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The role of gender in youth mentoring relationship formation and duration

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Abstract

The role of gender in shaping the course and quality of adult–youth mentoring relationships was examined. The study drew on data from a large, random assignment evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBSA) programs [Grossman, J. B., & Tierney, J. P. (1998). Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. *Evaluation Review, 22*, 403–426], and focused on variables associated with youth's relationships with their parents and mentors. At baseline, girls reported significantly lower levels of parental trust and higher levels of alienation from their parents than boys. Nonetheless, girls' mentoring relationships lasted significantly longer than those of boys. Moreover, girls were less satisfied than boys in short- and medium-term relationships, but were more satisfied than boys in long-term relationships. Similarly, girls in long-term relationships rated mentoring as more helpful than either the boys or the girls in the shorter-term relationship groups. Particularly in light of the heightened mistrust and alienation from parents at baseline, and the role of improved parent relationships in mediating the effects of mentoring, the protective aspect of longer-lasting mentoring relationships may be particularly salient for girls.

Keywords: Gender; Mentoring programs; Adolescents; Intergenerational relationships

1. Introduction

Surprisingly few studies have focused on how gender might shape youth mentoring relationships. Studies examining gender differences in outcomes among program participants have been mixed (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995), and few studies have looked at differences in relationship quality or length. Consequently, key questions regarding the relative importance of gender-specific approaches to training, supervising, and programming remain unanswered (Bogat & Liang, 2005). In this study, we explore gender differences in young adolescents' approaches to and satisfaction with mentoring relationships.

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1.1. Gender and relationships

Findings from diverse disciplinary perspectives shed light on how gender might affect adult–youth mentoring relationships. Scholars have observed, for example, that males and females tend to respond differently to helping relationships, with women placing relatively greater value on interpersonal support and intimacy than men (Canary & Dindia, 1998). In a meta-analysis, Eagly and Crowley (1986) found that men offered and responded to more instrumental, heroic and chivalrous forms of helping, while women offered and responded to more social, nurturing and caring forms of helping. These patterns can be traced to childhood, where girls tend to forge more intense emotional connections and show higher levels of both verbal expressiveness and non-verbal sensitivity (Brody, 1985). Different theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain these differences, most of which point to how gendered contexts, hierarchies, and socialization patterns shape early behavior (Bem, 1974; Brody, 1985; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Taken together, these differences might affect mentoring relationships, including their duration and perceived importance and helpfulness (Kram, 1985).

1.2. Gender and mentoring cross contexts

Ragins (1999) has argued that gender is a consideration in work-based mentoring relationships for much the same reason. In particular, because females, as a group, have less power, confront more sexism, and are perceived as more vulnerable than males, their relationships with mentors often serve more psychosocial roles (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Indeed, several studies have shown that male mentors tend to provide more instrumental and career support, whereas female mentorships are often characterized by more emotional support (Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2006; Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Noe, 1988; Ragins & Cotton, 1993; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Allen and Eby (2004), for example, surveyed nearly 400 mentors and noted this gender difference in support provision. Female mentors may be more comfortable conforming to gender expectations in providing support, as they may sense that their mentees need emotional support. Likewise, Sosik and Godshalk (2000) found that female–female mentoring relationships offered a greater level of friendship, counseling, and personal support than did other gender combinations. Such differences may cause the relationships to take on greater meaning and importance to women. It is also reasonable to predict that a more psychosocial approach to relationships will be more enduring, with social roles and satisfaction deepening as relationships grow in influence (Burke et al., 1993; Kram, 1985).

Studies of student–faculty mentorships have also detected these gender-specific patterns. Male and female faculty members tend to differ in their mentoring styles, with females providing more emotion-focused assistance than males (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002; Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). Moreover, female students place relatively more emphasis on their advisors' life-work balance and interests and rate their female faculty mentors as more important to their professional development than do males (Erkut & Mokros, 1984; Gilbert, 1985). Researchers have noted such gender differences among younger students as well, with school-aged girls receiving relatively more support and relatively less criticism and instruction support (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Teachers often rate their relationships with female students as closer and less conflictual than those with their male students (Birch & Ladd, 1997), a difference that is readily perceived by students (Hughes, Cavell, & Wilson, 2001). Interestingly, Goodenow (1993) found that associations between perceptions of teacher support and positive outcomes were higher for girls than for boys, suggesting their relatively greater importance to girls' adaptive functioning.

