

Mentoring College-Age Women: A Relational Approach¹

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Despite the popularity of mentoring programs, the relational dimension of mentoring has not been elucidated. Traditional conceptions of mentoring may exclude factors that are particularly important for women and girls, thus limiting the efficacy of mentoring programs for female adolescents. We suggest that the presence of relational qualities in the mentoring relationship (e.g., empathy, engagement, authenticity, and empowerment) strongly influences the success of mentoring in the lives of young women. In this study, we use a promising new measure of mentoring, the Relational Health Index – Mentor, to explore the impact of relational aspects of mentoring in female college students. We found that mentoring relationships high in relational qualities were associated with higher self-esteem and less loneliness.

KEY WORDS: mentoring; college-age women; adolescents; relational theory.

INTRODUCTION

Successful transition to adulthood is a major developmental task that has become increasingly complex. With changing gender roles, young women in particular may find this rite of passage frustrating, confusing, and stressful.

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A growing literature suggests that mentors, or nonkin adult support figures, can foster the psychosocial and educational adjustment of young women and help them move into adulthood (Cowen & Work, 1988; Darling, 1991; Galbo, 1986; Garmezy, 1985; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992; Rutter, 1987; Sullivan, 1996). Indeed, mentoring has become an increasingly popular form of intervention with youths, including both gifted and at-risk populations (Freedman, 1992, 1993; Galbo, Demetruilius, & Crippen, 1990; Gambone, 1993; Hamilton, 1991; Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Torrance, 1983). Some mentoring programs have even specifically targeted adolescent women (Rhodes, 1993). However, how mentoring relationships influence the lives of young women has been unclear.

Traditionally, it has been assumed that mentors facilitate transition from adolescence to adulthood through the instrumental provision of information, advice, skill-building, challenge, and role-modeling (Daloz, 1983; Flaxman, Ascher, & Harrington, 1988; Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1979). This prototype of mentoring tends to be unidirectional and task or behavior oriented, where the mentor intervenes on behalf of the protégé's specific, tangible needs or deficiencies. But interestingly, there is evidence that this traditional conception of mentoring may be less adequate for females compared to their male counterparts (Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Philip & Hendry, 1996; Sullivan, 1996). Instead, young women are more likely to respond to a relationship that involves *mutual* exchange (Belle, 1991; Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). We suggest that the presence of relational qualities in the mentoring relationship (e.g., empathy, engagement, authenticity, empowerment) strongly influences the success of mentoring during critical periods in the lives of adolescents and young adults. Accordingly, the current study explores the relational dimension of mentoring women in late adolescence.

Late Adolescence: Critical Period for Mentoring Young Women

Late adolescence is characterized by many stressful transitions, including physiological, cognitive, and social changes, that provide opportunities for positive development but also open the door to adjustment difficulties. Students entering into and graduating from college face role shifts that often involve making decisions about education and careers, assuming greater financial responsibility, and increased autonomy or agency (Barone, Trickett, Schmid, & Leone, 1993; Bogat et al., 1993; Bush & Simmons, 1987). For young women, these changes may threaten their sense of belonging, and may lead to loneliness, because women's self-concepts tend to be highly

defined by interpersonal relationships (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Jordan et al., 1991; Wiseman, 1997). Young women in late adolescence also face other maturational tasks, including separation–individuation, where adolescents are challenged to become less dependent on parents, and to find substitutes outside the family (Frank, Pirsch, & Wright, 1990; Hoffman, 1984; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991, 1992; Lopez, 1991). For females, this challenge is complicated by the fact that most maintain close emotional attachments with parents (Frank et al., 1990; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; Hoffman, 1984), but that these attachments need to evolve into more mutual, adult relationships over time.

In addition to shifts in attachment and autonomy, late adolescence is a time where one's sense of self must be renegotiated to accommodate transitions to adult roles. Self-esteem plays a central role in adolescents' psychological development and outcomes, including academic achievement (Liu, Kaplan, & Risser, 1992), depression (Smart & Walsh, 1993), illicit drug use (Taylor & del Pilar, 1992; Vega, Zimmerman, Warheit, & Apospori, 1993), and sexually risky behavior (Crockenberg & Soby, 1989). Research has documented decreases in adolescent self-esteem as a consequence of stress (e.g., Johnson & McCutcheon, 1980; Youngs, Rathge, Mullis, & Mullis, 1990).

