

Youth Mentoring Relationships in Context: Mentor Perceptions of Youth, Environment, and the  
Mentor Role

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THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2014

Chicago, Illinois

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## SUMMARY

Few studies focus on mentors' sense of their place within the existing constellation of mentee relationships and settings. Further, few studies explore how mentors' perceptions of their mentees' environments may relate to the fulfillment of the mentoring role. This qualitative study examines how mentors' perceptions of program youth and their environments informed their descriptions of their mentoring role: the nature of their involvement, their impact, and their perceptions of challenges. Analyses of interviews revealed that mentors commonly characterized environmental factors as risks, and conceptualized youths' own negative behaviors as byproducts of their environments, whereas individual-level strengths were seen as existing "in spite of" environmental inputs. Mentors described their roles as youth-focused, and couched their work within their perceptions of youths' contexts. However, they also worked closely with other key individuals. Mentors described challenges associated with role overload, and navigating role boundaries. Some also described feeling unsupported by other adults in mentees' lives, or frustrated at the prevalence of risks. Examination of mentors' perceptions of mentees and their environments and mentors' conceptualizations of their role fulfillment and challenges suggests that the link is consequential, and that mentoring may be optimized by equipping mentors to more effectively navigate their mentees' environments such as by forming close active partnerships with other key individuals.

# Youth Mentoring Relationships in Context: Mentor Perceptions of Youth, Environment, and the Mentor Role

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 **Background and Study Goals**

Youth mentoring has undergone a surge in popularity over the past several decades. Over three million young people are currently reported to have mentors through more than 5,000 formal mentoring programs operating throughout the United States. Mentoring remains a funding and policy priority, and the growth of the field continues apace (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Broadly, youth mentoring is defined as an individualized, supportive relationship between a young person and a non-parental adult that promotes positive development (DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Keller & Pryce, 2010). Rhodes's conceptual model of youth mentoring (2002, 2005) posits that a strong, meaningful connection between mentor and mentee, characterized by mutuality, empathy, and respect, buttresses the entire mentoring process and constitutes a necessary prerequisite for the achievement of more distal outcomes.

The empirical literature highlights variability in mentoring practices and intervention effectiveness between programs and dyads. Two comprehensive meta-analyses of youth mentoring program evaluations found modest benefits overall for youth involved in mentoring programs, but substantial variability in effects (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois et al., 2011). The studies found a positive association between strength of program effects and higher relationship quality (indexed by emotional closeness, frequency of contact, and longevity). Another study using a large dataset from Big Brothers Big Sisters found that youth in relationships that lasted longer than one year derived the most benefit from mentoring –

higher levels of self-worth, social acceptance, scholastic competence, parental relationship quality, and school connectedness, and decreases in both drug and alcohol use – and that youth in particularly short matches demonstrated decrements in self-worth and scholastic competence (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Thus, both between-program differences and within program implementation have implications for mentoring effectiveness.

Among the reasons for within program variability may be the high level of discretion and latitude allowed mentors in order to insure that the mentoring is responsive to each child's needs, strengths, and interests. Although a growing literature considers the complexity of the mentoring role (e.g., Goldner & Mayseless, 2008; Keller & Pryce, 2010; Morrow & Styles, 1995), understanding *how* and *why* mentors negotiate their role as they do remains little explored or understood. The current study's goal is to examine mentors' conceptualizations of their roles.

## **1.2 Mentor Perceptions and Role Fulfillment**

Given its inherent flexibility, mentors' perceptions of the role they fulfill can impact on the course and outcome of the intervention in several ways. First, mentor retention in mentoring programs remains lamentably low (Rhodes, 2002). Though myriad factors contribute to retention issues, mentors have reported that their decisions to terminate relationships after a short time have stemmed from the gap between their expectations and subsequent experiences, and feeling overwhelmed by their perceptions of mentees' considerable needs (Spencer, 2007). Conversely, prior work drawing on the data used in the current study highlighted paid mentors' perceptions that they were especially highly committed to their role, and thus were more likely to "stick it out" when faced with adversity (Lakind, Eddy, & Zell, 2013).

New evidence suggests that mentors' perceptions of their mentees can also influence their mentoring approach. Herrera, DuBois, and Grossman (2013) found that mentors matched with

youth with relatively high levels of individual and environmental-level risks engaged in activities targeting character/behavior change (e.g., developing social skills) more often than mentors matched with mentees with lower risk profiles. Mentors matched with these highest risk youth were also least likely to solicit input from their mentees about activities. This suggests that perceptions of youth can inform mentors' approaches. Morrow and Styles (1995) demonstrated that dissimilar mentoring approaches within one program differentially impacted both youth and mentor relationship satisfaction and ultimately relationship length. This evidence combined with Herrera et al.'s (2013) work suggests that the choices mentors make in response to their perceptions of their mentees can have tangible consequences on relationships and thus on youth outcomes. Given that mentors have such latitude in crafting their mentoring approach, and that this linkage between perceptions, approaches, and ultimately outcomes remains important regardless of other program details, examining the phenomenology of mentoring may contribute to the field's understanding of the intervention.

### **1.3 Mentoring Relationships in Context**

Though the growth of the mentoring field and proliferation of approaches has expanded the number and characteristics of youth receiving mentoring, formal mentoring programs most often target youth living in areas characterized by a relative lack of organizational and institutional resources, and by the presence of considerable community-level risk (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentoring for youth who live in resource-poor and risk-intensive communities is conceptualized as a corrective vehicle by helping children develop coping skills and more positive self-concept, experiencing a healthy and positive relationship with an adult, and providing exposure to alternative activities, settings, and futures (Rhodes, 2005).



Youth in high poverty environments characterized by violence and instability are more likely to demonstrate behavioral, emotional, social, and interpersonal difficulties (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1995; Larson, Russ, Kahn, & Halfon, 2007; Samaan, 2000; Schwartz & Gorman, 2003), thus potentially proving more difficult to partner with in mentoring relationships. Little work has focused on mentoring programs' capacities to serve youth demonstrating these heightened risk profiles. Herrera et al.'s recent study (2013), however, found that mentors matched with youth at relatively high individual-level risk reported greater difficulty dealing with behavior and concerns related to youth's social and emotional issues (Herrera et al., 2013).

In light of the substantial evidence that the mentor-mentee relationship is critical to successful mentoring, identifying adaptive or stressful facets of mentors' conceptualizations of their relationships with the youth they serve can provide important insights for research and practice. Because many children are assigned to mentoring programs precisely because they present with heightened risk profiles that may negatively impact on relationship-building, examining how mentors describe the strategies they employ and the perceptions they hold regarding their relationships with youth who do demonstrate these risks can help to elicit a new understanding of factors associated with relationship quality with children with whom it may be challenging to work.

#### **1.4 Mentors' Involvement With Contextual Factors**

Because youth mentoring programs commonly target youth perceived as at risk for poor outcomes, mentors may often enter into highly stressed situations, or may, at the least, perceive the situations into which they enter as stressful and challenging to navigate (Rogers & Taylor, 2007; Spencer, 2007). Environmental issues present in mentees' lives may also pose a unique set of challenges for mentors. In a recent study, mentors working with youth with heightened

environmental risk profiles cited difficulties connecting with and getting support from youth's families, meeting with youth consistently, and navigating social service systems (Herrera et al., 2013). Citing issues related to both families and larger community context, older adults mentoring high-risk youth identified mentees' difficult life circumstances, fear of neighborhoods in which youth lived, and the challenge of balancing mentors' relationships with youth and their families as salient stressors (Rogers & Taylor, 1997). Mentors involved in failed relationships interviewed by Spencer (2007) described feeling overwhelmed by the difficult circumstances faced by youth and their families.

Environmental factors, of course, are not always and only risk factors for youth or barriers to mentoring. Keller (2005) emphasizes that parents play a critical role in the mentoring process, and DuBois et al.'s first meta-analysis (2002) found stronger positive outcomes for youth involved in programs with a parent involvement component, implying the unique contributions parents may make, and thus their potential strengths, even when risks are also present. However, perhaps because mentoring is primarily conceptualized as a dyadic interpersonal relationship between mentor and mentee, relatively little scholarship has focused on mentors' relationships with other adults and community factors that influence their mentees.