1.3. Gender in youth mentoring programs

Taken together, these findings suggest that, across a broad array of mentor-protégé contexts and configurations, gender shapes the functions and importance of relationships (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). Gender differences may also affect the underlying processes by which mentors affect youth's outcomes. Specifically, for both sexes, youth mentoring relationships have been assumed to lead to improvements, at least in part through their positive effects on youth's perceptions of parental relationships (Karcher, Davis, & Powell, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, & Grossman, 2005). By serving as

a sounding board and providing a model of effective adult communication, mentors can help children and adolescents better understand, express, and regulate both their positive and negative emotions. Such experiences appear to generalize, enabling youth to interact more effectively with their parents (Rhodes, 2005). Yet, throughout early adolescence, males and females differ in the ways that they renegotiate parental relationships and manage the tension between connection and greater autonomy (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Mother–daughter relationships have been characterized by greater closeness than mother–son relationships (Flannery, 1991), but also by higher intensity conflict (e.g., Almeida, Chandler, & Wethington, 1999), which may heighten negative feelings among adolescent girls toward their mothers (Trees, 2002).

These difficulties may be especially common among girls in mentoring programs, many of whom are from single-parent homes and are referred by their mothers (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Whereas a single mother might seek a male role model for her son, a different set of circumstances might underlie the referral of her daughter. Perhaps the mother is struggling to effectively connect with her daughter. Troubled mother–daughter relationships, in turn, sometimes compromise the ability of girls to establish caring relationships with other women, complicating the early stages of the mentor-youth relationship and rendering the girls more vulnerable to distress in response to terminations.

Such observations are consistent with research on gender development, which has underscored the role of social connectedness as both a protective and a risk factor for adolescent girls (Batgos & Leadbeater, 1994). For example, Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus (1994) suggested that the more communal and socially oriented styles of girls might heighten their vulnerability to distress as they face the social challenges of early adolescence. On the other hand, because female mentees tend to experience relatively more conflict with their mothers, mentoring relationships may be particularly helpful and satisfying once they take hold.

The processes described above are complex, and in some cases involve changes in the ways that adolescents think about and approach relationships. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the benefits of mentoring accrue over a relatively long period of time (Burke et al., 1993; DuBois et al., 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Since, as noted above, girls face greater struggles in their maternal relationships, we anticipate that successfully cultivated mentoring relationships will be both satisfying and long-lasting. Although qualitative findings have suggested that girls' relationships with mentors are more enduring than boys (Morrow & Styles, 1995), additional research is needed. Moreover, large, random assignment evaluation of youth mentoring to date (Tierney & Grossman, 2000) did, in fact, yield a scattering of gender differences in outcomes. The current study draws on the same data set, this time focusing on the processes that may underlie these differences.

2. Hypotheses

Based on prior research on mentoring relationships in a variety of contexts, and informed by theory, we made the following three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Girls were expected to report more initial difficulties in their parental relationships. In particular, at baseline girls who were referred to a mentoring program were hypothesized to report lower levels of parental trust, higher levels of alienation from parents, and lower levels of parental communication.

Hypothesis 2. Girls' relationships with their mentors were expected to outlast those of boys.

Hypothesis 3. Girls were expected to be more sensitive to the relationship duration than boys, expressing greater dissatisfaction with prematurely terminating relationships, and deriving more satisfaction and help from enduring ties.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This study included 1138 youth who applied to Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) programs (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Applicants were randomly assigned to the treatment or control group, and were

administered questions at baseline and 18 months later. For purposes of this study, we focus on variables associated with parental and mentoring relationships. Eighty-four percent of the sample completed both interviews ($N = 959$; treatment group = 487, control group = 472) and were included in the analyses. Participants ranged in age from 10 to 14, with most (69%) between the ages of 11 and 13. The average age of the participants was 12.25 years, with boys slightly younger than girls ($X = 12.2$ years vs. 12.4 years, respectively, $p < .01$). The majority of participants were male (63%), and the sample had considerable racial diversity (43.2% white, 40.3% African-American, 10.2% Latina, and 6% in other racial/ethnic groups). Most of the youth (90%) lived in single-parent households (94% with mothers), while 5% lived with a grandparent and 5% with others.

