Paying it Forward:

An argument for single-sex youth mentoring programs

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ABSTRACT

Youth mentoring may be vital for the social development of young individuals. Mentors help

youth learn to form positive relationships in their community, navigate through college

experiences, or teaching them about social differences. This study argues the advantages of

having mentors paired up with the same race and sex so that youth can relate with individuals of

similar backgrounds. To test this argument, a content analysis was determined on 30 mentor

blogs. Findings revealed significant differences between men and women mentors and

differences by on a basis of race and gender roles are integrated into mentoring skills and

therefore it is important to create mentoring programs that are designed for specific race and

gender.

Mentoring as a means to foster growth and development is crucial for youth. Mentors provide support particularly for those whom lack parental or community ties. Mentoring has many long-term benefits in education and future careers for youth (Tierney, Colvar, & Corwin, 2003). According to Tierney, Colvar, & Corwin (2003), mentoring is most effective when students are paired with mentors of the same race, gender, and/or ethnicity. Mentors provide development and support for youth in a long-term relationship. Tierney, Colvar, & Corwin (2003), describe mentoring as a development program that requires specific training for adults who serve as role models for youth. Mentoring becomes successful when evaluations are regularly accessed and evaluated (Tierney, Colvar, & Corwin, 2003).

Although mentoring programs have been in place for decades in the United States, little attention has been given to same race and same sex mentoring programs are explored in this study. While some scholars have analyzed previous mentoring programs found in schools and society, social factors have been ignored. Gender roles must be explored to understand the significance of working with individuals that one can relate.

Given the lack of research on single race and sex mentoring programs, the purpose of this study is to examine how current mentors view their roles in the lives of youth. Particular attention is given to differences by sex and race. The central research questions addressed here are: why mentoring is important, why mentors have become involved, and what advice they would give to perspective mentors. This paper argues that contrary to prior co-educational mentoring programming, single race and sex mentorship would create a space for the reconstructing of gender roles and provide role models for underrepresented groups.

Social Learning Theory

For decades researchers have attempted to identify the causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and deviant acts by analyzing social factors. There has been a shift from biological explanations of youth behavior toward social explanations, such as Social Learning Theory (see Bandura, 1969; Akers, Krohn, Lanza- Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979). Social Learning Theory has previously been used to understand social behavioral condition of human beings (McMurtry & Curling 2008). It no longer solely address criminal behavior; rather, it gives insight to the behavior that causes deviant act to occur (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce,& Radosevich, 1979). Social Learning theorists, such as Akers (1979), used this theory to understand the effects of socialization on acquiring deviant behaviors. Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce,& Radosevich (1979) note that as human beings establish significant groups and relationship's, they acquire cultural attitudes and norms, including norms of deviant behavior.(p. 639).

According to McMurtry & Curling (2008), Social Learning Theory no longer focuses exclusively on criminal or deviant behaviors, but is used to understand human social behavior more generally. Contemporary Social Learning Theory, examines the social situations that causes deviant act to occur (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce,& Radosevich, 1979). Researchers today use Social Learning Theory to analyze how social interactions and social situations positively or negatively contribute to the socialization of youth.

Social Learning Theory was initially developed by Bandura in 1969, who argued that learning is a cognitive process that takes place within a social context. Bandura (1969) argues that social behaviors are acquired by first observing and then imitating, or modeling, other's social behavior. In the successful imitation of others' social behavior, positive reinforcements may be used, such as praising a child for correctly modeling a desired behavior. Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce,& Radosevich (1979) notes that positive reinforcements can also be given for negative

behaviors which result in the formation of deviant behavior (p. 638). This might occur when

peers praise a fellow teen for engaging in reckless behavior such as underage drinking.

