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Combining Mentoring With Structured Group Activities: A Potential After-School Context for Fostering Relationships Between Girls and Mentors

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Abstract

The current study explores the potential of one-on-one mentoring facilitated within a structured group format for developing connection and sustaining mentor-mentee relationships with early adolescent girls. Results from a mixed-methods study using survey and observational data reveal that college student mentors and their seventh grade mentees report moderate-to-high satisfaction with the group experience, with no mean differences between groups. Yet there were significant differences between groups in the group members' (mentees) satisfaction with their one-on-one mentoring relationships. Although all groups demonstrated high levels of some positive social processes related to connectedness (e.g., fun), groups in which mentees' reported higher levels of satisfaction with their one-on-one relationships engaged in more higher level positive social processes (e.g., caretaking). Groups in which mentee's reported lower satisfaction with

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their one-on-one relationships demonstrated more negative social processes (e.g., disengagement). Implications for after-school settings are discussed.

Keywords

youth mentoring, group contexts, girls, mentors, connection

When people think of after-school programs, they often picture structured, activity-based programs (e.g., theatre, sports), comprehensive drop-in programs (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs) or intervention/prevention programs (e.g., gang prevention). Yet mentoring programs have become a popular, relationally based intervention that provide youth social support after school. With more than three million youth participating in mentoring (MENTOR, 2006), new modes are on the rise to meet increased demand, with some programs experimenting with new formats (e.g., school-based or group mentoring). In addition, after-school programs provide unique opportunities for natural, group-based mentoring (Hirsch, 2005; Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011) and for youth to form important relationships with “high resource adults” (Sullivan & Larson, 2010, p. 100). Indeed, adults play an important role in the effectiveness and attractiveness of after-school programs to youth (Hirsch, 2005; Rhodes, 2004). Research on staff practices demonstrates the important role of adults in creating high quality after-school programs through how they relate to and work with youth (Larson & Walker, 2010; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005). Thus, the *practice* of mentoring, and the structures that support effective mentoring relationships in group contexts, are important for all after-school settings to consider.

Youth mentoring can improve academic, emotional, and social outcomes and decrease problem behaviors, such as alcohol use or violence (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn & Valentine, 2011; McGill, Mihalic, & Grotzinger, 1998; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt, 2005). Yet programs struggle with how to support the long-term, close relationships that are associated with positive effects (Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Given the growing presence of mentoring in youth’s after-school time, and the importance of adult-youth relationships to after-school programs, it is important to consider the program structures and social processes that help build and sustain relationships. This article reports on findings from a mixed-methods study of a program for early adolescent girls, which combines one-on-one mentoring with structured group activities. We focus on the social processes present in the group setting that

may foster or impede group and one-on-one relationship functioning. The findings are relevant to after-school settings that seek to foster strong adult-youth relationships as part of their programs.

Mentoring as a Relationally Based After-School Program for Early Adolescents

Rhodes' (2005; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006) suggests that it is through a mentor-mentee relationship characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy that mentoring affects youth. Similarly, in counseling, a positive therapeutic alliance is one of the best predictors of therapy outcomes (Horvath & Bedi, 2002; Martin, Garshe, & Davis; 2000), potentially accounting for more of the variance in client change than specific therapeutic techniques or models (Duncan, 2010). Yet mentoring programs often have difficulty helping mentoring pairs achieve the needed emotional closeness and long-term commitment (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). There has been limited research on why mentoring relationships fail (e.g., Spencer, 2007), but the factors facilitating closeness and commitment are still largely unknown.

Mentoring differs from other after-school programs because the focus is on providing a supportive youth-adult relationship. In traditional mentoring, the adult and youth engage in shared activity on a one-on-one basis to build a relationship. In other after-school settings, the activities are the focus. Multiple youth engage with one or more adults as a by-product of those activities. The majority of mentoring research has focused on dyadic relationships. Yet there is growing interest in new forms of mentoring, including group mentoring. Processes at play in group mentoring may be particularly applicable to other after-school programs due to their shared structure (i.e., multiple youth interacting with one or more adults).

Group Mentoring

The term group mentoring is used inconsistently, referring to groups with one mentor and multiple mentees to teams of mentors and mentees (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). The National Mentoring Partnership defines group mentoring as one adult with up to four youth (MENTOR, 2011), but also notes that group mentoring encapsulates a variety of program types and structures (MENTOR, 2002) ranging from one mentor with four mentees to two mentors with up to six mentees (Sherk, 2006). Mentoring groups also vary in where they meet (schools vs. community) and

whether they engage in unstructured or structured activities (Karcher et al., 2006). Some have questioned the effectiveness of group interventions due to possible contagion effects amongst youth with similar risk factors (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Yet Karcher and colleagues suggest that group mentoring may be an effective strategy due to its possible influence on social skills and focus on “(1) relationship building and (2) group processes as a primary means of targeting developmental achievements among group participants (e.g., modeling and peer support for the use of prosocial skills)” (p. 713).

Studies of group mentoring demonstrate mixed results (OJJDP, 2010); some find no effects (House, 2005). The largest study of group mentoring, which included programs with one or more mentors working with a group of mentees, could not calculate impact due to small sample size (Herrera, Vang, & Gale, 2002). Yet the authors did find that although youth in group programs reported less closeness with their mentors, the programs focused more on improving peer relationships and mentees’ social skills than traditional, one-on-one programs (Herrera et al., 2002; OJJDP, 2010). Other studies of group mentoring, in which mentor-mentee ratios ranged from 2:20 to 2:4, have also reported reductions in maladaptive behaviors, increased sense of group belonging (Lapidus, 2005; Utsey, Howard, & Williams, 2003), and psychosocial and academic outcomes (Hanlon, Simon, O’Grady, Carswell, & Callaman, 2009; Jent & Niec, 2009).

Mentoring Early Adolescent Girls

The inclusion of a structured group component with one-on-one mentoring may be well-suited for early adolescent girls. Mentoring relationships with girls can be challenging. The ways in which girls view and negotiate relationships, including what they value and how they negotiate autonomy and connection, may affect and pose challenges for their relationships with adults (Arnett, 1999; Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, Walsh-Samp, 2008; Underwood, 2003). Adding to this, girls who are referred to mentoring may be having relational issues that could affect their abilities to connect with an adult (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Rhodes, et al, 2008). Whereas some studies have found that mentoring matches involving females are more likely to terminate (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), others have found that girls tend to be in longer mentoring relationships than boys but are less satisfied with short-term relationships (Rhodes, et al, 2008). Girls are also less likely than boys to list their mentors as one of the most important people in their lives (DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002), a factor to which youth outcomes have been linked.