There are important exceptions to the literature's focus on dyadic interactions, though they are conceptual and not empirical contributions. For example, Keller's Systems Theory of Mentoring (2005) highlights the mentoring intervention's inclusion of key individuals beyond the mentor and mentee, namely the parent and caseworker, embedded within the organizational context. Keller and Blakeslee (2013) introduce social network theory as a valuable lens for examining the effects of mentoring beyond the dyad. Spencer et al. (2010) suggest that mentoring may function better as one valuable intervention to offer within an array of services

for highly vulnerable youth, rather than as a single disconnected intervention. Both Keller (2005) and Spencer et al. (2010) note the possible challenges for mentors in navigating the web of relationships and needs present beyond the dyad and consider the phenomenology of the mentoring process from this broader perspective. Because these are conceptual articles, however, they do not examine empirically how mentors' interpretation and negotiation of stressful environments may relate to their ongoing relationships with mentees. Lastly, Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, and Lewis's (2011) examination of mentees' parents' perspectives, which *is* an empirical contribution, illuminated the active role that parents took in nurturing their children's mentor-mentee relationships, but did not shed light on mentor's perspectives. In this study I sought to gain insight into how mentors working with children who experience high levels of environmental risk, and as service providers who likely interact directly with those environmental factors, perceived environmental factors and negotiated their interactions with individuals beyond the dyad.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework and Research Questions**

This study takes the form of a phenomenological exploration. In other words, I draw on interviews with several individuals who share the experience of serving as youth mentors in order to describe that lived experience for them and identify features of their experience that may be common across many or all of them, or unique to just one or two of them (Creswell, 2004).

An ecological perspective undergirds this study by drawing on the first and third of Kelly's (1966) three frameworks for analyses that examine the reciprocal impact of settings on individuals as well as of individuals on each other. The first is a given setting's embedded nature within a social or organizational system. The third is the relationship between an individual and the immediate social environment, with a focus on interrelations between individuals in specific

settings or circumstances. This study adopts Kelly's framework by proposing a systemic view of mentors, examining how they interact with other settings, organizations, institutions, and systemic factors. In addition, by emphasizing the adaptive function of mentors' perceptions and approaches within the contexts in which they operate (the schools, communities and families they come to occupy via their mentees) and the stressors and rewards they may experience in relation to these perceptions of context, this study addresses the relationship between the individual and his or her immediate social environment.

Given how little is known about the relationship between mentors' conceptualizations of their mentees and of the environmental factors present in their mentees' lives, and of their own role as mentors, we did not have *a priori* hypotheses that we sought to confirm, but rather planned for the data analysis process to generate ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My specific research questions hinged on exploring how these mentors defined:

1. The protective factors and risk factors present in the lives of program youth on both individual and environmental levels.
2. The nature of their mentoring role, with a focus on their involvement with and impact on their mentees and other key individuals in their mentees' lives.
3. The challenges they experienced.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Setting

This study drew on interviews with mentors employed by one chapter of a program called Friends of the Children (FOTC). At the time of the study, five independent non-profit FOTC “chapters” located through the U.S. engaged youth in long-term mentoring relationships with full-time paid mentors (see Eddy, Cearley, Bergen, & Stern-Carusone, 2013). Working within communities facing notable challenges, including poverty and violence, FOTC aimed to select the most highly at-risk children as indexed by the presence of a high number of evidence-based individual and environmental risk factors and a low number of protective factors (Rhodes, 1994). In partnership with neighborhood-based public elementary schools, kindergarten and first grade aged children considered appropriate for the program were identified by FOTC staff through 6 weeks of direct observation in the classroom, cafeteria, and playground, as well as through consultation with teachers and other school personnel. Once families agreed (and as long as they continued to agree) for their children to participate, FOTC guaranteed that as long as children lived in the chapter service area they would have an FOTC mentor continuously involved in their lives for the next 12 years.

Mentors were matched to children by gender. Those paired with elementary school aged children generally worked with eight children at a time. Mentors to adolescents typically had twelve to fourteen mentees. During children’s early years in the program, mentors met several hours per week with each child, ideally at least once in the school setting and once on an outing or on site at the FOTC chapter. As children entered their adolescent years, the program shifted away from predominately one-on-one activities towards group activities.

Mentors (called “Friends”) were required to have bachelor’s degrees and previous

experience working with vulnerable or challenging youth. At hire, mentors were asked to make an initial 3-year commitment. They underwent a weeklong pre-service training, and participated in several “ride alongs” with experienced mentors prior to working alone with children.

In spite of employing full-time youth workers to fill the role, the FOTC program model fell within the bounds of what the field currently considers youth mentoring. Though FOTC referred to their mentors as “professionals,” their version of mentoring may be more accurately represented as a paraprofessional model, with the job representing a downward extension on the specialized skills and training ladder from those in which individuals draw on skills acquired through graduate school or comparable training (e.g., therapists, teachers, social workers) (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentors had significant autonomy in selecting and structuring activities, and were encouraged in their training and meetings to confer primacy on building, strengthening, and maintaining positive relationships with youth, and to serve as positive role models and sources of love, encouragement, safety, and support. In the case of FOTC, however – a more expansive and intensive version of the mentoring role, with the mentor as a full-time paid employee of the mentoring agency – mentors may have taken on more of the role that Keller (2005) ascribes to caseworkers, interacting with families, teachers, and other service providers, and taking a more systemic and integrated approach to their work with youth in addition to developing the one-on-one relationship.

This study was conducted as part of an ongoing multisite randomized controlled trial (Eddy, 2005). The specific Friends of the Children site at which this study was conducted employed six male and seven female mentors serving 112 youth between five and seventeen years old at the time of data collection. The neighborhood population predominantly consisted of low-income African American, Hispanic/Latino, and West African immigrant families. The

racial/ethnic makeup of program youth at the time of the study was 71% African American, 22% Hispanic/Latino, and 7% first generation or immigrant of West African descent. Over 66% of the youth served by the program lived below the poverty line, and 99% qualified for free/reduced lunch.

Because FOTC mentors were expected to work closely with mentees' family members and teachers, and because youth were selected for program participation precisely because they demonstrate high and multifaceted risk, focusing on the phenomenology of the mentoring role using FOTC mentors represented an "Intensity Sampling" strategy, defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as the use of "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28).

## **2.2 Participants**

Mentors who had been employed in the role of mentor for at least one year ( $N = 9$ ) were recruited to participate. This cut-off was used in order to assess the perceptions of mentors who had had a range of mentoring experiences and who had already spent months working to build relationships with youth and their families, and therefore had developed some sense of what their role comprised week-to-week and how it changed over time. All eligible mentors agreed to participate.

Mean length of employment for mentors was 3.8 years (Range = 1.7 to 7.7 years). Mean age for mentors was 33.1 (Range = 25 to 49 years). Six mentors were male, and three female. Three identified as Hispanic/Latino, five as African American, and one as Asian Indian-American. Two had additional supervisory roles within the chapter. Three mentors worked solely with adolescents, and had an average roster of thirteen youth each. Four mentors worked with children between the ages of 5 and 11 years, and each had eight children on their rosters.

Mentors reported between two and nine years of prior professional experience working with children: five in school settings, two in after-school programs, and two in community-based prevention service programs. Two mentors reported prior experience with a formal volunteer mentoring program.

### **2.3 Interview**

A 14 question structured interview protocol was developed to explore multiple aspects of the ways in which mentors conceptualized their role, as well as their thoughts regarding the organization that employed them. Example prompts included, “What are the challenges the children you work with face?” and “What are the most important qualities for a professional mentor to have?” These questions were designed to elicit mentors’ views regarding their mentoring experiences, as well as their opinions regarding the relative importance of various facets of their roles (see Appendix A for the complete interview guide). All interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the author.

### **2.4 Procedure**

The original study was approved and overseen by the Institutional Review Board of the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene, OR. Following an informed consent meeting, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a private interview room. Interviews usually lasted one hour, but ranged from forty minutes to over two hours. Participants received \$75 to compensate them for their time.

### **2.5 Coding and Analysis**

The analytic approach to this phenomenological study drew on strategies based in *grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which guided me in generating a step-by-step inductive account of the properties and dimensions of the constructs identified in this dataset.



This approach has been argued to be appropriate to the examination of processes or relationships between phenomena that might help explain practice or provide a framework for future research (Creswell, 2004). As the field currently lacks an adequate understanding of how mentors construct their experience in terms of the link between their attitudes toward their mentees and mentees' environmental contexts, and their approach to and experience of their role, grounded theory represents a fitting methodological approach. Analysis was conducted with the aid of *Dedoose* web-based qualitative analysis software (Dedoose Version 3.3, 2012).

In the first step of the analytic process, the author and a collaborator experienced in qualitative analysis conducted independent *open coding* of interview transcript excerpts, identifying important or interesting concepts and generating a number of initial categories (i.e. phenomena that seem conceptually similar or related in meaning). With the research questions guiding the search, categorical codes were generated inductively, deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from reading and digesting interviews. We employed the “constant comparative” method, comparing excerpts against each other that seemed to represent thematic similarities and differences within emerging categories in order to define the categories' bounds. This helped us to identify complex and inclusive categories, ensure their internal coherence and consistency, and detect thematic similarities and differences in reported experiences across individuals and situations (Boeije, 2002; Goodman & Latta, 2011).

