MENTEE TO MENTOR TRANSITION
OF FEMALES IN YOUNG LIFE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
6

**Literature Review**  
6

Mentoring in a Historical Context  
7

Conceptualizing Youth Mentorship  
8

The New Frontier: Biology and Mentoring  
12

Success and Failure: Evaluating Mentoring  
13

Mentoring and Juvenile Delinquency  
17

Mentoring Youth Girls  
19

Faith-Based Mentoring  
21

A Gap in the Literature  
23

**Theory**  
24

Social Support  
24

Social Learning Theory  
27

**Methods**  
30

Methodological Approach  
31

Participants  
32

Procedure and Process  
33
Analysis 34

Findings 35

Initiation into Young Life 36

   Initiation at the high school level 37

   Initiation at the college/leader level 40

The Role of Gender in Mentoring Relationships 41

   Forming an initial connection between mentee and mentor 44

   Cultivating the new relationship 48

   Introducing faith to the relationship 49

Juvenile Delinquency and Mentoring 50

   Delinquency reduction in mentees 51

   Delinquency reduction in mentors 54

Junior Leadership 57

   Official junior leadership in Young Life 58

   Unofficial junior leadership in Young Life 60

   Junior leadership outside of Young Life 61

What it Takes to be a Mentor 61

   Characteristics of a Good Mentor 63

   Table 1: Characteristics of a Good Mentor 64

The Phenomenon of Mentoring While Being Mentored 68

   Older adults involved in Young Life 69
Youth mentoring has been studied broadly through both qualitative and quantitative empirical research. Such research indicates that mentoring is important for the guidance and support of youth in a variety of contexts. Mentoring programs are important for youth for many reasons. A mentoring relationship often leads to tangible, positive outcomes for the adolescent such as increased performance in school, better psychological and emotional health, improved behavior, and increased confidence about the future (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, McMaken, and Jucovy, 2007; Rhodes, 2005). It has also been demonstrated that although most youth mentoring research has been acquired from and applied to males, females experience mentoring differently. Female youth are an often-ignored or under-studied population in youth mentoring and in juvenile delinquency literature, and more information about how youth mentoring works for females is sorely needed (Chan and Henry, 2014; Hawkins, Graham, Williams, and Zahn, 2009; Siegal and Welsh, 2011; Young, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on youth mentoring is abundant, with most literature published in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Important concepts in the youth mentoring field which must be reviewed include youth mentoring history and theory, topical articles on the basics of youth mentoring, gender, juvenile delinquency, and religion-based programs. After
literature has been reviewed, it will be clear that there are gaps in the literature which must be filled in order to have a more comprehensive picture of youth mentoring.

*Mentoring in a Historical Context*

The term “mentor” was first used in the classics as the name of a character in Homer’s *The Odyssey* who aided Odysseus (Dubois and Karcher, 2005). However, youth mentoring as we know it today did not begin until thousands of years later. At the turn of the twentieth century, the industrial revolution in the United States brought about increased dangers for adolescents, including child labor and juvenile delinquency (Baker and Maguire, 2005). Concern by community members over the welfare of children led to the establishment of the juvenile courts and juvenile probation officers, which were some of the first formal youth mentors (Baker and Maguire, 2005). Big Brothers Big Sisters of America followed soon after in 1904, and today it is the oldest and largest formal mentoring organization (Baker and Maguire, 2005). Other formal mentoring programs developed as well, but these programs largely excluded minority groups, who sought out natural mentors instead (Baker and Maguire, 2005). Currently, there are approximately 4,500 youth mentoring programs in the United States (Dubois and Karcher, 2005).
There are several definitions for what a youth mentor is, but it is generally agreed that all types of youth mentoring share three main characteristics: mentors have greater experience and/or wisdom than the mentees, mentors offer guidance to the mentees based on their experience and/or wisdom, and an emotional bond is usually formed between the pair during the mentoring process (Dubois and Karcher, 2005). A mentor is someone who is different from a teacher, counselor, or coach, although a mentor may fill the shoes of one or more of these figures. The qualities that make mentors stand out are that they are not professional helpers, and the “scope of involvement” in the mentee’s life is “potentially unbounded” (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992:546).

It is rare to find studies dedicated solely to theories of youth mentoring; however, some scholars have made significant attempts. One such model is foundational to youth mentoring scholarship (Rhodes, 2005). It proposes that a mentoring relationship begins with “mutual trust and empathy,” which leads to “social-emotional development,” “cognitive development,” and “identity development” (Rhodes, 2005:32). Tangible, positive outcomes may be observed relating to each type of development, such as academic achievement, behavior, and psychological well-being for the adolescent (Rhodes, 2005). Many other articles briefly theorize about results of research conducted.
One landmark study, which began in the 1990s, analyzed over 1000 youth mentoring pairs from the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) program (Herrera et al., 2007). It remains the most extensive study on youth mentoring, and the data collected has been useful for secondary analysis in numerous other youth mentoring articles (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, and Walsh-Samp, 2008). Weighing in at over one hundred pages, this longitudinal study created an experimental and a control group (children who were given a mentor immediately and children who were placed on a waiting list for a mentor, respectively). Outcomes observed on mentees were increased academic performance, improved behavior, and confidence about attending college, among others (Herrera et al., 2007). The study suggested that a gap in mentoring relationships (which usually occur during the summer) and short-term mentoring relationships usually do not produce long-term results like long-term mentoring relationships do (Herrera et al., 2007).

A youth mentoring relationship normally progresses through specific stages (Keller, 2005). The first stage is “contemplation,” a time for both mentor and mentee to prepare and formulate ideas about what the mentoring experience will be like (Keller, 2005:86). Training for the future mentor is very important during this time, as is support from the formal mentoring organization (Keller, 2005; Coyne, Duffy, and Wandersman, 2005). Some mentoring organizations may go as far as to provide mentors for their mentors, someone with whom to discuss mentoring challenges, offer support, and brainstorm mentoring strategies (Hamilton and Hamilton 1992). During
the “initiation” phase, the mentor and mentee meet one another and evaluate each other against their preconceived notions developed in the first stage (Keller, 2005:86). It is very important at the outset of a mentoring relationship to create a list of objectives for the relationship and how to accomplish them (Coyne et al., 2005). The “growth and maintenance” phase consumes most of the time devoted to the mentoring relationship; the mentor and mentee become increasingly familiar with one another and committed to the mentoring relationship (Keller, 2005:86). It is up to the mentor to maintain a balance between a horizontal relationship (such as a relationship between friends in which the exchange is equal) and a vertical relationship (such as a relationship between parent and child in which the parent gives more to the child than he or she receives) during this stage of the mentoring process (Keller, 2005). Most research suggests that a mentoring relationship that is either too horizontal or too vertical will fail (Keller, 2005). The fourth stage is called “decline and dissolution” (Keller, 2005:86). Mentoring relationships end for a variety of reasons: sometimes the mentoring relationship ends when the formal program ends, sometimes the mentor and mentee drift apart, and sometimes the relationship ends abruptly due to an unseen circumstance such as a death or relocation (Keller, 2005). At times, there is a fifth phase called “redefinition,” in which the mentor and mentee rekindle a relationship after a period of time (Keller, 2005:86). Keller (2005) points out that there is virtually no research about this phase of the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring can be categorized in several ways. One important distinction is one-on-one mentoring versus group mentoring. One-on-one mentoring is as it sounds:
the mentor-mentee ratio is 1:1. This type of relationship provides individualized attention to the mentee, but only one mentee can be mentored at one time. For my thesis, it is important for me to focus on group mentoring, because the organization that I am studying (Young Life) utilizes this approach, as do 20% of all youth mentoring organizations (Kuperminc and Thomason, 2014). Group mentoring simply means that the mentor-mentee ratio is not 1:1. There may be one mentor with multiple mentees, one mentee with multiple mentors, or (like with Young Life) multiple mentors working with multiple mentees. This third type is also called team mentoring (Kuperminc and Thomason, 2014). Group mentoring usually does not provide as much individualized attention to the mentees as one-on-one mentoring, but it allows more mentees to be mentored at one time. Another important outcome of group mentoring is that mentees can learn from and inspire one another, an outcome relevant to adolescents because peer influence is very important during this time (Kuperminc and Thomason, 2014). Group mentoring also eases the pain for a mentee when a mentoring relationship ends (Keller and Blakeslee, 2014; Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). Kuperminc and Thomason (2014) say that there is virtually no research on teams of 3 or more mentors, which makes my study important because Young Life teams consists of teams anywhere from two to upwards of ten mentors.

