources were deemed congruent with the initial working model of mentor experiences.

Stage three involved coding. The team opted to focus primarily on the responses elicited from the mentor model assignment because of its depth, breadth, and consistency with all other data. The second author utilized open coding practice by comparing responses with one another and grouping them based on similarities and differences (Corbin & Straus, 1990). The first author then applied conceptual labels to each of the identified groupings. Collaboratively, a basic hierarchical structure was assigned through a process of axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As the coding of data progressed, we referred back to the mentor model assignment to look at individual responses in an attempt to reconcile possible pathways of mentor perceptions, mentee attendance, and relationship difficulties.

Finally, during stage four of the study and in an attempt to further corroborate the findings, data were extracted from the mentors' final reflection papers and compared with the emergent themes. The papers were consistent with the mentor model assignment, though more illustrative, providing a more thorough understanding of the respondents' experience. The data had reached a point of saturation.

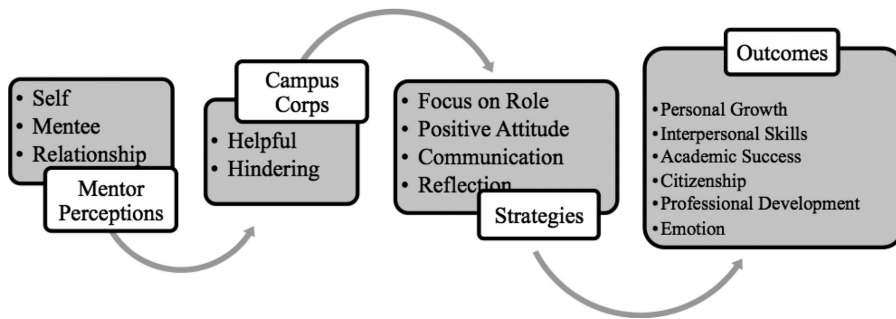


Figure 1. Model of Mentor Experiences.

Based on this notion and the canons of grounded theory, the finalized Mentor Model provides a trustworthy evaluation of the mentor experiences. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), limiting researcher bias in the development of grounded theory can be accomplished by implementing a multiple researcher method in which the data, conceptual labels, and categorization of data are discussed and scrutinized among two or more researchers. To establish trustworthiness in this study, data were organized into their respective hierarchies through the processes of open, axial, and selective coding by two primary investigators, who then turned to two other investigators for intermittent feedback. Furthermore, student grades for the service-earning course were not dependent on the quality of mentoring relationships, content of reflections, or youth attendance. Instead, students were evaluated on their ability to complete the assignment as outlined in the instructions. Students with neutral or negative experiences were not penalized and every effort was made to encourage honesty in all assignments. Our process of checking assumptions with the data also reflects the fluidity of our hypotheses and the inductive process of grounded theory to ensure overall trustworthiness (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

RESULTS

Initially, patterns in the responses led us to believe that specific pathways might exist, in which certain mentor perceptions would lead to certain mentor strategies and subsequently certain mentor outcomes. We expected to find that having negative perspectives of self as a mentor, youth, relationship, and/or program would result in using strategies different from those with more positive perspectives. Additionally, we expected that mentors with relationships who met less frequently or consistently would result in the use of different strategies or yield different outcomes. However, we found that the employment of strategies was not dependent on mentor perspectives. We further anticipated that the relationship qualities and length of the relationship would affect the experience. In particular, we expected to find that mentors who experienced adversity within their relationships with youth would report more negative outcomes in terms of their experience mentoring, but in fact the outcomes were largely positive for all mentors, regardless of relationship characteristics. Finally, we anticipated that mentors with youth who had less consistent attendance would report more negative outcomes, yet, these mentors reported outcomes similar to those who experienced adversity. Thus, a more unified experience was observed, as illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1 depicts the rich understanding gained by exploring how mentors perceive themselves, their mentees, the mentoring relationship, and the Campus Corps program. Based on these perceptions, mentors seem to employ a succinct series of similar strategies to optimally navigate the mentoring experience, yielding a number of benefits. In the following section, we expand on this model in detail. Each category of the mentor experience is discussed and supplemented with themes and quotes to support the model presented in Figure 1.