Following this phase, the two coders met to discuss, merge, and refine the categories we each generated, then created a codebook. We then coded each interview separately, also using *Dedoose* software, then met to share results and discuss preliminary findings. The frequency of mentors' responses across categories guided us in identifying meaningful properties of the categories. As we went through the process of categorical coding using the codebook, we also

began *axial coding* of our results, mapping out the relationships between categories and their properties and dimensions in order to contextualize phenomena, then re-reading interviews to seek disconfirming evidence and counter-examples as well as verification that the scheme represented the data.

In the last stage of the grounded theory process, *selective coding*, we integrated and refined categories by going back through the interview data and memos (described below) to check for internal consistency as well as nonconforming data. We sought to identify intervening variables or conditions to explain that variability when we found outliers or disconfirming evidence, and modified category definitions, properties, and dimensions accordingly. Building an understanding of the relationship between component parts of the phenomena through the multi-stage open, axial, and selective coding process helped clarify how those parts functioned together across the range of data, not simply to identify instances that possessed expected combinations.

**2.5.1 Integrity of the analytic process.** I took several steps to ensure the integrity of the data analysis process in addition to the constant comparative method described above, including the use of memo writing throughout the entirety of the analytic process. Memo writing involves documenting questions and thoughts that arise throughout the coding and analysis process. Both coders wrote memos, and shared them with each other when we came together for analysis. Our collaboration involved extensive discussion and refinement of codes and hypotheses at every stage.

**2.5.2 Reflexivity.** As a Friend at this particular chapter of FOTC at the time of the interviews, I had pre-existing and ongoing collegial relationships with the mentors interviewed. I did not offer personal opinions and strived to maintain an air of openness and neutrality as I interviewed my coworkers. Nonetheless, because I served in the same role as those interviewed, and had

personally informed viewpoints regarding the questions asked that they may have known or guessed, it is possible that demand characteristics influenced mentor responses.

The process of qualitative analysis is also shaped by researcher values and biases. Just as an epistemology of social constructivism influences our understanding of mentors' perceptions and performance, so too do I recognize the active role my coding partner and I took in making meaning out of the data, informed by our personal experiences and our current values and views. My collaborator, a child and family-focused psychiatrist, and I share an orientation that emphasizes the importance of seeking and activating available natural supports and indigenous resources in order to best serve youth from all backgrounds. I also had significant experience serving in the FOTC mentoring role, which may have informed my views. We discussed our biases with each other throughout this project, but it is important to acknowledge rather than deny the influence of our own perceptions on the results and implications discussed below.

### 3. RESULTS

This section presents the properties and dimensions that emerged from our analysis of mentors' perceptions of individual and environment-level risks and strengths, their role definition and negotiation, their sense of their impact, and challenges they experienced. The frequencies of mentors' responses across emergent categories and properties are outlined in Table 1. These were further refined through the axial and selective coding stages to reflect the categories and properties described below.

Though we found a range for each property we examined, mentors largely conceptualized risk factors as environmentally sourced, whereas they perceived protective factors to be individually held. Their conceptualizations of their mentoring roles, which they felt possessed several attributes related both to working directly with mentees and with other key individuals that contributed positively to close mentor-mentee relationships, reflected their perceptions of environmental as well as individual factors. The challenges they identified reflected the role contours they had described, as well as their perceptions of their mentees' environments.

#### 3.1 Risk and Protective Factors

Analyses of these categories centered first on the ecological levels on which mentors identified risks and protective factors. Other characteristics of risk and protective factors were framed by whether mentors' identified them on environmental versus individual levels.

**3.1.1 Location of risk.** Mentors located youth risk factors predominantly on an environmental level, as well as attributed individual-level risk factors to environmental influences. They cited peer and community pressures to become involved in delinquent or risky activities, and schools

that exacerbated rather than ameliorated both academic and social-emotional problems.

Describing community-level risk factors, one mentor explained:

The neighborhood – one of the kids' blocks, he walks through the entire block and there's all the males that are not ideal to be in his life, so they're rolling dice, or they're selling drugs, and they all know him, they've known him since they were little, and it's who he looks up to since that male figure was not in the house.

Describing youths' schools, one mentor said, "If the schools weren't as horrific as they are, things in our children's lives would go a lot better."

Mentors identified risk factors related to characteristics of their mentees' home lives more frequently than any other level of risk. They described challenges faced by youth because of unsupportive or negative parenting styles, as well as low parental support because of parents' work schedules or competing demands. Mentors also emphasized that program youth experienced great instability in their homes because of adults in and out of the home because of incarceration, shifting housing needs, and changing relationships; parents' unstable employment and shifting work schedules; and a lack of predictability due to poverty.

Their parents have really inconsistent work schedules. So I feel like that's really hard, especially on little kids, when you're trying to implement some sort of structure in their lives. And then, because of their work schedules, sometimes kids have to stay at different places. So like one of my girls, half the time she doesn't have her homework because she never knows where she's going to be, so some stuff is at her house, some stuff is at grandma's.

Some mentors identified explicit highly negative influences present in their mentees' lives, whereas others characterized the environments as under-resourced and lacking in positive

supports but espoused a greater degree of empathy for families within these situations. Some mentors also described variability in the degree of risk present in the different families of the youth on their rosters.

**3.1.1.1 *Individual risks.*** Mentors largely described their mentees' individual-level risks in relation to the difficulties youth faced in navigating challenges presented to them by their environments. Table 1 shows that ten out of thirteen excerpts coded as individual-level challenges or risky behaviors defined youth risks in relation to environmental factors (labeled "Interactive" in the table). Below is another example:

I think the main reason for a lot of their academic struggles is that a lot of them don't get any academic support at home. So when it falls on the eight-year-old to be doing all their academic work, a lot of times it doesn't get done.

Mentors also described mentees' limited exposure to experiences, settings, and opportunities. "Some of the children had never been outside the neighborhood."

**3.1.2 *Location of protective factors.*** Mentors' focus on the preponderance of environmental risk was offset by a negligible focus on environmental strengths. As seen in Table 1, 44 excerpts focused on community-level, school-level, and home-level risks, while only six focused on community-level, school-level, and home-level protective factors.

Mentors cited individual-level protective factors that youth possessed, *e.g.*, charisma, humor, kindness, personality, and resilience, with far greater frequency than they pointed to protective factors on the family, school, or community level. In comparison to the six excerpts coded for environmental-level protective factors, 23 focused on individual-level protective factors. "Each and every one of the girls that I work with are extremely resilient. They're very adaptable." Unlike individual-level challenges, strengths were not described as stemming from

environmental-level factors, but rather operating as buffers against them or in spite of them.

“Despite the circumstances that they’re in, they really work hard.”

Though not evenly distributed, there was still a range of responses around mentors’ identification of protective factors. One mentor broadly characterized families as sources of support and nurturance. By way of example, he described the family of one mentee: “[Program Youth 2]’s family – it’s just a very loving family... There’s ups and there’s downs, but their strength is their family.” As described above, other mentors noted too that some but not all of their mentees’ families were supportive, and identified other mentoring figures in some but not all of their mentees’ lives.

### **3.2 Mentor Role: The Mentor-Mentee Relationship**

The first category under the umbrella of Mentor Role, “The Mentor-Mentee Relationship,” reflected mentors’ descriptions of their dyadic partnerships. Mentors highlighted the primary importance of their relationships with their mentees, and identified other properties of their relationships that strengthened their connections and their impact. Mentors also defined their one-on-one work in light of their perceptions of their mentees’ environmental influences.

**3.2.1 Primacy of mentor-mentee relationships.** Mentors defined the primary day-to-day focus of their role as fostering, nurturing, and maintaining close, positive one-on-one relationships with their mentees. The importance of participating in a variety of activities, of partnering with youth consistently week-to week and over the long-term, and of entering into settings such as home and school, were conceptualized as critical because of the ways in which they nurtured the dyadic relationships. Mentors described setting and working toward goals with their mentees, as well, but described their close relationships as necessary foundations for working toward any other goals. “It’s all about the love, it’s all about just really trying to focus

on the child, and think about what's best for that child." Mentors also asserted that their prior youth work experience and that they were "good with kids" enabled them to effectively handle youths' challenging behavior so they could better build positive relationships.

**3.2.2 Long-term and consistent involvement.** Mentors explained that seeing their youth consistently over many years facilitated the growth and maintenance of very close relationships with their mentees, and especially helped increase their mentees' trust and comfort. They also explained that this long-term facet of the relationship allowed for them to pace themselves, thinking of their work as "a marathon, not a sprint." They felt they were able to maintain their relationships *and* work steadily toward goals because the timeframe for realizing those goals was delineated in terms of years.

**3.2.3 Multifaceted mentor-mentee relationships.** Mentors said their involvement with mentees included the provision of both instrumentally focused supports, such as help with academics, job searches, or exposure to new activities or places; and emotional support which consisted of serving as confidantes or sounding boards, and as fun companions. Mentors perceived that mentees' interrelated, interactive needs necessitated a many-pronged approach.