A second important distinction is formal/program versus informal/natural mentoring. Informal/natural mentoring is more available to youth who have large, diverse, dense, and stable social networks, while other youth benefit more from formal/program mentoring because they can then pick up relationships that they could
not easily find otherwise (Keller and Blakeslee, 2014). Formal programs have higher expectations for what the mentoring relationship will look like or will accomplish, and are generally shorter-term (Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014).

The New Frontier: Biology and Mentoring

Recent research demonstrates a biological basis for mentoring (Dubois and Karcher, 2014; Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). Early humans may have engaged in alloparenting, in which children receive care from biological family and also others who are not biologically related in order to survive (Dubois and Karcher, 2014). Hunter-gatherer societies still use this practice today. In other words, it takes a village to raise a child, and human beings were realizing this from the start. As humans increased their average lifespan, it made more and more sense that information could be passed down to the next generation, whether to biological offspring or not (Dubois and Karcher, 2014).

The field of biopsychology studies how biology, the environment, and the behavior of an individual interact (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). Biopsychologists have discovered that humans need love, nurturance, support, and social contact as much as they need food, water, and shelter (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). Most research in this field centers on the hormone oxytocin. This is not a biology paper and I will not pretend to be a biologist. However, oxytocin can be explained basically as a hormone that promotes social bonding (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). It has already been shown
to exist between mother and child, between sexual partners, and between friends. Now, some scientists believe that oxytocin is involved in mentoring relationships (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). How it works is this: a mentoring relationship leads provides psychosocial support to the mentee; this involves the hormone oxytocin, which may lower the hormone cortisol and reduce stress (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). Due to psychosocial support and reduced stress, the mentee may enjoy better physical health and may be better adjusted to his or her environment (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014).

Success and Failure: Evaluating Mentoring

Adolescence is a critical time in a person’s life, and it is important to understand the development of adolescents to be able to adequately understand how to mentor them. Adolescents undergo important changes in social behavior because they acquire empathy for the first time, which leads to pro-social behavior (Berk, 2013). They recognize a “generalized other” for the first time, basing actions on what society as a whole would think of them (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011). During adolescence, children distance themselves from parents and spend more time with peers and romantic partners (Darling, 2005). They are in a period of life when they are preoccupied with identity and ideology as they search for a role to play and a niche to inhabit (Erikson, 1968). Adolescence is also a time in which one is pressured to act in specified gender roles more than ever before (Bogat and Liang, 2005). These changes
bring on psychological stress for an adolescent, which is compounded by the fact that they often have extremely busy schedules (Darling, 2005). This can make it difficult for them to make time for a mentoring relationship, and the discouragement that many mentors feel over this can bring an unanticipated end to the relationship (Darling, 2005). Older adolescents are more likely to terminate the mentoring relationship due to other priorities that arise during that time (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). With regards to adolescents’ social development, this is a time when they distinguish between their own roles in intimate relationships and relationships with acquaintances (Darling, 2005). A mentor may become discouraged if the mentoring relationship progresses slowly at first, before the adolescent re-categorizes the mentoring relationship as intimate rather than one between acquaintances (Darling, 2005).

The length of a mentoring relationship is very critical for effects on the mentee (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Lerner, Napolitano, Boyd, Mueller, and Callina, 2014). Multiple studies show that although a long-term mentoring relationship has positive effects for the mentee, a short-term relationship often has negative effects (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Lerner et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2008; Spencer, 2007). Generally, a relationship must last at least a year to create lasting positive effects (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Lerner et al., 2014). This is problematic, as many programs last nine months—the duration of an academic year. A nine month relationship will create positive effects that may not last for a long period of time (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Unfortunately, less than half of formal mentoring relationships last as long as originally intended (Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). As stated above, the
summer gap can create problems for mentoring relationships even if they do last into the following academic year (Herrera et al., 2007). Relationships that end before three months can lead to decreased self-worth and scholastic competence for adolescents, especially girls (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2008). Boys in long-term mentoring relationships benefit more than boys in short term relationships, and girls in long-term relationships benefit more than girls in short-term relationships (Rhodes et al. 2008). However, a long-term mentoring relationship is especially beneficial for girls, and a short-term relationship is especially detrimental to them (Rhodes et al. 2008; Liang et al., 2014). The biological sensitivity to context theory states that highly reactive individuals flourish in good environments but negative environments can be detrimental to them; however, low reactivity individuals are less affected by either good or bad environments (Allison and Shirtcliff, 2014). Girls may have higher reactivity than boys, which may explain how mentoring relationship length affects them differently. Ultimately, abrupt and unexpected endings to a mentoring relationship are most harmful to youth, so no matter how long the mentoring relationship lasts, a mentor must be sure to provide closure to the mentee (Spencer and Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014).

The mentors most likely to terminate a mentoring relationship early are usually married or have low income, while the mentees most likely to terminate a relationship usually have been abused (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Transient populations such as college students are also at risk for terminating mentoring relationships early (Darling, 2005). Youth with qualities that help them do well in life are also the
qualities that would help them attract a mentor (Rhodes, 2005). This means that the youth most attractive to mentors usually do not require a mentor, and the youth that have difficulties attracting a mentor are the ones who need a mentor the most.

No matter the demographics of a mentor, there are certain mentor qualities that can determine how lasting and effective a mentoring relationship is. A “level one” mentor is solely concerned with building a relationship with the mentee, and a mentoring relationship based solely on this goal generally is not very effective (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992:547). A “level two” mentor is concerned with building a relationship with the mentee, but also concerned with introducing options to the mentee; mentors in these relationships fare only slightly better than level one mentors (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992:547). “Level three” mentors share the goals of the first two levels, but they also focus on developing the character of the mentee; mentoring relationships with these mentors turn out fairly well (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992:547). However, “level four” mentors share the same goals as the other types of mentors, but also attempt to develop the mentee’s competence (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992:547). These mentoring relationships are more likely to last longer and produce lasting positive effects for the mentee when they end (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992).

Themes that emerge when qualitative interviews are conducted with both mentors and mentees from successful mentoring relationships include “authenticity / “being real,” “empathy” / “believing” in the mentee, “collaboration,” and “companionship” (Spencer, 2006:296). The most successful mentoring relationships
are the ones that transform from a routine meeting or simply a burdensome commitment into an enjoyable experience that both mentor and mentee look forward to and expect to last for a long time (Spencer, 2006). In contrast, unsuccessful mentoring relationships were likely to have “social disconnection” or “cultural differences,” abandonment or lack of motivation of the relationship by either mentor or mentee, simply “unfulfilled expectations,” lack of relational skills on the mentor’s part, “family interference” on the mentee’s part, or “inadequate agency support” (Spencer, 2007:339). Many of these problems could be eliminated with a proper training program for mentors and support of the mentoring program, as stated previously (Coyne et al., 2005; Keller, 2005).