Impact of Mentoring for Young Women

The developmental, gender, and situational characteristics of young women may inform an understanding of both the desirable outcomes and process characteristics of their mentoring relationships. Given the centrality of psychological dimensions including self-esteem and sense of connection in young women's lives, mentoring may have its most significant impact in these areas (e.g., Cassidy, 1988). Fostering psychological growth, such as self-esteem, may then lead to a host of other positive behavioral outcomes (Crockenberg & Soby, 1988; Liu et al., 1992; Smart & Walsh, 1993; Taylor & del Pilar, 1992; Vega et al., 1993). Furthermore, as shown through social support research, mentoring relationships that match the needs of the population may buffer the stressful effects of school transition on adjustment outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Gottlieb, 1992).

Relational Mentoring

Research on social connections has indicated that the *quality and nature* of women's relationships may be more meaningful than is their *quantity or structure* (Bryant, 1985; Fiore, Becker, & Coppel, 1983; Waldrop & Halverson, 1975). Furthermore, a number of qualities are more salient in

women's versus men's relationships, including mutually self-disclosing, dyadic, empathic, and intimate relationships (e.g., Belle, 1991; Candy, Troll, & Levy, 1981). Relationships characterized by such qualities can facilitate emotional resiliency, coping strategies, and additional social support (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Genero et al., 1992; Lin, 1986).

Along these lines, the relational model was developed at the Wellesley College Stone Center as a theoretical paradigm for the assessment of women's psychological development and well-being (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). While most traditional psychological theories emphasize the task of separation-individuation as the ultimate goal of development, relational model theorists conceptualize ongoing, growth-fostering connection as critical to women's development (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Surrey, 1985). The relational model has been used to conceptualize innovations in areas such as psychotherapy, inpatient treatment, substance abuse, and HIV prevention among women (Amaro, 1995; Covington, 1998; Finkelstein, 1996; Nelson, 1996; Riggs & Bright, 1997).

In response to critics who contend that such a model overridealizes caring qualities and denies personal needs, Jordan and others have convincingly held that growth-fostering aspects of women's relational skills empower individuals as well as their relationships by increasing a sense of self-worth, vitality, and validation, a knowledge of self and others, and a desire for further connection (Jordan, 1997; Westkott, 1997). On the basis of clinical data, relational model theorists have identified several growth-fostering qualities of relationships, including mutual engagement (as defined by perceived mutual involvement, commitment, and attunement to the relationship), authenticity (the process of acquiring knowledge of self and the other and feeling free to be genuine in the context of the relationship), and empowerment (the experience of feeling personally strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to take action; Jordan, 1992, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Previous research has strongly suggested the significance of these three qualities in relationships. And they may be especially apropos in mentoring relationships. Engagement may play a beneficial role in mentoring relationships as indicated by studies on closeness and empathy in other types of dyadic relationships. By contributing to the perception of commitment and attunement, engagement in a relationship can mediate stress and depression and can be associated with self-esteem, self-actualization, cooperation, low interpersonal distress, and relationship satisfaction (Beeber, 1998; Burnett & Demnar, 1996; Gawronski & Privette, 1997; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996; Sheffield, Carey, Patenaude, & Lambert, 1995; Shulman & Knafo, 1997). Authenticity appears to be associated with being liked, greater liking of others, and motivation in relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994; Kay & Christopel, 1995). Empowerment has a direct impact on positive

affect, meaningful activity, and innovativeness (Hall & Nelson, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995).

The importance of psychologically oriented qualities, such as engagement, authenticity, and empowerment, is supported by research on adolescent girls that suggests that health-sustaining relationships with women mentors are characterized by mentors' ability to listen, understand, and affirm the knowledge and experience of the adolescent (Sullivan, 1996). Moreover, it stands to reason that in order for mentoring to fit the needs of young women, gender and developmental characteristics, such as increasing desire for close, mutual, adult relationships should be taken into account. Therefore, traditional notions of mentoring entail a unidirectional "passing down" of advice, role-modeling and socialization (Daloz, 1983; Flaxman et al., 1988; Hamilton & Darling, 1989) while an adolescent female may be better served by a more reciprocal, holistic type of mentoring that also recognizes her psychological needs and resources and fosters growth in those areas.