You get to have that one-on-one relationship, and you get to take them out. You get to have fun with them. You get to do things other than just academics. Because a lot of kids have other issues, and that leads to some of the academic problems, as well. So you have to resolve those issues.

**3.2.4 Partnering across multiple settings.** Mentors highlighted enrichment outings to novel settings around the city as opportunities to have fun, and to expand their mentees' horizons and augment their social capital. They also explained the value in joining with youth in multiple key



contexts such as home, school, and in the community, because of the insight it afforded them into their mentees' lives.

Being able to see the environment they grow up in and the school atmosphere that they're in helps you understand where the child is coming from and why they might have certain struggles with certain things. And being able to understand that helps you know how to work with the kid.

Additionally, mentors explained that their gradual accrual of insight into their mentees' other environments created a feedback loop that allowed them to gradually build deeper, closer relationships, and partner with youth more effectively as time went on.

Even though we're on the outside, we have a lot of insight into what goes on in the house. And if we don't, that'll probably come in time, as the kids are in the program for a longer and longer period of time.

**3.2.5 Mentor role contextualized by environment.** Mentors' descriptions of their role reflected their perceptions of their mentees' needs and their mentees' environments.

**3.2.5.1 Mentor as counterbalance.** A number of excerpts spoke to mentors' perceptions that their support served as a counterbalance to parents' limited capacities, a lack of positive supports, and the instability present in mentees' lives. "A lot of the girls that I have are from single parent homes, and really little structure or no structure... I think I'm a key person in setting down the structure and the love and the care for them." They especially highlighted the importance of the consistency of their involvement week-to-week and over the long-term in light of home-level instability. "The kids need stability in their life; I think it's what they lack. They don't have consistency, and to have a mentor who's there for at least three years of their life, that's a long time."

Some mentors suggested that elements of their role substituted for that typically filled by parents. One mentor described how mentees' parents relied on him to fill gaps in the adult support their children received:

In some cases they'll ask their parents and their parents will say, "Oh, what about asking [Mentor 1]? Maybe he can go with you." Because either they don't want to, or they don't have the time to do what their child wants them to.

A subset of mentors who also focused most on family-level deficits described filling a particularly critical void in the lives of their youth. One mentor who perceived himself as the only positive male role model in the lives of his mentees said:

The ladies are less likely to discipline them [adolescent boys], or raise their voice the way that I think their father might. Two of the moms have already said "I don't know what to do anymore, they're out of control, I'm not going to be here fighting with him," physically fighting. So the kids see that, saying okay, I'm in control now, and they're going to start making bad decisions because they think they're in control, and there's only me to try to right their path.

**3.2.5.2 *Mentor as supplement.*** The mentor who noted family strengths described his role as supplementary rather than corrective. He saw himself as one agent complementing the work of others, including parents, teachers, and the youth themselves.

The periods where we're both together on that, and mom's together on that, and the school's together on that... the times when we're together – that's the best thing, I'd say... Because I feel like the machine is working. Not just me, it's like, okay, you did what you needed to do, and I gave you the support that you needed to get, and at school

you got the support, or you rised above the lack of having support, and the whole thing is working fine.

**3.2.6 Approach styles for mentor-mentee relationships.** Mentors described taking an individualized approach to working with their mentees, and highlighted the importance of flexibility, patience, and humor. Mentors’ descriptions of their partnerships with their mentees ranged from approaches that were driven by their own long-term goals for their mentees, to youth-driven approaches. As an example of a mentor-driven approach style, one mentor said:

You know your goal for them. And you want to make sure that you do your job in order to get them to reach their goal. Because you set out and say, okay, I have this eight-year-old. They’re going to be in this program until they graduate from high school. Okay, what am I going to do to get this child to that point? Okay, my job is to get them ready, get them prepared to be the best citizen that they can be. To get them well educated.

As an example of a youth-driven approach style, one said:

I think the more I’m around my young people, the more I’m looking to see... the more I’m trying to see what possibilities they want to have for themselves in the future, as opposed to me just saying, okay well this is what works, this is nice.

Mentors who described approach styles driven by their own goals were also those who had focused most on the prevalence and severity of environmental risk, and mentors who espoused a youth-driven approach included the mentor who highlighted environmental strengths and those who had expressed more empathy regarding environmental risk.

### **3.3 Mentor Role: Engagement with Others**

The second distinct category to emerge from the analysis of “Mentor Role” revolved around mentors’ descriptions of their engagement with other key individuals in their mentees’

lives. These descriptions related to their involvement in multiple contexts, but focused on their relationships with mentees' parents, other family members, teachers, peers, and other service providers. Mentors described considerable engagement with others, especially families. They felt that these connections bolstered their work with their mentees, as well as facilitated change in others. They defined a range of styles for working with these other individuals.

**3.3.1 Elements of engagement.** Mentors described serving as liaisons between home and school, and advocating for youth in school and other service settings. Mentors also described valuable partnerships they maintained with other businesses and agencies, either established on their own or via FOTC, through which their mentees could receive other services or participate in enrichment activities.

**3.3.1.1 Members of the family.** Mentors described their relationships with their mentees' families as especially important, particularly close and connected, and an element of their role to which they devoted considerable time and energy. Multiple mentors described themselves as “members of the family” of their mentees. “You’re so close, because everything is centered, you know, me and the family, and me being a part of their lives.”

The limits mentors set regarding their engagement with families varied considerably, as did their rationale for the limits they set. A number of mentors described the importance of setting boundaries and limiting the extent of their involvement with families for their own well-being. Other excerpts highlighted mentors' feelings that extensive involvement with families had to be limited in order to preserve the amount and quality of time mentors focused on their mentees. One mentor described the importance of shaping his involvement to avoid undermining youth and families' agency:

I think sometimes the parents and the children can overly rely on the program to help them. Sometimes you have to draw the line, but it's being there to help them and support them as opposed to trying to do everything, and do everything for them.

One mentor emphasized the importance of remaining uninvolved, even in problematic family situations he might witness:

I call it the National Geographic Factor... you've just got to let it play out. You cannot get involved with whatever's going on in the family. I have horrible situations right now with some of my kids and their family. I cannot get involved, in terms of like, oh you shouldn't have hit him; oh you shouldn't have punished him. You should have light; it's three o'clock in the afternoon, and we're walking into a cave, for god's sakes. You can't get involved.

In contrast, another mentor described his propensity to intervene:

If we see things going wrong in the household, you can kind of, once you get to know the family, kind of step in and say, hey, you know what? I think this should be happening. Or maybe I can help you out with doing something with this child. Or maybe I can help you with parenting classes.

**3.3.2 Intervention recipients.** Mentors described their engagement with other individuals primarily to enhance their ability to serve their mentees. Mentors also alluded to their potential impact on other individuals in their mentees' lives. "You're able to not just reach a child, but you're able to reach the family as a whole, as well." Most mentors saw this impact on wider ecological levels as boosting the effectiveness of the mentoring intervention for their mentees via an indirect pathway, beginning with them but mediated by changes in other individuals. Some

mentors also conceptualized this farther-reaching impact as meaningful because of the effect on the lives of non-mentees.

**3.3.3 Approach styles for extra-dyadic collaborations.** Although all mentors emphasized their extensive engagement with other key individuals across various settings, they described different engagement approaches, ranging from egalitarian to mentor-driven. The mentor who described families as protective and positive described his work as a collaboration with other key individuals in his mentees' lives:

I learn how other either mentor-like people or teacher-like people affect them in their lives, and I can have a positive relationship with them there.

A mentor who described herself as a counterbalance to the lack of support and structure other individuals could offer her mentees described herself as the galvanizing force for a network of supports for youth:

I think it starts with yourself. If you come at it with a clear objective and keep that mission in mind, and have that support in FOTC, and in the community, with the parents, the school, [City Program 1], whatever other organizations your child is tapped into. I think that helps build and continue the web of connections and growth for that child.

### **3.4 Impact**

Overall, mentors endorsed high self-efficacy regarding their ability to impact their mentees positively. They felt they were able to forge and sustain close, meaningful, positive relationships with their mentees, and described effectively serving in an advisory capacity, and developing their mentees' social capital through outings and exposure to new experiences and activities. They believed that the positive behavior and life choices they modeled had an effect on their mentees. Many mentors described their influence in terms of future returns – outcomes

that would not be visible until the youth had reached adulthood, and had successfully avoided the negative life trajectories that their risk profiles might predict – but expressed optimism that these distal goals would be achieved. Mentors also described effectively impacting others, especially families, but, as demonstrated under “Challenges,” their self-efficacy regarding their ability to impact individuals beyond their mentees was relatively muted.

### **3.5 Challenges**

Mentors described challenges that fell into two interrelated groups: “Negotiation of Boundaries and Role Overload,” and “Limitations of Other Key Individuals.”

