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The Role of Mentoring in the Lives of Underrepresented Youth

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The Role of Mentoring in the Lives of Underrepresented Youth

By

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Abstract

Underrepresented youth (Latino, Black, Pacific Islander, and Native American) face challenges in school enrollment/completion and often lack feelings of belonging in educational and social institutions. One specific group of underrepresented youth who face unique struggles is unaccompanied youth. Mentoring, a non-parental relationship between a young person and someone who supports and guides youth, has been found to result in better well-being and health in adolescents and potentially lead to higher self-worth and better academic performance. In order to fill a gap in the literature examining the effects of mentoring on underrepresented youth and specifically unaccompanied youth, I conducted a mixed-methods study, including both quantitative and qualitative data.

For the quantitative data, a survey was distributed using five measuring tools that evaluated the correlation between having mentoring experience during adolescence and overall well-being, academic success, academic-self efficacy, and resiliency. Data consisted of 33 participants who were over the age of 18, varied in ethnicity and gender, and who have had previous mentorship experience. Due to a small sample size, represented and underrepresented individuals were included in the results. The results showed that a strong mentoring relationship did not positively influence well-being, resiliency, and academic success, but did positively influence academic self-efficacy. For the qualitative data, I interviewed 3 mentors to explore the ways in which mentoring helps support unaccompanied youth overcome barriers and examine how the mentoring process also affects the mentors themselves. Qualitative research findings suggest that the development of trust allows mentors to provide improved support and foster an increased sense of belonging with their mentees. This research is important to help train future mentors and strengthen mentoring programs for under-served youth.

Keywords: mentoring, unaccompanied minors, underrepresented youth, well-being, academic self-efficacy, academic success, resiliency

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The Role of Mentoring in the Lives of Underrepresented Youth

The age of adolescence can be a period of vulnerability to loneliness and alienation, but healthy connections outside of one's family are important to adolescent health and development (Austin et al., 2020). Mentoring can be described as a non-parental relationship with someone who supports and guides youth (Austin et al., 2020). These are individuals outside of one's family, such as teachers, counselors, coaches, community center workers, after-school program instructors or supervisors, neighbors, and others (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Relationships with non-parental adults that are supportive can lead to better well-being and health in adolescents (Austin et al., 2020). Additionally, having a mentor can help validate youths' efforts and abilities, help them build new relationships, gain more opportunities, learn decision-making and problem-solving skills, and potentially have higher self-worth and better academic performance (Gilligan, 1999; Smith, 2011).

In order to understand the effects of mentoring on underrepresented youth, a mixed-method study was conducted. For the quantitative data, a survey measuring well-being, resiliency, academic success, and academic self-efficacy was distributed to students at Dominican University of California who had a mentorship relationship during adolescence. For the qualitative data, interviews were conducted with mentors who worked at the Opportunities for Youth program, to gather data on the unaccompanied youth they work with.

In order to provide context and background knowledge, I will discuss four themes found in the academic literature on mentoring. First, I discuss the challenges facing youth who are underrepresented in U.S. colleges and universities (including Latino, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American). Secondly, I discuss what is already known about the benefits of mentoring in relation to well-being, academic success, academic self-efficacy, and resiliency, as

well as why having a strong mentoring relationship is important. Then I discuss a category of underrepresented youth who are known as unaccompanied minors. I define who an unaccompanied minor is, as well as reasons for migration to a new country. I also look at trauma and its correlation to migration. Included in this section is also a discussion on Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and a Healing-Centered Approach (HCA) to mentoring. I also examine barriers that unaccompanied youth face, such as education, language barriers, laws, and assimilation challenges. Lastly, I discuss what is currently known about the benefits of mentoring for unaccompanied youth.

Challenges for Underrepresented Youth

In the U.S., underrepresented students (Latino, Black, Pacific Islander, and Native American) and first-generation college students tend to have lower rates of enrollment/attendance in four-year colleges (Raposa & Hurd, 2018). A gap between ethnic minority and ethnic majority students has been found in attaining higher educational degrees. Minority students tend to have a higher probability of leaving higher education which can be detrimental to their long-term social mobility (Carter, 2006). First-generation students are also four times more likely to leave college than those who have higher incomes and are continuing-generation students (Schwartz et al., 2016).

On top of low enrollment/attendance, underrepresented students face challenges in obtaining a four-year degree and many lack feelings of belonging in predominantly white institutions (Raposa & Hurd, 2018). Overall college students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation students, and racial or ethnic minority students tend to face a variety of challenges when in college. This can result from financial and social difficulties, as well as marginalization and discrimination on campuses (Hurd et al., 2016). Due

to such stressors, psychological distress may occur which can lead to academic underachievement among these underrepresented students. Anxiety and depression have been found to influence academic performance and cognitive abilities and can lead to reduced sleep and energy, feelings of hopelessness, excessive worrying, impaired concentration, and less productivity on academic tasks (Hurd et al., 2016).

A potential protective factor through their transition can be mentors, who have been found to help the academic performance of youth in their adolescence (Raposa & Hurd, 2018; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Though this research is about college individuals, some of these struggles mentioned may still affect individuals at a younger age. Having a mentor at a younger age will also affect outcomes during their later life. Mentoring relationships have been found to create positive outcomes in psychological, behavioral, academic, and occupational aspects for both adults and adolescents (Schwartz et al., 2016). During the transition to college, students' high school and community connections may worsen, so having resources, information, and support, which mentors can provide is important for developing new forms of social support related to college and professional success (Schwartz et al., 2016).

Benefits of Mentoring

Well-Being

Previous research has shown that non-parental adults are influential in the well-being and health of adolescents. Mentors can help adolescents through personal and social barriers by helping them build new relationships and gain more opportunities that help with decision-making and problem-solving skills (Smith, 2011). Mentors help enhance mentees' social support by facilitating positive connections and modeling prosocial skills (Raposa et al., 2019). Positive socio-emotional experiences with mentors can also help adolescents interact with others more

effectively (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Additionally, mentoring relationships have been found to help facilitate identity development (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Mentors can promote identity development by modeling success, exhibiting good qualities adolescents may want to emulate, and helping them with interest exploration. They can also help by introducing them to activities, resources, and educational or occupational opportunities (Raposa et al., 2019).

Behavioral and mental health changes have also been linked to having a mentor figure (Smith, 2011). Adolescents who have inadequate parental support and no mentor role can exhibit bad behaviors, although studies have demonstrated that adolescents with no parental support but a mentorship role, may not exhibit such behaviors (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Having a relationship with a caring adult can help youth interpret difficulties, improve their relatedness to others, and increase their openness to adult advice, and perspectives (Raposa et al., 2019). Cognitive processes such as information processing and self-regulation may also be strengthened through supportive interactions with caring adults. (Raposa et al., 2019)

Academic Success and Academic Self-efficacy

Mentors have a protective influence on risk behavior and academic outcomes (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Those who received mentoring showed higher functioning in academic, psychosocial, and career outcomes compared to youth who were not in mentoring relationships (Raposa et al., 2019). Some mentoring programs have also been linked to better academic outcomes such as improved attendance and grades, as well as higher scholastic competence (Austin et al., 2020). Academic self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their abilities to complete academic tasks which is important since motivation and commitment tend to be reliant on a person's belief in their own abilities (Deane et al., 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2019). Having higher academic self-efficacy has been linked to academic achievement and lower school

dropout rates (Deane et al., 2017). Mentors can enhance students' academic self-efficacy and confidence through modeling skills and providing examples of resilience and interpersonal communication (Holloway-Friesen, 2019).

Resiliency

Resilient adolescents are those who succeed regardless of adversity and use their strengths to benefit from factors that can help them thrive. They may have higher feelings of confidence or faith that things will work out and take more positive actions in their lives, such as pursuing educational opportunities, participating in extracurriculars, and even seeking mentors for themselves (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Mentors are important in developing resiliency as they may be able to encourage talents and interests in adolescents, which helps build confidence, self-esteem, and social skills (Gilligan, 1999). Having higher self-esteem is important because an individual's self-concept can be linked to resilience (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Resilience enhancement can also occur when a mentor focuses on an adolescent's interests and talents.