Bandura (1969) suggests that positive reinforcements occurs in three ways: informative,

motivational, and cognitive (Bandura, 1969). Informative reinforcement occurs when a person

observes the responses to a social behavior, and then uses this information to hypothesize what

future behaviors are likely to result in successful performances, thus maximizing rewards and

minimizing punishments. Motivational reinforcement occurs when actions are self-regulated in

the present in anticipation of a positive consequence; thus "future consequences can be converted

in much the same way as actual consequences" (Bandura, 1969, p. 3). Lastly, Bandura considers

whether social behaviors are cognitively reinforced; in other words, to what extent do people

carefully weigh the consequences of a particular social behavior before acting?

Bandura's (1969) theory explains that deviance is a learned behavior. Changes in the

social situation means a person may observe new forms of behavior. If these behaviors are

positively reinforced, a personal adaption of new behaviors is more likely to occur, including

deviant behaviors.

Application of Social Learning Theory

The Health Belief Model, developed by Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker (1988),

incorporates Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The model attempts to explain individual's

desire to be healthy. The researchers argued that "being healthy" is a concept that not all human

beings adopt. They note that reinforcements are important in the behavioral development of

human. Thus if one does not take care of her health, she is punished in the form of an illness or

disease. "In the case of punishments, behavior that avoids punishment is learned because it

reduces the tension set up by punishment" (Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1979, p. 175).

Previous research has employed Social Learning Theory to understand juvenile crimes but it can also be used to understand why people become mentors. The research here considers why youth mentors enter the profession and what advice they give to others. In other words, how mentors "learn" to mentor from others.

Literature Review

Scholars describe youth mentoring as a means to overcome various youth risk factors, including substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and entering the juvenile justice system. Greenwood and Turner (2009) identify several indictors for at risk youth, such as lack physical or emotional family involvement and lack of appropriate assessment on present prevention and awareness programs. Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992) found two specific risk factors among adolescents: alcohol abuse and drug abuse (p. 64). They argue that abstinence from drugs and alcohol can be achieved, but family members often reinforce youth's risk behaviors. They suggest that the most effective strategies for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse among youth is through risk focused approaches such as counseling, discipline, and mentors.

Another risk factor for youth deviance identified in previous research is an imperfect bonding systems. Scheff's (2000) describes bonding as "attachment to families, commitment to social norms and institutions (school, employment), involvement in activities, and the belief that these things are important" (p. 86). Noyori-Corbett & Moon (2013) found that youth who engaged in delinquency often experienced social isolation and family rejection, and that youth who fail to attain attachments to family or their present communities lack encouraging mentors. If youth are not given a support system, such as mentors, many will experience the juvenile justice system. One question is how might risks factors vary by sex.

Sex Differences

Scholars have analyzed sex differences for youths engaged in deviant behavior. A study by Chapple, & McQuillan, and Berdahl (2005) examined the connection between social bonds and delinquency among youth by sex and found that, for boys, deviant behavior spiked when the degree of social bond decreased primarily in boys. Boys who were less attached deviated more than the girls who were less attached. Chapple, McQuillan, and Berdahl (2005) state, "Gender matters for rates of offending and for the degree of attachment boys and girls experience…yet theories of gendered control or bonding may not adequately explain the sex gap in delinquency " (p. 87).

Piquero, Gover, MacDonald, and Piquero (2005) suggest that boys and girls develop moral beliefs differently; therefore, they deviate differently. In a study of South Carolina students, Piquero, Gover, MacDonald, and Piquero (2005) found that students drop out rate varied by moral beliefs "For males, moral beliefs appears to differentially moderate the effect of prior delinquency and delinquent peers on future delinquency. For females, the pattern of results is similar, with one exception. Regardless of the level of moral belief, past delinquency is positively and significantly linked to subsequent delinquency, but the effect is much smaller among those with high moral beliefs"
 (p. 255). The researchers suggest that the moral beliefs of males are affected by the actions of peers during the times in which the acts were committed. However, both boys and girls are always given the same punishment with the assumption that the deviant act was motivated equally despite the given gender.

