

Mentoring At-Risk Female Youth

Cheyenne Peters

Michigan State University

Mentoring At-Risk Female Youth

Adolescent girls have it pretty rough. As they blossom from a child to young woman, they go through many changes. They must navigate from elementary to middle school and then middle school to high school. They learn how to adjust to the hormonal changes a woman's body goes through as they go through puberty. They learn to navigate social cliques and make new friends. They also grow up in a society that tells them how they should look, dress, act, and feel. Going through this time is easier when you have someone to look up, to learn on for support, and someone to guide you. Navigating through this journey becomes even more complicated if you are a female of color, or grow up in poverty, or come from a single parent home. These at-risk female students need more guidance as they go through this journey. Mentoring has been proven to be effective for youth in general. I was curious about what mentoring looked like for at-risk female youth, since I wanted to begin mentoring at my current high school. What impact does mentoring have on at-risk female students?

Human Capital & Social Capital

The purpose of mentoring is to help guide, and sometimes steer, a younger generation along the path of success. Whether this is through community based or school based mentoring, the goal has remained the same: provide the mentee with the tools they need to be successful. At the core of mentoring is to increase the mentee's human and social capital. Human capital is defined as the enhancing of one's abilities, through education or training (Quarles, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2005). Mentoring programs aim to equip those in the program

with the tools for success. This is done by some sort of teaching, whether it be formal or informal.

Human capital usually goes hand in hand with social capital. Often because the idea was then expanded to include the social and interpersonal skills development (Quarles et al., 2005). The way one must be taught how to ride a bike, for instance, it is the same way one must learn social skills, such as how to communicate with others. Social capital is defined as “a variety of different entities that facilitate action, including the interactions of individuals, the sharing of resources, and the combining of resources which make possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be possible in its absence” (Quarles et al., 2005, p.3). Thus, social capital is directly related to human capital. Who you know matters. Human capital is tied to social capital because the more your social capital grows, the more your human capital grows, and vice versa. In today’s society, it is not always about what you know, but who you know. Having access to people from various walks of life makes an impact on one’s life. That person can open the door to many opportunities. The relationships you build with people can determine if you receive a particular opportunity or not. Thus, one can enhance their skills via new training and/or educational opportunities. Mentoring allows the mentor to teach the mentee how to navigate through society. They help their mentee hone their social skills, increasing their social capital, thus enhancing their human capital.

Importance of Human and Social Capital

The importance of the role of social and human capital in mentoring is to increase opportunities for mentee and expand their horizons. However, most inner city youth do not get

to see outside of their neighborhood. “But youth growing up in conditions of concentrated poverty...have little opportunity to see futures other than the delimited or destructive ones they encounter every day (McLaughlin, 2018, p.143). They don’t have the chance to travel the world, interact with doctors and lawyers, or see people who look like them who are successful. They are limited to the adults they have within their community. Not all of these adults are a positive influence, but also not all of these adults know how to help the youth reach the goals that they have. They can’t be resources to the youth or aid and encourage them along their journey to success. “Having opportunities to really be exposed to possibilities and having adults who really believe in you—that has power and potential to change things” (McLaughlin, 2018, p.145-146). It gives mentees hope. It allows them to see it is possible to reach their goals and dreams. They also have someone to look up to and reach out to who can guide them on their journey. No one reaches success on their own. Even if they don’t get to see anyone within their community who has reached the success they wish to achieve, the mentor allows them to increase their human and social capital. Thus, this can open doors for them to meet someone who can expand their horizons past what they can see. In *You Can’t Be What You Can’t See*, the impact Community Youth Creative Learning Experience (CYCLE) had on youth in the Cabrini Green neighborhood. “The aim of the [CYCLE] staff was to provide images of a successful adult, an involved parent, an engaged community member that were not abstractions, that weren’t only ‘what you see on television’ but, instead, were part of their lived experience” (McLaughlin, 2018****). This is the goal of mentoring programs; to provide a world perspective to youth so they can see outside of the neighborhood.