3.2. Procedures

Eight BBBSA agencies from more than 500 nationwide were selected to participate based on having a large, active caseload and a waiting list of children. Over a 12-month intake period between 1992 and 1993, youth were informed about the study and were verified as being eligible. Once each youth agreed to participate (and parents signed informed consent forms), he or she was randomly assigned to either the treatment group (immediate matching with a mentor) or control group (12-month waitlist for a mentor). Only 2.7% of the youth refused to participate. Baseline telephone interviews were conducted before subjects were informed of their experimental status, and additional telephone interviews were conducted 18 months later.

Caseworkers at each agency matched adult volunteers and youth based on a variety of factors, including shared interests, same-race match preference, and geographic proximity. The mentor pairs were all same-sex, with adult males matched with boys and adult females matched with girls. All volunteers underwent an intensive screening and agency-based training, followed by case management. Typical activities included recreation, conversation, and occasional agency-sponsored events. At the conclusion of the study, 347 (76%) of the treatment youth had been matched, and 55.3% of the matches had met for 12 months or more. The ongoing matches had been meeting for an average of 12.6 months, although the closed matches met for an average of 9 months. Over 65% of the youth met with their mentors at least three times a month.

3.3. Measures

This study focuses on a subset of instruments, including:

3.3.1. Parental relationships

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greensberg, 1987) is a 23-item scale containing questions related to a child or adolescent's relationship with his/her primary care giver (the corresponding peer questions were not administered). Responses are coded on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (hardly ever true) to 4 (very often true). The IPPA contains three subscales: communication (e.g., my mother can tell when I am upset about something), trust (e.g., my father respects my feelings), and alienation (e.g., talking over problems with my mother makes me feel ashamed or foolish). At pretest, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the subscales were .83, .77, and .76, respectively.

3.3.2. Length of relationship

The length of all mentoring relationships was assessed in months, from the start of the relationship to the date of the termination. For relationships that were still on-going relationships, length was coded as months between the start of the relationship and the date of the follow-up interview. Consistent with previous research on youth mentoring relationship duration (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), participants were categorized into groups on the basis of how long their relationships had lasted. In this study, gender was also included as a grouping variable, resulting in six groups: boys 1–6 months, girls 1–6 months, boys 7–12 months, girls 7–12 months, boys 13–18 months, and girls 13–18 months.

3.3.3. Youth–mentor relationship quality inventory (YMRQI)

In the follow-up interviews, the mentored youth were asked a series of questions about the quality of the mentoring. These questions were based on previous qualitative work on youth mentoring (Morrow & Styles,

1995) and adapted items from The Relatedness Questionnaire (Lynch & Wellborn, 1987). Based on data from the national evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) mentoring program, the scale was validated as a 15-item diagnostic tool (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). In addition to the full scale, this measure contains four subscales, with negatively worded items reverse-scored. The subscales were as follows: *not dissatisfied* (three reverse-coded items, e.g., "I wish my mentor was different"), *helped to cope* (three items, e.g., "my mentor has lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem"), *not unhappy* (five reverse-coded items, e.g., "when I'm with my mentor, I feel bored"), and *trust not broken* (four reverse-coded items, e.g., "I feel that I can't trust my mentor with secrets because s/he would tell my parent/guardian"). Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of the full scale and subscales were .86, .74, .81, .85 and .81, respectively.

4. Results

To determine whether, as posited in Hypothesis 1, girls would report significantly more difficulties in their parental relationships, independent *t*-tests were performed on the three subscales (trust, communication, and alienation) of the IPPA. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 1. In support of our hypothesis, girls reported significantly lower levels of parental trust ($t = 3.24$, $p = .001$), and significantly higher levels of alienation from parents ($t = -2.593$, $p = .01$) at baseline. Contrary to our predictions, however, no significant gender differences were found on the parental communication subscale.