Development of Strong Mentorship Relationships

Previous research has shown that having a strong mentor/mentee relationship is important (Smith, 2011). The quality and length of the relationships can influence the benefits of mentoring programs and how long mentors and youth may engage in their relationships. In both community-based mentoring and school-based mentoring programs, it was shown that the length of a relationship leads to greater effects (Rhodes et al., 2017). During the length of a relationship mentors and mentees can build closeness and focus on maintaining a consistent relationship, which is important in deriving benefits (Spiekermann et al., 2020). Also having a mentor who takes their mentee's interests and preferences into consideration may yield stronger and more enduring ties (Rhodes et al., 2017).

Better effects are expected depending on the connection cultivated by the mentor and mentee, which can be characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The qualities of mentorship relationships like closeness, duration, stability, and satisfaction have also been linked with better mentee outcomes (Spiekermann et al., 2020). Strong relationships have been linked to higher mentee results including higher self-worth and academic performance (Smith, 2011). It has also been found that well-established mentoring relationships can contribute to positive social-emotional, cognitive, and identity-related processes (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). High-quality mentoring relationships are also important as they have been linked to better social and emotional functioning with parents, peers, and teachers (Raposa et al., 2019). Significant benefits such as academic and vocational outcomes are also derived if mentors and youth spend consistent time with one another over a significant amount of time (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

As research has shown, mentoring can provide benefits in relation to well-being, resiliency, academic success, and academic self-efficacy. It has also shown that the strength and longevity of a mentorship relationship are important and can lead to better outcomes for youth. Although, a category we still know little about in regard to the benefits of mentoring, is unaccompanied youth. These youth have very specific histories of separation and trauma, as well as barriers to success not experienced by other underrepresented youth.

Unaccompanied Youth

Reasons for Migration

One category of migrants is unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are children who migrate without a parent or primary adult guardian. Migration for youth can be triggered by war, conflict, violence such as domestic or gang violence, environmental devastation, or other traumatic events in a child's life. Unaccompanied children may also migrate for a better life in

hopes of getting employment or educational opportunities (Rosen, 2020). Forced migration refers to individuals leaving their home country as a result of situations such as war, human rights abuses, or political instability. Forced migration is different from that of individuals who choose to leave their home country to seek better economic opportunities because these individuals do not have a choice about leaving their countries (Clauss-Ehlers, 2019). Mental health clinicians who work with individuals that have experienced forced migration look at the impacts of sudden departure, traumatic experiences pre-migration, stressors/trauma related to the migration journey, and uncertainty surrounding arrival to a new country (Clauss-Ehlers, 2019).

Trauma and Migration

Pre-migration, unaccompanied youth may be forced to leave due to circumstances in their home country. During migration, youth can be exposed to violence and other difficult circumstances. Post-migration they may stay in detention centers, have unstable living situations, and deal with acculturation and daily stressors, which can be linked to poor mental health outcomes (Clearly et al., 2017) Trauma can be a singular or repeated exposure to experiences that threaten injury or death and cause feelings of fear and helplessness. Some examples of traumatic events can be violence, neglect, loss, disasters, war, or other emotionally harmful experiences (Dye, 2018).

Previous research has shown that exposure to trauma during childhood can have long-term consequences. Trauma, especially during early childhood can also cause neurological changes, impacting development and brain function. Childhood trauma has also been linked to attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression and anxiety, cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties, and higher risks for chronic diseases. Substance abuse, PTSD, attachment disorders, aggression, and crime are also common among individuals who have

experienced trauma (Dye, 2018). Imaging studies have validated psychosomatic aspects of

trauma, showing that trauma is stored somatically in the body. This means that the mind and

body responses may be linked which can lead to impaired homeostatic function, like heart

disease, irritable bowels, etc. Some therapeutic themes and interventions for this are culturally

informed care, and psychosocial support (O'Brien & Charura, 2022).

Structural Barriers for Unaccompanied Youth

Post-migration unaccompanied youth can face issues such as trafficking and other forms

of abuse (NeMoyer et al., 2019). Sometimes parents of a child are able to stay in the U.S. which

can be problematic as adult asylum seekers may claim them as their own children. Youth may be

victims of kidnapping and subject to slave-like practices (Bantekas, 2013). Children are also

often not informed of their rights which is important when it comes to making decisions that are

best for them (Bantekas, 2013). Upon arriving in the U.S., youth may also struggle with stressors

such as poverty, issues related to identity, challenging environments, substance abuse, and

psychiatric disorders. This may be enhanced due to youth living in impoverished areas and being

exposed to drug abuse, violence, and more (Rodriguez & Dawkins, 2016). A previous study

showed that immigrant youth experience more violence in the United States in comparison to

their home countries (NeMoyer et al., 2019). Many undocumented youth face challenges such as

trauma, fear of deportation, employment abuse, and more by being in the U.S. illegally

(Rodriguez & Dawkins, 2016).

English capabilities are also something that impacts migrants' daily lives (Lewis, 2008).

Unaccompanied youth may be unfamiliar with the dominant language so they may be unable to

follow classes in school. They may have also not attended school regularly so although they may

be placed in classes with individuals of similar ages, they may not be able to keep up with the

demands of the class (Bantekas, 2013). Limited language abilities may also create barriers for the youth to access secondary education. Immigrants may struggle to pursue higher education due to being labeled an immigrant, legal barriers, socioeconomic status, and parental educational attainment (Crea et al., 2018). Unaccompanied youth in the U.S. are likely to have gaps in formal education due to poverty, forced migration, safety concerns, and school availability in their countries of origin. Expectations such as waking up on time, listening to authority figures, and behaviors in a classroom may also be difficult for unaccompanied youth to follow and can cause them to act out due to stress or trauma they have previously experienced (Crea et al., 2018).

Another difficulty for migrants can be the media. Media can amplify anti-immigrant sentiments, exaggerating them as criminals (Rodriguez & Dawkins, 2016). Some representations in media and policies view unaccompanied youth as risk-takers, scammers, criminals, and threats to the host country. Youth are often conscious of how others view and treat them causing some youth to hide their status from friends and acquaintances (Rosen, 2020). Conversely, the media may represent these youth as innocents destroyed by circumstance. This can impact how asylum and welfare systems treat youth. These contrasting representations can contribute to the marginalization of unaccompanied minors in policy and practice (Rosen, 2020). Anti-immigration enforcement and restrictive immigration policies that target undocumented immigrants also worsen their mental health (Bruzelius & Baum, 2019).

Youth may also encounter negative outcomes when facing discrimination and acculturation. (NeMoyer et al., 2019). Acculturation refers to cultural change due to adopting cultural traits from another group. Assimilation refers to adopting a group's cultural values and practices at the expense of one's own. Cultural conflict can occur if the cultural values of two groups collide (Theodorou, 2020). Acculturation and the lack of conforming to American society

have been correlated to poorer mental health. At the same time, those who are more acculturated may also suffer from mental health issues due to the loss of prevention factors such as social support (Bulut & Gayman, 2020).

With all the unique barriers and challenges unaccompanied youth face, different approaches to mentoring may be applied. When working with traumatized populations, some may use the trauma-informed approach, while others may focus on a healing-centered approach.

Trauma-Informed Model versus Healing-Centered Approach

A framework that helps individuals with trauma is the trauma-informed model which looks at practice and treatment to understand individuals who have experienced trauma. It focuses on the impact trauma has on those who experience it and those who work with them (Storrod, 2020). This model has grown and been applied to behavior management, schooling, therapy, and personal relationships (Storrod, 2020). Trauma-informed care provides a safe space to help survivors recognize and process their triggers. Individuals can then work on their responses to those triggers and work on skills to help them succeed (Storrod, 2020). In comparison, the healing-centered approach focuses on self-reflection and targets healing by not only looking at what harms an individual but also how interventions also can help restore a person's humanity. In addition, a healing center approach focuses on the well-being of an individual but also looks at how those who are supporting youth or other individuals can look within themselves to do their own healing and better help others (Ginwright, 2022). Ginwright (2022) argues that a healing center approach is more beneficial when working with traumatized youth since trauma-informed care tends to focus on what is wrong with a child, rather than focusing on the child as a whole and using who they are to restore their identity.

The Opportunities for Youth (OFY) mentoring program takes on a similar approach to that of the healing-centered approach. The OFY program does not focus on the traumatic experiences that youth may have faced but rather focuses on helping them through current challenges, helping them reach their goals, attaining their full potential, and providing support in any way possible.