Mentor Perceptions

The first category of the mentor model includes Mentor Perceptions. Perceptions of *self as a mentor*, *mentee*, and the *mentoring relationship* differed among mentors. First, mentors described the qualities and characteristics they believed were critical or hindering to being an effective mentor. Second, mentors described the characteristics of their mentees' personalities that were either favorable or unfavorable. Third, mentors discussed their perceptions of the mentoring relationship. Within the mentors' perceptions, there was great complexity and variability in responses (see Table 1). Although the variability in themes does not appear to influence the strategies used, or outcomes experienced by the mentors, it is noteworthy to depict the depth and diversity of the sample.

Experience of the Campus Corps Program

Mentors also described significant experiences related to the components of the Campus Corps Program that they believed were most effective in supporting them as a mentor. Mentors described three characteristics that were most helpful: supportive relationships, training and supervision, and structured time and activities. Supportive relationships refer to the supportive, encouraging, and healthy relationships built with fellow mentors and Campus Corps staff. One mentor described a sense of comfort knowing that staff members were available to help: "The most important resource I believe is Mentor Coaches and Instructors. These people allow mentors to have immediate help and problem solve with situations right away." Another mentor described a sense of belonging to the Mentor Family: "I like how we have the support of the Mentor Families. I have grown to really like my Mentor Family and consider them to be my friends. They are all very supportive and especially my Mentor Coach because she is always there to discuss things that are going wrong or good that night."

Second, mentors reflected on the importance of training and supervision, which refers to the intensive training, ongoing reflection, in-the-moment supervision, and supportive hierarchy at Campus Corps. Mentors reflected on the importance of the mentor training: "I have never worked with at-risk youth before so I did not know what to expect. Having a day-long training and listening to the different presentations helped me understand some things about the population"; and on available resources: "The readings posted on [online classroom resources] are very beneficial in the beginning of the program. They supplied me with an idea of what Campus Corps would be like, what exactly it involves, and how to be an effective mentor." In reflecting on what was most helpful in easing the pressure to maintain a relationship with an at-risk youth, one mentor stated: "I found all the instructors to be very helpful in making the night go smoothly. Having all of these resources has made me a better mentor."

Third, structured time and activities refers to the organization, rules, boundaries, and activities that aid in establishing structure for mentoring time. The mentors who

Table 1. Mentor Perceptions

Themes	Perceptions of self as a mentor
Approachable, friendly, flexible, patient, energetic, engaging, confident, optimistic, listener, role model, empathetic, brings relevant past experiences, motivated, determined, brings relevant knowledge, respectful, trustworthy, genuine, resourceful, helpful, humorous, advocate, curious, hesitant, stressed, insightful, has similar background to mentee, attentive, reactive	<p>"I am naturally very energetic and sociable. I love meeting and getting to know other people to form new relationships. But just how I can be very talkative and hyper, I can also be quiet and calm when someone requests my attention."</p> <p>"I am very reliable and I feel this is a significant quality to have. Being reliable gives a sense of trust to my mentee, knowing that I am there for her."</p> <p>"When reflecting on the different characteristics I may bring to the table, it was interesting to realize that some of them are not helpful characteristics and actually are road blocks to forming the best relationship possible with my mentee. One example of this would be feeling stressed by outside sources."</p>
Themes	Perceptions of mentee
Friendly, energetic, reserved, open, humorous, engaged, volatile, considerate, driven, unmotivated, intelligent, laid-back, confident, uninterested, ambitious, positive attitude, independent, seeks attention, anti-social, accepting, creative, responsible, dishonest, restless, loyal, talented	<p>"My mentee is very energetic. He is also very talkative and everyone seems to get along with him. He has very good people skills, which makes him very likeable with the other mentees and the other mentors."</p> <p>"Although [my mentee] is very open, talkative, and friendly, there is a great deal of feelings that he suppresses, which leaves him feeling sad and somewhat alone."</p> <p>"My mentee has a happy demeanor and smiles a lot. Things don't seem to get her too down in life and if they do, she doesn't show it. [My mentee] is enthusiastic and likes to try different activities."</p> <p>"Her family structure is completely different than mine, her high school experience is the opposite of mine, and her attitude is different than mine. She is tough and strong on the outside but I know she is a kid who wants to do the right thing, have fun, stay out of trouble, and be close with her family on the inside."</p> <p>"My mentee has not been very open when it comes to her lifestyle at home or school."</p>
Themes	Perceptions of relationship
Positive communication, accepting, supportive, comfortable, common interests, disconnected, ups and downs, engaged, structured, socially focused, academically focused	<p>"Our relationship has gone up and down throughout the semester; but we have both developed a special bond and have learned to approach each activity with enthusiasm."</p> <p>"Our relationship is very strong because we have many things in common including, but not limited to, helping others, being independent and driven, and enjoying photography."</p> <p>"While there is a good relationship, I don't think it is a very deep one because she doesn't know me enough to trust me as much as I would like her to."</p> <p>"I like to think that our relationship is unique, although we share many similarities, we do have our differences. We are aware of each other's views and aware of what we want and we respect it."</p>