Svensson (2003) investigated the link between adolescent drug abuse and parental monitoring and found distinction between boys and girls. (Svensson, 2003). Girls are more monitored by parents more than boys, thus boys are exposed to more deviant behavior of peers.

The research on sex differences for deviant behavior shows that the less boys are monitored, the more they are exposed to the deviant behavior of peers and the less moral beliefs shape behaviors. By contrast, parents monitored girls more than boys, thus girls have stronger bonds to families and community which decreases their exposure to deviant behavior and strengthens their moral beliefs.

Prevention and Awareness

Prevention and awareness programs for deviant youth are common but little research exists about the effectiveness of such programs. Bickman (1983) identifies possible reasons that such programs have not deemed effective. First, while some believe in the effectiveness of youth programs, others argue that to evaluate a prevention programs is illogical because one cannot assess the absence of a condition (p. 183). Second, Bickman (1983) argues that there is lack of theory to properly guide development programs (p. 184). Next, he argues that there is a tendency to look at prevention in simplistic terms, so real change does not occur. Assessment has been conducted on prevention programs, but little of this research is made public or discussed differences for boys versus girls. For example, Greenwood (2008) reports that the programs Scared Straight, LIFT, and No Child Left Behind, were constructed as guides for youth development programs but no training was implemented for the adults running these prevention programs.

Greenwood (2008) agrees with Bickman's argument that prevention and awareness programs are not producing effective results. Greenwood argues that implementing programs that are effective takes too long to implement. Greenwood (2008) states, "Measuring the effects of delinquency prevention programs is challenging because the behavior the programs attempt to change is often covert and the full benefits extend over long periods of time" (p. 187). However,

Greenwood (2008) stresses that identifying successful programs is important to identify the strategies that are successful.

Bickman (1983) questions the assessment measures used claiming that there are not enough measured outcomes with supporting data to conclude such programs are effective. Instead of having a design that compares outcomes for the experimental treatment groups, Bickman argues that measurements show the treatment group compared to nonrandom comparison groups, but what is important for this study is that the groups have been measured only in terms of risk factors while sex differences are largely ignored.

Mentoring programs have been the subject of research but no studies have been conducted on prevention programs that are targeting youth by sex. The purpose of this study is to consider the advice mentors give to others in the field. Given that girl's have stronger bonds to families and communities, female mentors might that allow girls to speak freely among the issues they do not feel comfortable sharing with their peers. Boys, on the other hand, may benefit from mentors who help them build stronger bonds to their community.

Methodology

This research employs a content analysis of 30 mentor's blog, posted at massmentors.org. The study analyzes mentors' views about their profession. This platform is designed as a mock facebook. This platform provides a picture of each mentor and a set of questions and answers about their occupation including "Why do you think mentoring is important, Why did you decide to get involved? What would you say to a potential mentor?" This blog site was found through a Google search using the words "Mentoring blogs." Data was collected between August- October during the hours of 6 pm to 8 pm EST.

This blog site was chosen because it gave demographic information about each individual mentor. The blog also provides links to individual blogs for some of its mentors. The blog site is randomly generated. Every time you return to the site a new mentor's page is displayed. In total, thirty mentors were collected for three specific questions, resulting in a total sample size of thirty.

The mentors varied in sex, race, and age. For this sample, eighteen women were analyzed, nine white, six black, two hispanic, and one other. Twelve men were sampled, six white, five hispanic, and one other. All of the mentors are located in various organizations throughout Boston. They are within late twenties and early thirty years of age.

The blogs were for the following: the mentor's sex and race, views on youth deviance feelings/attitudes about mentoring and influences that led to their occuapation as a mentor. Also, the advice social factors that they felt were necessary to share with perspective mentors. It was important to note their advice to future mentors in order to ensure continued mentoring programs. Finally, the reasons why mentors chose their profession were analyzed.