Benefits of Mentoring for Unaccompanied Youth

Adolescents who have had a mentoring relationship show better outcomes in education, work, mental health, problem behaviors, and health. Youth likely to benefit from mentoring are those who come from backgrounds of environmental risk (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). When migrant youth are exposed to risks and adapt successfully they are able to foster resilience. Some mentors may also be able to foster hope in adolescents which can help them overcome challenges and lead to better settlement and social inclusion, health, school performance, higher life satisfaction, and better perceptions of obstacles (Alarcón et al., 2021).

Support from peers or responsible adults like mentors has been linked to positive effects on self-esteem (Alarcón et al., 2021). Self-esteem in young migrants has also been shown to correlate positively with mental health and can buffer the effects of stress on depression (Alarcón et al., 2021). Having a mentor is important since studies have shown that social support can be a protective factor in traumatized populations. It helps support mental health for individuals who come from conflict zones and deal with multiple stressful life events (Sierau et al., 2018). Social support can also minimize feelings of possible depression and help school functioning (Nabors et al., 2022).

The Current Study

Existing literature has shown that having a mentor during adolescence contributes to positive outcomes in underrepresented and underserved youth. In line with this past research, I

propose four quantitative hypotheses: 1) Among traditionally underrepresented college students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will positively be correlated with well-being: as the strength of mentoring increases, well-being also increases. 2) Among traditionally underrepresented college students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will positively be correlated with academic success: as the strength of mentoring increases, academic success also increases. 3) Among traditionally underrepresented college students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will positively be correlated with academic self-efficacy: as the strength of mentoring increases, academic self-efficacy will also increase. 4) Among traditionally underrepresented college students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will positively be correlated with resiliency: as the strength of mentoring increases, resiliency also increases.

Research has also demonstrated that unaccompanied youth who have a mentor in adolescence have more support in overcoming barriers. In addition, a correlation has been documented between strong, long-lasting mentorship relationships and positive benefits for youth. However, there is not much research exploring the significance of mentoring for unaccompanied minors or the effects of the mentorship relationship on mentors themselves. Moreover, few studies have explored how strong, long-lasting mentorship relationships are established with unaccompanied minors. The purpose of my research is to explore how the protective factor of mentoring can help unaccompanied youth overcome the disadvantages they face as a marginalized group. Specifically, I investigate two qualitative research questions: 1) What are the ways in which mentoring helps support unaccompanied youth overcome barriers? 2) How does the mentoring process affect mentors?

Methods

The current study included both quantitative and qualitative components, each with separate samples. The quantitative portion distributed a survey in order to assess the hypotheses outlined above. The qualitative portion included a series of qualitative interviews to answer the two research questions above.

Quantitative Survey

In this study, participants were asked to complete a brief online survey about their experiences with mentors during their adolescent experience in order to measure the effect of mentors on youth in relation to academic self-efficacy, academic performance, resiliency, and well-being.

Participants

Participants were 33 individuals of different demographics, who had a mentor during their adolescence. The sample was comprised of 25 females (75.8%), 5 males (15.2%), and 3 non-binary participants (9.1%), and the participants' age ranged from 18-72 years old ($m = 23$; $SD = 10.4$). The sample was primarily Hispanic (51.5%), followed by White (30.3%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (18.2%). In addition, 75% of the sample completed high school, 15.6% completed community college, 6.3% completed their Bachelor's, and 3.1% achieved a higher post-graduate degree.

Measures

Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS)

The Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS) is used to measure the quality of mentor-youth relationships from the perspective of the youth. The 10 items in the MYAS are rated on a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (very true) to 4 (very false). The 10-item

measure is broken up into two subscales, caring and acceptance. Questions asked include: *I would feel sad if something bad happened to my mentor. My mentor cares about me, and more* (Zand et al., 2008). Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency and was within the acceptable range. The caring subscale was a .73 and the acceptance subscale was a .83.

Academic Self-Efficacy Scale

The academic Self-Efficacy Scale is a 6-item scale that assesses the extent of one's belief in their own ability to accomplish academic tasks and goals. The scale measures how often individuals do certain things such as: *concentrate on school subjects, learn the class material, even if it is hard, figure out how to do the hardest classwork,* etc (Shank & Cotten, 2014). Responses are measured by almost never, sometimes, and almost always. A scale from 6 to 18 is created by the sum of responses. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .81.

Resiliency Scale

The Resiliency Scale consists of 9 questions and the scale ranges from 1 (very inaccurate) to 6 (very accurate). A 10-item resiliency test was created. All items had a correlation of .40 or more, except for one item. One item was dropped, leaving a revised 9-item scale with an internal consistency of .88. Questions in this scale include: *When there is a great deal of pressure on me, I remain calm, I have high capacity for facing adversity,* and more (Siu et al., 2009).

I COPPE Scale

The I COPPE Scale contains 21 items that measure seven well-being factors in key areas of one's life (Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, Economic, and overall). All are measured with three different time periods: past, present, and future. The scale ranged from 0 being the worst, to 10 being the best (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Convergent validity was proven using this measure. This was done by having participants take the I COPPE

Scale, as well as established comparison instruments that corresponded to the I COPPE and overall well-being constructs.

Procedure

Participants who consented to participate in this study were given an anonymous survey hosted by Qualtrics. Participants were gathered through the recruitment of classes or sent a recruitment email by either the researcher or a teacher willing to forward it to their students. They then completed a short screening using the following measures: the Mentor Youth Alliance Scale (Zand et al., 2009), the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Shank & Cotten, 2013), the Resiliency Scale (Siu et al., 2009), and the I COPPE Scale (Prilleltensky et al., 2015), along with a demographic questionnaire. Participants were thanked for their participation.

Qualitative Methods

Description and Rationale for the Research Approach

The Opportunities for Youth Program (OFY) is a mentoring program for unaccompanied youth. I decided to conduct a qualitative research study within the mentoring program to get some insight into how to develop strong relationships between mentors and unaccompanied youth. My research approach was guided by multiple social justice theoretical frameworks. These frameworks guided my approach to research and informed my interview questions. The first theoretical framework that helped guide me during my research was Cultural Humility. Cultural Humility focuses on 3 main principles (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). The first is that we as individuals should realize we are always lifelong learners and that self-reflection should always occur when engaging communities in research. This framework is important because it was key for me to realize my privilege in the community, as well as my personal biases. This was especially important when conducting research so that I could better understand

the data collected and look out for not only supporting information but any discrepancies as well. This framework informed my research questions because I explored what mentors had learned from their experience as a mentor. The second principle of Cultural Humility is that one should be aware of and challenge power imbalances. Awareness of power imbalances helped shape my research questions. I explored the barriers that the youth faced and how mentors are affected by the mentoring experience. Lastly, the third principle is that one should look at the issues within institutions and hold them accountable. It is important to look at the institutional issues that arise that limit mentees and put them at a disadvantage. Barriers are something I focused on for my research by diving into what barriers the youth face upon arriving in the U.S. such as language and education. I asked mentors about the struggles they had seen their mentee face. This theoretical framework really helped me dig deeper into the issues that the youth were facing.

The second social justice framework that guided my research design was Community Cultural Wealth. This refers to the skills communities of color use to resist macro and micro-forms of oppression. The different capitals of community cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams even when challenges arise. Linguistic capital looks at the skills obtained from communication in more than one language. Familial capital includes cultural knowledge that has been gained through one's family. Social capital refers to the networks and resources that individuals have learned to obtain. Navigational capital focuses on the skills that help individuals maneuver through institutions not created for people of color (Yosso, 2005). Lastly, resistant capital refers to the skills fostered by challenging inequality. This framework is relevant to my research approach because, although I gathered the insights of mentors about the youth they are working with, my research explored the skills the

youth have that allow them to overcome obstacles in their lives. It is important to focus on the

assets individuals have as they confront barriers and consider how mentors can best develop

these strengths.

Another theoretical framework is the Asset-Based Approach which builds on the human,

social, and physical capital that exists in communities (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). This

approach focuses on building the values and skills people in a community possess in order to

uplift them and provide them with adequate resources needed to support them. It is important to

see the skills and motivations communities have as a whole and build off of those to uplift

individuals and create unity within the community. This framework helped me look at the

strengths such as community cultural wealth when designing my research. It helped guide my

interview questions in which I asked about the strengths that mentors have seen in their youth

and the OFY community. My research was designed to support the OFY program by

contributing to the development of a potential mentoring training program.