*Mentoring and Juvenile Delinquency*

Mentoring can be an effective measure for both intervention and prevention of delinquency in juveniles. Prevention of juvenile delinquency is important because reducing it means that an adolescent is less at risk for antisocial and criminal behavior as an adult (Farrington 2005). Juvenile delinquency is “criminal behavior engaged in by minors” (Siegel and Welsh, 2011: 6). According to David P. Farrington (2005), juvenile delinquency can be predicted by ten main factors: impulsivity, low parental supervision, child abuse, low school achievement, low school attachment, harsh/erratic parental discipline, criminal relatives, weak parent-child bonds, delinquent peers, and high crime neighborhoods.
Mentoring could potentially limit the negative effects of some of these factors. One must exercise speculation on how a mentor could be of assistance in each case. For example, although it is improbable that a mentor can remove a high crime neighborhood, delinquent peers, and criminal relatives from a child’s life, the mentor may spend time with the mentee in a setting away from these influences, if only for a few hours. The mentor may discourage impulsivity by promoting decision-making skills, and may be present to encourage greater school attachment and school achievement, which has already been illustrated by other researchers (Herrera et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2005). The mentor may also attempt to foster a better parent-child bond for the mentee, and may even confront the mentee’s parents about child abuse, parental supervision, and discipline style.

So far, these are all speculations about the possibility of a mentor reducing risk factors for a mentee becoming delinquent. However, research has shown that a mentoring relationship reduces delinquency because it pairs a child with a caring adult (Chan and Henry, 2014; Exline, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2009; Keating, Tomishima, Foster, and Allesandri, 2002; Siegal & Welsh, 2011). This was more effective than interventions in school connectedness, school success, and religiosity for youth (Hawkins et al., 2009). Delinquency is reduced in mentored children because it leads to improved self-esteem and to less-destructive behaviors for at-risk youth (Keating et al., 2002). Instead, youth engage with their mentor in fun and challenging activities which are legal instead of delinquent activities (Exline, 2007). Mentors who are supportive, nonjudgmental, and serve as role models for their mentees engage in
prevention of delinquency in these youth (Siegel and Welsh, 2011). Farrington (2005: 185) proposes that “antisocial models” for youth may cause “long term antisocial potential,” so perhaps the reverse may be true in that good role models may limit a juvenile’s risk for delinquency. Mentoring youth is also successful intervention for youth who have already engaged in petty delinquent acts—it can “ward off involvement for more serious delinquency” while there is still time (Siegel and Welsh, 2011: 297). Mentoring often results in networking for current delinquents, which may help them find a job when they are released from a detention center (Chan and Henry, 2014). One of the best treatments for youth is to emphasize their interpersonal skills (Siegel and Welsh, 2011). This is especially relevant for delinquent girls, which will be discussed below.

Mentoring Youth Girls

As briefly discussed above, adolescence is a critical time in which both males and females are increasingly encouraged to act out their individual gender roles (Bogat and Liang, 2005). Males are encouraged to seek out autonomy and leadership; they value mentors who can teach them instrumental skills that will help them achieve autonomy (Bogat and Liang, 2005; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001; Rhodes et al., 2008). Females are encouraged to be relationship-driven; relationships with mentors revolve around psychosocial development and help and support with problems (Bogat and Liang, 2005; Liang, Bogat, and Duffy, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2008; Spencer and Liang, 2009; Thoits, 1995). Spencer and Liang (2009) propose that there is a fundamental
difference in these two styles in that the feminine model of psychosocial mentoring encourages a bidirectional mentoring relationship that places both mentor and mentee on the same level, whereas the masculine model of instrumental mentoring places the mentor in a position of an experienced authority figure “above” the mentee. Girls are more likely than boys to sustain relationships, have better verbal skills, have lower self-esteem, be less aggressive, be more self-aware, blame themselves more, have body image issues, be victims of sexual abuse, have trust issues, and be socialized toward passivity (Siegel and Welsh, 2011; Young, 2000). They are taught that “their self-worth depends on their ability to sustain relationships” (Siegel and Welsh, 2011: 147). Girls take longer to build beneficial relationships, but they benefit more from those relationships once they have been established (Liang et al., 2014).

It is important to note that not all girls fit into the category described above, as not all members of a given gender are exactly the same. However, to serve most female youth, a mentoring relationship tailored for females must be focused on a relational approach that emphasizes conversation about potentially sensitive issues, an effort to improve the mentee’s self-esteem (including body image), and building trust with an adult mentor. Mentors must be especially supportive and accepting of a girl for who she is. Since males and females are different with regards to mentoring style preference, certain programs already exist that cater to one or the other. For example, GO-GIRL uses college student mentors of both genders to teach females about the science and math disciplines (Pincham, 2010). The Young Women Leaders Program consists of one-on-one mentoring in the context of a larger relational group (Deutsch,
Girls thrive in mentoring situations that include “caretaking,” “trust,” “fun,” “reaching out,” “emotional support,” “promoting skills,” and “fun experiences” (Deutsch et al., 2012:66:123; Spencer and Liang, 2009). They are most likely discouraged by “disconnection,” “disengagement,” or “rejection” (Deutsch et al., 2012:66).

Since male and female mentors have such differing styles of mentorship, and since male and female mentees prefer different styles, it would not be practical to study youth mentoring relationships of both males and females in this study. My thesis will focus only on females because they gravitate toward a mentoring style that cannot be effectively grouped with male mentoring relationships for analysis. I chose to study females instead of males because I have more experience with these types of relationships; I have been a female mentee and I am currently a female mentor.

**Faith-Based Mentoring**

Faith-based mentoring is unique for several reasons. First of all, a mentor in this context is likely to be more committed to the mentoring relationship and to hold the relationship longer-term, which is beneficial for youth, as stated previously (Matton, Santo Domingo, and King, 2005). Secondly, the pair often shares a stronger bond because the commonality between them (their faith) is often the central focus of their entire lives (Matton et al., 2005). The goal of spiritual mentoring is not focused on external tasks, but rather on a gradual transformation the mentee undergoes which...
the mentor has already undergone and gives guidance to the mentee (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001). Although one-on-one mentoring is the core of spiritual mentorship, the mentoring pair would be much less effective without the support of the community, and it is not unusual for a mentee to have two or more mentors (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001). Many spiritual mentors do not attempt to force the mentee to convert, and their meetings very often include secular components; most spiritual mentoring pairs spend a minority of their time in church studying a holy book (Matton et al., 2005). In fact, spiritual mentoring organizations often must jump through hoops to receive government funding or other types of aid because of the “separation of church and state” issue (Matton et al., 2005:386). Spiritual mentoring organizations are often focused within a religious community, which is called “inreach,” or they partner with schools or with juvenile detention centers, which are both types of “outreach” (Matton et al., 2005:384).

Young Life is a Christian-based program that trains mentors to go where adolescents are, instead of expecting adolescents to come to them. Not every program is the same, but the majority of the mentors are college students, and the majority of mentees are high school students. A small group of both male and female mentors is placed together on a team and is assigned a local school. They work as a team to meet new students, being students to events, and build relationships with them. Mentors are expected to have more than one mentee, and mentees sometimes have more than one mentor, since the program takes place in a group context. The organization was started by Jim Rayburn in 1941, and currently there are over 2,500 high school ministries
worldwide, and other ministries catering to middle school students, students with disabilities, college students, and teen moms (http://www.younglife.org/us). The Young Life Vision is that “every adolescent will have the opportunity to meet Jesus Christ and follow him” (http://www.younglife.org/us). Mentors do not force mentees to convert to Christianity, but rather, present their mentees with the opportunity to do so, and continue a relationship with the mentee even if he or she decides not to convert.