**3.5.1 Negotiation of boundaries and role overload.** Mentors all described the challenge of identifying and maintaining appropriate boundaries and role definition given the flexible, individualized nature of mentoring.

It’s really hard to know where you’re overstepping, or if you’re not doing enough...

Sometimes I think I should have pushed a lot harder; sometimes I think I push too much.

It’s like I can’t really tell; there’s no, we don’t have a handbook. No, now we do have a handbook! But that’s the kind of thing in this kind of work, it’s great to have it, but a lot of these things are instinct at dealing with change like the weather. So that’s the hardest thing.

Mentors also linked the challenges of negotiating boundaries to their long-term, multifaceted, multi-context involvement with youth and with others. “Being a Friend it’s kind of hard to set that boundary, especially when you have that long-term relationship. And even though it’s very good to be seen as a part of the family, at times.” Because their role lacked clear boundaries, many struggled with the sense that so many responsibilities fell within the bounds. “You have to be an expert in everything.”

**3.5.1.1 Burdensome workload.** Mentors described their workload as onerous and expressed concern that they were unable to sufficiently support the youth on their caseloads in light of their role conceptualizations as multi-faceted and ambiguously bound, and their perception of the high needs of mentees and mentees' families.

I think for the mentor that cares, that really is dealing with the family issues, really dealing with the hospital issues, with the doctors, with the principal, whether he's going to get left back or not – like really diving in and getting your hands dirty? Eight is way too much.

**3.5.2 Limitations of other key individuals.** Mentors frequently described feeling disappointed or frustrated by other decision-makers in youths' lives. They felt that the lack of positive youth support attenuated their own effectiveness, both by impeding their efforts and dampening or counteracting the positive effects of their work with their mentees.

I think the families and the parents, and the schools [are the biggest challenges mentors face]. You just hit a brick wall with some of the people who are involved in their lives, and they don't really want to go the direction that you want to go. So you know what will help the child, but other people kind of block that. And there's only so much you can do at times. When you have uncooperative parents, uncooperative teachers, other people in the community, it's tough to deal with them.



#### 4. DISCUSSION

This qualitative inquiry into the phenomenology of youth mentoring explored the dynamic processes by which mentors' perceptions of their mentees and mentees' environments informed their understanding of their role. Prior literature has examined mentors' perceptions of mentees and mentee environments, and of mentor role fulfillment (Herrera et al., 2013; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Spencer, 2007), but has not traced the processes by which one may inform the other. This study builds on prior work by examining mentors' interpretation and navigation of their role in light of their perceptions.

A heuristic that emphasized the prevalence and salience of environmental-level risk pervaded these interviews, with youth challenges attributed to environmental inputs, especially home-level factors such as poverty, instability, and low support and nurturance. In contrast, individual-level strengths were commonly seen as existing "in spite of" environment. Mentors more commonly identified individual-level protective factors than environmental-level factors, but did identify supports for youth on home, school, and community levels, as well.

Because FOTC selects children for program participation explicitly because they demonstrate high and multifaceted risk status on both environmental and individual levels, the emphasis on environmental-level risks and the attribution of youths' problems to environmental risks suggests an adaptive function in perceiving children through this lens. It indicates, perhaps, one means available to mentors to resolve the dissonance between the deficits-based eligibility criteria for children to enter the program, and the strengths-based approach encouraged once mentors and youth are matched. It could protect mentors' positive feelings for their mentees, and thus the relationship. This finding reinforces DuBois et al.'s (2002) speculation that mentors may be less inclined to accept negative labels assigned to youth or attribute problems the youth

exhibit solely to personal deficits or limitations when environmental risk is present, which they posited in light of finding stronger program effects for youth demonstrating both environmental and individual-level risks than youth with individual-level risks only.

Mentors defined their own roles as primarily youth-focused. They described nurturing their mentees and developing close one-on-one relationships. They also felt that their long-term, consistent, and multifaceted roles allowed them to serve youth effectively. Their descriptions regarding the purpose these elements of their roles served brought to life some possible mechanisms for the positive association found between these specific role features and stronger program outcomes in previous research (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentors also described engaging with their mentees across multiple contexts as a critical mechanism for creating deep, authentic dyadic bonds and for serving mentees effectively, both because of the insight they gained and because of the experiences within these settings they shared with their mentees. Mentors descriptions of *where* they partner with their mentees and the purpose served by partnering within these various contexts has not been explored previously in the literature, but these mentors clearly felt that this was a crucial component of their role.

Additionally, mentors couched their role descriptions within the larger web of environmental factors in mentees' lives. A number of mentors contrasted their provision of support, structure, positivity and nurturance with mentees' other more negative and problematic relationships, thus depicting their role as a counterbalance. A notion of building on families' existing strengths was largely absent. One mentor who identified more environmental-level strengths, however, described his role as supplemental and complementary.

Though secondary to their dyadic relationship building endeavors, mentors also ascribed considerable import to their involvement with other individuals in their mentees' lives, and

described expending considerable effort working with others, and especially families. Mentors' descriptions of their partnerships with parents, teachers, and others highlight their recognition of the network of interactions and supports needed to bolster the creation and maintenance of deep, durable mentor-mentee relationships. The opaque boundaries of the mentor role were highlighted by some mentors' sense that their role sometimes could and should encompass intervention with families, and others' sense that their role was limited to bearing witness rather than intervening. Though mentors demonstrated a range regarding the limits they set on their relationships with others, however, some significant degree of involvement with families marked all mentors' descriptions of their roles.

Further, mentors located most of their challenges in relation to the components of their roles extending beyond the dyad. The competing demands of extensive involvement across domains, which some saw as necessary because of environmental-level problems, and the prioritization of their one-on-one relationships with youth, contributed to their reports of role overload and burdensome workload. They also described frustration or disappointment regarding their perceptions of families' limited capacities to contribute positively to their mentees development. The potential cost to mentors of intensive involvement combined with limited authority has been noted in the literature previously (Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011; Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009). These mentors described the necessity of working closely with other individuals toward the goals of best serving their mentees *in spite of* their perceptions that other individuals in mentees' lives were unable to support them well, exerted a strong negative influence, and undermined the efforts the mentors put forth.

Some mentors' experience of challenges may have been exacerbated by their role conceptualization and approach. Many mentors' relative insensitivity to possible environmental-

level strengths seemed to obstruct their ability to see parents as capable co-interventionists. It seemed to lead for some to the adoption of a less collaborative approach, to frustration that others did not support their work, and to an overwhelming responsibility placed on the mentors' shoulders. As one said, "there's only me to right their path" – a heavy and unfeasible burden.

In contrast, the mentor who identified family as a primary strength for his mentees described his position as egalitarian and collaborative within a network of other supports, and focused on negotiating his role within this network to be maximally effective without overstepping. It was still the case, however, that he and the other more family-positive mentors endorsed a sense of relative unpreparedness for navigating their roles beyond their dyadic interactions. Across all combinations of mentors' perceptions of youth and their conceptualizations of the mentor role, this study substantiates the concerns raised by Spencer et al. (2010) regarding the importance and the challenge of attending to the many complicated relationships that occur *around* the mentor-mentee relationship, and for which mentors may be much less prepared and supported.

Because of the unique and significant challenges associated with working with families as well as one-on-one with youth, the youth mentoring literature has largely adopted a view that the ideal role of parents and families should remain fairly limited. Morrow and Styles (1995) described "knowing how to maintain distance" (p. 99) as a key component of engaging with families effectively and protecting the primary focus on the mentor-mentee connection. Miller (2007) recommended soliciting families' support, but not their active involvement in mentoring. Yet long-term, intensive involvement with a young person may render this arrangement unrealistic, and perhaps sub-optimal. As emphasized by these mentors, a unique strength of their role lay in the potential to connect with youths' families and enter into other contexts, regardless

of the accompanying challenges and frustrations. Close relationships with families and with other key individuals may enhance the impact of mentoring by enhancing the depth and authenticity of the relationship between mentor and mentee, activating and coordinating indigenous supports for youth, and strengthening family systems. Given the inevitability of engaging with families, the potential value in working closely with them, but also the significant and unique challenges that accompany this more expansive approach, the field may benefit from a reimagining of mentors' roles that explicitly facilitates rather than ineffectively or artificially limits parent involvement in the mentoring process.

#### **4.1 Strengths and Limitations**

Because this study was a secondary data analysis, with the research questions developed after data collection was long complete, we were not in a position to pose questions to the mentors that could have further illuminated the phenomena in question. Further, the possibility exists that the framing or phrasing of various questions in the interview protocol pulled for certain responses, which could have led to an inaccurate characterization of these mentors' perceptions and experiences. The findings presented are also limited to a particular form of youth mentoring as practiced and experienced by full-time paid youth workers firmly committed to their roles at one particular agency site.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) remind us, however, “the most useful generalizations from qualitative studies are *analytic*, not ‘sample to population’ ” (p. 28). This study demonstrates the importance of accounting for mentor perceptions, and considering how they may inform and interact with role fulfillment. The purpose of the study is not to suggest that these perceptions or processes look exactly the same across mentors and agencies. Limiting our sample to one agency, however, allowed us to see the variability in mentor perceptions within

one organization. Our exploration revealed considerable heterogeneity and complexity of mentors' perceptions regarding youth, context, and mentor role within this very specific sample.