The last theoretical framework I used to design my research project was Accompaniment

(Farmer & Weigel, 2013). This theory focuses on building long-term relationships and walking

side by side with an individual through their challenges. The Opportunities for Youth program

focuses on having mentors for unaccompanied minors. The mentor focuses on supporting and

helping their youth holistically and building a relationship of trust. Being a mentor entails

working with a mentee for the entirety of the year and meeting on a regular basis. This creates a

long-term relationship that the youth knows will be a constant source of support. Being a mentor

is practicing accompaniment. The mentor walks beside their mentee through any challenges they

are facing, helping support the youth by giving advice and focusing on their strengths and

motivations. Based on this framework, my research was designed to better understand the social

support mentors provide for the youth and why having a support system is important.

Research Design

Research Site and Entry into the Field

The organization I worked with is a non-profit organization located in Northern

California that helps immigrants and low-income Latinos. The organization is located in

Northern California. They offer a variety of services from adult English classes, to college help,

legal support, and digital literacy help (*Who we are*, 2022). Canal has supported 295

unaccompanied minors through their immigration and social services team and provided 2,016

hours of English and digital literacy classes for over 300 ESL students. They have also helped

4,776 people receive health services, 1,700 people receive social and behavioral services, and

provided a food pantry for 2,500 people (*2022 Annual Report*, 2022).

I have worked with this organization for four years during my entire undergraduate career

at Dominican University. During the first two years, I worked with a variety of programs

including rental assistance, voter registration, English as a second language class, and a digital

literacy program. Around August of 2021, I was offered the opportunity to be a mentor for an

unaccompanied minor for their Opportunities for Youth Program (OFY). I had never been a

mentor but I was excited to try. Now I have worked with the same youth consistently for close to

two years.

My positionality in relation to the unaccompanied youth I work with is that I am a young,

female Latina who is a citizen, educated, low-income, and Spanish-speaking. Being younger is

an advantage and helps me be an insider because I am able to connect to the youth who are teens

and still in a similar stage of life as I am. Being Latina and a Spanish speaker also helps me be an

insider. I am able to connect with the youth and the community as a whole. Almost all of the

community members who go for help at the non-profit are Latino and speak Spanish. Going

through similar cultural experiences and understanding cultural norms helps me bond with the

community and speaking Spanish makes it easier for others to trust me and try to communicate

with me. If I only spoke English I believe a lot of people would not try to talk to me because they

either wouldn't feel comfortable speaking to me or see me as an outsider who would judge them.

Growing up low-income, along with being Latina, also helps me understand some issues they

may be experiencing and allows me to better guide/support the youth and the rest of the

community. However, being a college student may be something that causes them to see me as

an outsider. Since many people in the community may not have gone to school or finished, they

may think I judge them. My legal status can also cause me to be an outsider. Some people in the

community are immigrants and seeing someone who isn't might make them feel like I cannot

relate to them or that I will have bad intentions toward them.

Sampling Procedures

I was able to gather participants in the Opportunities for Youth program by obtaining a

letter of permission from my supervisor. Recruitment for my interviews consisted of sending a

recruitment email to my supervisor who forwarded it to mentors in the program. Mentors in the

program were to reach out to me if they were interested in participating in my study. Participants

had the option to choose from in-person or Zoom interviews. In-person interviews were

conducted either in a reserved room at the organization or at a location that the participant

preferred (e.g., a local coffee shop). Additionally, I emailed mentors who I worked with in the

past to see if they were interested in participating in my research study. Being a mentor in the

program helped me gather other mentors to participate in my study since they may have seen me

as someone they can relate to and some expressed they were interested in seeing what results the study would yield.

I discussed the paper consent form with in-person participants and collected their signatures before each interview began. Participants being interviewed over Zoom read and signed an online consent form created through Qualtrics. This informed participants about the potential risks of the study before they decided to begin and/or complete their interview.

Participants

I interviewed three mentors about their experiences in the Opportunities for Youth program. All participants were over the age of 18 and lived in California. One of the mentors was a student at Dominican University of California who takes service-learning classes. Students from Dominican University must be Spanish speaking in order to participate in the program. Other mentors range in ethnicities although all must speak Spanish in order to be able to communicate with their mentee. Gender and race/ethnicity varied, two participants were female and one was male. Genders included two White participants and one Latino. All names used in the thesis are pseudonyms.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Approximate Age	Ethnicity	Language Ability
Angel	Male	30-40	Hispanic	Native speaker
Sue	Female	Over 50	White	Fluent in Spanish

Pseudonym	Gender	Approximate Age	Ethnicity	Language Ability
Jade	Female	Early 20's	White	Fluent in Spanish

Instruments for Data collection

For interviews, sixteen interview questions (Appendix A) were created with the objective of assessing how mentors helped support unaccompanied youth overcome barriers, as well as what impact mentoring had on the mentors themselves. The interview questions looked at how the participants came to be mentors as well as how being a mentor affected them personally. The questions also explored what barriers mentors had seen their mentees face during their time working together and what mentors did to support their mentees with the challenges they faced. Additionally, weekly field notes were submitted to the site GivePulse, documenting prompts and reflections on the connections between my work with the organization and the focus of my research.

Procedures

In-person interviews took place at a site that the participants preferred. Confidentiality was ensured by using identifiers or pseudonyms for participants and recordings were on a password-protected phone. Zoom interviews were conducted on the video conferencing application, Zoom. Participants were able to keep their cameras off if they preferred and confidentiality was ensured by keeping recordings on a password-protected device. For in-person interviews, the audio was recorded on my personal phone. Interviews took around 40 minutes to complete.

All recordings were transcribed using the online service Otter.ai. After being transcribed I listened to each recording while reviewing the documents to make edits for accuracy. During my experience working with the organization, I also recorded weekly field notes and wrote analytic memos exploring the connections between my experience in the community and my research questions.

Data Analysis

After transcription, open coding was used to identify expected and unexpected codes based on my literature review and research questions. The process involved marking short segments of the transcript with brackets and writing keywords or phrases for the main ideas of the segment.

Expected codes from the literature review included the codes of support, barriers, and learning. Unexpected codes that were identified during the coding process included beneficial, sense of belonging, and humanity. The initial coding of the transcripts included peer coding so that insights were gathered from different perspectives. Additionally, field notes were coded using an open coding process.

Once initial coding was done, a concept map was created with the codes to identify themes in the data. Peers debriefed the concept map in order to allow for different interpretations of the data. During peer debriefing, relationships between the emerging themes and the research questions were explored.

After finishing the concept map, focused coding was completed on the transcripts to identify specific data (e.g., participant quotes or recorded observations) that supported or contradicted the emerging themes. I then returned to the concept map to revise themes based on the results of the focused coding. Lastly, the identified themes were used to answer the research

questions and specific data was used as evidence to support the conclusions for each research question.

Validity

The first main threat to validity in qualitative research is reactivity. Reactivity looks at how the presence or positionality of the researcher can skew participants' behavior or the ways they respond to the researcher's questions (Maxwell, 2013). A way to increase validity is by using triangulation. Triangulation is the collection of information from a diverse range of individuals, diverse settings, or through multiple methods (Creswell, 2014). This study used multiple methods by incorporating a survey, interviews, and field notes written after one on one mentoring sessions. The study surveyed mentors to gauge the strength of the mentoring relationship and to see if mentoring had any perceived effects on resiliency, academic success, academic efficacy, and well-being of the mentees. Interviews looked specifically at how mentors supported unaccompanied youth through challenges. The validity of the findings was increased by comparing and contrasting data gathered from all three sources when developing conclusions to the research questions.

The second main threat to validity in qualitative research is researcher bias. Researcher bias can cause the researcher to select data that fits into preconceived theories, goals, expectations, and more (Maxwell, 2013). Two ways to increase validity are by using rich, thick descriptions of findings in the data and incorporating peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014). Thick and rich descriptions were used when presenting the findings of the study. This allowed the researcher to support conclusions with multiple examples, including discrepant examples, thereby leaving less room for personal interpretations. Additionally, peer debriefing in which results are shared in class in order to learn from the analysis of other individuals was used for all data, which allowed for multiple interpretations of the data. This is important as it allows for

multiple perspectives of the data, not only the researchers, eliminating bias and increasing validity.