Existing literature on mentoring suggests the specific importance of engagement, authenticity, and empowerment qualities in promoting positive psychological outcomes. Engagement is critical in that mentoring has been described as being one of the most intimate and intense of all helping relationships (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1979). Clawson (1980) defines mentor-protégé relationships as those with a high degree of mutuality and comprehensiveness of influence on the protégé. A key factor that is seen as contributing to the emotional intensity of mentor relationships may be the young person's discovery of an adult who "sees me as I really am" (Daloz, 1986)—making mutual authenticity important to include in assessing mentoring quality. Finally, many definitions of mentoring entail the function of empowering a protégé to "do" or "experience" things through teaching, role-modeling, challenging, or inspiring (Hamilton & Darling, 1989).

Despite these relevant findings, empirical examination of relational qualities within young women's mentoring relationships has been limited by a lack of validated tools expressly designed to reflect them, especially in the context of specific relationship types, such as mentoring connections. To date, we are aware of only one published measure, the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ; Genero et al., 1992), that explicitly reflects the growth-fostering characteristics described earlier. The MPDQ is a 22-item self-report measure that asks respondents to rate their perceptions of their relationship with someone to whom they feel close, as well as their perceptions of the other's experience of this relationship.

For the purpose of this study, it was determined that a different measure of relational health would better address the direct and moderating effects of quality mentoring relationships. This newly validated measure,

the Relational Health Index – Mentor (RHI-M; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002) differs from the MPDQ in a number of ways. First, the MPDQ is an assessment based on impressions during *verbal interactions* with a partner. The RHI-M, on the other hand, includes attitudinal and behavioral assessments in more general context (e.g., “I can be genuinely myself with my mentor”). This is particularly useful in assessing mentoring relationships whose growth-fostering impact may occur through modes other than dyadic, verbal interaction (e.g., classroom or group instruction, coaching on a sports team, role-modeling, or advocacy). Second, although the MPDQ reflects a more unitary concept, the RHI-M items were designed to reflect several distinct attributes of growth-fostering relationships or relational health described earlier (i.e., engagement, authenticity, empowerment). Lastly, the RHI-M was designed to assess mentoring relationships, and thus contains items that specifically pertain to this type of relationship (e.g., “my mentor’s commitment to and involvement in our relationship exceeds that required by his/her social/professional role”). Because the MPDQ was not specifically designed to assess mentoring relationships, it contains items that are relevant to dyadic relationships in general.

This Study

This study is a “pilot” investigation into the active ingredients of a mentoring relationship. We used the new RHI-M (Liang et al., 2002), to explore the direct and moderating effects of quality mentoring relationships in first and final year college students. We hypothesized that those with high levels of relational mentoring would evince higher levels of self-esteem and sense of connection beyond any effects of structurally based characteristics of mentoring such as duration of the mentoring relationship, mentor–adolescent match, and degree of contact between the mentor and adolescent. We also predicted that relational aspects of mentoring would buffer the impact of perceived stress on self-esteem and sense of connection more than would structural aspects of mentoring.

METHOD

Participants

This study drew from data collected for a larger study assessing the dynamics of critical transition periods in students’ academic lives. The broader study collected data from 450 first- and fourth-year female undergraduates, age 17–23 ($M = 19.20$, $SD = 1.48$), who were enrolled in a small liberal