Findings

The data from this study shows that, there are gender differences among adult mentors in regards to their profession. Women, particularly black women believe that mentoring youths is a way of "paying it forward." This ensures continuing the cycle of helping others. Adults who were once mentored, mentoring youth, who will hopefully mentor in their future. The importance of mentoring youth for the majority of women was unanimously described as being a role model for youth who might otherwise engage in deviant behaviors.

Table 1 shows the social factors that influence mentors by race and sex. The most

frequent response as to why a person becomes a mentor is because they were previously

mentored; however, there is a different by sex. Women were more likely to mentor being

previously mentored (23%) whereas only 10% of men mentioned this. "I was mentored from a

young age from community members, teachers, and my grandmother," stated a woman in this

research. The most frequent response given by men as to why they become a mentor (13%) is

that they want to influence youth. Both men and women both mentioned they mentor because it

builds the youths' connections to their communities. The second most frequently mentioned

reason for mentoring was to build community connections: 23% of the thirty men and women

blogging describe community connections as a social factor that influences them to mentor

youth. Other reasons mentors gave for entering this profession was "youth guidance" (17%) and

because they had a passion for helping (10%). Notably, only women mentioned youth guidance.

Table 1
Social factors influencing mentors by race and sex

Social Factors		Race of Mentor					Total
		White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total by sex	
Previous Mentors	Female	1	5	1	0	7 (23%)	10 (33%)
	Male	1	0	1	1	3 (10%)	
Community Connections	Female	3	0	1	0	4 (13%)	7 (23%)
	Male	1	0	2	0	3 (10%)	
Youth Guidance	Female	4	0	0	1	5 (17%)	5 (17%)
	Male	0	0	0	0	0	
Influence Youth	Female	1	0	0	0	1 (3%)	5 (17%)
	Male	3	0	1	0	4 (13%)	
Passion for helping	Female	0	1	0	0	1 (3%)	3 (10%)
	Male	1	0	1	0	2 (6%)	
TOTAL		15 (50%)	6 (20%)	7 (23%)	2 (6%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Another social factor that impacts the respondent's career as a mentor is their race. Table 1 shows that five Black women were most likely to have previous mentors in their lives, compared to one white woman and one Hispanic woman. One woman stated, "I decided to get involved in the Stronger Leaders, Brighter Futures program at DSNI because I live and grew up in the neighborhood. I also currently reside in my community. I was running a successful business, yet I was missing the fulfillment of really investing in my community through its young people. The mentoring program paired me up with two different young people, both who had similar life stories as mine." In contrast, white women, white men, Hispanic women, and Hispanic men describe various factors shaping their decision to become a mentor. The most frequently response given by white women (4/9) was to provide youth guidance. One half of white men engage in mentoring in order to influence youth (3/6). One man stated, "All of the things that go into making a solid friendship- trust, communication and honesty- can make for a caring mentoring relationship that is fulfilling for both parties by providing guidance."

Table 2 shows the advice current mentors would give to perspective mentors as to why youth mentoring is important. The most frequently given is the positive impact mentors can make in the lives of youth (37%). Both men and women mentors listed this as the most important aspect of mentoring: 20% of women describe their mentorship experience as one that brings about positive impact and 17% of men also mention mentoring creates a positive impact on youth. One woman stated, "It makes me not think about the difficulties in my life. It enriches me and allows me to give my all back to the community." The second most frequently mentioned advice given by current mentors is "pay it forward" (27%), by which mentors explain that others should mentor youth because they were once mentored. This response reveals significant differences by sex and race. Only one Hispanic man expressed mentoring as a way to

"pay it forward." Minority groups in this sample described mentoring as a means to give back,

more than white men and women. Men and women mentioned that mentoring allows to build

ties for the youth within their community (20%). Notably, only 10% of men and women would

advise perspective mentors to join mentorship because it is a rewarding career. The only notable

difference between current mentors advice by sex regarding the response that more mentors were

needed: no male mentors offered this response while 6% of respondents who were female

mentors did.