Impact on Urban Youth

The increase in human and social capital allows for mentees to experience opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise. For example, they can increase their human capital in ways that will impact their career choice. Mentees get to see beyond their community. At risk youth have the opportunity to interact with doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, and even more because of the relationship they have with their mentors. Mentors usually know someone directly or indirectly that they can connect their mentor with. Thus, the mentee's horizon is broadened to include career choices they thought were impossible. For at risk youth, this also includes them seeing someone who looks like them in the field they wish to go in. By seeing someone who looks like them, doing exactly what they aspire to achieve, it encourages and inspires them to reach their goals. These interactions can also be life changing. The mentee's world is opened up to new relationships, job and internship opportunities, and to travel the country and the world. For anyone, especially at risk youth, this is life changing. For those who dream of making it out of their city, this helps fuel this goal.

According to Maldonado, Quarles, & Lacey, from their research, an increase in both human and social capital is linked to self-efficacy (2008). Self-efficacy is the belief that one has the ability to accomplish their goals. Without the internal motivation of self-efficacy, these goals cannot become a reality. The drive of self-efficacy is more powerful than motivation alone. It is the realization that one can achieve, thus you already see yourself as having accomplished your goal. Thus, the ability to follow the path to reach this goal isn't a deterrent. Social and human capital allow the mentee to build self-efficacy as they are guided along their

path. The increase in both human and social capital opens doors for them they once thought were closed.

Since self-efficacy is a social construct, determined by each person, relationships impact one's perception of their own self-efficacy (Maldonado et al., 2008). The relationship the mentee and mentor have is very important. When done correctly, it can change the mentee's life forever. Positive relationships established through mentoring allow the mentee to build a positive self-efficacy. When this happens, the mentee can actually believe the sky is the limit. For at-risk youth, this is important. "Having to deal with hardships has often been shown to diminish self-efficacy" (Maldonado et al., 2008, p.227). They are used to being sold a dream that is far from their grasp. They begin to believe they cannot amount to more than their situation(s). Their reality gets distorted by the negative life circumstances. Mentoring allows these dreams to become fully attainable and within their reach. The narrative changes from "if" to "when."

"Self-effective adolescents have high expectations and self-confidence" (Maldonado et al., 2008, p.229). Adolescents who are self-effective believe in themselves. They are confident they can do and be anything they set their mind to. This is an important takeaway of the benefits of a mentoring program. Mentees need to feel and believe they can take on the world once they exit the program. For at-risk youth, this means they need to be able to see themselves outside of their environment being successful. They can confidently reach towards those opportunities they never thought were possible. They truly believe the world is their oyster, because they have been given a fighting chance. This by no means all of their obstacles have been removed. However, they are confident and believe in themselves to accomplish

whatever goal they set their mind to. Without this level of confidence and motivation to drive them, their chances of being successful decreases. “The building of self-efficacy was indicated by the mentees’ expressed statements of enhanced confidence and their ability to develop and execute plans which were reinforced by their [mentors]. ... Their possible future selves were linked to their feelings of self-efficacy and defined career aspirations” (Maldonado et al., 2008, p.231-232).

It is important for at risk girls to build their self-efficacy and confidence. Society tries to tell girls who they can be and what box they need to fit into. Girls need to know that they can go against the grain of what society says they can do, who they can be, and what level of success they can reach. Women are breaking barriers every day, paving the way for the next generation of girls. Not just girls, but especially at risk girls, need to see women achieving. Mentoring adds to that layer because now they get to interact with those successful women. They learn from these successful women while defining their possible selves. “The concept of ‘possible selves’ has been defined as a conceptual link between cognition and motivation. It represents a person construct of what one might become, what one would like to become, and what one is afraid of becoming” (Maldonado et al., 2008, p.225). At risk girls need to have positive role models so they can envision themselves at their best possible self. Mentoring programs provide them with those mentors who encourage them to become this version. They encourage them through guidance and support, even when the mentee makes a mistakes. When confidence, self-efficacy, and positive possible self is combined, it increases the mentee’s self-worth. The role the mentor has on the mentee’s life is to not only build that relationship with the mentee to increase their social and human capital, but also to help promote these