Table I. Descriptive Statistics on Sample Characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%
Class standing		
First-year students	197	66.6
Fourth-year students	99	33.4
Ethnicity (could select more than one)		
White	192	64.9
Asian	69	23.3
Black	13	4.4
Hispanic	13	4.4
Other	17	5.7
Duration of mentor relationship		
Known mentor less than 6 months	35	11.8
Known mentor 6 months to less than 1 year	29	9.8
Known mentor 1 year to less than 2 years	26	8.8
Known mentor 2 years or more	206	69.6
Degree of mentor/protégé match		
Match both ethnicity and gender	23	7.8
Match either ethnicity or gender	131	44.3
Match neither ethnicity nor gender	142	48.0
Type of mentor		
Mentor is college faculty or staff	104	35.1
Mentor is not faculty or staff	192	64.9
Mentor provides guidance for (could select more than one)		
Social issues	147	49.7
Emotional issues	160	54.0
Academic or intellectual issues	228	77.0
Athletic and physical movement issues	33	11.1
Ethnic or minority issues	27	9.1
Religious or spiritual issues	53	17.9
Other issues	31	10.5

arts college in New England. Our analyses are based on a subsample of 296 students who nominated at least one person whom they considered to be a current mentor and who had valid data on each of the analysis variables. Descriptive data on these participants are shown in Table I.

Procedure

In the spring of 1998, students were sent a questionnaire and informed consent cover letter asking them to participate in a study of relationships and health, outlining risks and benefits, and explaining that returning the survey indicated consent to participate. The questionnaire contained indices of mentoring relationships, other social support, related adjustment measures, and demographic information as well as other psychosocial measures. Incentives (several cash prize raffles) were offered in return for completed surveys. The return rate for surveys was 53%.

Table II. Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables

	High score indicates	Possible range	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Obtained range
Self-esteem	Higher self-esteem levels	1.00–4.00	3.28 (0.58)	1.20–4.00
Loneliness	Higher loneliness levels	1.00–4.00	2.01 (0.50)	1.05–3.50
Stress	Higher levels of stress	1.00–5.00	2.82 (0.53)	1.43–4.36
Relational quality	Higher levels of relational quality	1.00–5.00	4.06 (0.56)	2.18–5.00
Contact with mentor	Higher levels of contact	1.00–4.00	1.96 (0.86)	1.00–4.00

Measures

We used the RHI-M (Liang et al., 2002; see Appendix A³), a measure of the *quality of mentoring relationships*, which was developed as part of the original study. Items representing characteristics of growth-fostering mentoring relationships were generated and refined through a series of conversations and focus groups with female college students and relational model theorists (Liang et al., 1998). Respondents were asked to choose someone who represented their most significant nonkin mentor (defined as “someone who is older than you, more experienced than you and guides you in some area of your life”) and rate their relationship with this person in terms of these growth-fostering characteristics from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Confirmatory factor analyses provided empirical support for three hypothesized scales representing authenticity (four items), engagement (three items), and empowerment (four items). Although conceptually distinct, the three subscales were highly interrelated ($r = .76-.88$), and so a composite score was obtained by calculating the mean of all 11 items. This composite scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$). A higher score on this composite reflects better relationship quality. The current study’s respondents reported high levels of mentor relationship quality (see Table II for descriptive statistics on this and other analysis variables).

Two items were used to assess the *degree of contact with a mentor*: (1) meetings with the mentor alone and (2) contact by e-mail or phone (1 = *less than once a month*, 2 = *once or twice a month*, 3 = *three or four times a month*, and 4 = *more than once a week*). A composite was obtained by averaging across these two items. Another item assessed the *length of time the student has known the mentor* (1 = *less than 6 months*, 2 = *6 months to less than 1 year*, 3 = *1 year to less than 2 years*, and 4 = *2 years or more*). Because almost 70% of the sample reported having had known the nominated

³Detailed information regarding this scale and its development can be obtained from the first author.

Table III. Pearson Product–Moment Correlations Among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	1.00								
	-.05	1.00							
	.14*	.03	1.00						
	.25**	-.16**	.10	1.00					
White	.05	-.01	.41**	-.04	1.00				
Class	-.21**	.33**	.03	-.01	.03	1.00			
Stress	.00	.03	.04	.06	-.07	.01	1.00		
Self-esteem	.09	.02	.02	-.01	.12*	.16**	-.57**	1.00	
Loneliness	-.14*	-.13*	-.10	-.02	-.11*	-.06	.47**	-.52**	1.00

Note. Shaded boxes indicate intercorrelations among mentor relationship characteristics.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

mentor for a period of 2 years or longer, we dichotomized this item by giving a value of “1” to mentoring relationships that were at least 2 years old and a value of “0” to relationships that were newer. A constructed item reflecting the *degree of match between the student and mentor* in terms of gender and ethnicity was also used. Mentors who matched students in *both* gender and ethnicity were given a value of “2,” those who matched only one characteristic were given a value of “1,” and those matching neither characteristic were given a value of “0” on this new variable.