Young Life operates on the “5 Cs,” which are contact work, club, camp, campaigners, and committee. Contact work means “going where kids are, meeting them as they are, [and] believing in who they can be” (http://www.younglife.org/us). Examples of contact work include standing outside the school doors at dismissal, attending sports events and theater performances, or meeting a mentee for lunch. Club is a weekly event run by a group of mentors that includes skits, games, songs, and a biblical talk at the end. All high school students are invited to attend, usually by word of mouth. Camp is a summer camp that lasts one week in which the group of mentors and mentees stay in a cabin together to get to know each other and talk about spiritual matters together. Campaigners is a bible study in which mentors and mentees gather together to listen to and discuss a topic or passage of biblical scripture that one mentor has chosen. Finally, committee is a support system of parents and community members, who help raise funds, train and choose new mentors, and hire or fire area directors.
A Gap in the Literature

The studies cited above take different approaches to studying youth mentoring, but one dimension that has not yet been studied is that of the mentee-to-mentor transition. Even in the literature from other fields, there are virtually no studies on this transition. This gap is problematic because some youth mentoring organizations, like Young Life, are organized in such a way as to encourage mentees to become mentors in the program when they are old enough. Not only does Young Life encourage this transition, but it relies heavily on it for its mentor pool. By studying the transition of a mentee to a mentor, circumstances that promote this transition can be identified and communicated to others who rely on former mentees to become mentors.

THEORY

Two main theoretical paradigms informed my study. The first is the social support theory and the second is the social learning theory, both of which have ties to several fields in the social sciences, including sociology.

Social Support

Social support refers to the actual or perceived support that one country, community, family, or person receives (Cullen, 1994). Sometimes just the perception of available social support can be more beneficial than its actual availability (Thoits,
For the purpose of my study, social support both given and received is relevant, as I am dealing with individuals who are either simultaneously mentors and mentees, or who are current mentors but were former mentees.

Social support can be micro- or macro-level, formal or informal (Cullen, 1994). It can also be instrumental (practical support such as teaching a new skill; using the relationship as a means to an end) or expressive (psychosocial support such as emotional support; using the relationship as an end in itself) (Cullen, 1994). In his study on illness etiology and social support, Lin (1979) distinguished between the benefits of each type. He defines social support as, “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (Lin, 1979: 109). The first type of support is more instrumental; in Lin’s (1979) study it is relevant because it encompasses the information that people may amass through others on how to take preventative health measures to avoid illness. This is a proactive use of social support that may take place before any significant harm befalls the receiver. With regards to my study, a youth mentor may serve as an instrumental social supporter who provides guidance to a mentee on how to navigate one of the many obstacles that he or she may come across in life before he or she is ever faced with one. The second type of social support is more emotional in nature; Lin (1979) explains how close friends or family can help an ill person cope with their illness and keep the emotional consequences of this illness in check. This type of support usually comes into play after a person is experiencing distress. Considering youth mentoring, a mentor may
provide emotional support to a mentee who has a traumatic experience or simply a daily hassle.

In the mental health sciences, support can be described as a coping resource used to handle stress (Thoits, 1995). Coping with stress gives one a sense of control over his or her life, higher self-esteem, and better overall physical and mental health as a result (Thoits, 1995). Research has shown that social support has a significant negative correlation with illness symptoms (Lin, 1979). Females are more likely to seek out social support than men, which is important information for my study exclusively on females (Thoits, 1995). Having a confidant, specifically one who is similar to the supported person, significantly reduces stress (Thoits, 1995).

Criminologists look at social support as a way to reduce crime (Cullen, 1994). No matter if it is on a large scale or a small scale; if social support is lacking, crime will generally increase (Cullen, 1994). This may explain why the United States has a less socially supportive society and also one of the highest crime rates of the industrialized nations (Cullen, 1994). A finding on the small scale which is relevant to my study is that socially supported adolescents are less prone to delinquency and already-delinquent adolescents may reduce their delinquent behavior if they receive social support (Cullen, 1994). Mentorship is one method of social support for adolescents specifically; they may offer backup support if an adolescent is not being socially supported well by his or her family (Cullen, 1994). It is not only the supported but the supporter who benefits from social support. Socially supporting others has
shown to also reduce crime in the supporter (Cullen, 1994). Since women typically are more socially supportive, they are also typically less criminal (Cullen, 1994).

Social Learning Theory

In the middle of the twentieth century, social scientists began refuting original claims that behavior was controlled solely by instincts and impulses. Instead, scholars argued that an individual, his or her behavior, and the surrounding environment interact continuously and reciprocally; this is called “reciprocal determinism” (Bandura, 1977:194). There are two ways in which an individual can learn a new behavior: either by directly experiencing a consequence of trial-and-error, or by observing a model act out a behavior and receive either a positive or negative consequence; the latter is called “vicarious experience” (Bandura, 1977:13). As might be expected, learning through vicarious experience is much more efficient because it is not as tedious as a trial-and-error process for the individual.

An important aspect of vicarious experience is modeling. A model is a person observed by the learner who receives either good or bad consequences for a certain behavior performed. According to social learning theorists, the learning process is as follows: the learner watches a model, the learner performs the same tasks carefully as the model did, and then the learner begins to internalize the behaviors so that they may be performed without much thought (Bandura 1977). A learner who watches a model being rewarded for a certain behavior will be more likely to act out the same behavior,
and a learner who watches a model being punished for a behavior will be more likely to limit that behavior (Bandura, 1977). Through what is called “vicarious arousal,” even the preferences or emotions of a learner might be affected after watching a model; individuals tend to fear things they see others react fearfully to, to be angry at things at which others get angry, et cetera (Bandura, 1977). Learners also have the ability to recognize when a model’s behavior does not apply to the learner and disregard the model’s actions, as behavior is situationally specific (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1977) describes the modeling process at length, and his main points will be summarized here. Modeling involves a series of four processes: attentional (the model must have the learner’s attention), retention (the learner must remember the modeled action through cognitive processes), motor reproduction (the learner must reproduce the modeled action—a skill which is refined through practice), and motivational (the learner must be motivated to learn and reproduce the modeled action). In addition, there are several factors which contribute to successful modeling. Not all people are equally effective in making an impression on the learner (Burgess and Akers, 2001). The most influential models have characteristics such as high status or prestige, are warm and responsive, are competent, and—most importantly—practice what they preach (Bandura, 1977; Berk, 2013). If models are influential enough, they may even teach a young person to engage in delinquent activities that he or she might otherwise have avoided (Burgess and Akers, 2001).

Vicarious experience is not always clear and concrete. Modeling is often abstract because as humans, we manipulate our environment using symbols, including
language. In the real world, learners are often faced with several diverse models. This leads a learner to use “behavioral innovation,” meaning that the learner creates his or her own version of the modeled action based on the plethora of vicarious information he or she takes in (Bandura, 1977: 48). Having many diverse models is actually a good thing because otherwise the learner may form biased and one-sided impressions of the way one ought to do or think about things. The ability to use language allows a learner to gather information from even more sources. Models need not always act out a behavior, but they may explain it to the learner using language or other symbols, which is not as effective as performing the behavior, but still has influence on the learner (Bandura, 1977).

Social learning theory recognizes that instead of being mindless drones, human beings are not simply swayed to and fro depending on the influences of others, but they also have “personal sources of behavior control” (Bandura, 1977: 129). They engage in self-regulation, meaning that they set personal standards and then reward or punish themselves based on their actual performance. Even self-regulation, however, has a social component. One often evaluates his own behavior based on standards set by what others have achieved or what others think he should achieve (Bandura, 1977).

Youth mentoring may be described as social learning—otherwise known as vicarious experience—in which the “learner” is a young person and the “model” is a mentor. Because behavior is situationally specific and because each learner has his or her own personal behavior control and self-regulation, not all learners will be influenced by all mentors. However, there are certain characteristics of a youth mentor
which can make him or her more effective. As stated before, influential models are warm, responsive and competent; these characteristics vary from person to person. Influential models also have high status or prestige—an advantage that all youth mentors have because they are older than their mentees, therefore affording them at least some level or prestige in the mentee’s eyes (even if the mentee dislikes authority figures). Finally, according to the social learning theory, the most successful youth mentors will “practice what they preach” instead of being hypocritical; this affords them more respect from their mentees.