Mentors of early adolescent girls, therefore, may benefit from the social support and role modeling available in a group. For example, a mentor may, by observing other relationships, come to view episodes of mentee disconnection as normative (Comstock, Duffey, & St. George, 2002). Furthermore, this format allows for multiple connections and draws on relational processes for development, reflecting work that suggests a benefit of relationships to women's well-being (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). The group setting can also provide opportunities for relational learning, feedback, and support (Bogat & Liang, 2005). Group therapy research (Craigie & Nathan, 2009) supports this, indicating that group-level processes such as support, normalization, and learning may contribute to interventions' effectiveness. For mentees, interacting with peers may serve as an incentive (Herrera et al., 2002), helping sustain involvement in the program even if the one-on-one relationship is less satisfying.

Understanding social processes that foster positive relational experiences within mentoring may inform after-school programs generally. Given the importance of adult-youth relationships to after-school programs (Rhodes, 2004), finding ways to cultivate strong relationships in group settings should be a priority (Hirsch et al., 2011).

Current Study

This article explores the potential of one-on-one mentoring combined with a structured group component for developing connection and sustaining mentor-mentee relationships with early adolescent girls. We expand on Rhodes' (2002) model of mentoring to consider the group as a context, which contributes to relationships by fostering social processes that may promote connection and closeness. Focusing on these social processes makes the findings relevant for other after-school programs in which adolescents and adults engage together in groups. It thus builds on qualitative research examining the practices of adult staff in after-school settings (e.g., Larson & Walker, 2010). The following research questions guided our study:

- (1) In a program that combines one-on-one mentoring with a group component, are there differences between mentoring groups in the mentees' and mentors' satisfaction with their group and/or mentees' satisfaction with their one-on-one mentoring relationships?
- (2) If differences exist, what social processes related to connection and disconnection (e.g., caretaking, sharing, having fun, conflict, conflict resolution.) occur within the groups that may foster or impede connection within the group and one-on-one relationships?

The first question focuses on patterns and prevalence of phenomena measured via standardized assessment tools; the second question seeks to understand those patterns. Quantitative data were used to respond to the first question; qualitative data were used to understand the quantitative results, allowing us to draw on the strengths of both types of data and analysis (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2008). Combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows us to measure structure and process with both contextual and generalizable understandings (Bryman, 2006). The primacy of the qualitative methods capitalizes on their strengths for understanding meaning, process and context within natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Research on group mentoring (e.g., Herrera et al., 2002) and group therapy (Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003; Sobell, Sobell, & Agrawal, 2009; Tasca et al., 2010) suggests that group characteristics influence individuals' experiences in group-based interventions. Thus, we hypothesize that there will be between-group differences in girls' satisfaction with their group experiences and their one-on-one relationships. Our goal in the second question is to explore what group characteristics, in terms of positive (connection) and negative (disconnection) social processes, are associated with any differences. Below, we introduce the site of the study. Because the quantitative results provided the basis for selecting groups to focus on qualitatively, we first present the quantitative data and results followed by the qualitative data and results.

The Young Women Leaders Program

The Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP) is a one-on-one mentoring program with a structured group component (Lawrence, Levy, Martin, & Strother-Taylor, 2008). YWLP pairs college women mentors with seventh grade girls for a year of one-on-one and group activities. It has demonstrated higher than average retention rates (75% and above). This study focuses on the program at four middle schools in the Eastern United States (Hamilton, Roosevelt, Lewis and Monroe¹) that have been implementing YWLP for more than a decade and incorporate evaluative research. Mentees are nominated for the program by school personnel. They are asked to select girls who are at risk for making poor academic, socioemotional or behavioral choices but who have leadership potential and are not receiving services. Mentors apply to and are selected for the program through their university.

Mentor-mentee pairs meet weekly during the school year in groups of 8 to 10 pairs at the mentees' schools. Program staff form groups based on mentor and

mentee availability and with attention to racial-ethnic diversity and peer groups; mentor-mentee pairs are matched within groups based on interests. The groups are heterogeneous due to the multiple types of risk for which girls are referred to the program. Graduate or experienced undergraduate student facilitators lead the groups; some facilitators also have a mentee. Mentors and facilitators take a class about adolescent girls and receive ongoing training and support.

The program structure is consistent across the four schools. Groups follow a curriculum about issues such as body image, academics, and relational aggression (Lawrence, Sovik-Johnston, Roberts, & Thorndike, 2009). Weekly 2-hour group sessions include activities such as “high-low’s,” in which group members report on good and bad things from the week, “star time,” during which group members state something of which they are proud, “sister time” when girls talk one-on-one time with their mentor, and activities or discussions focused on problem-solving, relationship development, and celebration. Mentor-mentee pairs also spend 4 hours together outside of group each month. During the year of the study, girls spent an average of 20 hours with their mentors outside of the group and 25 hours in their groups over the academic year. Eighty-seven percent of mentees remained in the program the full academic year and 75% of matches maintained beyond the end of the school-year. This study is part of two larger studies of YWLP that examine program impacts and the role of the group component.

Quantitative Method

Quantitative Sample

There were eight mentoring groups in the year of the study (Hamilton and Roosevelt had two groups, Monroe had one group, Lewis had three groups), all of which were included in the quantitative sample. Each group included eight to ten mentor-mentee dyads. For demographics of the sample, collected in pre-program surveys ($n = 78$ mentees; $n = 68$ mentors), see Table 1.

Quantitative Data Collection and Measures

Data include post-program surveys collected from mentors ($n = 65$) and mentees ($n = 60$). The surveys measured a variety of mentor and mentee behavioral, academic, social, and emotional outcomes. The constructs of interest in this paper are mentors and mentees’ experiences in the group and mentees’ experiences in their one-on-one relationships.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants (in Percentages).