Another way to increase validity is by clarifying researcher positionality and potential biases (Creswell, 2014). I have worked at the central research site for four years in various programs. For the last year and a half, I have worked as a mentor for an unaccompanied youth at the organization Opportunities for Youth program. My motivation for the study stemmed from having a mentor during adolescence and now being a mentor myself. I wanted to understand how mentoring relationships have affected others. The mentors who were interviewed for the study are colleagues at the research site. I maintained an awareness of my personal biases, to avoid only focusing on the benefits of mentoring during data collection and analysis. In addition, during the data analysis process I also actively searched for discrepant examples of emerging themes in order to avoid overemphasizing examples that are aligned with my personal biases.

Results

Quantitative Results

In order to understand whether the strength of mentoring relationships positively correlates with well-being, academic self-efficacy, academic success, and resiliency during adolescence, a correlation was run once data was collected for the strength of mentoring and each dependent variable. Due to a small sample size, the results included all participants not just traditionally underrepresented students. Therefore, the hypotheses were not just looked at in relation to traditionally underrepresented students, but any student who partook in the study.

Strength of Mentoring and Well-Being

The first hypothesis tested in this research study was that among college students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will be positively correlated with well-being: as the strength

of mentoring increases, well-being also increases. After running a correlation between the

strength of mentoring and well-being, I did not find support for hypothesis 1; the two variables

were not statistically significantly correlated with one another $(r = -.05, p = .78)$. The well-being

measure included a variety of questions, though only the first section which looked at overall life

satisfaction of the participant was used for the results. The Cronbach's alpha for those questions

was .70. The Cronbach's alpha for the mentor questions was .90.

Strength of Mentoring and Academic Success

Hypothesis two stated that among traditionally underrepresented college students, the

strength of a mentoring relationship will be positively correlated with academic success: as the

strength of mentoring increases, academic success also increases. To test this hypothesis I ran a

correlation between the strength of mentoring and academic success. This showed that the two

variables were not statistically significantly correlated with one another $(r = .10, p = .58)$.

Strength of Mentoring and Academic Self-Efficacy

The third hypothesis tested if, among traditionally underrepresented college students, the

strength of a mentoring relationship will be positively correlated with academic self-efficacy: as

the strength of mentoring increases, academic self-efficacy will also increase. After running a

correlation, the two variables showed a significant positive correlation, meaning a stronger

mentoring relationship was associated with higher academic self-efficacy $(r = .33, p = .04)$. The

Cronbach's alpha for the measure used was .77.

Strength of Mentoring and Resiliency

The last hypothesis tested stated that among traditionally underrepresented college

students, the strength of a mentoring relationship will be positively correlated with resiliency: as

the strength of mentoring increases, resiliency also increases. The correlation run showed that the

two variables were not statistically significantly correlated with one another ($r = .17$, $p = .33$).

The reliability was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

Qualitative Results

The two qualitative research questions explored in this study were 1) What are the ways in which mentoring helps support unaccompanied youth overcome barriers? 2) How does the mentoring process affect mentors? The findings of this study suggest that the development of trust allows mentors to provide improved support and foster an increased sense of belonging and humanization with their mentees'. In what follows, I demonstrate that a good relationship based on trust and communication is often built through fun activities. Next, I use evidence from the study to illustrate how mentors provide support for barriers youth face by bridging language barriers and navigating systems, which increases the mentee's sense of belonging. Finally, I document the ways in which mentors have learned during their time working with youth and how this humanizes their mentoring relationship and reduces the hierarchical aspect of mentoring.

Building Trust and Communication Through Fun Activities

Mentors were able to foster trust and communication with their mentees by inviting them to do fun activities. In the first interview, Sue noted that she and her mentee plan activities a couple of times a month. During their time spent together, her mentee was able to get more comfortable with her, Sue mentioned: "She feels comfortable saying when there's an activity she doesn't want to do." Sue supported her mentee in things she had never experienced before, such as riding a bike or swimming. She would remain by her side when it came to new and scary experiences for her mentee and cheered her on while she completed them. Due to feeling comfortable with Sue, her mentee has grown to share more about herself. Sue says that she has

not shared much about her immigration story but they talk a lot about all kinds of relationships and the youth's family.

Angel also discussed the importance of participating in activities with his mentee to facilitate communication and build trust. He mentioned doing activities with his mentee once or twice a month and texting or talking every day or every other day. He defines their relationship as having a good connection and being fun. They often play soccer games and the mentee goes to Angel's soccer games. They also go hiking, drive around, and go for breakfast. It seems that for Angel, a key component of their good relationship is doing enjoyable activities that are full of fun. Angel invited his mentee to do many things which caused them to build more connections and more communication.

In a similar way, Jade reflected that her relationship with her mentee was enjoyable because they kept things on the lighter side and didn't get too much into harder things. She explained that she wants him to enjoy life since it is already hard enough. They meet weekly and have gone to museums, the movies, and farmer's markets. Jade even invited her family to do things with her mentee: "But then I was like, maybe my parents wanted to join. So I kind of involved him in some stuff I was doing with my family." Jade was comfortable including her family with her mentee because of the fun and good relationship they had and her mentee was comfortable meeting them as well. Merging her family and her important mentee relationships is special and shows how meaningful the relationship she has with her mentee is.

Mentors Providing Support and Guidance, Which Increases Mentees' Sense of Belonging

Since mentees' had trust in their mentors, they were able to open up to them about some of their barriers. The predominant barrier found was that of language. Language was found to inhibit youth in various ways, such as with work, school, healthcare, and social interactions.

Angel described his mentees' interaction with the healthcare system which he was unfamiliar with. His mentee struggled to get help due to his language capabilities. In one instance, his mentee went to play soccer and got injured. He recounted: "And so he went to play soccer, our soccer, and so somehow he got injured. He went to see medical and I mean, he went to the clinic, and they were asking for the medical which he didn't have, and also that he was referred to a different place, but because he didn't know how to communicate with the person he got discouraged and he went back home even though he needs the care." In this instance, his mentee was unaware of the system of healthcare since it was something he did not have to deal with previously, but Angel stepped in and helped teach him what it was and how he could access it. He helped his mentee follow up and schedule an appointment and gathered information to make sure he did not have to pay out of pocket.

Angel's mentee also mentioned a struggle with language in school expressing that he struggled because he felt that at times he was not fully able to understand the material or not being able to understand it fast enough. Not only did he have difficulty in school, but with work as well. Angel mentioned that: "There was one of the places where he applied and because the interview was in English, he was disqualified because he couldn't communicate well with the person who was interviewing him." Here Angel has stepped in by helping him find employment that will benefit his mentee. Angel states: "He wants to start working as an electrician. I already got all the information for an apprenticeship to start in the union for the electrician union in Oakland." A goal of Angel's mentee is to go to school and get certified to be an electrician and Angel has supported him by pushing him towards achieving his overall work goals and in creating connections.

Jade noticed that during the beginning of the mentorship experience her mentee struggled with social interactions due to his language skills. An observation she noted was that: "He was kind of stuck but confined to his Spanish-speaking community. But as he developed his English language ability, he made friends with a girl, opening up his social network." Language had created a barrier to this mentee's social networking abilities.

Another barrier that impacted the youth was getting to know the systems they were previously unfamiliar with. Mentors were able to help them through that by helping their mentees navigate different systems. For example, Angel helped his mentee understand finances because he had noted it was something he was not familiar with and had difficulties with. He guided him on how to apply and use credit and how he could be smarter with his money. He also helped him apply for a driver's license and explained to him the consequences of what would happen if he were to get stopped by a police officer while driving and not having a license. Jade also helped her mentee get his driver's license. She helped him study for the written part of the exam, as well as gave him information about setting up an appointment for his license. Lastly, Sue helped her mentee navigate the school system. Her mentee did not know much about the education system so Sue helped her understand what material would be covered in certain classes and answered any questions that arose for her mentee. All mentors provided guidance for their mentees which was crucial for their growth and comfort.