METHODS

Taking part in the youth mentoring organization, Young Life, has allowed me to observe youth mentoring up close. Young Life is a Christian-based organization which places leaders at local high schools or middle schools to mentor students there. Leaders are interested in building relationships with the students and allowing the students to hear the gospel. One of the most rewarding experiences to observe is when a mentee becomes a mentor. I am one of those cases. I took part in Young Life as a mentee when I was in high school, and my mentor greatly influenced my decision to become a mentor for Young Life when I began college. Having talked to numerous other Young Life mentors, I find that many of them were also influenced to become mentors by their own mentors. Some of my own mentees have also told me that they
plan to become Young Life leaders after they graduate from high school. After reviewing the literature on youth mentoring, I have found no research about mentees who became mentors. This is where I situate my thesis. I center my study on the process by which a female youth mentee becomes a mentor in the Young Life organization.

Methodological Approach

I operated under the grounded theory paradigm for this study. Grounded theory was first recognized in the 1960s and is primarily found in qualitative studies and/or studies centering on a subject that has not yet been explored, like my own. Grounded theory is a theory “derived from an exploration of and an intimate familiarity with data” (Scott, 1971). This theory is unique because it does not necessarily focus on the verification or nullification of a hypothesis (Scott, 1971). Instead, a researcher begins with data collection on a broad topic, and throughout the study focuses on explanation rather than description (Schroth, 2013). As a researcher becomes more increasingly familiar with the data, other theories begin to emerge. Therefore, the theory section of a grounded theory study may be formulated after or even during data collection (Schroth, 2013). Crafting a theory section before data collection is possible, but may create problems for the researcher. “Theory should be a lens for seeing, not a set of blinders,” but anticipating data to come forward to support a certain theoretical
paradigm may cause the researcher to become too preoccupied with one way of seeing things and miss other relevant data. (Vander Ven, 1998: 142).

Participants

Participants include twelve female Young Life leaders (nine current, and three former leaders) who were mentees in the program during high school. Mentors fall within an age range of 18 to 23 years. Three were college freshmen, three college sophomores, two college juniors, three recent graduates, and one graduate student. None of the participants were asked about socioeconomic status; however, they all were attending or had attended college at a four-year public university, which indicates that they had some level of middle-class resources and were most likely middle-class. With regards to race, all of the participants in this study were white. The organization is open to people of all races and ethnic backgrounds. However, the demographics in the town where this study was conducted indicate a large majority of whites. Due to probability, it is not surprising that all of the participants in this study happened to be white, since most members of the town are white.

I gained access to members in this sample by approaching them directly during a Young Life meeting and verbally asking them if they would be interested in participating. I wrote down the names of the interested mentors and additional communication took place by telephone or by social media. Formal consent was acquired before interviewing each mentor. Eleven participants read and signed a
written copy of an IRB-approved consent form, and one over-the-phone participant had the form read to her before verbally consenting.

Procedure and Process

Since this is an exploratory study on an area that has not yet been examined, I have chosen to perform qualitative methods. I conducted semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviews with twelve participants. I focus my study only on female mentors for two main reasons. First, there are differences between males and females with regards to mentoring style preference, so I chose to study one style specifically instead of two styles more broadly (Berk, 2013; Bogat and Liang, 2005; Deutsch et al., 2012; Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001; Pincham, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2008; Spencer and Liang, 2009). Secondly, programs for females are often overlooked in the literature compared to programs for boys, and I have attempted to shed light on female-centered mentoring (Hawkins et al., 2009; Siegal and Welsh, 2011; Young, 2000). After obtaining approval from the IRB, I scheduled interviews with the participants, which took place at their convenience over a period of time from January 15th to March 8th, 2014. Some interviews were conducted in public spaces and others in a private residence, depending on the preference of the participant. As stated previously, there was one over-the-phone interview. Participants chose their own pseudonyms if desired, an idea borrowed from other studies I have read (Spencer, 2006; Spencer, 2007; Spencer and Liang, 2009). If a participant did not wish to choose a pseudonym,
one was assigned to them and to all names that they mentioned in the course of their interview. The open-ended questions that guided the interviews are provided in Appendix A.

These interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. They varied in length but most were approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were recorded using either an application on my cell phone or a recording device, and audio files were transferred to my home computer within 24 hours of recording. Once the interviews had been transferred to my computer, they were deleted from my cell phone or from the recording device. Both my cell phone and my computer are password protected, so only I was able to access the interviews. After transcribing the interviews using my computer, I deleted the audio files from my computer.

Analysis

After transcription, interviews were coded for themes. A coding system is a “set of instructions or rules describing how to observe and record content from text” (Neuman, 2011:363). Coding is often conducted during qualitative studies, and consists of both manifest and latent coding. Manifest coding means scanning a text to find certain words, but latent coding means looking for “underlying, implicit meaning in the context of a text” (Neuman, 2011:365). I began by rereading all transcriptions and taking notes on each. After reviewing the notes, six major themes emerged across all interviews conducted: (1) initiation into Young Life; (2) the role of gender in
mentoring relationships; (3) juvenile delinquency and mentoring; (4) junior leadership; (5) what it takes to be a mentor; and (6) the phenomenon of mentoring while being mentored.

Next, I read each transcript again six times, each time focusing on one of the emergent themes. Information relevant to each theme was copied and pasted onto a separate “coding sheet,” which contained all information from one participant about one theme. Afterward, I was left with 72 coding sheets (6 themes x 12 participants). Relevant quotations from each theme were combined across all participants, leaving 6 “quote logs.” Each theme had its own quote log document, listing all quotations from all participants dealing with that theme. I could then begin my analysis by rereading the quote logs and taking notes. The results section will explain which themes were apparent and analyze them. Exact quotes from the interviews will be provided as examples of themes.

FINDINGS

Several relevant themes emerged in the data: (1) initiation into Young Life; (2) the role of gender in mentoring relationships; (3) juvenile delinquency and mentoring; (4) junior leadership; (5) what it takes to be a mentor; and (6) the phenomenon of mentoring while being mentored. Together, these themes illustrate the mentoring experience for both mentor and mentee. They have been arranged in a specific order as
to demonstrate the chronological progression from the mentee’s original involvement in the organization to deeper involvement and eventually to the position of mentor for the same organization.

*Initiation into Young Life*

Eleven out of twelve female leaders discussed how they first became involved in Young Life. When asked, some leaders described their first Young Life experience in high school, and others described their initiation into a leadership role once in college. I did not distinguish between these two types of “initiation” in the wording of my questions, so there were two different interpretations (those being “initiation at the high school level,” or “initiation at the college/leader level”). It should be noted that all participants were involved in Young Life in high school except for one, who had other Christian leadership responsibilities. This exception will not be included in this section on initiation. The literature on initiation typically centers on formal, one-on-one mentoring relationships (Keller, 2005; Coyne et al., 2005). Young Life, on the other hand, involves multiple mentoring relationships. It is not uncommon for spiritual mentoring relationships to involve multiple mentors or mentees, and Young Life is one example of this (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001). Initiation for other types of mentoring relationships may include more structure and thought, while I found that in Young Life it is more unstructured and related to happenstance. However, both types of mentoring relationships include an initiation of sorts—an initial meeting between
mentee and mentor—from which the mentoring relationship grows and builds; this is
found in other research as well as my own (Keller, 2005).

Initiation at the high school level

Age at initial involvement varied among participants. Many of them became
involved during their freshman year, but a few did not become involved until later.
One girl did not become involved until junior year, most likely because she did not
have Young Life at her own school and attended events held by a neighboring school
district. Age at initial involvement did not seem to affect level or depth of
involvement.