Characteristic	Mentees (N = 78)	Mentors (N = 68)
Race/Ethnicity (mentors and mentees)		
Caucasian	25%	62%
African American	41%	20%
Hispanic	9%	4%
Asian	1%	6%
Mixed	13%	9%
Other	10%	
Free/reduced lunch status (mentees)		
Free/reduced	64%	n/a
Neither	36%	
Family income (mentors)		
>US\$100,000	n/a	60%
US\$50,000-US\$99,000		34%
<US\$50,000		6%
Mother's education (mentees)		
High school or less	34%	n/a
College (all or some)	27%	
More than college	9%	
Don't know	30%	
Residency (mentees)		
Lives with both parents	31%	n/a
Mom or dad only	35%	
Mom or dad and other adult	24%	
Other	10%	
Risky behaviors in year prior to Young Women Leaders Program (mentees)		
Referral	38%	n/a
Fight	21%	
Skipped school	11%	
In-school suspension	28%	
Out-of-school suspension	20%	
Year in college (mentors)		
First	n/a	2%
Second		51%
Third		31%
Fourth		13%
Graduate school		4%
Prior experience with Young Women Leaders Program (mentors)		
Prior experience	n/a	22%
No prior experience		78%

Relationship quality. Rhodes' (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005) measure of mentoring relationship quality assessed mentees' perceptions of their one-on-one relationships. The scale includes four subscales (helping cope, not dissatisfied, not unhappy, trust not broken; 15 items total) rated on a 4-point likert-type scale ranging from *not true at all* to *very true*. Questions include "When I was with my Big Sister I felt ignored," "My Big Sister had lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem," "Sometimes my Big Sister promised we would do something and then we didn't," and "I wish my Big Sister were different." Negative items were reverse coded; a higher score demonstrated greater relationship quality. The subscales range from three to six items, with some items loading on more than one subscale. All four scales demonstrated acceptable reliability with our sample (help coping = .93 [3 items], not unhappy = .94 [6 items], trust not broken = .80 [6 items]; not dissatisfied = .78 [3 items]).

Group experience. An adapted version of Allen, Kuperminc, Philliber, & Herre's (1994) autonomy and relatedness in program scale assessed mentor and mentee's experiences in their groups. The original scale was developed to study how much a program supported participants' autonomy and relationships within that program. The adapted scale includes 10 items asking mentors and mentees to rate how they felt about their YWLP mentoring group on a 5-point likert-type scale ranging from *almost never* to *almost always*. The scale includes items such as "how often did you feel close to other YWLP members," "how often did you share your ideas and thoughts in your group," and "how often did you look forward to your group." Both mentor and mentee scales demonstrated good reliability [mentors = .89; mentees = .87].

Quantitative Analysis

To answer research question one, we analyzed the quantitative data using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) via the General Linear Model in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 17. We used relationship quality (mentee) and group experience (mentee and mentor) as indicators of relational and group satisfaction. ANOVAs were run separately for mentor and mentee group experience and for the four subscales of relational quality. Post Hoc Tukey comparisons were used to test for differences between the eight mentoring groups to explore whether the group context influences individual participants' satisfaction with the group and one-on-one aspects of the program.

Table 2. Group Differences in Mentor and Mentee Group Satisfaction and Mentee Relational Satisfaction.

Group	Mentor group satisfaction	Mentee group satisfaction	Mentee relational satisfaction Not dissatisfied	Mentee relational satisfaction Not unhappy	Mentee relational satisfaction Trust not broken	Mentee relational satisfaction Helping cope
Lewis1	3.8 (.64)	4.3 (.77)	3.6 (.55)	3.5 (.65)	3.5 (.68)	3.7 (.45)
Monroe1	4 (.31)	4 (.61)	3.4 (.7)	3.7 (.42)	3.5 (.58)	3.3 (.95)
Hamilton2	3.8 (1)	3.8 (.87)	3.1 (1)	3.2 (.89)	2.8 (.77)	3.4 (.5)
Lewis2	3.3 (.46)	4.4 (.27)	3 (1.1)	3.2 (1.1)	2.9 (1.3)	2.5 (.15)
Hamilton1	4.2 (.69)	3.7 (1.2)	2.8 (.88)	3.2 (.88)	3.2 (.93)	3.1 (.9)
Lewis3	3.4 (.89)	3.7 (.73)	2.7 (.97)	2.5 (1.4)	2.6 (.97)	3.4 (.72)
Roosevelt1	3.5 (.72)	3.7 (.66)	2.1 (.77)	2.7 (.66)	2.8 (.74)	3.1 (.2)
Roosevelt2	3.3 (.93)	3.2 (.84)	1.9 (.61)	1.95 (.56)	2.2 (.32)	3.1 (.66)
Total	3.7 (.75)	3.9 (.84)	2.8 (.98)	3 (.96)	2.98 (.88)	3.2 (.82)

Note. Bolded results indicate groups that are significantly different from each other using Tukey's Post-hoc Comparison at $p < .05$. The Group Satisfaction Scales are 5-point likert-type scales. The relational satisfaction scales are 4-point likert-type scales.

Quantitative Results

Mentors ($\bar{X} = 3.70$; $SD = .75$) and mentees ($\bar{X} = 3.85$; $SD = .84$) reported moderate to high satisfaction with their mentoring group experiences. There were no significant differences between groups. Within group variation was generally low (see Table 2).

Mentees reported being moderately satisfied with their one-on-one relationships (see Table 2 for means). There were significant between-group differences on two of the subscales. On the not dissatisfied scale [$F(7, 58) = 3.91, p = .001$; means range 1.90 to 3.60], Lewis1 was significantly different from Roosevelt1 [\bar{X} difference = 1.54, $SE = .43, p < .05, 95\% CI = (.20, 2.88)$, Cohen's $d = 2.32$] and Roosevelt2 [\bar{X} difference = 1.71, $SE = .43, p < .01, 95\% CI = (.37, 3.05)$, Cohen's $d = 2.94$]; Roosevelt2 was significantly different from Monroe1 [\bar{X} difference = $-1.50, SE = .43, p < .05, 95\% CI = (-2.84, -.16)$ Cohen's $d = 2.27$]. On the not unhappy scale [$F(7, 58) = 3.32, p = .005$; means range 2.0 to 3.70] Lewis1 was significantly different from Roosevelt2 [\bar{X} difference = 1.59, $SE = .44, p < .05, 95\% CI = (.20, 2.98)$, Cohen's $d = 2.62$]; Roosevelt2 was significantly different from Monroe1 [\bar{X} difference = $-1.76, SE = .44, p < .01, 95\% CI = (-3.15, -.36)$, Cohen's $d = 3.56$]. There were no significant differences on the trust not broken or helping cope scales.

That there were differences between groups on the one-on-one relationship measure but not on the group experiences measure was surprising. We therefore turned to qualitative methods to explore what processes may influence relational development in the group context.

Qualitative Method

Qualitative Sample

We used the quantitative results to identify those groups between which there were significant differences in mentees' ratings of their one-on-one relationships. This yielded a sample of four groups, two of which were high and two of which were low in relational strength (conceptualized as relational satisfaction). In the groups with the highest relational satisfaction (Lewis1, Monroe1), the mentees identified as 32% Caucasian, 42% African American, 5% Hispanic, 10% Other, 10% Multiracial, and 59% qualified for free or reduced lunch. The mentors identified as 71% Caucasian, 21% African American, and 10% Asian American. Sixty percent had family incomes of greater than \$100,000; 10% had family incomes below US\$50,000. The majority of mentors had prior YWLP experience (60%). In the two groups with the lowest relational satisfaction (Roosevelt1, Roosevelt2), the mentees identified as 22% Caucasian, 39% African American, 6% Hispanic, 17% Other, 17% Multiracial and 72% received free or reduced lunch. The mentors identified as 71% Caucasian, 14% African American, 7% Asian American, and 7% Multiracial. Seventy-one percent had family incomes of greater than US\$100,000; none had family incomes below US\$50,000. Thirty-five percent of mentors had prior YWLP experience.