Through providing support and guidance, mentors were able to increase a minor's sense of belonging in the U.S. Another way in which a sense of belonging was created was by exposing youth to different perspectives and viewpoints. All mentors exposed their mentees to new things or the things around them. Angel says he tried to help his mentee by showing him different perspectives and viewpoints that could arise. He would then explain those new

perspectives so that his mentee could try to adjust smoothly when those new experiences arose. Angel also tried to help his mentee by showing him that he could use the resources surrounding him to his advantage. He explained that whenever his mentee would come up to him for help or voice that he needed or wanted to get something, Angel would help seek resources that could provide what he was looking for. He wanted to expose his mentee to resources in his community like non-profits or others to help him get what he needs rather than him having to struggle to get those things. This seemed very important to Angel because he wanted to help his mentee have stress-free experiences, rather than one's in which he would run into struggles. Sue mentioned she would take her mentee to explore different areas around her city. She noted: "I want her to be exposed to where she lives, and to new experiences that might be more common occurrences here that she didn't have the opportunity for when she was living in Guatemala." She also said: "My agenda is for her to feel comfortable and knowledgeable about where she is and what this world is like, and to support her through that world." It seems as though a crucial aspect of their relationship was to have comfort and understanding about the world around her.

Another way in which mentors help support their mentees' is by answering their questions when they don't understand situations or experiences. All mentees feel they can express concerns with their mentors and ask questions which is a very important component of their mentorship relationships. Sue says: "She has called me to, you know, ask for support with her sister." Not only is her mentee comfortable asking questions that pertain to herself, but also for help to other people that are important to her. Sue has also provided support to her mentee by answering her questions about the school system, such as what certain classes or courses are. Angel mentions that his mentee is "really into asking questions whenever he doesn't understand something or when he says something." Angel will take the time to explain his answers to his

mentee and help him understand whatever he needs. Likewise Jade mentions her mentee had made a friend who was dealing with health issues and so he had reached out to her to ask about advice and what kind of support they could give his friend. Once again, we see mentees feeling comfortable enough to ask for help, not only when it pertains to themselves.

All mentors also talked about being a friend and reliable sources of support for their mentees. Being a friend was key, as it helped create a sense of belonging for the youth. It allowed for the youth to have someone to rely on and be there for them through any questions or doubts. Angel said: "I guess also just as a friend, as a person, just to be there, because he's still young, he's still learning life… he's making decisions so just by me opening the door just to let him know that we're here whenever he has to make a decision if he needs to see things from a different perspective or something, so he can always just call me or text me." Something that Jade said was: "Yeah, I mean that's what a mentor is supposed to be, somebody you could talk to and feel comfortable with."

Sue said she also helped support her mentee by listening. In her interview, she says: "So that's kind of, you know, listening, and to hear how she's feeling about something. And then, you know, sharing that I'm hearing her of course, and then asking other questions to show that I care and I'm interested but not again, probing any way that would, might make her uncomfortable." Actively listening and showing she cared seemed to be a key component to her mentee feeling comfortable enough to share any questions or issues that arose. Similarly, Jade said she supported her mentee by caring and showing sympathy: "Show that I care… Like, I'm here to listen and support you in whatever way." Being someone who the youth can share and be comfortable with was an important finding. It allowed mentors to better support their mentees during difficult times.

Overall mentors were able to provide support by bridging language barriers and helping their youth navigate systems like healthcare, jobs, and getting a driver's license. This can help youths' sense of belonging by having someone who is reliable in times of need and in times when they may not know how to overcome a challenge. Mentors also exposed their mentees to new environments, experiences, and perspectives in order to increase their sense of belonging and help them feel comfortable and knowledgeable in the area they are living in. Mentors also answered questions whenever they arose. They were also empathetic and became a friend that their mentees could confide in. All these forms of support and guidance led to an increased sense of belonging for the youth and helped their overall relationship.

Learning From Their Mentees

The last theme found in my research was that mentors are also learners in this mentorship relationship and value their mentees. As can be seen in the evidence above, mentees learn a lot from their mentors, but in the interviews, it was found that having a mutually beneficial relationship was a factor in creating good relationships. Moreover, in order to have these mutually beneficial relationships, mentors worked to remove the common hierarchical status that typically arises in a mentoring relationship. It seems that when there is a relationship in which both people benefit and mentors are able to learn and appreciate their mentees' strengths, a process of humanization occurs. This is why it is important to look at how though mentees are learners in this relationship and take away things from their mentors, mentors are also learners.

Angel mentioned that his mentee has taken advice from him, such as when got into an altercation with someone in his class, and instead of fighting or causing a fight, he walked away because not letting his negative emotions get the best of him was something he and his mentee had talked about previously. Angel expressed pride and happiness towards his mentee for taking

into consideration the advice given. Angel also acknowledged his learning as a mentor and how

he learned some things from his mentee as well. He mentioned that after working with his

mentee, he feels he has changed physically and mentally. He said "I think it was physically… I

guess just planning having those outdoor opportunities just to walk, the hiking or walking in

soccer practice. I guess physically and mentally there was something that I benefit of. And I

think at the end also knowing that I was also helping someone. I think that also gave me a sense

of direction in terms of what I'm doing. I'm creating something for someone else. I'm making life

easier for someone else in that sense."

Sue mentions that during her interactions with her mentee, she has learned to be okay

with certain things such as awkward silence that can arise during their interactions. She also

mentioned that she was exposed to different experiences and different ways of thinking. Sue also

talked about her mentee and how she was "strong, sweet, brave, and persistent". She spoke of her

mentee highly and recognized the traits and qualities that made up her mentee. She also used

those traits to help build her up, such as when learning to do new things like riding a bike or

learning how to swim.

Jade mentioned wanting to join the program to challenge herself since she is not a native

Spanish speaker. She wanted to go out of her comfort zone while also being able to help

someone else. She mentioned learning more about the immigration journey from her mentee and

how treacherous it is. She says "I learned so much. Yeah, it's so different coming from a person

sitting right across the table telling me like, it's right in front of me. Instead of reading a book,

okay, I mean, that's tough. That's really traumatic, But he's sitting right there." Her perspective

about why individuals migrate also changed because of her conversations with him. All mentors

gained something and it shows that mentors are also learners in these relationships and they take away a lot from these experiences as well.

Discussion

Relationships with non-parental adults can lead to better well-being, validate youths' efforts and abilities, gain opportunities, problem-solve, and potentially have higher self-worth and better academic performance (Austin et al., 2020; Gilligan, 1999; Smith, 2011). The aim of the quantitative data was to see if the strength of mentoring was positively related to four individual variables: resiliency, academic success, well-being, and academic self-efficacy. The results found that the strength of mentoring positively influenced academic self-efficacy, but not well-being, resiliency, or academic success.

Prior studies have documented that mentoring affects the well-being and health of adolescents, leads to better academic outcomes such as improved attendance and grades, and helps develop resiliency by encouraging talents and interests in adolescents, which can help build confidence, self-esteem, and social skills (Austin et al., 2020; Gilligan, 1999, Smith, 2011). However, the results of this study did not show a positive relationship between resilience, well-being, and academic success in relation to the strength of mentoring. This may be due to the small sample size. Having a small sample size may have led to fewer experiences on mentoring and therefore some of the variables were not significant. Additionally, since there was a small sample size, all participants gathered were included in the results. This meant that individuals who were not underrepresented were also included, which could have skewed the final results, perhaps other variables would have been more significant and the overall results would have differed if represented individuals were taken out of the sample. This also affected the overall aim of the study which was to specifically look at underrepresented individuals.

Academic self-efficacy was the variable that was found to be positively related to a strong mentoring relationship. Academic self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their abilities to complete academic tasks (Holloway-Friesen, 2019). Since in the current study mentoring was not found to affect academic success or other factors in individuals' lives, a potential theory may be that mentors may create more changes within individuals' lives. They may help more with motivation and for individuals to feel more confident in their overall abilities, specifically academic ones. It has been shown that there was a correlation between higher academic self-efficacy with sense of belonging which has been linked to higher academic outcomes (Holloway-Friesen, 2019). Other evidence has also shown that support from adult figures like mentors has been linked to positive effects on self-esteem (Alarcón et al., 2021). This may be why this variable yielded more significant results than the others.

The qualitative findings showed the difficulties of being an unaccompanied youth and some of the ways mentors were able to support them. The literature review showed that mentoring is beneficial to youth as a whole, but also to unaccompanied youth. It also showed how social support can help unaccompanied youth thrive. The current study showed this through mentors describing how they were able to support their youth through difficult circumstances and how their youth benefited from that support. The literature review also discussed who unaccompanied youth are, the reasons they migrate, barriers they face upon arrival to the U.S., and how mentoring has been beneficial for these youth.