positive aspects of the mentee. Increasing the mentee's self-worth has a huge impact on their life not only academically, but also personally. Mentors need encourage and praise their mentee along their journey. "Improvements in adolescents' sense of self-worth could be understood as an internalization of their mentors' positive appraisals of them" (Rhodes, 2009, p.41). They help them build resilience. This skill is not necessarily taught, but is honed through conversations between the mentee and mentor. All of these skills allow the mentee to be able to see themselves in the best possible light and with the future they have always dreamed of. This is so important for at risk female students. If they can't see themselves in a certain role, they won't become it. When at risk female students are equip with all the tools necessary to become these strong and confident young women, they can become unstoppable. No roadblock or obstacle will stand in their way. They break the status quo of what a young woman is "supposed to be" and allows for diversity in areas where women weren't seen before.

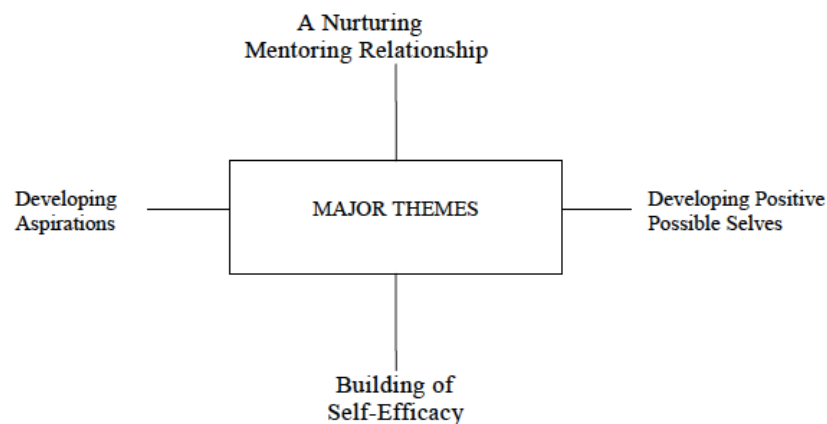
Positive Impact

Whether through a community based program or a school based program, mentors play an important role for the mentee. They help build upon and improve skills that mentees need to become their best possible self. "[Rhodes] have concluded that mentors can influence their protégé development in three important ways: by enhancing social skills and emotional well-being, by improving cognitive skills through dialogue and listening, [and] by serving as a role model and advocate" (Rhodes, 2009, p.35). According to Rhodes, they not only improve their cognitive skills, but also serve as their advocate. Mentors speaks up for their mentees and help provide them with these life changing opportunities.

The measurement of the impact is dependent on how committed the mentor is to the mentee and also the structure of the mentoring program. Programs that incorporate one-on-one mentoring with group mentoring have a higher impact on at risk female students (Quarles et al., 2005). Mentees get to interact with not only their personal mentor, but also with the other mentors in the program. They get to build human and social capital with others, instead of just their personal mentor. Also, when the program lasts longer than a year, the positive influence tends to have lasting results. The mentee and mentor get to build a genuine relationship.

Looking at the figure from Quarles et al. (2005) below, it shows the four major themes that an effective mentoring programs has that leads to a positive impact on mentees.

Figure 1. Structural Description of the Mentee Major Themes



The next four figures, also from Quarles et al. (2005), show the characteristics that are needed for each of the major themes to have a lasting impact.

Figure 2. Structural Description of Mentee Major Theme 1: A Nurturing Mentoring Relationship

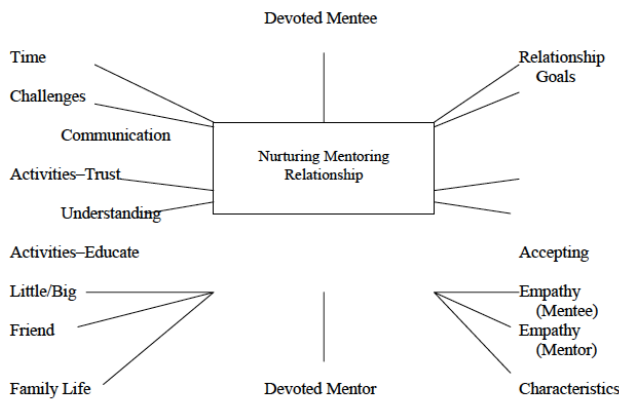


Figure 3. Structural Description of Mentee Major Theme 2: Building of Self-Efficacy