The groups with the lowest levels of satisfaction are from the same school, suggesting a possible school-level effect. The Roosevelt groups did have more youth receiving free or reduced lunch than the Lewis and Monroe groups, and differing backgrounds and experiences can strain the abilities of mentors to make strong connections with their mentees (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006). Yet program personnel note that Roosevelt does not consistently have mentoring pairs that struggle; struggling pairs have occurred at all schools. Thus, whereas some school-level effect is possible, it is important to understand the processes that occur within groups that may contribute to relational development.

Qualitative Data Collection

Trained faculty, postdoctoral, and doctoral level researchers conducted ethnographic observations in all eight mentoring groups. One group at each school

was observed weekly; the other groups were observed biweekly. Researchers observed the same group each week. In January two researchers switched groups due to scheduling conflicts. To minimize disruptions, only one researcher was present in each group. Researchers took detailed field notes and weekly meetings were used for debriefing, addressing issues, discussing emerging themes, and ensuring consistency across observers. This helped ensure that field notes included thick description of constructs important to the study (Spradley, 1980). We analyzed the field notes from the four groups that differed significantly in relational satisfaction. This included 11 observations at Lewis1, 17 observations at Monroe1, 7 observations at Roosevelt1 and 16 observations at Roosevelt2 for a total of 28 observations of groups reporting high relational satisfaction and 23 observations of groups reporting low satisfaction. Differences in observation schedules and factors such as illness and snow days resulted in different numbers of observations.

Qualitative Analysis

Because we were interested in processes that fostered or inhibited relational connection, we used QSR NVivo to code field notes for Connection and Disconnection, broad themes related to Rhoads' (2005) theory that the connection developed between the mentor and mentee is key. Pairs of observers independently coded the data to determine intercoder agreement. Team meetings were used to refine code definitions and discuss any disagreements. Once each pair reached satisfactory intercoder agreement² and there were no disagreements on application of the codes, each observer independently coded her field notes for Connection and Disconnection.

We then coded all excerpts coded as Connection or Disconnection for the people involved in the interaction (Mentor-Mentee pair, Mentor-Mentee non-pair, Mentor-Mentor, Mentee-Mentee, Whole Group) and open coded for micro themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The team discussed and came to agreement on codes, deleting or combining codes that were not theoretically distinct. The final list of codes included eleven codes for Connection (e.g., reaching out, caretaking/support, trust building) and seven codes for Disconnection (e.g., rejection, confrontation, and isolation). Once data were coded and reviewed for consistency, NVivo's Query function was used to examine patterns of codes, comparing high versus low satisfaction groups. Prevalence was calculated by dividing the number of observations in which a code appeared at least once by the total number of times that group was observed. Data were then examined for meaning to determine what was occurring related to relational development.

Social Processes That May Hinder or Support Relational Development

High levels of social processes reflecting group members connecting to one another were observed in all groups. This included having fun, pairs publically displaying their connection (e.g., hugging), and group members emotionally supporting each other. Yet important differences emerged between groups in the prevalence of particular social processes (see Table 3). Below we explore the meaning of the most prevalent differences between groups.

Connection. Across groups, members displayed many behaviors expressing their connection to, or desire to connect with, each other. This ranged from smiling and laughter to in-depth sharing of personal stories and emotional support. Connection occurred in all groups. Yet there were some differences in how connection occurred between groups in which mentees' reported higher versus lower relational satisfaction at the end of the program.

Caretaking/support and trust building. Groups with greater relational satisfaction had more instances of caretaking/support and trust. These processes are related to trust and empathy, constructs in Rhodes' (2005) model. The excerpt below illustrates such caretaking/support.³

[LS1 says that her] Star Time [something she did that week that she is proud of] was that she helped her mom with the dog. And another one was that her sister takes some medication, and her mom didn't have enough money, so she bought it. F followed up with a comment/question. "I know you support your mom and family a lot, and help out with your siblings, but do you ever take time for yourself?" LS1 says she does, and F says that it's good to have a balance. [Lewis1]

Rather than just congratulating the mentee, the facilitator here references knowledge of her outside life and follows up to express concern for her welfare. In doing so, she models caretaking and indicates a level of empathy for the girl's situation. She also provides a platform for this mentee's mentor to raise this issue further in one-on-one conversation.

Caretaking and support also occurred in one-on-one interactions between mentor-mentee pairs. In the excerpt below, a mentor and mentee are talking during "Sister Time":

BS1 and LS1 are discussing the details of LS1's romantic relationship. "Well, he like broke up with me so. . ." says LS1 as she looks down at the floor. LS1 and BS1 are facing one another and BS1 tilts her head

Table 3. Examples and Prevalence of Codes Within High Versus Low Satisfaction Groups.