described structure as an important component to helping them be a successful mentor had this to say:

The program itself and the structure have been very effective. The structure of the schedule is something I find to be very helpful. Having a time frame and a routine keeps you constantly busy and engaged.

The schedule of Campus Corps is very well planned out with youth getting some of their blood pumping during walk and talk, then settling down for [individualized tutoring] and dinner, and then finally ending the day with some fun interactive activities.

Some mentors, on the other hand, experienced the structure as hindering. Interestingly, some mentors thought the structure was too rigid and others thought it was too loose. This discrepancy appears to reflect the individual mentor's needs based on his or her perceptions of self, mentee, and mentoring relationship:

The structure of the program is sometimes too rigid; there are times when an individual youth or mentor–mentee pair could benefit from doing their own thing during the time at Campus Corps.

What is not effective about the program is its relaxed structure for mentees with a lot of energy.

Strategies

Despite the variability of perceptions that mentors have about themselves, mentees, and their relationships, four primary strategies emerged as prominent means by which mentors strive to be an effective mentor. The third category – *strategies* – refers to the ways in which mentors embraced the positive and coped with the negative experiences of being a mentor, and the ways in which they were able to rise to the challenge of mentoring an at-risk youth. The initial responses for the strategies category included 367 different descriptors. Remarkably, these responses shared striking similarities when coded into relative themes. The following four strategies are listed in order of frequency of responses: focus on mentor role, positive attitude and way of being, communication, and reflection and metacognition.

The strategy to focus on mentor role refers to the mentor's attention to his or her responsibility as a mentor, including but not limited to being supportive, encouraging, and motivating, encouraging goal setting, and empathizing with my mentee. Responses in these categories were centered upon the mentor role and what strategies could be employed to facilitate the mentee's positive experience. Mentors described a host of strategies within the subthemes of this category, such as: "keep in mind my mentee's age," "have empathy for what is going on in my mentee's life," and "help my mentee set realistic goals for school." Other mentors described a few strategies within this subtheme: "trying to be as understanding as possible," "helping mentee stay motivated," and "always making my mentee feel supported." One mentor stated: "It doesn't matter what is going on that week, or what I want to do, I just put it aside and allow my mentee to have the experience that he wants to have."

Other mentors employed the strategy of positive attitude and way of being, including being patient, flexible, positive, and using humor. This particular strategy includes

intentionally doing things to maintain a positive attitude during Campus Corps, such as being consistent, helping others, staying calm, being flexible and patient, using humor, and having a positive attitude. One mentor described using this strategy: “No matter the situation, I try to maintain positive. Being positive helps me solve problems faster and easier.”