Hypothesis 2, that the mentoring relationships of girls would outlast those of boys, was tested using an independent *t*-test. As shown in Table 2, in support of our hypothesis, girls' mentoring relationships were significantly longer than boys ($t = -2.043$, $p < .05$). On average, girls remained in mentoring relationships for approximately a month longer than boys. Moreover, although only marginally significant ($x^2 = 4.80$, $p = .09$), a higher percentage of boys were found in the short- (1–6 months) and medium-term (7–12 months) relationships, whereas a higher percentage of girls were in the long-term (13–18 months) group.

Hypothesis 3, that relative to boys, girls' satisfaction with mentoring relationships would be more sensitive to relationship length, was tested using one-way analysis of variance. In particular, we predicted that, in shorter relationships, girls' scores would reflect less satisfaction than boys, whereas in longer relationships girls would be more satisfied than boys. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was partially supported. One-way analyses of variance revealed significant within-group differences in the YMQRI full scale ($F_{(5,348)} = 3.051$, $p = .010$). Post-hoc Scheffe tests, however, did not detect any significant between group differences; however, the non-significant trends in the data are worth noting. Boys in short-term relationships (1–6 months) were less satisfied than boys in medium-term relationships (7–12 months). Boys in long-term relationships (13–18 month) were even more satisfied than boys in medium-term relationships, although this increase was not as large as that from short- to medium-term. Similarly, girls' satisfaction levels increased significantly from short- to medium-term, and from medium- to long-term. The medium- to long-term increase in satisfaction was larger for girls than for boys. In addition, girls appeared to be less satisfied than boys in short- and medium-term relationships, but were more satisfied than boys in long-term relationships.

Table 1
Baseline scores on IPPA subscales for males and females

	N	Mean	*SD*	*T*	*p*
Trust					
Male	599	32.13	3.558	3.24	.001
Female	360	31.31	3.910		
Communication					
Male	599	28.19	4.614	1.31	n.s.
Female	360	27.79	4.724		
Alienation					
Male	599	13.59	4.204	−2.59	.01
Female	360	14.32	4.244		

Table 2
Length of mentoring relationships for males and females

	N	Mean	*SD*	*T*	*p*
Male	213	10.30	4.83	−2.04	.042
Female	147	11.35	7.72		

Within-group differences were also detected in the *helped to* cope subscale of the YMRQI ($F_{(5,349)} = 3.625$, $p = .003$). Post-hoc Scheffe tests indicated significant ($p < .05$) between-group differences between the females in long-term relationships and males in short-term relationships, as well as females in long-term relationships and females in short-term relationships. In each case, females in long-term relationships reported significantly greater levels of mentor helpfulness. Looking at the overall trends, a slightly different pattern emerged than in the full-scale scores. Boys in medium-term relationships reported a higher level of help than those in short-term relationships; however, the difference in helping from medium- to long-term relationships for boys was small. In contrast, for girls, there was an increase in perceived helpfulness for girls in long-term relationships (13–18 months), compared to both the boys and girls in medium-term relationships (6–12 months). Similar non-significant trends emerged on the remaining three subscales: *not unhappy* ($F_{(5,350)} = 2.160$, $p = .058$), *trust not broken* ($F_{(5,348)} = 2.181$, $p = .056$), and *not dissatisfied* ($F_{(5,348)} = 1.921$, $p = .090$).

5. Discussion

This study sought to examine gender differences in the duration and perceived quality of mentoring relationships. Based on previous mentoring research and informed by theory and research on gender differences in relationships across multiple contexts, we hypothesized that girls' parental relationships would be more impaired at the time of referral, and that girls' mentor relationships would outlast those of boys and be more reactive to relationship duration.