Code	Example	(% of Observations in which code appeared at least once)	
		High satisfaction	Low satisfaction
Connection Caretaking/ support	What can we do to help you?" F asked LS2 [who said she is getting in trouble for talking at school]. This led to showers of support [and specific suggestions] from others in the room.... [Lewis I]	19 (68%)	11 (48%)
Fun	One of the LS's asks [BS1], "oh, its your birthday?" ...F says, "I think we should sing!" ... They sing the birthday song... At the end of the song, LS2 leans back in her chair, throws her arms out and shakes her hands around yelling, "and many moooooore." [Monroe I]	20 (71%)	22 (96%)
PDA	LS1 holds BS1's hand as she says her high-lows. [Roosevelt2]	26 (93%)	19 (83%)
Reaching out	BS7 goes over to talk to a LS who is sitting alone and has been for about 5 minutes. [Roosevelt I]	22 (79%)	23 (100%)
Sharing	BS4 shares that she was the victim of "cyber-bullying" in high school [Monroe I]	26 (93%)	19 (83%)
Sharing asking	LS3 asks "when is your wedding?" F/BS1 says "June 27. Thanks for caring about that." (Lewis I)	23 (82%)	19 (83%)
Sharing commonalities	LS4 [talks] about how she has been watching her little sister. ... She mentions getting up extra early and making breakfast for her sister. LS5 shares her experience, "I had to do that before my mom died, for two weeks I had to take care of my siblings and they didn't want to listen to me." [Lewis I]	17 (61%)	12 (52%)
Teasing	LS6 crosses the room and LS2 says "you's a copy catter you know that?" Girls laugh and smile. [Roosevelt I]	17 (61%)	14 (61%)
Trust building	Next, it is LS3's turn but LS3 says that she "is fine" and doesn't want to act. BS5 prods, "come on, LS3, we're ready for ya!" LS3 shakes her head. BS4 tries again, "oh come on, we've all made fools of ourselves already." F tilts her head to the side and asks, "LS3- are you sure you don't want to?" LS3 nods. [Monroe I]	21 (75%)	6 (26%)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Code	Example	(% of Observations in which code appeared at least once	
		High satisfaction	Low satisfaction
Nicknames	BS1 called LS1 "sweetie" [Lewis I]	5 (22%)	0 (0%)
Con-general	LS3 walked toward BS3 and they greeted each other with a smile. [Roosevelt2]	8 (29%)	16 (70%)
<i>Disconnection</i>			
Addressing conflict	LS6 walked around the circle ... but as she walked by LS5 she smacked her on the head. BS6 said: "LS6, you need to apologize to LS5." [Lewis I]	6 (21%)	13 (57%)
Disengagement	LS2 talks about her goal and while this is going on there are multiple side conversations. [Roosevelt I]	10 (36%)	22 (96%)
Confrontation	LS2 replied, "I remember human knot!" LS3 interjects and says, "do you think you have to reply to all the questions! There are others in the group too!" [Roosevelt2]	10 (36%)	13 (57%)
Isolation	LS4 and BS4 vote with the group, but whisper quietly to one another. [Monroe I]	12 (43%)	9 (39%)
Processing conflict	[LS1 is talking to the group about how she is having difficulty with being bullied in the school cafeteria, including by girls who are friends with girls in the Young Women Leaders Program group.] LS2 keeps telling LS1 that she needs to do things like sit at another lunch table. This led to a major "lunch" discussion. First F/BS1 asked the group if they could support LS1 and if she could sit at another table. . . They went through whether LS1 could sit with either of the other [LS's who had her same lunch period]. LS1 had running commentary about how a lot of LS3 and LS4's friends don't like her. . . After several minutes of conversations about whose group sits on which end of which table, BS2 announced that she could go to [LS1's school] tomorrow and have lunch with LS1. [Lewis I]	3 (11%)	4 (17%)
Rejection	LS3 said, "I will miss meeting people every week in the group and especially some Big Sisters whom I have started to like a lot! [as she said this LS3 made eye contact with 4 BS's but never looked at BS3, her own BS] [Roosevelt2]	18 (64%)	21 (91%)
Discon-general	Throughout the activity little sisters continue to giggle. The big sisters do not smile or laugh. [Roosevelt I]	3 (11%)	19 (83%)

to the side, “oh I’m sorry.” The two continue to talk quietly. “It sucks, he did it at school near the bleachers outside . . . he said like, we’ve been going out for a long time and he thinks we should just be friends. . . I thought we were more.” BS1 asks LS1 questions and rubs a hand on her back. . . [Monroe1]

The designated relational time provided by the group format allows this mentor-mentee pair to discuss the mentee’s recent break up. The mentor expresses support for her mentee verbally, through empathic phrases and asking questions, and physically, patting her on the back. Her active listening and responding suggest a level of trust being built between her and her mentee.

Instances such as this were not absent from the groups in which girls reported lower relational satisfaction, just less prevalent. Mentors in those groups were more likely to respond to mentees with superficial expressions of support, such as “good job.” In the groups with higher relational satisfaction mentors used such phrases, but often expressed deeper levels of support. In the excerpt from Lewis1, for example, one could imagine the facilitator simply saying “great” after the mentee shares her Star Time. Such praise can be supportive, but it does not provide the engagement and role modeling that the Lewis1 facilitator’s response provided.

Related to caretaking and support is trust building. In the excerpt below, mentees are sharing posters they made about things that they are proud of and have learned in the program.

LS1 is next in the circle, but she doesn’t want to share her poster. F prods her gently, “oh LS1, we really want to hear yours.” So, she reads quietly and quickly, “help around the house, help friends with problems, time to hang out with friends, turn in homework.” She looks up and smiles. BS1 smiles back at her, their eyes meet and BS1 nods. [Monroe1]

Sharing in the group was a challenge for this mentee, who was very shy. Here she received support from both the facilitator and her mentor. The mentor connects with her almost privately within the group setting, providing a base of trust from which the mentee can share her work.

Trust building that is instigated by the mentors can also serve to model trust for the mentees. In the interaction below, we see how trust can also emerge between mentees.

LS1 covered her face with her hands like she was embarrassed as she spoke. Her rose was that she was going to a dance. Her thorn was that. . . ‘a bad thing happened’. LS2, sitting to her right, had a question-

ing and concerned look on her face. Everyone wanted to know what happened. LS1 said that a friend got shot outside of her home. LS3 asked if he was alive. "Tell him we feel sorry for him," she said. "But you don't know him," responded LS1. "That's okay," LS3 added. "Send him our condolences." [Lewis1]⁴

Lewis1 is the same group in which we earlier saw the facilitator model caretaking behavior. Here, a climate of trust *and* caretaking emerges amongst the mentees themselves.

Fun, reaching out, and general connection. There were some unexpected differences between the groups as well. Fun and reaching out (i.e., one person attempting to connect with another) occurred in all groups frequently. Yet they occurred more in the groups in which girls reported lower levels of relational satisfaction. General connection, expressions of connection not specific enough for a micro code, also appeared more in these groups. This included girls greeting each other, smiling at each other, engaging in conversations that demonstrate interest but do not include emotional or personal information, and expressing a general desire to be together (e.g., making plans to see each other outside of group). This may explain why girls and mentors still expressed relatively high satisfaction with their experiences in these groups.

Both fun and general connection are more superficial social processes that don't reflect the deeper levels of connection related to mutuality, empathy, or trust. Furthermore, fun often "looked" different in groups with high versus low relational satisfaction. In the lower relational satisfaction groups, fun often co-occurred with disconnection (especially in the mentor-mentee dyad) and more often occurred between mentees. This frequently served as a distraction from group experiences. For example, in the following selection from Roosevelt1, two mentees are engaging in a side conversation when a mentor intervenes: "LS1 and LS2 laugh. . . BS3 says 'BS4, hold on, LS1 can you calm down for a second?' LS1 looks at BS3 and continues laughing." Rather than promoting connection between girls and mentors or the whole group, this instance of fun promotes closeness between two mentees but disrupts the group.