Our investigation was similarly well served by the fact that these mentors were an especially intensive version of the case we sought to understand. The mentors interviewed shared role characteristics with other community-based youth mentors, but their fulfillment of the mentoring role for several years, the amplified nature of their involvement in other settings, and the high-risk profiles of program youth, meant that their views on these topics were especially rich, and represented significant experience with the themes in question.

## **4.2 Future Directions**

This analysis highlights the need for a fuller and more nuanced understanding of mentors' relationships with other individuals involved in the lives of participating youth, as well as research linking the quality of these extra-dyadic relationships to mentor-mentee relationships and youth outcomes. Building on Herrera et al.'s (2013) work parsing mentor approaches by different youth risk profiles, it will be important to trace variability in these processes across youth and mentors.

Agencies can provide training and ongoing support aimed at fostering an understanding of youth and their environments that may be more conducive to partnering effectively with those youth and other individuals. Absent agency-level strategies that foster these dialogues and understandings, some mentors may maintain or develop perceptions of youth and/or their environments that create barriers to effective collaboration and the ultimate achievement of positive youth outcomes. Agencies may also benefit from a broader, more ecological perspective that would embed mentoring within a host of intervention strategies, per the recommendations of Spencer et al. (2010).

### **4.3    Conclusions**

Community-based youth mentoring can be cast as an individual-level intervention, but the role comprises significant environmental involvement, as well. Conceptualizing other individuals and settings as problematic, incapable, or deficient may protect the mentor-mentee relationship, but may impede the work that mentors do with other individuals in their mentees' lives, and the cost of perceiving key settings and individuals as deficient or dangerous may be considerable. Mentoring's significant environmental component, especially for mentors whose roles take them into homes, schools, and the community at large, can, instead, be capitalized on as a unique strength of the intervention. Mentors' environmental involvement can compliment or activate settings' protective properties, and can enrich the dyadic relationship. To optimize these connections, however, agencies will need to focus explicitly on training and supporting mentors around their perceptions of and engagement with individuals besides their mentees.

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**TABLE I**

CATEGORIES AND EMERGENT PROPERTIES OF MENTOR  
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF YOUTH, ENVIRONMENT, AND ROLE

<b>Category</b>	<b>Emergent Property</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Risk Factors	Community	14
	School	5
	Home	26
	Individual	14
	Interactive	10
	(individual by home, school, or community)	
Protective Factors	Community	1
	School	2
	Home	3
	Individual	23
Mentor Role: The Mentor-Mentee Relationship	Primacy of relationship	23
	Consistency	7
	Long term involvement	18
	Multifaceted role	8
	Multiple settings	9
	<i>Mentor as counterbalance</i>	14
	<i>Mentor as complement</i>	2
Mentor Role: Engagement with Others	Approach style	25
	Involvement with family members	13
	Involvement with school personnel	6
	Involvement with others	4
	<i>Intervention recipients: Youth</i>	10
	<i>Intervention recipients: Family</i>	5
Impact	Impact on mentee	54
	Impact on family	7
	Impact on schools/institutions	1
	Impact on community	3
Mentor Challenges	Negotiation of boundaries/Role overload	17
	<i>Burdensome workload</i>	15
	Challenges: families	7
	Challenges: schools	2

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol for Mentor Structured Interview

#### 1. Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today.

There are many mentoring organizations in the U.S., but almost all are volunteer programs where a mentor works with only one child at a time. As a Friend, you are thus in a very unique position.

In this interview, I'm going to ask you a series of questions about being a full-time, professional mentor to children. You are welcome to say as much or as little as you like about each question. If you think of something relevant to a prior question and would like to talk about that during a later question, you are welcome to do so.

#### 2. Questions

- 1) Growing up, did you have a mentor?
  - a. Was this through a mentoring program like Big Brothers Big Sisters or was this person a “natural” mentor – someone who was part of your life through your family, school, neighborhood or some other part of your regular life?
  - b. How long did you have this mentor?
  - c. Was this mentor an important person in your life? In what ways?
- 2) Before you worked at FOTC, had you ever been a mentor to a child?
  - a. Was this through a mentoring program or were you a “natural” mentor?
  - b. If you were a “natural” mentor, was it a relationship formed through another job you had working with children, or outside of work?

## Appendix A (continued)

- c. How long did you serve as a mentor?
  - d. Do you think you were an important person in the life of the child or children you mentored? In what ways?
- 3) When and how did you first hear about the Friends of the Children program?
- a. What were your first thoughts about the program?
  - b. Why did you decide to become a Friend?
  - c. How long have you been a Friend?
  - d. How long do you think you'll continue to work as a Friend?
- 4) How many children do you work with and for how long have you worked with each?
- a. What are the challenges they face?
  - b. What are their strengths?
  - c. Are you the only mentor in the lives of the children you work with? Do you think you are an important person in the life of the child or children you are mentoring? In what ways?
- 5) Besides mentoring children through Friends of the Children, do you mentor any other children?
- a. Are you serving as a mentor through a program or are you a "natural" mentor?
  - b. How long have you served as a mentor in this way?
  - c. Do you think you are an important person in the life of the child or children you are mentoring? In what ways?
- 6) If you mentored a child as a volunteer, what is different about mentoring as a paid professional? What is similar?

## Appendix A (continued)

- a. What are the advantages of being a professional mentoring versus a volunteer?  
What are the disadvantages?
  - b. Which do you prefer? Why?
- 7) If you have mentored a child as a volunteer, and presumably mentored only one child at a time, what is different about mentoring eight (or fourteen) children instead of just one?  
What is similar?
- a. What are the advantages of mentoring many children versus one? What are the disadvantages?
  - b. Which do you prefer? Why?
- \*If you have not mentored a child as a volunteer, feel free to speculate.
- 8) Have you worked professionally with children in other contexts? If so, what is different about working for Friends of the Children as a professional mentor? What is similar?
- a. How many children did you work with in your other job/jobs?
  - b. Were they of a similar demographic to the children you work with as a professional mentor?
  - c. What are the advantages of working as a Friend versus working with children in other capacities? What are the disadvantages?
  - d. Which do you prefer? Why?
- 9) A typical volunteer mentor is asked to make a one-year commitment to mentoring, and many other child work jobs ask for no durational commitment at all. In contrast, when you began working as a Friend, you were asked to make a three-year commitment. How did that inform your thinking about the work you were about to begin?



## Appendix A (continued)

- a. How has the idea of the three-year commitment influenced your concept of your work since that time?
- 10) Do you think it is important that Friends of the Children employs professional mentors instead of utilizing volunteer mentors? Why or why not?
- a. What difference does it make in light of the idea that Friends of the Children serves “the most highly at-risk children, those deemed at a young age most likely to fail or slip through the cracks?”
- 11) What are the most important qualities for a professional mentor to have?
- a. What are the biggest challenges they face?
  - b. What opportunities do professional mentors have that volunteer mentors do not in terms of being able to make a difference for youth?
  - c. What opportunities do professional mentors have that people employed in other child work capacities do not in terms of being able to make a difference for youth?
- 12) What type of education, training, support, and supervision do you think is absolutely essential for professional mentors to serve at-risk youth effectively?
- a. Do you think these differ from what volunteer mentors need?
- 13) What other types of organizational structure, opportunities, and services for children and families do you think are absolutely needed as a backdrop for professional mentors to be successful with at-risk youth?
- 14) What are the best things about being a professional mentor?