The barriers of language and education which were discussed in the literature review, were also found in the data of my interviews. My findings showed that language was the prominent barrier that affected the youth of the mentors, followed by navigating systems. Language impacted areas of the youths' lives including school, work, social networks, and

healthcare. Though, one of the ways in which mentors were able to help them navigate was by answering their questions and concerns. Additionally, mentors supported their mentees by being a friend, exposing them to their environment, listening, and sympathizing. It also showed that by mentors providing support, a sense of belonging was developed for their mentees. This was able to answer my first research question about how mentors support their mentees during the times in which they encounter barriers.

The second research question explored how mentors were affected by the mentoring process. Throughout the interviews, mentors were able to self-reflect on their mentoring role and they all expressed that they were able to learn something from their mentees ranging from new insights to new ways of thinking. The major takeaway was that mentors take on a learner role as well and benefit from these mentoring relationships. This learning also falls in line with the cultural humility principles which talk about self-reflection and being a lifelong learner. All mentors were able to reflect and were open to learning from their mentees and getting new perspectives, causing them to be lifelong learners. All research questions were able to be answered based on the data collected.

Contributions to the Academic Literature on Mentoring Unaccompanied Youth

My qualitative research found that a way in which communication and trust were cultivated amongst mentees and mentors was through activities, specifically fun activities. All mentors demonstrated doing fun and interactive activities with their mentees weekly or monthly. This eventually led to more comfort and openness for the mentees. This shows how perhaps doing activities creates a stronger bond in comparison to only focusing on helping youth with academics or other specific tasks. This would be interesting to explore in other research and see

if there is a difference between the strength of mentoring in relation to what mentors and mentees focus on during their time together.

My literature review discussed assimilation as something that unaccompanied youth face. Though that is true and important, my findings suggested that mentors created a sense of belonging in order to help youth transition from their experiences in their home country to that of those here. They also created a sense of belonging by supporting them through challenging barriers, being a friend, empathizing, and being someone who the youth could rely on. This is important because it was a common factor in all three of the interviews conducted and shows how a sense of belonging can help amplify comfortability for the youth.

My findings also showed that mentors learned from the mentoring experience as well by gaining new experiences and perspectives. It helped them become more open to new feelings and ideas, which I believe is an extremely important note. It is important to look at this because when thinking of a mentor/mentee relationship one may think about how a mentor is there to teach their youth and hierarchically have more power because they have the mentor title. Though, mentees' can also teach them new things and change their perspectives. This also helps create humanization in their relationships because both are learning and growing.

Overall there is not much research about unaccompanied youth and mentoring, which was an issue when collecting background information on the topic. After this research, there is now a little bit more about what barriers youth face, mutually beneficial relationships, and how fostering humanization and cultivating a sense of belonging is important in a mentorship relationship. By understanding the barriers and seeing how trust, support, and mutually beneficial relationships are important, one can learn how to better support them, especially since it seemed that these relationships are what helped the youth flourish.

Implications for Policy and Practice

  Underrepresented college students tend to have lower rates of enrollment and attendance and face challenges in obtaining a four-year degree (Raposa & Hurd, 2018). Underrepresented students struggle with different factors in school. By doing research on mentors, we can see how they are protective factors and how they help individuals later on in life. This quantitative portion of the study showed a positive impact on the strength of mentoring and academic self-efficacy. With more research done, we may be able to see how this affects other areas of individuals' lives. It is important to see how mentoring can be beneficial especially for underrepresented youth so that more mentoring programs can be encouraged and implemented and help support more underrepresented individuals.

  The qualitative findings can help with mentor training at the OFY program. The training can show mentors that taking youth on activities helps build not only better trust and communication but can help foster a sense of belonging. It can also show that they can provide support by being a listener, a friend, and helping with barriers that arise for the youth. They can also see that valuing their mentees and being open to learning from them can humanize their relationship and lead to more vulnerability for both individuals. The findings can also encourage the program to host more events for mentors and mentees to gather together. Since it seemed that doing interactive and fun activities was important for the participants and their mentees' perhaps implementing more activities that mentors and mentees can do together would be helpful, such as activities on the weekends. The organization that OFY is a part of is well known in their city. They can choose to spread the word about this research and help reach a bigger audience. This may help future programs or other forms of support for unaccompanied youth be implemented.

This research will also help bring awareness about unaccompanied youth. Educating others about this group of individuals, which people may not be aware of, can help foster more change.

Limitations

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from small sample sizes. The quantitative data consisted of 33 participants. Due to this, all participants, including White individuals, who are not classified as underrepresented, partook in the study. If people who identified as White were not a part of the study, perhaps it would have yielded different results and other categories would have been more statistically significant. The overall goal of the research was to look at underrepresented individuals and their mentoring relationships, therefore including individuals who are not underrepresented also affects the overall aim of the study. The qualitative sample only consisted of 3 mentors. Future research should try to gather a larger participant pool in order to get more mentor perspectives. This may lead to new findings and can help expand the research already found.

Another limitation was that only Dominican University of California students were recruited for this study. Dominican is a small school that attracts a certain type of individual. This could have influenced the results due to individuals having similar backgrounds or experiences. It would be important to expand the recruited population to see if different results would arise, especially because mentoring experiences and values may vary based on where individuals are from. In some areas, mentoring relationships may focus more on academics, and in others, it may be more on activities or faith-based experiences. Some mentoring relationships may also value different things like family, careers, or education which could alter their benefits to youth. Seeing how this would affect youth differently would be very interesting to explore, maybe different results would arise in relation to academic success, well-being, or resiliency.

Similarly, the qualitative research conducted was specific to my research site and community. It specifically pertained to the Opportunities for Youth program which helped a Spanish-speaking immigrant community. This narrows down the research for youth who were unaccompanied during the time of migration. The study may have produced different results if the study was for a more general population. The interviews were also from the mentors' perspectives which misses out on the crucial perspective of the targeted population which is unaccompanied youth. Due to the limited time of the study and the youth being under the age of 18, they were not able to participate in the study. Although, if there had been more time for the approval process and length of gathering data, it would have been interesting to gather the youth in the program that had just turned 18 or were already over the age of 18 and get their insights.

Directions for future research

If quantitative research is continued, focusing on gathering more participants would be extremely important. This may lead to different results than that of this study. Something that would be interesting to look at if there were more participants would be to compare underrepresented populations to that of those who are represented. Underrepresented individuals have different experiences than those who are represented and so they may gain more or less from their mentoring relationship.

The hypothesis that was significant was that of the strength of mentoring and academic self-efficacy. It was shown that academic self-efficacy was positively related to the strength of mentoring. Exploring how mentors can affect youth in regard to internal motivations or confidence would be a good direction for future research. Since the other variables such as academic success or well-being were not significant, maybe it is important to look at how mentors help youth more in terms of motivation and building self-confidence.

For the qualitative portion of the research, a significant finding was looking at how the mentoring process affects mentors and how that can lead to a mutually beneficial relationship and a process of humanization. It would be interesting to explore more about mutually beneficial relationships and how they affect the individuals in the mentorship relationship, as well as how this then helps create vulnerability and humanization. This may even lead future mentoring to focus on building this within their relationships. It was also interesting to find this since this theme was not expected prior to this research. I had no questions in my study about the topic, therefore continuing to explore this finding and add more to the academic literature about mentoring is important.

Conclusion

This study supports previous findings that having a mentoring relationship positively affects academic self-efficacy. The current study suggests that having a strong mentoring relationship during adolescence will lead to positive academic self-efficacy in underrepresented youth. The current study did not support prior findings that showed mentoring positively influenced resiliency, well-being, and resiliency. This suggests that mentors may provide more support in motivating individuals and helping them gain confidence in their abilities, rather than in other areas of individuals' lives.

The findings in this study also suggested that through fun activities, mentors and mentees are able to foster trust and communication. It also suggested that mentors were able to create a sense of belonging by exposing them to new situations, being a friend, supporting their youth through challenges, and being someone who was reliable. This was important in helping mentees feel comfortable with their mentors, new environments, and new experiences, which helped mentors better help their mentees when challenges arose. The findings also suggest that an

especially important aspect of the relationships built was mentors making the effort to learn from their mentees and value them, their strengths, and their experiences. By doing this their mentorship relationship was humanized and an authentic relationship that provided benefits for both individuals was created. This is something that cannot be built solely through volunteer work because it requires both individuals to immerse themselves into the mentorship relationship experience and be active learners.