Communication was another important mentor strategy, which refers to mentors focusing on communication by remaining open, asking for help, talking to staff and mentor coaches, and using honesty. Not only did mentors find it useful to communicate properly with their mentees, but they also described using communication with fellow mentors, staff, and mentor coaches as a tool to facilitate their mentoring success. One mentor stated: “Without good communication between mentees and mentors, mentors and mentors, and mentors and mentor coaches/instructors, not only would we set ourselves up for failure, but more importantly, we’d be less able to set our mentees up for success.” Another mentor described the importance of talking with his or her mentor coach to cope with difficult situations: “I believe that I have gained positive relationships with other mentors and mentor coaches. They are a great support system for me during Campus Corps and even for problems outside of Campus Corps.”

Mentors also described aspects of reflection and metacognition to be useful, which are represented by intentional behaviors to find perspective, reflect, prioritize, and be present. Responses depicting this theme include paying attention, remaining receptive, reflecting on personal experiences, and separating personal life from Campus Corps. One mentor described how she or he was able to set aside other stresses in life to be present at Campus Corps: “When I walk into the room of the Campus Corps program, I leave everything from my personal life behind as best as I can. I try my best to be the better me.” Additionally, one mentor described the profound experience of reflecting on his or her purpose in mentoring:

The last major strategy I have used is accepting that fact that I may not change [my mentee’s] path and that I cannot save him. He is going to have to choose what he wants in his life and my mentoring may not have any extremely apparent effects at this time. I am here for him, and I hope the outcome of my mentoring is fantastic; but I know the majority of my mentoring experience will have the most impact upon me.

Many mentors also used reflection time to make sense of their own adolescence: “In order for me to not feel discouraged, I kept putting myself in his situation. I had to think about what I was like when I was his age and what I would respond to.” Others described feeling appreciative of their own families and communities: “I am also grateful for the life that I was born into. I never had to worry about not having food or where I was going to sleep.”

Outcomes

The main themes described by mentors as projected outcomes from their experience in Campus Corps are captured in personal growth, interpersonal skills, academic success, citizenship, professional development, and emotional responses. Within the theme personal growth, mentors described their potential outcomes in terms of gaining perspective, increasing their self-confidence, learning about themselves, being humbled, motivated,

and improving their reflective skills. Powerfully, a mentor described his or her experience as follows:

I think that being a mentor alone is definitely rewarding for me. I feel like it makes me a better person because I know that someone is looking up to me and is, in a way, learning by example.

Many mentors also described their outcomes related to improvements in their interpersonal skills, such as communication, relationships, parenting, and problem-solving skills. This is most eloquently depicted by this mentor's description:

I think being a mentor will also help me to be a better parent when I do decide to have children. I know what to expect during the teenage years and I have learned how to communicate and remain open and honest with children at this age.

There were also mentors who described their experience as contributing to their academic success as they learned, earned college credits, and increased their motivation to perform well academically. One mentor described a personal transformation regarding motivation and determination to complete a degree: "I was ready to drop out of college before joining Campus Corps, and now, because of my time spent with the youth, I am excited about the possibility of pursuing an education degree."

Mentors felt their experiences in the program also contributed to their improved ideals related to citizenship. Many mentors described the experience as greatly reducing their use of stereotypes and judgment of others and others described an increased sense of community involvement and empathy:

This program has taught me a lot about at-risk youth. People tend to think that at-risk youth are just bad kids and don't deserve another chance because they screwed up. In this program, I have met a lot of awesome youth and really like them. I care for them because they do deserve a second chance; they just need direction and someone to help them to get them on the right path.

The program also provided mentors with advances in professional development. Specifically, mentors described an increase in professionalism, experience with adolescents, and a boost in confidence towards future career plans. "Being able to talk to youth and coming up with different strategies to help them will be helpful in my future career. I want to be able to make a difference in the lives of others," captures this mentor's notable development.

Within the theme of emotional responses, mentors described both positive and negative reactions, although most were overwhelmingly positive. Mentors who described outcomes related to positive emotions described their experience as fun, a sense of accomplishment, satisfying, and memorable. One of the mentors stated:

For me the best short-term outcome of being a youth mentor is the great sense of pride that one feels watching others strive for, work towards, and ultimately achieve their goals because you helped them or just said to them "I know you can do it."