Hypothesis 1, which predicted that girls would report more difficulties in their parental relationships at baseline, was partially supported. Although there were no gender differences in parental communication, girls reported significantly lower levels of parental trust and higher levels of parental alienation than boy at baseline. This finding has implications for mentoring programs. At least initially, feelings of alienation and mistrust may spill over into the mentoring relationships in ways that undermine the development of satisfactory ties. Mentors who are aware of such difficulties, and can interpret initial resistance in this light, may be more persistent. The findings might also shed some light onto mentoring relationships in other contexts. For example, some women may be drawn to faculty mentors who, over time, can help compensate for unsatisfying maternal ties (Larose, Bernier, & Soucy, 2005). Since the girls in the study were slightly older (12.4 years) than the boys (12.2 years), a difference that was statistically significant, it is possible that age is an alternative explanation for a lower level of trust and a higher degree of alienation on the part of girls. It may not be gender per say, but increasing age during early adolescence, that leads to parental difficulties. Age, however, was not strongly correlated with the parental relationship variables. Nonetheless, it will be important to consider the effects of age in future studies and, more generally, consider how mentees' changing feelings toward their parents affect the development and course of mentoring relationships.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, girls' mentoring relationships outlasted those of boys, with average relationship duration of 11.4 months for girls and 10.3 months for boys. Although few empirical studies have examined gender differences in relationship duration, these trends are consistent with qualitative observations and might help to explain why, across nearly every setting, female mentorships tend to take on more expansive, psychosocial functions than males. As Kram (1985) has theorized, longer relationships provide more time and opportunities for a range of mentoring functions to emerge. In order to establish this link, however, additional research is needed, particularly with regard to work-based mentoring. Indeed, although some studies have found that longer duration mentorships tend to be more psychosocial in nature, others have found stronger associations with career functions (Allen & Eby, 2004; Burke et al., 1993; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997). Similarly, qualitative work by Spencer (2007) has underscored the emotional closeness and deep psychological connections that are sometimes forged in male's youth mentoring relationships.

Table 3
Youth–mentor quality inventory scale and subscales by sex and relationship length

	N	Mean	*SD*	95% CI	*F*	*p*
Not dissatisfied					1.92	.090
1–6 months						
Male	50	9.90	2.44	9.21–10.59		
Female	27	9.41	2.85	8.28–10.53		
7–12 months						
Male	73	10.25	2.00	9.78–10.71		
Female	39	9.77	2.41	8.99–10.55		
13–18 months						
Male	89	10.56	2.04	10.13–10.99		
Female	76	10.42	1.73	10.03–10.82		
Helped to cope					3.63	.003
1–6 months						
Male[a]	50	8.56	2.98	7.71–9.41		
Female[b]	27	8.41	3.52	7.01–9.80		
7–12 months						
Male	73	9.77	2.78	9.12–10.41		
Female	40	9.88	2.36	9.12–10.63		
13–18 months						
Male	89	9.75	2.75	9.17–10.33		
Female[ab]	76	10.26	2.21	9.76–10.77		
Not unhappy					2.16	.058
1–6 months						
Male	50	19.88	4.30	18.66–21.10		
Female	27	20.15	4.43	18.40–21.90		
7–12 months						
Male	73	21.11	3.20	20.36–21.86		
Female	40	19.45	4.40	18.04–20.86		
13–18 months						
Male	89	21.19	3.77	20.40–21.98		
Female	77	21.13	3.26	20.40–21.88		
Trust not broken					2.18	.056
1–6 months						
Male	50	17.72	5.05	16.28–19.16		
Female	27	16.96	4.65	15.13–18.80		
7–12 months						
Male	73	18.82	3.98	17.89–19.75		
Female	39	18.23	4.39	16.81–19.65		
13–18 months						
Male	89	19.38	4.35	18.47–20.30		
Female	76	19.25	3.90	18.36–20.14		
YMRQ (full scale)					3.05	.010
1–6 months						
Male	50	56.06	11.94	52.67–59.45		
Female	27	54.93	13.24	49.69–60.16		
7–12 months						
Male	73	59.95	8.76	57.90–61.99		
Female	39	57.82	10.13	54.54–61.11		

(*continued on next page*)

Table 3 (*continued*)

	N	Mean	*SD*	95% CI	*F*	*p*
13–18 months						
Male	89	60.89	10.91	58.59–63.19		
Female	76	61.14	8.93	59.10–63.19		

