What’s Sex (!) Got to Do with it?: A Consideration of Gender in Mentoring

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Introduction

• Personal background in mentoring (& beyond)
• Check in regarding gender-specific mentoring experience
  – Challenges to the work of gender-specific mentoring?
  – Benefits?
• Overview of presentation
  – Brief overview of theoretical frameworks that inform gender-specific mentoring
  – Key research questions & key associated outcomes
  – Discussion of innovative programs
  – Implications for practice
  – Discussion
Theoretical frameworks

- Relationship development
- Similarity-attraction
- Help-seeking
- Gender identity
- Friendship patterns
- Attachment theory
Relationship development theory

• Initiation
  – Mentor and protégé start learning each other’s personal style and work habits

• Cultivation
  – If relationship matures into mentorship, it then progresses to the cultivation phase; relationship develops and mentoring takes place

• Separation
  – As mentee and mentor grow and change, the structure of the relation begins to change, which often involves structural and/or psychological disconnection or shift

• Redefinition
  – Relationship is redefined to meet the new needs of the pair

• How might gender matter in the context of this theory?

Kram, 1983; Byrne, 1971; Bogat & Liang, 2005
Similarity-Attraction & Help-seeking Paradigms

• Similarity-Attraction
  – Mentors may be more comfortable to mentees whom they consider to be similar to themselves (e.g., males preferring males, females to females)

• Help-Seeking
  – Boys view seeking help more negatively than girls
  – Girls often seek more emotional help

Kram, 1983; Byrne, 1971; Bogat & Liang, 2005
Theories of friendship and relationship

• Developmental Theory & the “Gender-Intensification” Hypothesis
  – Gender-specific behaviors and beliefs intensify during adolescence (as gendered roles become important)
  – Girls desire stronger relationships (and form identity more around these), boys prefer autonomy

• Theories of friendship and relationship
  – Differing expectations and desires in relationship
    • Girls desire more mutuality and authenticity
    • Girls drawn more easily to intimacy, self-disclosure, empathy
    • Other differences?

Bogat & Liang, 2005
Gender-Based Theory

• Carol Gilligan
  – Female empowerment
  – Girls tend to either silence their own thoughts & feelings or lose close relationships during adolescence
  – Women need to take care of *themselves*, as well as help others
  – How might this look or matter in gender-specific programming?

Gilligan, 2005
Guiding questions considered by research

1) Do boys and girls have different needs in mentoring relationships? If so, what are they?

2) Do same-sex and cross-sex mentoring relationships vary in their impact on youth? If so, how?

3) Do gender differences in mentoring hold across various identity characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, age)?

• Preliminary thoughts in your small group?
Question 1: Do boys and girls have different needs in mentoring relationships?

- Sociocultural influences foster autonomy in boys relatedness in girls—what are some of these, and what do mentoring programs DO with these?
- Four major growth-fostering characteristics in female relationships:
  (A) mutual engagement
  (B) authenticity
  (C) empowerment
  (D) the ability to deal with difference or conflict

How do these qualities make stakes particularly high in mentoring relationships between girls & women?

Cross & Madson, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997
Question 1 (cont.)

• Friendship Patterns:
  – Girls tend to value intimacy in friendships more than boys

• Help-Seeking:
  – In times of need, girls often seek out emotional support
  – Girls also engage in “co-rumination” when stressed, whereas boys attempt to handle problems individually
  – Implications for mentoring?
    • Instrumental versus psychosocial-based relationships
    • Duration required, and openness to relationship?
    • Importance of attending to each as individual and to gender as one piece of equation

Buhrmester, 1990; Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998
Question 2: Do same-sex and cross-sex mentoring relationships vary in their impact on youth?

• Attachment Theory
  – Female mentees and mentors tend to have greater "attachment" with each other, compared to males
  – Youth who experience accepting maternal relationships early in life are more likely to develop strong mentoring relationships
  – Importance of considering attachment styles and histories in matching and in supporting relationships

Paterson, Field, & Pryor, 1994
Question 2, cont.

• Similarity Theory
  – Gender-matched role models can be especially critical during adolescence when youth are developing their identities and roles in society
    • Matching in other areas, such as shared interests, personality, and relational style may be equally as important
    • Important to consider recent increase in school-based programs in pairing female mentors with male mentees (Kanchewa et al., 2014)
  – For females and other historically oppressed groups, having role models from their same group can provide them with explicit examples of what they have the potential to achieve
• In what ways might gender-based matching limit the potential of mentoring relationships?

Zirkel, 2002
Question 3: *Do gender differences hold across various identity characteristics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity)?*

- Identity theories
  - “Gender” is socially constructed
  - Important to consider gender across race, ethnicity, social class, as well as ‘intersectionality’ between these characteristics (e.g., how does race & gender, together, matter differently for different groups?)
  - For youth whose ethnicity is of greater (or equal) salience to his or her identity than gender, gender may play a lesser role in their mentoring relationships
  - Gender-tailored programs might be more beneficial for those who have strong, typical gender identities

Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Clark, 1999; Way, 1995
Gender & age—what are we learning?