Table 1. Summary Table of Results

<i>Category</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Mentor perceptions	Self Mentee Relationship
Program perception	Helpful Hindering
Strategies	Focus on role Positive attitude and way of being Communication Reflection and metacognition
Outcomes	Personal growth Interpersonal skills Academic success Citizenship Professional development Emotional responses

Remarkably, the mentors who mentioned negative emotions depicted them only as short-term outcomes such as stress, frustration, and disappointment:

Being a mentor has been stressful and time consuming. Since I am personally invested, I take time to process it. I worry about him and spend time thinking about how I can be the best mentor and it can get very stressful.

Additionally, a small number of mentors reflected on their disappointment related to broken systems. Referring to the seemingly small impact he or she made, one mentor stated, "I had heard so many things about how great Campus Corps was before I joined and I had some high expectations that have not at all been fulfilled." Table 1 presents a summary of each category and corresponding themes.

DISCUSSION

The reflections and responses of mentors provide a detailed account of the overall experience of being a mentor to at-risk youth in Campus Corps. The emergent Model of Mentor Experiences has many practical and useful applications and provides an avenue to enrich the current understanding of mentor experiences, especially mentors who are mentoring within a service-learning course or similar style of mentoring community. Consistent with previous research, Campus Corps mentors described a host of positive outcomes resulting from their experiences as mentors (Schmidt et al., 2004; Trepanier-Street, 2007). Campus Corps mentors did not, however, allude to significant psychologically taxing effects related to their mentor experience, which is inconsistent with the findings of Evans (2005) and Faith et al. (2011). Rather, a negative experience was related to time management and stress, and such descriptions were minimal. Also consistent with existing literature, Campus Corps mentors found the structure, supportive staff, and training influential on their overall success in the program (Hughes et al., 2010). The present study contributed new knowledge regarding the strategies utilized by mentors within a mentoring community.

The data allude to a thoughtful model that captures the complexity of the mentor's experience. As described, mentors enter the program with many diverse qualities that help or hinder their abilities. Based on the match of mentor and mentee, mentors evaluate and reflect on their relationship. A mentor's perception of their mentee and the relationship gives rise to the mentor's perception of program components that may be perceived as helpful or hindering. Next, although a multitude of diverse perspectives emerged, the vast majority of mentors described four integral strategies for managing the experience of being a mentor: focusing on their role, maintaining a positive attitude, communicating, and reflecting. One of the most profound findings of the present study is that despite the diversity of pairings between mentor and mentee and the multitude of both positive and negative program experiences, mentors mostly described all potential outcomes in positive terms.

During the mentors' time in Campus Corps, they adapt to the positive and negative aspects of mentoring, ultimately working through whatever troubles arise to obtain many positive outcomes. For example, many mentors may have initially perceived their match to their mentee as ineffective or challenging, but upon seeking support from staff and fellow mentors, the mentors were able to identify ways in which their role, attitude, self-reflection, and communication could aid in times when they found the relationship to be a challenge. The use of the primary program components coupled with the implementation of four basic strategies begin to illustrate the mentoring experience as a funnel. The high level of diversity with which mentors and mentees entered the program prescribes its shape. The program structure and strategies, however, appear to illicit highly similar experiences for a large faction of mentors. Finally, the strategies described by Campus Corps mentors appear to narrowly contribute to fond memories and positive prospective outcomes for all.

Implications

The literature depicting the experience of mentors for at-risk youth is limited. Future programs can benefit from the analyses of mentors' diverse experiences by utilizing the mechanisms in Campus Corps that appear to contribute to positive perceptions of outcomes by mentors. For example, programs across the country are increasingly utilizing similar supervisory components of Campus Corps, such as group mentoring, peer supervision, and more involved match support specialists. Such components may also have a profound affect on their mentor. Beyond mentor effects, these supervisory and structural program components benefit the mentee as well. Based on the current and preexisting analyses of mentor perceptions, having structured activities, supportive staff, and intensive training (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000) contribute to the mentor's confidence, which likely enhances the mentoring experience for mentees (Karcher et al., 2006).