Table 2
Current mentors advice to perspective mentors on importance of mentoring

Social Factor	Sex	Race of Mentor					
		White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total by sex	Total
Positive impact	Female	4	1	1	0	6 (20%)	11 (37%)
	Male	4	0	1	0	5 (17%)	
"Pay it forward"	Female	2	4	1	0	7 (23)%	8 (27%)
	Male	0	0	1	0	1 (3%)	
Community Ties	Female	2	1	0	0	3 (100%)	6 (20%)
	Male	1	0	1	1	3 (10%)	
Rewarding	Female	1	0	0	1	2 (6%)	3 (10%)
	Male	0	0	1	0	1 (3%)	
Mentors Needed	Female	0	0	0	0	0	2 (6%)
	Male	1	0	1	0	2 (6%)	
TOTAL		15 (50%)	6 (20%)	7 (23%)	2 (6%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Advices to perspective mentors also differ by race. Advice to perspective mentors given

by the six black women most frequently mentioned the idea of "pay it forward" (4/6). One black

woman shared, "My grandmother taught me that when you succeed you have to get involved in

the community and pay it forward. If I can help somebody along the way in my life, then my life

will not be in vain." This response may be impacted by their personal backgrounds in which

they described the importance of mentors in their own youth. The responses among white and

Hispanics were more varied. White men and women were more likely to advise perspective

mentors that that mentoring is important because of the positive impact of the mentor and mentee

relationship. One white man stated, "Do it! Be a mentor! It's incredibly rewarding and refreshing

to work with young people. The hours you put into mentoring really do pay off - and you can see

your successes in a tangible way."

      Table 3 shows why the mentors believe mentoring is important by race and gender. The

most frequently mentioned reason for mentoring is guiding youth (27%), but this various by sex.

Of the female mentors, 20% saw guiding youth as important, while only 6% of the males did.

Men most frequently mentioned that mentoring is important because of the relationship they

build with their mentee (17%). One white man stated, "Through being a mentor, I learned way

more than I expected to learn. Above all, I learned how to be patient! Working to build a

relationship and establish a mindset of success can be really, really hard. But with persistence

and patience, really good things can happen." By contrast, only 3% of women find the

relationship formed with their youth as to why mentoring is important. The second most

frequently mentioned reason for mentoring overall is that it is "essential for life" (23%). Mentors

responses showed that they believed every person should have a mentor at one point in their life.

Again a difference by sex is found: 20% of women believe mentoring is important because it is

essential for life, while only 35 of the men did. Notably, 13% of men and women believe

mentoring is important because it empowers youth. One woman stated, "I've learned that

mentorship is a lifelong commitment. When it's done well, both parties involved gain so much. I

learned that the hardest to reach young people need mentors too. Those complex and challenging

relationships often lead to amazing transformations. You just have to be patient and be

dedicated."

Racial differences amongst men and women also vary in terms of why mentoring is

important. The most frequently mentioned reason for mentoring by white women was because

they wanted to guide youth (4/9). The majority of white men said that mentoring was important

because of the relationship built amongst the mentor and youth (4/6). By contrast, four of the six

black women mentioned that mentoring is "Essential for Life." One black woman stated, "Young

people need guidance, we need people like you to give young people a chance to evolve, and

grow.   Everyone has the potential to be awesome. Some of us just need an extra push and voice

of reason to get there, so get involved! It's essential for life!"