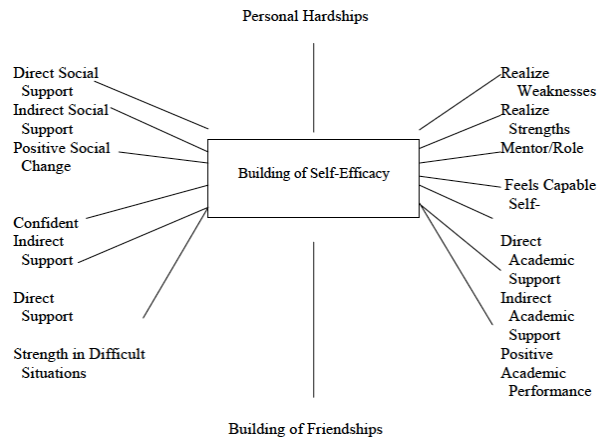


Figure 4. Structural Description of Mentee Major Theme 3: Developing Aspirations

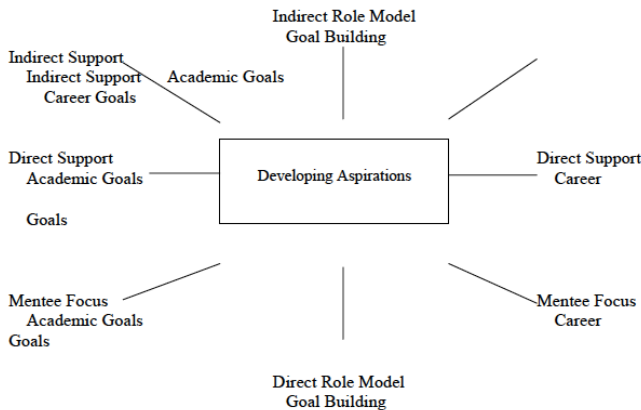
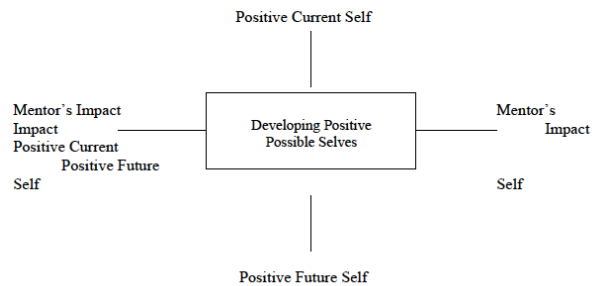


Figure 5. Structural Description of Mentee Major Theme 4: Developing Positive Possible Selves



Conclusion

The impact mentoring has on at risk female youth is it build them up so they can live their full potential. It gives the mentees the social and human capital, the confidence they need while building their self-efficacy and positive possible self. This question can be researched even more deeply to see how the structure of mentoring has an impact on at-risk girls, whether community based or school based mentoring has a greater impact, and explore more deeply the characteristics of the major themes as to how they make an influential impact on the

mentee. There are so many positive aspects as to the impact that mentoring has on at-risk youth. This research has me confident that the mentoring program I wish to implement will be great for my students.

References

- Maldonado, N. L., Quarles, A., Lacey, C. H., & Thompson, S. D. (2008). Mentoring at-risk adolescent girls: Listening to "little sisters". *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 16*(2), 223-234. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/61967208?accountid=12598>
- McLaughlin, M. (2018). *You can't be what you can't see: The power of opportunity to change young lives*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2009). *Stand by me*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Quarles, A., Maldonado, N., & Lacey, C.H. (2005). Mentoring and at-risk adolescent girls: A phonological. American Educational Research Association. Montreal, CA April 1 1-15.