None of the respondents reported seeking out involvement in Young Life on
their own. According to Mercy, “[She] didn’t know why [she] showed up at this
Young Life thing.” This was very typical of the participants. Many of them described
the initial experience as “random” or occurring for an unknown reason. The key to
initial involvement is networking / word of mouth / inviting. A mantra of Young Life
is to “invite your friends, invite your friends, invite your friends.” It’s not a formal or
written rule but it’s an extremely well-known one. Blair explained, “…a lot of my
friends went, and so that’s basically what kept me going a lot in the beginning. But
then I started to really get it and really liked it and appreciated it so I kept going.”
Invitation is the basis of how Young Life operates. A majority of the girls were invited
to Young Life by friends, teammates, older siblings, or classmates. As they became
more involved, they began inviting their friends as well. One participant, Stacy, described her experience, “Ok: well my freshman year I didn’t really wanna go to Young Life cuz I was super shy, but my mom made me go.” Stacy’s quote demonstrates the importance of parental involvement in addition to peer involvement.

The first Young Life event that most high school students attend is club. Each district does club a little differently, but it usually takes place once a week and involves skits, games, music, and a short lecture at the end dealing with a Christian topic. Club is designed to be fun and exciting for students to attend; leaders hope that the initial club experience will entice them to attend more often and eventually become more involved. Additional involvement opportunities are campaigners (a coed weekly bible study), bible study (a weekly study for either all females or all males), periodic weekend retreats, summer camp, and leadership opportunities. At any involvement opportunity, the first meeting may occur between mentee and mentor. Ultimately, leaders attempt to build a mentoring relationship with the students in hopes of sharing the gospel with them.

Some students get hooked by their initial club experience and others do not. I anticipated that the females I interviewed would consist of those who enjoyed their time in Young Life and moved forward to a leadership role in college. Several did. They said that they began to enjoy and appreciate Young Life, they felt loved and accepted by the leaders and by new friends they had made, and that becoming a Christian solidified their involvement. Karsyn reported that, “my friend [Ellen] invited me to it and it was so awesome. And it was just like with 90 kids that was like
at club—like 90 kids I didn’t know at all. And I just felt like super loved the first time 
that I went there. So that’s when I was really drawn to it. And then I made a lot of 
great friends that first year that I started going and then I went to camp and took some 
of my friends…” Karsyn’s experience is typical of many mentees who enjoy their first 
Young Life event, make friends, and deepen involvement even to the point of later 
leadership. Enjoyment of the first experience was a strong predictor for later 
leadership.

However, I also found some interviewees who did not enjoy Young Life, but 
still became leaders anyway. Their reasoning was usually that they were involved in 
other Christian activities such as youth group at church, or that they wanted to change 
what they did not like about Young Life by becoming a leader, or both. Hayley told 
me, “I was never somebody that like loved Young Life. I didn’t love camp, I didn’t 
love a lot of things that happened with it… And the reason—one of the reasons why I 
started leading was because I decided that I couldn’t be upset about a ministry or 
complain about something and then not try to do anything about it.” Hayley didn’t 
enjoy Young Life in high school, but she still became a leader for the organization for 
other reasons, demonstrating that a successful mentoring experience in high school is 
not necessary for future leadership in the same organization.
Initiation at the college/leader level

Familiarity with Young Life because of high school involvement was a huge predictor for college leadership. Many interviewees stumbled upon or searched for the Young Life booth at the freshman involvement fair during the first week of the school year. Some became friends with Young Life leaders who encouraged them to become involved. One community event—the annual Young Life cookout, held at the beginning of each school year, is a starting point for many prospective Young Life leaders beginning college. They are able to meet current leaders, ask questions, and begin to build friendships. Kayla explained, “Just after freshman year, I didn’t really know what I was gonna do, and then one of the girls in the dorm was like, “There is Young Life here! Like, there is a cookout. We should all go.” I went, and like it felt right. I felt like I was more at home because it was something I knew, it was something that was very positive for me, and I really—I did, I just felt at home with all these strangers (laughs). But they were just so nice! They were just great people, and I knew that that was something that I wanted to get back into and see what the next step was.” Even amidst all the strangers at the cookout, Kayla immediately felt comfortable and at home. Having fun and making new friends early in the school year encourages many prospective leaders to become more involved. Several mentioned that the community that the leaders had together was irresistible and encouraging and they wanted to be part of it. Prayer was another important influence for some leaders to help them decide if mentorship was for them.
The Role of Gender in Mentoring Relationships

All participants commented, in some way, on the role that gender has in shaping the Young Life experience. What I found here was that they often had difficulty explaining what they meant; several participants contradicted what others said, and some even contradicted themselves within the course of the interview. It may be that girls are diverse and they don’t always approach relationships in the same way. Leaders are diverse as well. Females-as-emotional was taken for granted in several of the interviews, as shown by this quote from Elizabeth, “…females in general I think are more emotional. Well, obviously.” I also think that some interviewees became confused between what the social construction of femininity is and what their own experiences look like. That is, respondents were conflicted when they compared their beliefs about gendered expectations with their own experiences. Stacy voiced this by saying, “But yeah, definitely with girls…it’s cooler to talk about your feelings cuz that’s what we do as girls, like, we’re more apparently emotional and open to that kind of stuff. I mean, that’s what society tells us.” There is probably a pressure to have mentoring relationships that conform to the standard of a typical female relationship—one that is emotionally charged and personal. In fact, research has shown that typing females as overly emotional can backfire because it is simply unrealistic; females are diverse and their emotions are intense at some times but not at others (Liang et al., 2014).

I did not study male mentoring relationships for this project, and I can therefore only report the perceptions of male mentoring relationships according to the
females I interviewed instead of drawing my own conclusions. Young Life has some gender specific elements and some co-ed elements, so the female participants that I interviewed have had plenty of chances to watch their male counterparts interact with the male mentees. However, while the participants were able to report on their one-on-one mentoring experiences, they could not report on male mentoring relationships in the same way. Their accounts of males arose from listening to their fellow mentors describe the one-on-one male mentoring relationships, or by watching the mentoring take place within a group.

The following conclusions were drawn by female mentors who I interviewed. Guys usually bond quicker and easier to their mentors, while girls may be difficult to hang out with initially. Mercy ventured, “I feel like guys will do whatever they’re told if they think the person’s cool, if they think they’re someone they can open up to. If they get that initial bond of friendship, then that’s it. And they’re totally for it and like that’s a deep bond that you can’t break. I feel like sometimes girls can be more cautious... But once you can get past that, I think like that’s when the real friendships come through and like when being a woman mentor is like awesome and really cool to be part of.” Guys roughhouse, “get crazy,” and do “stupid stuff” together. They’re more outgoing and “goofy” with one another. They’re more likely to strike up a conversation with someone they don’t know very well, while girls may just ignore a stranger greeting them. On the plus side, girls may be more likely to come to planned Young Life events than males, who might find them “lame.” Some interviewees said that it is easier to get to know girls on a personal level than it is guys because girls talk
more about their feelings. Many interviewees said that males are less emotionally vulnerable and that it is easier to get girls to open up than it is for guys. There were some contradictions here, like the story told by Olivia,

I honestly think that girls are harder to get through to, which seems so opposite because guys are taught to be these big tough things and don’t let anyone see your emotions, blah blah blah. But when I talk to [a male leader], or when I talk to other guys leaders in the area about their cabin times, or, “Oh I just hung out with this guy and he just like spilled everything and he was crying,” and cabins times at camp for the last two years for the guys always seem to end in tears! And then I’m over in my cabin and I’m like, “We had like a 20 minute cabin time, and no one was crying! What the heck am I doing wrong?!” You know? I think sometimes it seems really opposite in Young Life when guys start breaking down and girls are still like, “Nope, I can’t show that. I can’t do that.” So I think it becomes frustrating a little bit, sometimes. I just wanna be in the guys’ cabin, and I want tears to happen!

