

Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals [☆]

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Abstract

The study of mentoring has generally been conducted within disciplinary silos with a specific type of mentoring relationship as a focus. The purpose of this article is to quantitatively review the three major areas of mentoring research (youth, academic, workplace) to determine the overall effect size associated with mentoring outcomes for protégés. We also explored whether the relationship between mentoring and protégé outcomes varied by the type of mentoring relationship (youth, academic, workplace). Results demonstrate that mentoring is associated with a wide range of favorable behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career outcomes, although the effect size is generally small. Some differences were also found across type of mentoring. Generally, larger effect sizes were detected for academic and workplace mentoring compared to youth mentoring. Implications for future research, theory, and applied practice are provided. © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Across areas of research, scholars agree that mentoring can be associated with a wide range of positive outcomes for protégés. Mentoring has been discussed as a strategy for positive youth development and as a deterrent of risky youth behavior (DuBois & Karcher, 2005), as a way to improve the academic adjustment, retention, and success of college students (Johnson, 2007), and as a means to facilitate career development among employees (Kram, 1985). Despite the widespread study of mentoring and its prevalence in community,

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academic and organizational contexts, research has progressed within its own disciplinary silos. As a consequence, there is little cross-disciplinary communication among mentoring scholars. There are also no quantitative reviews of the mentoring literature as a whole, even though the same basic assumption applies to all types of mentoring. That is, when a more experienced or senior individual (the mentor) takes an interest in and encourages a less experienced or disadvantaged individual (the protégé), the protégé will benefit (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Rhodes, 2005).

To spark mentoring researchers to think more broadly about the potential role of mentoring in protégés' lives and to advance mentoring theory, a comprehensive multidisciplinary meta-analysis was conducted. Our primary objective was to answer the question, "Looking across different areas of mentoring scholarship, does mentoring matter, and if so, how much?" This is an important question because the popular press makes strong claims about the importance of mentoring and both public and private funds are used to support many different types of mentoring initiatives (Rhodes, 2005). We were also interested in documenting whether or not there are differences in how much mentoring matters across protégé outcomes. For example, does mentoring have a stronger relationship with protégé attitudes (e.g., attitudes toward school, satisfaction with college, job satisfaction), protégé behaviors (e.g., grades in school, deviant behavior, job performance), or protégé motivational variables (e.g., aspiration level, time spent on educational pursuits, career commitment)? This information has implications for theory development and refinement. It may also alert practitioners as to the protégé outcomes that may be most likely affected by mentoring when designing formal programs. Finally, we were interested in examining whether mentoring outcomes vary by the type of relationship (youth mentoring, workplace mentoring, academic mentoring). This will provide a more fine-grained assessment of the conditions under which mentoring matters the most.

1.1. Overview of the mentoring literature

Because individuals may experience mentoring at various life stages, it is not surprising that there are three distinct streams of mentoring scholarship: youth mentoring, academic mentoring, and workplace mentoring. Youth mentoring involves a relationship between a caring, supportive adult and a child or adolescent (Rhodes, 2002). Youth mentoring assumes that supportive relationships with adults are important for personal, emotional, cognitive, and psychological growth (Ainsworth, 1989; Rhodes, 2002). Academic mentoring typifies the apprentice model of education where a faculty member imparts knowledge, provides support, and offers guidance to a student protégé on academic (e.g., classroom performance) as well as non-academic (e.g., personal problems, identity issues) issues (Jacobi, 1991). This type of mentoring may facilitate psychological adjustment and foster a sense of professional identity (Austin, 2002). Finally, workplace mentoring occurs in an organizational setting and the purpose is the personal and professional growth of the protégé (Kram, 1985). The mentor may be a supervisor, someone else within the organization but outside the protégé's chain of command, or an individual in another organization (Eby, 1997).

Several narrative reviews of the youth, academic, and workplace mentoring literature exist. Some narrative reviews summarize research findings associated with youth, academic or workplace mentoring in a particular area, such as diversity (e.g., Ragins, 2002), formal mentoring relationships (e.g., Miller, 2007), or naturally occurring mentoring relationships (e.g., Mullen, 2007; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt, 2005). Other reviews focus on a specific type of mentoring (e.g., academic, workplace) more broadly (e.g., Jacobi, 1991; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). Several quantitative reviews also exist. This includes quantitative reviews of formal youth mentoring (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002), academic mentoring (Dorsey & Baker, 2004; Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusic, 2006), and workplace mentoring (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Underhill, 2006). Collectively these represent important efforts to synthesize the literature. However, there are no reviews that incorporate diverse areas of mentoring scholarship or compare mentoring outcomes across youth, academic and workplace mentoring. The present study addresses this issue.

1.2. Hypothesized effects of mentoring on outcomes

We expect a wide range of outcomes to be related to mentoring. This includes behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career outcomes.

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