Table 3
Reasons Why Mentoring is Important in regards to race and gender

Reasons	Sex	Race of Mentor					Total
		White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total by sex	
Guiding Youth	Female	4	2	0	0	6 (20%)	8 (27%)
	Male	0	0	2	0	2 (6%)	
Essential for Life	Female	0	4	2	0	6 (20%)	7 (23%)
	Male	1	0	0	0	1 (3%)	
Adult & Youth Relationship	Female	0	0	0	1	1 (3%)	6 (20%)
	Male	4	0	1	0	5 (17%)	
Impact Community	Female	4	0	0	0	4 (13%)	5 (17%)
	Male	0	0	0	1	1 (3%)	
Empower Youth	Female	1	0	0	0	1 (3%)	4 (13%)
	Male	1	0	2	0	3 (10%)	
TOTAL		15 (50%)	6 (20%)	7 (23%)	2 (6%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Given the differences found here by sex and race, the data suggests that the sex and race

of mentors matter in mentoring programs. Mentors of the same race or sex, view mentoring

through a particular lens, which means they view youth deviance in different ways. Similarly,

mentors of the same race find that mentoring is a way to "pay it forward." Therefore, the

likelihood that a mentee will benefit from mentoring program may increase if matched with a

mentor of the same race and sex.

Discussion

As the data here shows, adults decide to become mentors because of various social

factors, however, according to this study, mentors agree that mentoring allows them to "pay it

forward" for youth. The majority of women suggest that mentoring is important to ensure a

prosperous future for generations to come. Patton (2009) analyzed the mentoring experiences of

African American women in graduate and professional schools who had African American

mentors, and found that "Individuals tend to identify with persons who are like themselves on

salient identity group characteristics" (p. 511). The research here also suggests that mentoring

works better when the mentee and mentor share cultural experiences, languages, or similar

interests.

Fordham (1993) explains what happens when women occupy masculine spaces like

educated systems; "gender passing" allows one to avoid the traditional dichotomous definition of

womanhood and allows women to wish to pass as men (p. 14). According to Fordham (1993)

while affects both white and black women, black girls tend to be less successful academically

because they are also in a predominantly white space. Fordham (1993) states, "the academically

successful black girls achieved academic success in the following ways: (1) becoming and

remaining voiceless or silent or, alternatively, (2) impersonating a male image- -symbolically--

in self- presentation" (p. 10). For women to be taken seriously they must not appear to be a

woman. Fordham (1993) states, "[Anthropologists] need to examine the ways by which the

Women's Movement has perpetrated a type of cultural imperialism that takes the oppression

of white women as its norm and develops its theory from experiences of small minority of

women in global terms" (p. 5). Black women must not only work through "gender passing" in

masculine spaces, but also the limitations that come with being of a minority group. Forham's

work suggests that women who are youth mentors could be more effective by guiding youth of

the same race and sex by teaching them how to "pass" in spaces that are structured by both sex

and race.

      In this study, youth guidance is most important factor in mentoring youth regardless of

race or sex. Guiding youth successfully through life's milestones is the goal. Such guidance

include helping youth navigate college applications and career choices, and consider how to

navigate these gendered and racialized spaces. Having same sex and same race mentoring groups

could have benefits as seen in other types of organizations. For example, women's colleges

exemplify the benefits of having single sex teachings. Rice & Hemmings (1988) found that

women's colleges encourage leadership skills in women, provide women with more female role

models, and that they encourage women to focus on traditionally male-dominated fields of study

(p. 547). Women do not only excel academically in all of the women's colleges, they are also

taught a positive perspective on equity of the sexes. Women's colleges are a model that

mentoring programs can replicate. Rice & Hemmings (1988) describe how women had more

positive relationships with female faculty members and more positive interactions with peers (p.

549). Relationship building was a frequent response given by mentors in this study. Mentors

believe that it is important for youth to build ties with their communities. Youth may be able to

strengthen their relationships with peers and their communities, if placed in same mentoring

programs designed for single race or sex participants.

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Post Title:

Name of Person:

Date:

City:

Gender: Male   Female   Unknown

Age: 20 30 40 50 60+ Unknown

Perceived Race/ Ethnicity:

White   Hispanic   African-American   Other

1. Why is mentoring important?

2. Why did you get involved?

3. What would say to a potential mentor?