Olivia became frustrated because the tears that the males showed were a sign of willingness to open up to their mentors and be emotionally vulnerable, and her own female mentees weren’t showing the same level of vulnerability. Even more frustrating was that females are socially expected to be more emotional than males, so when she saw that was not the case, she wondered what she was doing wrong as a mentor.

Generally, respondents believed it was hard to form an initial bond with the mentees, but once that bond was formed, the mentoring relationship became increasingly personal and lots of life-sharing occurred. This is exactly what Liang et al. (2014) found in a recent study: girls take longer to build beneficial relationships, but they benefit more from those relationships once they have been established. This is different from how the female mentors perceived male mentoring relationships: male
mentees are more willing to form an initial bond with the mentors, but even when that bond is formed, they will unlikely become emotional and personal. Hayley said it best when she told me, “I think guys put up a lot of walls, I think it’s easier for them to find guys to hang out with, I think that the process of actually getting to the deep things takes a lot longer for guys, though? Whereas girls, I think it does go faster once you have those relationships, girls like to talk. They do.” Blair touched on this topic as well by saying, “And I think that when I was their age—even though it wasn’t that long ago—I was really immature and was really selfish and like wasn’t really willing to open up, so you have to be patient with them and like let them develop and like not be too pushy with them. Cuz they’re not so willing to open up all the time, and that’s ok.” Other research confirms that in general, females focus on emotional and psychosocial aspects of a mentoring relationship when compared to males, and to be more relationship-centered as a whole (Bogat and Liang, 2005; Liang, Bogat, and Duffy, 2014; Rhodes et al., 2008; Siegel and Welsh, 2011; Spencer and Liang, 2009; Thoits, 1995; Young, 2000).

**Forming an initial connection between mentee and mentor**

Some leaders became motivated to take their positions because they saw troubled girls and wanted to make a difference in their lives. These girls may have had difficulty forming and maintaining relationships in the past (be it friendships, romantic relationships, or family ties) and they are left not knowing who to trust. Trust building
was repeatedly mentioned by interviewees as a major step in the initial relationship building. Blair talks about one of her mentees by saying, “She really trusts me and she has told me things that she’s only told two other people. Like really big personal secrets. And like a lot of struggles. And that meant a lot to me that she trusted me enough to tell me those things.” Rhodes (2005) also found that trust is an important building block to a mentoring relationship that leads to several types of positive development for the mentee. Trust is the portal to a deeper and more personal mentoring relationship. Some girls trust more easily than others, and the mentor might get frustrated with this. They must have patience even with girls who are cautious about or slow-to-warm-up to the relationship. Girls share personal secrets when they feel ready, not when the mentor feels ready. Research by Darling (2005) supports this finding; adolescence can be a time for social development that includes categorization of intimate relationships versus acquaintance-relationships. Although this can be frustrating or discouraging for the mentor, the relationship may progress slowly until the mentee recognizes the mentoring relationship as an intimate one (Darling, 2005). Trust can also be broken; sharing the private information that a mentee told a mentor in secret can be a devastating blow to their trust.

Some girls can be “cliquey,” mean, harsh, or judgmental. Several mentors discussed the “walls” that females often have up—walls that must be broken down by the leaders very slowly. Elizabeth said, “But yeah, it’s really cool for the girl leaders to see girls break walls down. Cuz I feel like girls put walls up a lot.” One way to chip away at the wall is to spend time with the mentee one-on-one; several interviewees
believed that females are more willing to life-share in this setting. Another option is for the mentor to life-share about their own personal lives and their own secrets. If a mentor becomes emotionally vulnerable with the mentee, the mentee is more likely to reciprocate. Karsyn said, “So we definitely do share personal things and it’s not just one-sided, it’s not like I just hear them; I also share personal things. Because it is a relationship. It’s not one-sided.” Anne’s comments agreed with this: “One night she [my leader] had like a girls’ hangout at her house and she just like sat us down and told us her testimony and all of these like intimate details about her life. Things that I would have never pictured her doing or being involved in. And I think after that was when I really started to trust her and be like, ‘Okay, well you told me your baggage; I’ll tell you what’s going on with me,’ type of thing.” Often it’s helpful for a mentee to understand that their mentor has been in their shoes and can relate to what they’re going through. Stacy told me that, “It’s cool that she can share that stuff with me and I can be like, ‘Yeah, I’ve been there too.’ And we relate that way.” Literature has shown that having a confidant reduces stress, specially a confidant who is similar to the confiding person or has successfully navigated similar situations in the past (Thoits, 1995). A mentor should clarify to the mentee that they will not be judged no matter what they say. The mentee must know that they are loved and cared about. Periodic retreats also encourage emotional vulnerability; they give the appearance that everyone is becoming emotionally vulnerable. Outgoing girls will probably be more willing to talk to the mentors. A contradiction exists here because although some interviewees claim that females never want to talk, others tell stories of mentees
talking to them for hours about personal topics when they barely knew each other. Jill
tells a unique story about spending time with her mentee: “Like one time I hung out
with a girl for the first time and we went to go see a movie and it was sold out and so
she was just like, ‘Well we can just sit and talk until the next showing.’ So we sat at [a
local movie theater] and talked for three hours about life.”

Some mentoring relationships never progress past a surface-level stage.
Unfortunately, these relationships are usually the ones that do not continue past the
official mentoring period. There may be topics that a mentee never grows comfortable
discussing with their mentor. Hayley said, “When I hang out with one of my girls, we
talk about life and we talk about all those kinds of things. We talk for hours. But
again, there’s just this layer you don’t really pass in the conversation.” If this
happens, a mentor can make it known that she is available if the mentee needs to talk
about anything, but allow the mentee to keep her distance if she so chooses. Karsyn
said, “So that they know that they can come to me if they wanna talk, but they also can
keep their distance—being high school girls.” Some mentees may clash with a mentor,
but it is important for the mentor to continue providing support. A mentor may not
always get close to a girl she expects to get close to, but then again she might get
closer with girls she never expected to.
Cultivating the new relationship

Building trust and entering into a more personal mentoring relationship is both exciting and rewarding to the mentors. The mentoring relationship can now enter into a new, “deeper” stage. This is similar to the “growth and maintenance stage described by Keller (2005). It is optimal if both parties in the mentoring relationship see it as a friendship as well. A mentoring relationship must be a mix of a horizontal relationship (an equal social exchange) and a vertical relationship (a social exchange in which one partner is giving more than she is receiving) to function well (Keller, 2005). The horizontal model is a more feminine style of mentoring than the vertical model (Spencer and Liang, 2009). Mercy reflects on her relationship with her former mentor by saying, “I think what was cool about her [my leader] was like sharing personal parts of my life didn’t even feel that awkward because it was just one of my closest friends.” Mentees may increasingly disclose personal details about their lives to their mentors as they become more comfortable, and they might even go off on a rant from time to time about situations that are bothering them. Blair said, “she [my leader] just was a really good example of what a woman in Christ looks like and she was just always there like was the best listener ever so I would just rant about anything and she would be there.” The mentor must continue to encourage the mentee throughout the relationship. It is important during this stage for mentee and mentor to meet outside of planned Young Life events; some mentioned were a trip out for coffee, spending time at either the mentee’s or the mentor’s home, having a sleepover, talking on the phone when it’s unrealistic to meet in person, tutoring at school, or going to the movies.
“Real-talk” is a term used not exclusively in Young Life, but it is often used by members when talking about personal and deep topics. Several topics that adolescent girls center on include: insecurity and self-image issues, boys, school, sports, family, friends, and faith. Because of the wide range in struggles that girls face, most leaders gravitate toward a few girls who they can relate to; with several diverse leaders on the team, all girls can be matched up with the most appropriate leader. The mentee might disclose things that few other people know, including parents or friends. During this stage, the mentor may be able to ask hard or direct questions and have them answered by the mentee. Anne explained, “Like I wanted them to be able to like feel that they could be open with me and I was always pretty direct with them. Like I wasn’t afraid to ask them the hard questions when it was just me one-on-one with the girls.” Both parties usually plan to continue the relationship even after formal mentoring ends.