This research was important to help unaccompanied youth by understanding how they can best be supported. As a mentor, I noticed that providing these youth was helpful and it was important to learn more about the impact mentors have on them. It was also to help build a presentation to share with future mentors in the Opportunities for Youth program. By understanding some of the barriers the youth are facing, mentors are better able to assist them. Future mentors are also able to learn from the experiences of previous mentors. It is also important to emphasize that through mutually beneficial relationships, mentors are better able to help. The hope is that this research may inspire more programs to come to light since OFY has been successful in helping youth. Ultimately, unaccompanied youth are a vulnerable group of individuals that need help and support and through providing programs that assist them and their specific needs, they will better adjust to the new environment and experiences they are facing.

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Appendix A - Qualitative Interview Questions

1. How did you come to be a mentor in the program?
    a. What made you want to participate in the program?
2. Can you tell me about a typical day when you are working with a student?
3. Can you tell me a story about a time when your mentee shared one of their struggles with you?
    a. What was that like for you?
    b. How did you respond?
    c. How did this interaction affect you personally?
4. What are the most prominent issues you see your mentee face? (What does your mentee struggle with most)
5. Can you tell me a story about a time when you noticed that your mentee has changed since you first worked with them?
    a. What was that like for you?
6. Can you tell me a story about a time when you observed your mentee using skills to maneuver a specific challenge?
    a. How has your mentee used other skills or community assets to maneuver the challenges that they are facing?
7. Can you tell me a story about an interaction with your mentee that changed your perspective or shaped the way you go about your daily life?
    a. What did you learn during this interaction?
8. How do you think your relationship with your mentee has shaped your perspectives or outlook on life over time?
    a. How do you think this experience will affect you in the future?
9. How do you support your mentee?
10. How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?
11. How do you get to know your mentee?
12. Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt like you were having fun with your mentee?
    a. What was that like for you?
13. Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt proud of your mentee?
    a. What was that like for you?
14. Can you tell me a time when you felt challenged in your role as a mentor?
    a. What was that like for you?
15. What do you think is the most important aspect of your relationship with your mentee?
16. What do you hope for your mentee?

Appendix B - Mentor Youth Alliance Scale

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Appendix C - Academic Self-Efficacy Scale

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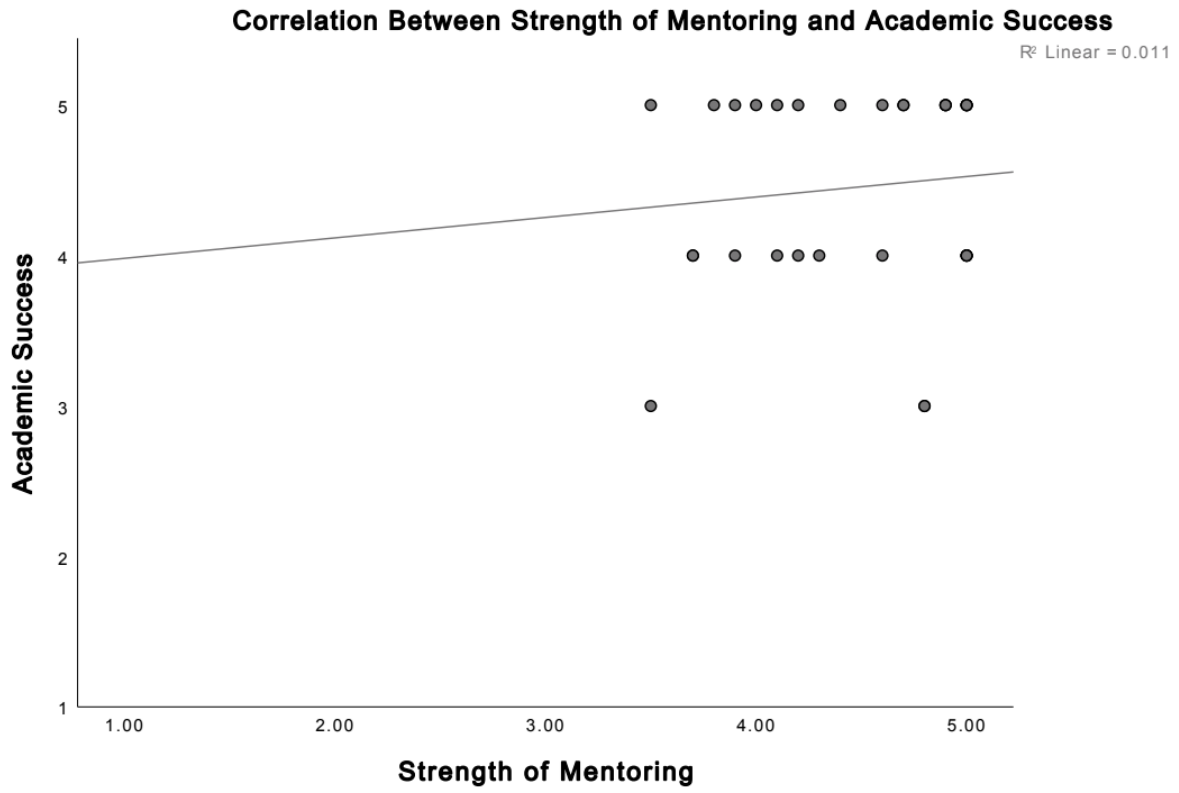
Appendix D - Resiliency Scale

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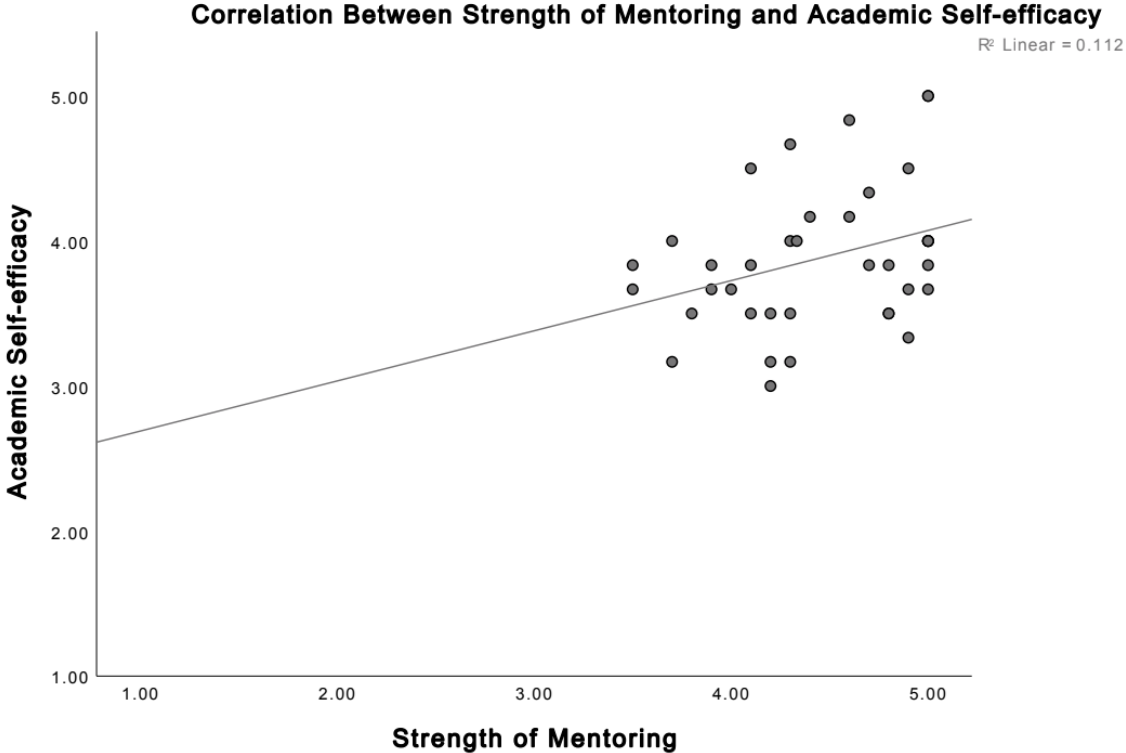
Appendix E - I COPPE Scale

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Appendix F - Well-being results graph

Correlation Between Strength of Mentoring and Well-being

Appendix G - Academic success results graph

Correlation Between Strength of Mentoring and Academic Success

Appendix H - Academic self-efficacy results graph

Correlation Between Strength of Mentoring and Academic Self-efficacy

Appendix I - Resiliency graph results

Correlation Between Strength of Mentoring and Resiliency