## Appendix B

FOTC Mentor Interviews – Final Code Book for *Mentoring Relationships in Context*

<b>YRISK: Youth Risk Factors</b>	
Descriptions of elements present in mentees' lives on various ecological levels that mentors perceive as problematic, negative, dangerous, deficient.	<p><b>YRISK/community:</b> Descriptions of community level risk factors</p> <p><b>YRISK/school:</b> Descriptions of risk factors present in children's lives via their schools.</p> <p><b>YRISK/home:</b> Descriptions of risk factors present in children's home lives</p> <p><b>YRISK/individual:</b> Descriptions of individual-level risk factors</p> <p><b>YRISK/interactive:</b> Descriptions of risk due to a confluence of two or more risk factors, or because of an interaction between individual and environment.</p>
<b>YPROTECT: Youth Protective Factors</b>	
Descriptions of elements present in mentees' lives on various ecological levels that mentors perceive as positive, helpful, protective, or as strengths.	<p><b>YPROTECT/community:</b> Descriptions of communities' strengths, positive characteristics, of their positive influence on mentees</p> <p><b>YPROTECT/school:</b> Descriptions of schools' or teachers' strengths, positive characteristics, positive influence on mentees</p> <p><b>YPROTECT/home:</b> Descriptions of families' strengths, positive characteristics, positive influence on mentees</p> <p><b>YPROTECT/individual:</b> Descriptions of individual-level protective factors, i.e. personal characteristics that mentors see as protective, or as strengths</p>
<b>MROLE: Mentor role</b>	
Mentors' descriptions of what they <i>do</i> , what they believe falls within the bounds of their role, as well as the importance they ascribe to these various elements of their roles.	<p><b>MROLE/primacy:</b> mentors' descriptions of the primacy of the 1-on-1 <i>relationship</i> focus of their work, their approach being individualized to each mentee.</p> <p><b>MROLE/consistency:</b> mentors describing being in kids' lives, or in some setting, consistently. More focused on what people <i>do</i> than long-term.</p> <p><b>MROLE/longterm:</b> mentors' descriptions of the long-term facet of their relationship</p>

## Appendix B (continued)

	<p><b>MROLE/emosup:</b> Descriptions of mentors providing emotional support. Can also be focused on relationship quality or aspects of relationships that aren't explicitly instrumentally focused, such as having fun or spending time together.</p> <p><b>MROLE/instsup:</b> Descriptions of mentors' roles including provision of instrumental support. Could include academic assistance, goal setting and pursuit, and/or exposing youth to new experiences, new lifestyles, new neighborhoods, new opportunities, new ideas, etc. Could also include descriptions of resources that mentors provide to children and/or families, whether tangible or information-related.</p> <p><i>** emotional support and instrumental support coincided in so many excerpts that the category was redefined to reflect the multifaceted nature of the role</i></p> <p><b>MROLE/counterbalance:</b> descriptions of mentors' conceptualizations of their roles as counterbalancing negative influences, or providing a different perspective, or a safe space, or something else that mentees wouldn't have access to otherwise (i.e. counterbalance code also encompasses a notion of filling a gap). Could also be mentors conceptualizing kids differently than others (e.g., not thinking of them as lost causes, as bad).</p> <p><b>MROLE/approach style:</b> descriptions of facilitating rather than taking over and doing, OR of driving interventions, agendas, or foci.</p> <p><i>**this code covers both dyadic role functions as well as role functions involving interactions between mentors and others.</i></p>
<b>INVOLVEMENT (Became Mentor Role: Engagement with Others)</b>	
Descriptions of when mentors are involved in situations but do not describe actively impacting them, or when the nature of the mentoring role involves gaining understanding and insight but not directly changing a situation.	<p><b>INVOLVEMENT/dyad:</b> mentors' descriptions of their one-on-one involvement with their mentees (<i>double coded with MROLE codes and then pulled out of final analysis</i>)</p> <p><b>INVOLVEMENT/family:</b> mentors' descriptions of involvement in mentees' home settings or with mentees' families</p> <p><b>INVOLVEMENT/school:</b> mentors' descriptions of involvement in mentees' schools or with mentees' teachers or other school personnel</p> <p><i><b>*INVOLVEMENT/other:</b> this was used mainly to code for mentors' descriptions of their engagement with youth not on their own roster, and was not included in final analysis.</i></p>

## Appendix B (continued)

<b>TARGET: Intervention Recipients</b>	
Double coded with involvement to define the intended target of the mentors' involvement in a given setting/engagement with certain individuals aside from their mentees.	<p><b>TARGET/youth:</b> mentors' descriptions of involvement with individuals aside from their mentees, but with the ultimate goal of serving their mentees directly</p> <p><b>TARGET/family:</b> mentors' descriptions of involvement with people aside from their mentees, with the goal of serving families, including but not limited to involvement with families for the purpose of serving families (i.e. could also include case management-type activities).</p>
<b>INFLUENCE</b>	
Mentors' descriptions of exerting active influence on a situation, changing something, or when they describe the results of something they do.	<p><b>INFLUENCE/mentee:</b> mentors' descriptions of their influence on their mentees</p> <p><b>INFLUENCE/family:</b> mentors' descriptions of their influence on their mentees' families</p> <p><b>INFLUENCE/schools:</b> mentors' descriptions of their influence on their mentees' schools, or on teachers or other school personnel</p> <p><b>INFLUENCE/community:</b> mentors' descriptions of their influence on the community</p> <p><b>INFLUENCE/other:</b> mentors' descriptions of influence that do not fit in one of the other categories, e.g. other institutions or agencies</p>
<b>MCHALL: Challenges, barriers, stressors, and difficulties mentors experience</b>	
<p>Mentors' description of challenges, stressors, and difficulties they experienced in their work</p> <p><u>Exclusion criteria:</u> Youth risk factors that are not linked explicitly to mentors' experiences of their work should be coded only with YRISK.</p>	<p><b>MCHALL/boundaries:</b> Lack of clarity regarding role contours; frustrations and stressors related to difficulty of identifying or establishing boundaries, recognition of difficulties related to being enmeshed with mentees.</p> <p><b>MCHALL/families:</b> Difficulties related to working with families, not knowing how to get families involved, challenging interactions with caregivers, stress related to parents limited parenting skills, neglect/abuse.</p> <p><b>MCHALL/kids:</b> Difficulties related to working with program youth, (e.g. youth displaying negative behaviors; youth resisting relationship)</p> <p><b>MCHALL/other:</b> Other challenges/stressors.</p>

	<p><b>MCHALL/schools:</b> Difficulties related to working with schools, or frustrations regarding schools.</p> <p><b>MCHALL/workload:</b> Excessive workload, playing too many roles, too much paperwork, too much to do, spread thin between all mentees' needs.</p>
<i>What not to code</i>	
	<p>Attach "other" subcode to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- descriptions of mentors' own mentors</li> <li>- descriptions of mentors' employment and volunteer history</li> <li>- descriptions largely centered around volunteer mentoring organizations or other youth service jobs</li> <li>- **UNLESS description highlights something about mentor role</li> </ul>

## Determination of Human Subject Research at UIC

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)  
203 Administrative Office Building  
1737 West Polk Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

## Notice of Determination of Human Subject Research at UIC

March 26, 2013

**\*20130309-73644-1\***

20130309-73644-1

Rebecca Lakind  
Psychology  
1747 W Roosevelt, Rm 155  
M/C 747  
Phone: (312) 413-1039 / Fax: (312) 413-0214

RE: **Protocol # 2013-0309**  
**Mentoring Relationships in Context: Perceptions and Experiences of Paid Mentors**  
**Sponsor: None at UIC**

Dear Ms. Lakind:

The UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects received your "Determination of Whether an Activity Represents Human Subjects Research" application, and has determined that this activity **DOES NOT meet the definition of human subject research at UIC** as defined by 45 CFR 46.102(f).

It is understood that this Masters Thesis study will involve a secondary analysis of existing de-identified data only.

You may conduct your activity without further submission to the IRB.

If this activity is used in conjunction with any other research involving human subjects or if it is modified in any way, it must be re-reviewed by OPRS staff.

cc: Marc Atkins, Psychiatry, M/C 747

Phone: 312-996-1711

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/oprs/>

Fax: 312-413-2929

## VITA

### EDUCATION

**University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL**  
 Doctoral Student in Clinical Psychology  
 M.A. received 2013  
 Advisor: Marc Atkins

August 2011-Present

**Amherst College, Amherst, MA**  
 B.A. received 2006 in English, *magna cum laude*.

August 2002-May 2006

### AWARDS, HONORS, DISTINCTIONS

UIC Graduate Student Council Travel Award	2013
Amherst Memorial Fellowship	2012, 2013
UIC Graduate College Graduate Student Presenter Award	2013
UIC Department of Psychology Graduate Student Travel Award	2012
Amherst College Fellowship for Action	2006

### PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

**Lakind, D.,** Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., & Eddy, J. M. (2013). Youth Mentoring Relationships in Context: Perceptions and Experiences of Full-Time Paid Mentors. In Dominguez, N. & Gandert, Y. (Eds.). 6th Annual Mentoring Conference Proceedings: Impact and Effectiveness of Developmental Relationships. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico

Atkins, M. S. & **Lakind, D.** (2012). Usual care for clinicians, unusual care for their clients: Rearranging priorities for children's mental health services. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*. 40(1), 48-51.

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

**Lakind, D.** (2013, Spring). Bridging the present-to-future gap in graduate school: The importance of studying dissemination and implementation. *CYF News (newsletter of the Children, Youth, and Families Office of the American Psychological Association)*.

Starin, A., Lakind, D., Bernard, K., & Reitz, K. (2012) *Partners Achieving Student Success (PASS) Student Family Liaisons Skill Development Modules*. Unpublished treatment manual.

### MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION OR UNDER REVIEW

**Lakind, D.,** Eddy, J. M., & Zell, A. (2013). *Mentoring At-Risk Youth as a Full Time Job: The Perspectives of Professional Mentors*. Under Review.

Shernoff, E. S., Jakobsons, L., **Lakind, D.**, Frazier, S. L., Maríñez-Lora, A., Hamre, B. K., Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., Parker Katz, M., Smylie, M. (2013). *Enhancing urban early career teachers' effectiveness and connectedness: A mixed method study*. Under Review.

Atkins, M. S., Shernoff, E. S., Frazier, S. L., Schoenwald, S. K., Capella, E., Mariñez-Lora, A., Mehta, T. G., **Lakind, D.**, Bhaumik, R., & Bhaumik, D. (in preparation). *Links to learning: A school-based mental health service model for urban children and families.*

Shernoff, E. S., **Lakind, D.**, Jakobsons, L., (in preparation). *The role of coaching in supporting early career teachers in urban schools: A mixed method study.*

**Lakind, D.**, Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., & Eddy, J. M. (in preparation). *Youth mentoring in context: Mentor perceptions of youth, environment, and the mentor role.*

#### INVITED PRESENTATIONS

**Lakind, D.** (2012, July). *Professional Mentors' Perceptions of Their Role and Program: Implications for Mentoring Programs of All Kinds.* Presentation for the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring, Portland, OR.

#### CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

**Lakind, D.**, Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., & Eddy, J. M. (2013, October). *Youth mentoring in context: Mentor perceptions of youth, environment, and the mentor role.* Presentation for the UNM Mentoring Institute 2013 Mentoring Conference.

**Lakind, D.**, Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., & Eddy, J. M. (2013, September). *Youth mentoring in context: The perceptions of full-time paid youth mentors.* Poster presented at the 2013 University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychiatry Research Forum.

Starin, A., Atkins, M. S., Rusch, D., Bernard, K., Cua, G., & **Lakind, D.** (2013, September). *Initial program evaluation results from the Partners Achieving Student Success (PASS) program.* Poster presented at the 2013 University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychiatry Research Forum.

**Lakind, D.**, Patel, D., Atkins, M. S., & Eddy, J. M. (2013, June). *Youth mentoring in context: The perceptions of full-time paid youth mentors.* Poster presented at the 2013 Society for Research and Community Action Biennial Conference.

**Lakind, D.**, Eddy, J. M., & Zell, A. (2012, October). *Risks and Strengths of At-Risk Youth: The Perspectives of Paid Mentors.* Poster presented at the UNM Mentoring Institute 2012 Mentoring Conference.

Patel, D. A., **Lakind, D.**, & Shernoff, E. S. (2012, September). *Coaching Early Career Teachers in Urban Schools: A Mixed Methods Study of Evidence Based Practices.* Poster presented at the University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychiatry Research Forum.

Bhaumik, R., Shernoff, E., Zao, W., **Lakind, D.**, Bhaumik, D. K., Solomon, B., Schoenwald, S., Atkins, M. S. (2012, September) *Multilevel Regression and SEM Approaches to Growth Curve Modeling.* Poster presented at the University of Illinois at Chicago Department of Psychiatry Research Forum.

Shernoff, E. S., Mariñez-Lora, A., Jakobsons, L., Frazier, S., & **Lakind, D.** (2012, May). *Teachers Supporting Teachers in Urban Schools: Examining Implementation Quality to Enhance Implementation Support Systems.* In Wendy Reinke (Chair) Beyond the Intervention: Multidimensional Considerations for High Quality Implementation in Schools. Organized Paper Symposium for the Annual Meeting of the Society for Prevention Research.



## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**Research Group on Mental Health Services for Urban Children and Families** August 2011-Present  
 Institute for Juvenile Research, Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago  
 Graduate Research Assistant – specific projects and duties listed below

*Project: Urban Teachers Supporting Teachers* September 2011-Present

- Qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups with early career teachers in high poverty urban schools and with teachers' coaches
- Quantitative analysis of measures of teacher self-efficacy and connectedness
- Manuscript preparation

*Project: Links to Learning* October 2011-Present

- Data management
- Consultation with statisticians on analysis process
- Manuscript preparation

### *Miscellaneous*

- Ad-hoc manuscript review
  - Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology
  - Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research
  - Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology
  - Educational Researcher

### **Friends of the Children New York, New York, NY**

- Lead Investigator, qualitative study of paid mentor perceptions Spring 2010 – Winter 2010
- Classroom Observations, Behavioral Coding, and Child Selection Spring 2008 – Spring 2009  
 “A randomized trial for a mentoring program for high risk children”  
 (Principal Investigator: Dr. J. Mark Eddy)

## CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

**Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL** May 2013-Present  
 Good Behavior Game Coach

- Facilitating implementation of “Good Behavior Game,” a universal classroom management strategy, with K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers in 8 urban schools

**Research Group on Mental Health Services for Urban Children and Families** August 2011-Present  
 Institute for Juvenile Research, Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago  
 Graduate Research Assistant – specific projects and duties listed below

*Project: Partners Achieving Student Success (PASS) Program* August 2011-Present

- Develop and facilitate trainings for Student Family Liaisons (paraprofessional mental health service providers) and Social Workers
- Ongoing in vivo observation and support of Student Family Liaisons
- Co-created social skill development modules for use by Student Family Liaisons with children

*Project: Urban Teachers Supporting Teachers* November 2011-June 2012

- “Coaching” an early career teacher – classroom observations, strategy modeling, one-on-one discussions with teacher
- Co-facilitating Professional Learning Communities workshops

**Office of Applied Psychological Services, University of Illinois at Chicago**

August 2011-Present

Graduate Student Clinician, Practicum

- Psychotherapy to adults and children, specializing in Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- Clinical intake interviews
- Administration of neuropsychological assessments to adults and children
- Psychological assessment report writing

**Friends of the Children New York, New York, NY**

February 2008-May 2011

Friend (Paid Mentor)

Friends of the Children New York selects highly at-risk kindergarten and first grade-age children from public schools in Harlem, NYC, and commits to providing them with a full-time paid mentor until they graduate from high school.

- 3.5 year caseload of same eight girls, spanning from their kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade years
- Behavior modification, informal therapeutic activities, community outings, role-modeling
- Academic assistance
- Close collaboration with families, teachers, school psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, doctors, administrators, and other mentors
- Advocacy in schools, hospitals, child service agencies
- Resource linkage
- Developed protocols currently used by organization for:
  - Transition of youth to new mentors
  - Mentor introductions into new schools and/or classrooms

TEACHING AND MENTORING EXPERIENCE**University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL**

August 2013 – Present

Teaching Assistant, Clinical Interviewing

- Supervision of undergraduates' clinical interviews with community members
- Grading and guidance around clinical interviewing skills and clinical interview report writing

**Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology Mentorship Program**

January 2013 – Present

Mentor

- Monthly phone calls with two undergraduates considering careers in Child/Adolescent Clinical Psychology

**Amherst College Writing Center, Amherst, MA**

August 2005 – May

2006

Peer Writing Tutor

- One-on-one tutoring sessions with students, assisting at all levels of abilities, and at all stages of writing projects.
- Received employment offer for "Writing Fellow" position following graduation.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**David Hindie Fundraising Consulting, New York, NY**

March 2007 – December

2007

Associate Development Consultant to Friends of the Children New York

- Grant proposal writer, researched fundraising opportunities, collaborated directly with FOTCNY Executive Director and Board of Trustees.

**Instituto Allpa Janpiriña, Tumbaco, Ecuador, and project sites around Ecuador**  
2006

September 2006 – December

Volunteer, funded by Amherst College Fellowship for Action

Instituto Allpa Janpiriña is a grassroots organization facilitating various ecological projects in small indigenous Andean communities throughout Ecuador.

- Researched funding opportunities, wrote grant proposals.
- Translated several scientific documents from Spanish to English.
- Facilitated service-learning visit to several farms and ecological projects by a group of German high school students.
- Worked on several community farms, working especially closely with young children and adolescents.

**Permacultura America Latina Santa Fe, NM**  
2006/2007

Summer 2006, Winter

Administrative Assistant / Grant Writer and Editor

Permacultura America Latina is an umbrella organization networking several ecological projects, schools, and organizations throughout Latin America, including Instituto Allpa Janpiriña.

- Funding research and grant proposal writing
- After returning from Ecuador, created guidelines to shape PAL's volunteer policies.

## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Student Representative and Student Advisory Board Co-Chair

January 2013-Present

*Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (APA Division 53)*

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Psychological Association, Student Affiliate Member

September 2011 – Present

APA Division 27: Society for Community Research and Action

November 2011 – Present

APA Division 53: Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology

November 2012 – Present

Society for Research in Child Development

November 2012 – Present

Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies

September 2013 – Present

## LANGUAGES

English – Native

Spanish – Fluent (speaking, writing, reading)