In contrast, when fun occurred in groups in which girls reported higher relational satisfaction, everyone in the group was engaged in the fun:

LS2 interrupts [F2] and asks if she and LS1 can perform for the group. F2 says "later," but LS1 continues, "I have to leave early." F2 turns to F1/BS1 and asks "do we have time?" F1/BS1 looks at the clock and nods. LS1 and LS2 jump into the middle of the circle. . . LS2 starts laughing and stalling as though she is really nervous. After 3 false

starts and much laughter, F1/BS1 says, “okay, it’s now or never.” The two begin a step performance. LS2 seems to be the leader. At one point LS2 says, “say DIRTY” and LS1 responds “DIRTY” but she laughs loudly. . . LS2 says “oh I messed up, we need to start over” and they do. When they are finished the group claps . . . [Monroe1]

On the surface fun may be a positive social process that can serve as a foundation for the development of closeness (Markowitz, 2010). But in the absence of deeper levels of connection, and when it provides opportunity for disengagement at the group or dyadic level, fun may interfere with relational development for those who are not participating in the fun.

The fact that reaching out was more prevalent in the groups with lower relational satisfaction was a surprise. Yet when we examined the data we began to understand how this may explain the high levels of satisfaction with the group experience even in groups in which girls rated their one-on-one relationships lower. Within a mentoring group there are multiple relationships girls can develop with different peers and mentors; reaching out represents girls and mentors taking advantage of that opportunity by attempting to connect with one another. The above interaction from Lewis1, when one mentee shares that her friend was shot and another expresses sympathy, is one example of peers reaching out to each other. In one of the two groups with lower relational satisfaction, mentees frequently reached out to each other. Mentees and mentors also often reached out to each other, as in the two examples below.

BS1 taps LS1 on the thigh and says something to her. LS1 looks and shakes her head. BS1 says “I like your watch.” LS1 looks down and appears to say something about her watch. [*Observer note: BS1 seems to be doing a genuinely good job with LS1. It takes a lot to get LS1 to talk.*] [Roosevelt1]

“I’m good at this,” LS1 says a few times. [*Observer note: LS1 is very quiet so it’s a big deal that she was saying this*] F/BS2 looks over at LS1 and asks her “were you talking to me?” LS1 shyly says “yeah” and F/BS2 walks over to her chair. “Wow!” she says, looking at LS1’s work. “You’re a regular Chinese stair climber!” [Lewis1]

In the first excerpt, the mentor reaches out to her mentee to try to engage her in conversation. In the second case, a mentee reaches out to a mentor who is not her own and the mentor (also the group facilitator) responds positively.

Such processes engender connectedness between mentors and mentees and also allow mentees to connect with other mentors in addition to their own.

Yet reaching out can have a darker side. In the groups in which girls reported lower relational satisfaction, reaching out co-occurred with rejection in more than half of the observations (vs. 14% in groups with high relational satisfaction). Such reaching out may be an attempt to connect with other group members when one is unhappy in a one-on-one relationship. The co-occurrence of reaching out and rejection is discussed further, below.

Disconnection. We were not surprised to find a greater prevalence of disconnection, confrontation, and disengagement in groups that reported lower versus higher relational satisfaction postprogram. Disconnection ranged from acts such as one girl rolling her eyes at another girl to mentors and/or mentees ignoring another group member. Some moments of disconnection were passive, whereas others were active, involving blatant rejection of or an insulting comment to a group member. Such interactions were not absent from the groups in which girls reported higher relational satisfaction, but were more prevalent in the lower satisfaction groups, particularly around the issues of disengagement and rejection.

Disengagement. Disengagement was far more prevalent in the groups in which girls reported low relational satisfaction than in groups with high relational satisfaction. In one of the high satisfaction groups, the majority of instances of disengagement involve a single mentee who is easily distracted. Her group uses multiple strategies to reengage her, such as her mentor talking privately with her and the facilitator having her take notes for the group.

Disengagement in the groups in which girls reported lower relational satisfaction, on the other hand, occurs in multiple forms: Cliques of mentees who disengage from the group, mentor-mentee pairs disengaging from each other or from the group, mentors engaging with each other but disengaging from the mentees, and mentees leaving the room without permission.

In addition to the mentees' disengaging from the group, there are also many instances of mentor-mentee disengagement in the groups with lower relational satisfaction; pairs do not communicate or the mentor attempts to engage her mentee in conversation but is ignored.

BS1 asks LS1 about her hair, but I am not sure exactly what she says. I hear her say something about natural. [*Observer Note: BS1 seems like she is legitimately trying to make conversation with LS1. Before this point they have not spoken much today, which seems to be a trend. . . LS1 seems uninterested in this conversation. LS1 is not really engaging.*] [Roosevelt 1]

Disengagement occurred within whole group interactions in every observation in the low satisfaction groups. The mentees often seem more interested in engaging with their peers. The mentors, perhaps in response, seem disinterested in engaging with the mentees. The following excerpt occurs when the facilitator attempts to begin a game with the group.

LS1 was all over the place not paying attention to the group at all. The group voted to play and they started to play but the girls got disoriented. LS2 and LS3 talk to each other from across the circle. LS4, LS5, BS5, and BS4 have a side bar conversation among themselves. The girls did not play. F asked, “are you guys not playing? You guys are very hard to organize today and you all are all over the place today!! What has happened?” They said they were tired. LS3 said, “can we have sister time . . . please please!!” [Roosevelt2]

In this interaction, multiple pairs of mentors and mentees are interacting and connecting; yet they are interacting in small groups rather than engaging with the whole group. This demonstrates how connection and disengagement can be simultaneously present, working against each other. Only in the groups with lower relational satisfaction does disengagement appear to be a reoccurring problem for the group as a whole.

This lack of ability to reengage the group may be related to how the mentors and group facilitators addressed conflict. Confrontations involving mentees occurred in all groups but were more likely to be ignored or responded to passively by mentors in the low satisfaction groups. For example, compare the following two responses to confrontations between mentees.

Low Satisfaction Group: LS1 told LS2, “you are cutting my emotion. Stop touching the jelly beans!” LS2 replied, “you don’t have any!” and walked back to her desk beside BS2. Then she spoke with BS2 very softly with her head very low in the project. BS2 listened to her patiently, occasionally looking up at LS1 and then patted LS2 on her shoulder and said, “it is OK, you do not have to respond to her!” [Roosevelt 2]

High Satisfaction Group: The next thing I heard was LS2 saying to LS1 “you got on my nerves this morning!” I noticed [two mentees] looking up in surprise and holding back giggles. . . BS1 [the group facilitator] let them talk in front of the group for about a minute. LS2 said “Why would you do that?” and LS1 explained her side of the

story. BS1 then asked if they could save it for sister time, which was coming up next, because it sounded like they really needed to talk. . . [During Sister Time] LS2, LS1, BS1 and BS2 went to the back of the room and settled in at a lab desk on the right hand side. [Lewis1]

In the first excerpt, the mentor's response is passive, directed toward her mentee, the object of the confrontation, rather than the perpetrator. In the second excerpt, there is active intervention on the part of the facilitator, who is also the mentor of the girl being confronted. The mentor addresses the root cause of the problem, rather than trying to simply pacify her mentee. This was a common distinction in how conflict was handled in the low versus high satisfaction groups.