[a] Females in 13–18 month group were significantly higher than Males in the 1–6 month group on the *Helped to cope* subscale, $p < .05$.
[b] Females in 13–18 month group were significantly higher than Females in the 1–6 month group on the *Helped to cope* subscale, $p < .05$.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, for both boys and girls there was a non-significant trend towards an increase in relationship satisfaction, as reflected by the full YMRQI scale scores, from short- to medium-term relationships, and from medium- to long-term relationships. Girls were less satisfied than boys in short- and medium-length mentoring relationships, but more satisfied in longer-term ties. In addition, females in long-term mentoring relationships reported significantly greater levels of mentor helpfulness than both males and females in short-term relationships, and the overall trends in the data suggest that girls' perceived helpfulness increases over time, whereas boys' plateaus after medium-term relationships. Although it is difficult to conclusively identify the direction of the associations (i.e., duration could lead to satisfaction and/or low satisfaction could cause early terminations), these findings are consistent with previous work which has underscored the importance of relationship duration in youth mentoring (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). An equally important consideration, however, may be whether relationships are continued for the full duration of the expectations that were originally established, even if these are for a considerably shorter period of time (De Ayala & Perry, 2005; Larose, Tarabulsy, & Cyrenne, 2005). It seems likely, moreover, that the amount of time needed for satisfactory mentoring to occur also depends on other factors, such as the characteristics and needs of the youth, the mentor's skills and background, the frequency of contact during the relationship, and the specific outcome(s) under consideration. Although researchers have yet to establish the optimal duration for gains to be made and maximized during the mentoring process, relationships may be especially rewarding when they continue over the course of multiple years (Klaw, Rhodes, & Fitzgerald, 2003; Kram, 1985; McLearn, Colasanto, & Schoen, 1998).

Taken together, these findings are consistent with research on gender development, which has underscored the role of social connectedness as both a risk and a protective factor for adolescent girls. Particularly in light of the heightened mistrust and alienation from parents at baseline, and the role of improved parent relationships in mediating mentoring effects (Rhodes et al., 2002, 2005), the protective aspect of longer-lasting mentoring relationships may be particularly salient for girls. Given the potential of supportive relationships to help adolescents transcend parental difficulties, caseworkers should work closely with matches to move them beyond the initial challenging stages of relationships. Of course, it remains possible that relationship duration is simply a proxy for unmeasured factors such as a generally more negative approach to relationships. The fact that boys and girls also differed in their sensitivity to relationship terminations, however, suggests that gender is at play in the associations.

The collection of data from a large, national sample of adolescents over time (1.5 years) confers confidence in the precision and generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, the mentor relationships were all situated within the context of a single youth mentoring program, and as such the pattern of findings may not apply as well to other, short-term or less formal mentoring interventions. Ideally, the study should be replicated with other samples of adolescents and volunteers in other types of interventions, and with youth at different developmental stages.

In addition, the data were collected a decade ago within the context of a one-on-one community based program, and therefore may not be fully applicable to the types programs and relationships that are being more recently forged. Indeed, under pressure to reach expansion goals, many programs have relaxed volunteer requirements in ways that have diminished the intensity and length of adult–youth matches (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Finally, future studies should move beyond adolescent self-reports to include data from observations, school records, teachers, case managers, and mentors.

Finally, this research cannot differentiate whether the findings were the result of the youth's gender, the mentors' gender, or some combination of both. It may be the case, for example, that women's approaches

to termination are a contributing factor to girls' heightened levels of dissatisfaction in shorter-lasting matches. Yet, because this program did not match male mentors with female mentees, a balanced research design that crossed mentor and youth gender is unfeasible. Natural mentoring relationships would, however, be a context for making such comparisons.

Overall, our findings shed light on how gender might influence the development and course of mentoring relationships. Programs and volunteers should be sensitive to potential difficulties in the mother–daughter relationships, and how they might impede closeness and satisfaction in the early stages of the mentoring relationship. This knowledge could prevent mentors from exiting mentoring relationships prematurely. Since the mentees' satisfaction increased over time, mentors should be supported in developing their mentoring relationships, and instructed that it may take time for their mentees, especially females, to forge trusting ties.

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