• Karcher, 2008
  – Randomized study on gender in school-based mentoring programs of Latino boys and girls, 5th to 12th grade
  – Strongest effects of mentoring program involvement were for **elementary aged boys** and **high school girls**
  – Among younger boys, those who were mentored showed better academically-related outcomes
  – Among older girls, those who were mentored reported more favorable relationships with friends and peers
  – Other thoughts on how age, along with gender, matters in mentoring relationships?
Additional research studies focused on gender

• Bernstein et al. (2009)
  – 2,300 elementary and middle-school aged youth, boys and girls
  – Found significantly greater improvements for mentored youth on scholastic efficacy, school bonding, parental relationships and misconduct among females compared to males
  – Girls’ outcomes associated with mentoring may be more heavily influenced by program quality and support than boys’ outcomes. Why?
Gender-based research findings, cont.

• Spencer & Liang (2009)
  – 12 female youth–adult pairs of community-based mentoring participants ($N = 24$)
  – Three interrelated relational processes emerged:
    1) engaged and authentic emotional support
    2) the development of new skills and confidence through collaborations
    3) experiences of companionship that provided relief from daily stresses

• Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield & Walsh-Samp (2008)
  – Girls’ mentoring relationships lasted significantly longer than boys’
  – Longer lasting mentoring relationships for girls can help them feel less alienated from their parents
  – Girls reported less satisfaction in short & medium-term relationships, more satisfaction in long-term relationships
What’s gender got to do with it?

• Ratings of relationship closeness does not significantly differ between same-gender and cross-gender pairs
  – Gender should be considered in the context of other individual differences, such as race, ethnicity, social class, and the mentee’s developmental stage

• Girls found one-one-one mentoring more rewarding than group mentoring

• Naturally-forming mentoring relationships may be more beneficial and authentic than voluntary mentor programs, especially for girls

Herrera et al., 2007; Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002; Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger & Lawrence, 2013; Rhodes, Davis, Prescott & Spencer, 2007
The plot thickens...

• With only a few exceptions, male youth in same-versus cross-gender school-based mentoring relationships (Kanchewa et al., 2014) experienced similar relationship processes and outcomes.

• Factors present in all successful relationships, regardless of gender of mentor?
Examples of innovative programs focused on gender-specific mentoring

- Examples & how gender is conceptualized and addressed in the work
- Young Women Leaders Program
- Go Girls!
- Cool Girls, Inc.
- GirlPOWER!
- Economic Mentoring Program (EMP)
What does this mean for practice?

• **Question 1:** Do boys and girls have different needs in mentoring relationships?
  
  – For girls, mentoring relationships may take longer to establish, last longer (perhaps due to preference), & be especially helpful in times of stress
  
  – Gender-specific tendencies in pacing, development, and support of relationship—what does that look like?
  
  – Whereas girls may emphasize “talking together,” boys may emphasize “doing together”
    
    • Still based on assessment of individual—importance of not imposing gender-based values in programming
    
    • Programs should be prepared to offer both psychosocial support and instrumental mentoring for both boys and girls
    
    • In cases where gender is not matched, how might that impact training differently in supporting mentors paired with each gender?

Bay-Cheng & Lewis, 2008; Kaplan, Turner, Piotrkowski, & Silber, 2009
Practice implications, cont.

• Question 2: Do same-sex and cross-sex mentoring relationships vary in their impact on youth?
  – There is no definitive evidence that same-sex pairing is more beneficial for youth
  • Safety implications and potential hesitancy or concern that relationship will be perceived as sexualized
  – Matching criteria likely needs to go beyond considerations of demographic variables to include relational styles
  – Initial mentor and staff training/ongoing services should attend to gender, and possibly consider separate training for same- and cross-gender pairs
Practice implications, cont.

• Question 3: Do gender differences in mentoring hold across various identity characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, age)?
  – Matching based on personality characteristics, interests, and relational styles equally important in fostering a compatible relationship between mentors and mentees
  – Consider role of “cultural mistrust” (Sanchez & colleagues, in preparation), particularly in early stages of mentoring
  – Preferences of mentor and mentee are key
Conclusions

- Long-term mentoring relationships may be particularly beneficial for girls as compared to boys.
- Both girls and boys seem likely to benefit from a combination of instrumental support paired with psychosocial support, perhaps weighted and timed slightly differently.
- Research on same-sex versus cross-sex pairs has yielded mixed findings as to whether one type of pairing is more beneficial.
- The intersection of gender with other identity characteristics is important to consider when designing mentoring programs.
- The role of goals in relationships are important for those with both genders; they make show up different, however, and/or be timed differently in the relationship.
Discussion

• What do these concepts and findings mean for your work in mentoring?
  – Assess your current work. How are these concepts already applied to your programming? How can they be further used? What challenges do you anticipate in doing so?

• What questions are you curious about from your work? What additional areas of research, as it relates to gender, might be helpful to practitioners?