Preliminary analyses showed that these four characteristics of the mentor–adolescent relationship (relationship quality, degree of contact, duration of relationship, and mentor match), although moderately related, are independent enough to be considered distinct constructs (see Table III for intercorrelations among the analysis variables). Therefore, these four indicators of mentoring quality provide unique information regarding the nature of the mentoring relationship.

Stress was measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), a 14-item measure designed to assess the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful. Respondents are asked to rate statements such as “In the past month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?” and “In the past month how often have you felt that things were going your way?” Participants rate the items on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from *never* to *very often*) with higher scores reflecting greater perceived stress. The PSS has previously demonstrated adequate test-retest ($r = .85$), internal reliability ($\alpha = .84$ – $.86$), and validity (Cohen et al., 1983). In our sample, this scale shows good internal reliability ($\alpha = .87$). We constructed a scale score so that higher values indicate higher perceived stress. The mean for participants in this study was 2.81 ($SD = 0.53$).

Loneliness, or the extent to which a student lacks a sense of connection was measured by the UCLA Loneliness Scale (RULS; Russell, Cutrona, Rose, & Yurko, 1984) with the use of items rated from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). This 20-item self-report measure is well documented and has consistently demonstrated evidence of validity and reliability. The coefficient of internal consistency obtained in our sample was high ($\alpha = .94$). A scale score (the mean of the 20 items) was constructed so that a higher score indicates greater loneliness.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SE; Rosenberg, 1965) contains 10 items regarding an individual's perceptions of self-worth, which are rated from 1 (*disagree a lot*) to 4 (*agree a lot*). Numerous studies using the scale have provided strong evidence of validity and reliability. The coefficient of internal consistency obtained in our sample was good ($\alpha = .89$). We constructed a scale score (the mean of the 10 items) so that higher values indicate higher self-esteem.

Analyses

We conducted three sets of analyses designed to test the following hypotheses: (1) the relational quality of mentoring relationships is associated with students' ratings of self-esteem and loneliness beyond structural aspects of mentoring (duration, match, and contact) and (2) the relational quality of mentoring relationships buffers the effects of stress on students' self-esteem and loneliness more than do structural aspects of mentoring. In addition, we examined whether (3) the effects of mentoring on self-esteem and loneliness differ by academic class standing. To test the hypothesis that characteristics of the mentoring relationship are associated with student's self-esteem and loneliness (Hypothesis 1), we conducted a set of regression analyses. In each of these regression equations, race (White vs. non-White) and academic class standing (1st year vs. senior) were entered as covariates in the analyses. Main effects of mentoring quality, the degree of contact with the mentor, mentor-adolescent match, and the length of the mentoring relationship were modeled. To test the hypothesis that mentoring buffers the deleterious effects of stress on self-esteem and loneliness (Hypothesis 2), we conducted another set of analyses where psychological outcomes were regressed on the interaction between stress level and each of the mentoring relationship characteristics (modeled as product terms constructed with centered variables), with the rest of the model remaining the same. Similarly, we tested for differential mentoring effects because of academic class standing by replacing stress-by-mentoring interactions with interactions between academic class standing and mentoring characteristics (Hypothesis 3).

RESULTS

Our analyses show (see Table IV) that relational quality significantly predicts both loneliness and self-esteem, beyond the effects of structural aspects of mentoring, stress, race, and academic class standing. In contrast, degree of contact with a mentor only marginally predicts loneliness, and mentor match and relationship duration predict neither outcome. Stress was the strongest predictor of self-esteem and loneliness, by far, increasing the proportion of variance explained by our models from less than 5% to more than 25% for self-esteem and more than 35% for loneliness. This suggests that strategies to reduce stress may be most beneficial for increasing the psychological well-being of college-aged women. Because stress itself may not be easily reduced in direct ways because of the inherently stressful nature of college years, a more effective strategy for offsetting the strain to students' well-being may be applied to enhance the quality of their mentoring relationships.