Rejection. Rejection (i.e., one group member ignores or excludes another) occurred far more in the lower relational satisfaction groups than in the higher satisfaction groups. At times, mentees reject each other or reach out to mentors and are ignored. More often rejection occurs when mentees reject mentors. Sometimes mentees reject their mentor while simultaneously reaching out to a different mentor or a peer. Reaching out-rejecting interactions were more prevalent in groups with lower relational satisfaction. In programs without a group component, mentor-mentee relationships marked by rejection would likely fail. Here, the mentors can share their feelings with other mentors. The mentees also seem comfortable connecting with other mentors, which may keep them involved in the program despite a lack of connection with their own mentor. In the excerpt below, two mentors discuss rejection, using each other for support:

BS1 walked in and spoke with BS2 softly. She looked upset . . . and she said to BS2, "did you notice her behavior? I am sad! She totally ignores me!" [*it seems she is talking about her mentee*] BS2 replied, "it is [my mentee's] birthday today and I wanted to wish her. I have left several notes and messages for her in her locker and her phone and she never replies! I am sad!" [Roosevelt 2]

Whereas rejection also occurs in the two groups with high relational satisfaction, it is more often actively addressed. For example, in one group the rejection typically occurs between mentees but is always responded to by another group member, as in the instance below.

F started to form the teams. "LS1, go with LS2 please." LS1 responded by saying "Nooooooo. I mean yay [imply on the yay]. "I don't like

LS2,” LS1 said matter of factly. Another mentee says, “we don’t say that in here.” [Lewis 1]

It is likely that the process of the adults responding directly to acts of rejection empowers the girls to do the same. The presence of deeper levels of connected social processes in the higher satisfaction groups may also mitigate the impact of negative social processes on the mentees, making it easier for mentors and mentees to reengage after disengagement or rejection.

Discussion

Overall, mentors and mentees in YWLP expressed high levels of satisfaction with their mentoring group experiences and high levels of social processes related to connectedness were present in all groups. Girls appeared to be connected with peers and other mentors even in the face of less satisfactory one-on-one mentoring relationships. The prevalence of reaching out in the groups in which girls reported less satisfaction with their one-on-one relationships may explain why there were no significant differences between groups on mentors and mentees’ satisfaction with their group experiences. The additional connections made may also account for the program’s high retention rates. As noted earlier, Herrera et al. (2002) found that the presence of peers was an incentive for youth to participate in group mentoring. This mirrors work in other after-school settings, which suggests that adolescent girls’ peer relationships are important to the success of youth programs (Loder & Hirsch, 2003). The addition of more relationships may also favor psychosocial mentoring, in which relational development is privileged over specific activities; such mentoring has been suggested to be most effective with girls (Bogat & Liang, 2005). The presence of additional mentors also provides choices to girls of different adults with whom they may develop a relationship, something also possible in comprehensive after-school centers with multiple staff (Hirsch et al., 2011).

Yet interactions with people other than one’s own mentor/mentee can also contribute to a lack of connection between the mentor-mentee pairs. The mentoring group can provide important peer support for mentors. But if mentors connect with each other at the expense of their relationship with their mentees such opportunity could become a cost rather than a benefit. And if mentees connect with their peers at the expense of overall group cohesion, the benefit of the group component may not be realized. Further research is needed to examine whether girls who are less satisfied with their one-on-one relationships, or are in groups with overall lower relational satisfaction,

demonstrate the same outcomes as other program participants. In addition, it would be important to determine if girls with less satisfying one-on-one relationships who remain in the program achieve different outcomes than girls who drop out.

The groups with higher levels of relational satisfaction demonstrated more in-depth social processes related to connection. Attention to particular relational processes at the group level may have helped foster the one-on-one relationships. While largely driven by the adults, these processes reflect an acknowledgement of and responsiveness to the needs of the girls. Such responsiveness to youth needs has also been identified as an important practice for after-school staff (Larson & Walker, 2010). Through caretaking, support and trust building, mentors in these groups appear to be involved in the developmental or psychosocial mentoring style that has been suggested as most effective (Karcher et al, 2006; Morrow & Styles, 1995). In addition, they seem to be building the mutuality, empathy, and trust that Rhodes (2005) identifies as the route to youth outcomes. Such attention to relationships, rather than just activities, can also be important for staff in other types of after-school programs (Hirsch, 2005).

The groups with higher relational satisfaction and more positive social processes had more mentors with prior YWLP experience. This may reflect a more established skill set and ability to address and redirect negative social processes. Prior work on the role of adult staff in structuring experiences for youth in after-school settings has shown the importance of staff being able to balance youth and program needs, providing structure while allowing for youth ownership (Larson et al., 2005; Larson & Walker, 2010). Sovik-Johnson (2011), in a prior study of YWLP, found that group facilitators used similar strategies to those reported by Larson and colleagues, including guiding questions and providing intermediate structures to keep youth on track. We did not study specific adult behaviors. Yet the fact that groups with higher relational satisfaction had more experienced mentors suggests a link between adults' skills and the social processes we found to differentiate between groups.

There were also between-group differences in the prevalence of social processes reflecting disconnection, particularly disengagement and rejection. Not surprising for groups serving early adolescents (Malekoff, 2004), disconnection occurred in all groups. Yet in groups with high relational satisfaction, mentors more frequently responded proactively. In the groups with low relational satisfaction, such interactions were more commonly ignored or handled passively. This aligns with Rhodes' (Rhodes et al, 2005) findings that it is negative dimensions that best predict successful mentoring relationships. Indeed, the one positive scale in our survey data (helping cope) showed no

group differences. Spencer's (2007) work on failed mentoring relationships also highlights the important role of negative relational issues such as unrealistic expectations, difficulties with cultural differences, or perceived lack of motivation of the mentee. The low satisfaction groups in our study had a slightly greater percentage of youth on free or reduced lunch and the mentors had an overall higher income level than the mentees. It is possible that some issues were related to difficulties connecting across race or social class. However, given that there also were significant race and social class differences in the high satisfaction groups, our findings suggest that handling moments of confrontation and rejection supportively but directly may be important if reconnection is to occur. Indeed, the group therapy literature suggests that supporting group members to address and work through disconnection is a critical facilitator skill as this process of connection, disconnection and reconnection can lead to a deepening of the relationship (Comstock et al., 2002; Malekoff, 2004).