Additionally, the specific strategies employed by Campus Corps mentors may also prove to be useful for mentors in other structured, time-limited mentoring programs. It stands to reason that focusing on one's role, maintaining a positive attitude, working on communication, and reflecting would often be beneficial for youth mentors to employ. One implication of the current study may be the potential benefit of training mentors to focus on those four strategies prior to involvement with youth. It is unknown if such strategies would be as helpful in a more traditional one-to-one model of mentoring, and future research on these strategies in other settings is needed. Additionally, further research is needed to ascertain the relationship between these strategies and predicted outcomes.

Last, as many as half of typical youth mentoring relationships terminate prematurely, resulting in detrimental outcomes for vulnerable youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Such failed relationships stem from mentor abandonment, unmet expectations of mentors regarding the experience, deficiencies in mentor relational skills, or inadequate agency support (Spencer, 2007). Therefore, it remains fundamentally important for mentoring programs to ensure that the mentor experience is satisfying, manageable, and rewarding. A program's ability to ensure such an experience would mean more mentoring relationships being supported, and ultimately sustained. For programs similar to Campus Corps, focusing on the mentors' perceptions and strategies may be helpful in guiding the overall experience of mentoring. For programs with fewer similarities to Campus Corps, it is also important to obtain the mentors' experience and seek to provide a positive one, to promote a successful experience, further volunteerism, and positive mentee outcomes.

Limitations

The present study followed the canons of grounded theory methodology and was developed with a specific focus on generating a high level of dependability. The strengths of the present study include the use of numerous data sources to corroborate the emergent model in a multifaceted method. Unlike many qualitative studies, the sample of mentors was large, allowing for more variability of responses and ultimately lending to greater generalizability of findings to similar programs. The study also utilized multiple researchers which greatly decreased the instance of biases throughout the conclusions grounded in the coding of responses.

The present study also had several limitations. First, the bulk of the data was centered upon mentor perceptions and reflections of themselves, their mentees, and the program. As with any study based on self-report there remains a question of accuracy. However, because the goal of the current study was to capture the mentor experience through an inductive process, self-report was preferable to more objective methods. Next, the mentors with Campus Corps participate on a volunteer basis. This leads to self-selection of sample participants. The large majority of individuals in Campus Corps are involved in human development and family studies and psychology major fields of study. Therefore, results may not be generalizable to mentor programs within other fields.

Last, it is crucial to note that Campus Corps is a university course that students complete for college credit. Based on this premise, commitment levels among mentors might be higher than in volunteer mentoring programs because of the added incentive of college credit. Similarly, because the experience occurred within a university course, there is the potential that students may have had assumptions about the study's hypotheses or learned implicitly from any communication with the experimenter. Although efforts were made to disguise which assignments were utilized for research, eliminate our contact with participants aside from the grounded theory methodology, assure students that participation in research had no bearing on their grade, and maintain consistency with previous semesters, it is possible that demand characteristics biased the mentors' responses. Therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution and additional research on this topic should be conducted to verify results.

Future Research

As part of the larger program evaluation of Campus Corps, we are evaluating youth outcomes. Preliminary results from the mixed-method study indicate a positive experience

for youth. Future research on the program will include continued evaluation of youth and mentor outcomes, as well as an evaluation of the mechanisms of change within the program. To further evaluate the experience of mentoring from the perspective of the mentor, research should focus on replication of findings. Specifically, future studies should explicitly test the effect that program structure has on positive outcomes and determine whether the support, structure, or training aspects of the program translate to success in other programs. Additionally, future research may include the following questions: Does focusing on role as mentor, positive attitude, communication, or reflections improve outcomes for other mentors in other programs? Are these strategies universal in the success of mentoring? What mentor characteristics, mentee characteristics, relationship characteristics, or a combination of all characteristics are associated with positive outcomes for mentors and mentees? In what ways does the mentor experience ultimately affect the mentee experience?

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