It is interesting to note that higher academic class standing is associated with higher self-esteem. This may be due to an increase in self-esteem over time as students master skills. Alternatively, students with lower self-esteem may tend to drop out of college over time, which would serve to increase the group's mean self-esteem level. It is likely that both of these dynamics

Table IV. Results of Regression Analyses

	Self-esteem			Loneliness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
White	.132*	.069	.136*	-.093	-.038	-.089
Class	.205**	.199**	.210**	-.049	-.043	-.050
Relational quality	.144*	.124*	.144*	-.147*	-.127*	-.150*
Contact	-.048	-.026	-.053	-.117	-.134*	-.119
Match	-.055	-.011	-.064	-.032	-.072	-.033
Duration	-.038	-.001	-.038	-.002	-.032	-.003
Stress		-.562**			.480**	
Stress by quality		.042			-.051	
Stress by contact		.004			-.019	
Stress by match		.040			-.056	
Stress by duration		.093			-.079	
Class by quality			.040			-.008
Class by contact			.017			.001
Class by match			-.050			.033
Class by duration			.070			.047
<i>F</i> statistic (<i>df</i> , <i>df</i>)	3.135** (6, 289)	16.348** (11, 284)	2.138* (10, 285)	2.636* (6, 289)	10.741** (11, 284)	1.670 (10, 285)
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.042	.364	.037	.032	.266	.022

Note. Parameters shown are standardized beta weights.
p* < .05. *p* < .01.

are occurring. Another interesting finding is the effect of ethnicity on self-esteem. This effect disappears, however, when the model accounts for stress levels. It may be that minority students experience stress associated with their minority status over and above the typical stresses of negotiating college transitions and academic rigors. These combined stresses may have a more negative impact on their self-esteem levels when compared to their Caucasian counterparts.

Analyses testing our hypotheses that mentoring characteristics buffer the effects of stress on self-esteem and loneliness were not supported in this sample, although the direction of the obtained effects is consistent with a stress-buffering hypothesis. We did note one marginally significant interaction effect in these models: the interaction of stress and the duration of the mentor relationship in the prediction of self-esteem ($r = .09$, $p = .067$). Because this sample had a restricted range on several of the variables (e.g., mentor match, relationship duration, relational quality, and self-esteem), we expect that a resulting decrease in power of the statistical tests yields a conservative estimate of the true relationships among these variables.

Although there was a significant main effect of class standing on self-esteem (i.e., seniors had relatively greater self-esteem levels than did 1st-year students), there were no interaction effects between academic class standing and mentoring characteristics. In other words, mentoring relationships predict students' self-esteem similarly well for 1st- and 4th-year students. In terms of loneliness, 1st-year students did not differ from 4th-year students, nor did the effects of mentoring on loneliness differ for 1st- and 4th-year students.

DISCUSSION

While existing mentor studies have tended to focus on the outcomes of traditional mentoring models (cf. Edlind & Haensly, 1985; Freedman, 1993), the current study explores the underlying characteristics of mentoring relationships in female adolescents thought to be fundamental to their psychological development. This study used a new measure of relational health and mentoring, the RHI-M.

The findings have important implications for the design of mentor interventions and program evaluation. Despite the intuitive appeal of mentor programs for both males and females, many such programs have fallen short of their advocates' hopes (Edlind & Haensly, 1985; Freedman, 1993). These failures may reflect the fact that simply establishing mentoring programs provides opportunities for the formation of mentoring relationships, but does not represent an a priori guarantee that such relationships will in fact

develop, or that they will foster growth in the protégé. Most mentor programs have offered limited training with few guidelines on the content of mentoring (Freedman, 1992; Rhodes & Englund, 1994). Instead, some programs have placed an emphasis on structural components of mentor programs, such as frequency of contact and matching gender and ethnicity in mentor–protégé pairs. Interestingly, our results indicate that these aspects have limited importance compared to the nature and quality of the mentoring relationship. Moreover, the basic virtues of mutual engagement, authenticity, and empowerment, which may also be hallmarks of relationships other than mentoring, can in themselves produce positive developmental outcomes in adolescent females. It is important to note that data from this study do not prove that more tangible qualities such as teaching, advising, and role-modeling are not present or beneficial in the mentoring relationships of young women. Indeed, such tangible functions may be helpful if they are manifest in a manner that conveys mutual engagement/empathy, authenticity, and empowerment. Additional research involving the measurement of both instrumental and psychological dimensions of mentoring is necessary to determine their combined efficacy.