There is some evidence from this study of the potential for negative peer contagion (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999), particularly when some group members' disengagement fosters further disengagement among others. Yet the possibility of *positive* contagion should not be overlooked. Consider the excerpt presented in which a mentee from the Lewis1 group admonishes another mentee for her negative attitude. The facilitator of this group often modeled such corrective actions and was adept at addressing negative processes between group members. The role of the group facilitator, then, may be a key to turning the group setting into a space for positive rather than negative contagion (Sovik-Johnston, 2011).

Related to this, a benefit of the natural mentoring that can occur in after-school programs is potential for direct intervention in youths' peer groups (Hirsch, 2005). Because staff members are present with groups of youth, they can witness and address issues as they arise. Similarly, the mentors and facilitators in these mentoring groups have the opportunity to directly work with the girls to model positive relational processes and actively intervene. Recall how the Lewis1 facilitator directly addressed a conflict between two group members, allowing time and space in the group for facilitation of the problem. In an early study of group mentoring Herrera et al. (2002) found that group mentoring improved youths' relations with peers as well as other adults. This is a mirror image of the mechanism for one-on-one mentoring suggested by Rhodes (2005), wherein the mentoring relationship improves youths' relations with others (peers and adults), which then mediate positive youth outcomes. Further research is needed to understand the role of the facilitator and what facilitator skills are associated with higher functioning groups.

Limitations

This study is limited in its generalizability due to its small sample size and focus on a single year in one program. Attrition in the survey sample limits the conclusions we can draw from the quantitative data due to the potential for selection bias. That the two groups which reported lower relational satisfaction were at the same school suggests a potential school-level effect that we cannot address with this data. Having equal numbers of adults and youth is unusual in group mentoring and after-school programs. Care should therefore be taken when applying findings to other youth settings. There are a number of areas which, although important, are beyond the scope of this study and are potential topics for future research. This includes the ways in which race and social class influence group dynamics and the one-on-one relationships, measuring the impact of the groups on girls' psychosocial outcomes, and understanding the role of the adults in fostering these processes.

Implications

Adult-youth relationships are important to after-school settings. Considering how to best train youth workers to promote social processes that foster relational development in group settings is an important next step for the field. Toward that end, a number of implications can be drawn from this research that may be useful to after-school programs.

First, after-school program staff who work with groups of youth should be well-trained in facilitation skills such as scaffolding, conflict resolution, redirection, active listening, and questioning. Promoting positive social processes while containing and redirecting conflict may be key to a climate that promotes connection. Second, youth programs using multiple staff must ensure that they are trained to stay focused on engaging with the youth, not each other, especially during episodes of youth confrontation and rejection. Staff supporting each other is important, perhaps especially for staff working with populations who may pose relational challenges. Yet connections between the adults cannot come at the expense of connections with the youth. Third, offering youth multiple adults and peers with whom they can connect may help keep youth engaged in programs even in the face of some less satisfying relationships. Thus, paying attention to the relationships, not just activities, available to youth may be important. Providing multiple opportunities for relationships with adults and peers may be particularly responsive to girls needs, as girls may have different expectations and be less satisfied in short

relationships. Fourth, whereas having fun may help forge initial connections and engage youth, it does not appear to be enough to foster deeper relational development. Adults should focus in part on fostering social processes in groups that help promote mutuality, empathy, and trust. Caretaking and trust-building require responsiveness to youth's needs beyond the specific activity at hand. Such practices, when enacted within a group setting, appear to also serve as modeling, allowing youth to pick up and practice skills, further fostering a positive relational climate.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that combining group with one-on-one mentoring can provide girls with opportunities to make multiple connections that may keep them satisfied and involved with the program. The group component may also offer a context for the development of connectedness between mentors and mentees. Recent work on comprehensive after-school centers has suggested the potential for collective mentoring of youth by staff (Hirsch et al., 2011). Our results suggest processes that after-school programs could seek to foster (or prevent) to maximize the potential for adult-youth relational development in group settings.

Our findings support reports of the potential of group mentoring (Karcher et al., 2006) and add to our knowledge on the social processes through which such potential may be met. Yet they also point to a danger of the group context. When not facilitated well, relationships can develop at the expense of, or serve as a distraction from, the goals of the program. Similarly, research on group therapy suggests that while group interventions are effective (McRoberts, Burlingame, & Hoag, 1998 as cited in Tasca et al., 2010), the culture and characteristics of the group influence individual outcomes (Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003; Sobell et al., 2009; Tasca et al., 2010). Malekoff (2004) notes several principles for developing an effective group culture with adolescents, including addressing members' felt needs and wants, welcoming the whole person not just their problematic behavior, socializing the group toward a process of mutual respect and aid, integrating members' verbal and nonverbal activities, and group workers taking a nondefensive, playful stance. Our findings further elucidate these principles by highlighting specific group processes that may be related to individual level outcomes.

The potential of these groups to both foster positive peer processes (e.g., through role modeling of caretaking and support) and manage episodes of disconnection (e.g., through supportively addressing confrontation and rejection) may be a promising structure for enhancing connectedness in one-on-one

mentoring relationships. Such social processes may be transferable to other after-school settings and programs wishing to use relationships as a basis for engaging and promoting the development of early adolescents, especially girls.

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Notes

1. All school names are pseudonyms.
2. Because there was no set number of coded segments and excerpts could be multiply coded, the percent agreement method was used. Each coding pair indicated each instance of coding agreement and disagreement. An excerpt that is identified and coded by one coder but is not coded by the second coder counts as a disagreement. All coders reached a minimum agreement level of .7 or above, with all discrepancies discussed and consensus reached.
3. Names have been replaced to protect the participants. The abbreviations "LS" for mentee (Little Sister) and "BS" for mentor (Big Sister) have been used. To indicate mentor-mentee pairs, each LS and BS pair has been assigned a number within the field note excerpt, so that LS1 is the mentee of BS1, and so on. "F" is used to designate the group facilitator. When the facilitator has a mentee who is involved in the interaction F/BS is used. The abbreviations do not represent the same people throughout the manuscript; each excerpt was abbreviated within itself and not in relation to the other excerpts.

4. Given the seriousness of this revelation, the Facilitator and mentee's Big Sister consulted with program staff and school personnel after the group to ensure all group members who were affected by the shooting received additional support and guidance.

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