Because the characteristics of relational mentoring are less tangible compared to instrumental functions, questions remain concerning the method of training mentors. Although our findings might suggest the usefulness of systematically integrating relational qualities into both natural and assigned mentoring relationships through psychologically oriented training, such as empathy-building, the extent to which this is possible is not entirely clear. In contrast to structural characteristics and instrumental mentoring, it may be that the processes that occur in relational mentoring are subject to less controllable phenomena, such as individual disposition and natural attraction or “chemistry.” Extended time in the mentoring relationship seems to aid in the development of growth-fostering characteristics, but beyond this fact, additional work must be done to describe the exact nature of mentors’ conduct that elicits protégés’ perceptions of authenticity, engagement, and empowerment within the relationship.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although we expect our overall results to be generalizable to college-aged women, they should be interpreted within the limitations of our study. First, the sample may be biased because of self-selection. Because the response rate was only about 50%, we do not know if characteristics associated with relational mentoring differ for students who completed and returned the survey and those who did not. Second, the generalizability of the data is likely

to be limited because the sample is a self-selected group of accomplished, bright, highly achievement-oriented young women. Such young women may be more likely to form and utilize mentoring relationships, as well as be more aware of their beneficial qualities compared to less success-oriented young women. Third, because of the correlational nature of the data, direction of causality in the relationships between stress, relational mentoring, loneliness, and self-esteem is unclear. For example, positive social ties and self-esteem can be seen as co-occurring coping resources. Although healthy and intimate attachments can lead to the development of a positive sense of self, this process may become reciprocal over time; individuals with high self-esteem may be more apt to form and maintain relationships, as well as elicit and perceive positive responses from others. A longitudinal study is warranted to provide greater evidence of causal relationships.

Ecological person-process-context models also warrant the study of relational qualities in the mentoring relationships of diverse populations and situations. For example, participants in the current study were predominantly Caucasian and Asian; future studies should explore in greater depth the cross-cultural differences in mentoring between these populations, as well as other ethnic minorities. Although few empirical studies explicitly examine such cultural differences, theoretical literature indicates that differences in mentor formation and quality might be expected (e.g., Liang & Bogat, 1994; Liang, Kauh, Tracy, Williams, & Taylor, under review). For example, characteristics of Asian culture, such as status hierarchy and emotional restriction, may inhibit most Asian American students in establishing mentor relationships with individuals they view as authority figures.

Besides cultural differences, additional studies examining the applicability of relational concepts in male mentoring should be conducted to determine whether relational mentoring may be more effective for male students than traditional conceptualizations of mentoring have suggested. Although theories of male psychological development that tend to emphasize the primary importance of the self over social connection have been criticized (Bergman, 1995), empirical research on relational mentoring comparing male and female students is needed to provide clearer evidence of similarities and differences across gender.

Finally, relational theory also indicates the need for future studies examining mutuality by assessing both members of the relationship. Research has acknowledged that successful mentoring relationships may be founded on mutual benefit (Burgoyne & Kelly, 1991; Healy & Welchert, 1990; Maton, 1990). Therefore, in addition to protégé outcomes, the personal attributes of and outcomes for the mentor, including motivating benefits, should be assessed. Motivating benefits for the mentor might include a sense of efficacy that derives from mentoring (Rhodes & Englund, 1994), or simply the

enjoyment of the relationship because of affection for the protégé. Therefore, additional inquiry into the characteristics of both members of the dyad in various contexts may further expand our understanding of the mutually beneficial qualities of mentoring relationships and how they vary across persons and situations.

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