*Introducing faith to the relationship*

Young Life is a relational ministry, but at its core, it is a ministry. Mentors are all Christians who want to share the gospel with their mentees. In order to do so, they build a relationship first, as explained by Stacy, “And it wasn’t just like, ‘Ok, I’m gonna teach you about the Bible.’ It was like, ‘I’m gonna have a relationship with you and I’m going to spend time with you and get to know who you are. And then I’m gonna teach you how I live out my faith and then you can know how to live out the faith, too.’” Other research agrees that spiritual mentoring typically does not involve
forceful conversion, and meetings between mentee and mentor have a mixture of secular and spiritual components; it is not entirely spiritual (Matton et al., 2005). Even if the mentee is not interested in becoming a Christian, the mentors are still happy to continue the relationship they have built with the mentee. Often, mentees are willing to listen to the mentor talk about their faith only when a level of trust and comfort has been well established. If and when the mentee decides to pursue the Christian faith, the mentor can be a great model for them to show them how a Christian woman lives her life; several interviewees commented on this. The mentor may introduce prayer or one-on-one bible study into the relationship at this point. Elizabeth explained, “I think [females] understand the gospel in a different way than males might, so I think it’s really important for girls to have a girl leader that’s very prominent in their life to like show them what being a godly woman looks like… I feel like a lot of times when girls hear the gospel for the first time, or like especially for me, it just hit me very deeply and emotionally.”

Juvenile Delinquency and Mentoring

The topic of delinquency was addressed through two angles: relation between delinquency and being a mentee, and relation between delinquency and being a mentor. In summary, delinquency is decreased for parties on both sides of a mentoring relationship: in mentees because they feel cared about by their mentor and don’t feel a need to seek approval through delinquency, and in mentors because they want to set a
good example for their mentees. My study was not the first to suggest that mentorship or positive role modeling reduces delinquency for both mentee and mentor (Chan and Henry, 2014; Cullen, 1994; Exline, 2007; Farrington, 2005; Hawkins et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2007; Keating et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2005; Siegal and Welsh, 2011). In addition, Young Life mentoring relationships are faith-based, and faith was a predictor for reduced delinquency in this sample for both mentor and mentee. Participants in Young Life often had euphemisms for the term “delinquent.” Two prominent euphemisms for the term include “crazy” and “broken.”

Delinquency reduction in mentees

Several participants said that they were involved in delinquent activities such as underage drinking, partying, and staying out past curfew prior to Young Life involvement. Not all answers were specific; a few girls just said that they behaved inappropriately or got into trouble with peers. Some of them even had run-ins with the police because of this. A few of them admitted that they were trying to rebellious and get attention from their peers or their parents. Other participants fought depression as teenagers and had occasional-to-frequent suicidal thoughts.

Anne went so far as to say, “I think it [Young Life] saved my life…My sophomore year of high school, I was really suicidal. And depressed. And I was just going through a lot of stuff. Personal stuff. And if it wasn’t for the other girls in Young Life and my leader finally getting me to open up about everything, I would not be here…They were able to point me back on the right track. And let me know that I wasn’t as alone as I thought I was… I mean
obviously, God had a huge part in it too, but Young Life was really his tool to lead me back from the darkness.”

When they began attending Young Life events, many participants said that they were living a “double life,” holding onto their delinquency on the weekends while putting on an innocent façade in front of their mentors and new friends. Blair put it this way, “I had friends that were like the ‘Young Life crowd’ and like the ‘good kid’ crowd and then I had friends that weren’t. And I would hang out with them separately and make friends that weren’t Christians. I would get into trouble with them sometimes.” They admitted that they were being hypocritical, but now as leaders they understand that delinquent youth are just as welcome at Young Life as anyone else—in fact, they are wanted there. The Christian faith discourages most types of delinquent behavior that the girls listed; several of them changed their actions because they changed their faith and morals and put those things as a priority. Karsyn explained, “I guess in some regard, it was Young Life, but I think essentially it was just Jesus” who caused her to change her behavior. Even though Young Life did not necessarily end all delinquency for these mentees, many of them said it at least limited their delinquent behavior because they did not want a bad reputation.

Superficially, Young Life provided a distraction from delinquency—another outlet for bored kids on a weekday night. The more involved that the mentees became, the less time they even had for delinquent activities. When asked if Young Life kept her out of trouble, Abby answered, “Yeah, it gave me something else to do. There’s nothing to do in [my hometown] at all. It gave me something to do during the week.” A few participants came from small towns and they were especially grateful for
something to do on weeknights. Some parents encouraged Young Life involvement and even used it as an incentive for good behavior, so it indirectly discouraged delinquency.

A common answer that emerged was that as the mentees became more immersed in the Young Life social group and bonded with new friends and mentors, they saw that they could be cared about without having to engage in delinquent activities.

Mercy explained, “Before going around Young Life, I was kind of...crazy. I was just totally obsessed with guys and really kind of just wanted to be a rebel in my own way. So that included—I partied, but not all the time, but enough where I made up my own rules, and I was just trying to get people just to notice me—people to care about me. And like through my mentor, like, that’s where I found it and where I found people who actually did care and I didn’t have to do these crazy stupid things. Just because people like actually loved me the way I was.”

Mentees gained attention in positive ways and realized that people could love them just as they were. In addition, they found Young Life events to be fun—more fun than partying, even. Soon many of them had built genuine relationships and were having genuine fun, and they reported that they no longer had a desire for delinquency; in fact, they even forgot about it.

Karsyn said, “Before I started going to Young Life, I was definitely not in a very good place in my life where I was just going out. So initially...Young Life and my friends I made through that I guess were kind of a distraction and a way to avoid those things. But definitely later on, it’s not that I avoided those things, it’s just like I never wanted to do them. I no longer had the desire, so it’s not like I used Young Life to escape those things. I did Young Life because I enjoyed it and those other things weren’t of interest to me anymore.”
Delinquent peers is one predictor of antisocial or delinquent behavior in juveniles (Farrington, 2005). Young Life provided a group of non-delinquent peers who respondents said were nice to have around because they didn’t judge them for not wanting to drink or party. Their mentors supported them and kept them accountable for their actions by continually checking up on them and asking them about their lives.

Jill said, “Young Life provided that new group of friends to hang out with that were making life choices that fell in line with what I wanted—how I wanted to live my life. So that was really cool to have that support of leaders to talk to about that and just having fellowship that allows me to start making decisions based off of my faith and not just falling in line with decisions that my friends were making… I think it was just really nice to actually have other people who didn’t think I was crazy for not wanting to do those things (laughs).”

**Delinquency reduction in mentors**

Mentors encounter both formal and informal methods of social control when they begin leadership. First, they must sign an official leadership contract binding them to a certain lifestyle; both required behaviors and prohibited behaviors are listed on the contract. Perhaps the one that causes greatest controversy is that no leader may drink underage, and leaders of age to drink must not do so in the county in which they are a leader. It is a common topic of conversation among leaders in this sample, and I noticed a prevalence of the subject of alcohol in the participants’ answers, most likely because of the contract. Since all participants attend college, this rule can be difficult to follow, especially for leaders over the age of 21. Some participants claim that this rule can be a negative because it disallows them from forming closer friendships with
certain people they may have met in class or in other ways who invite them to a party or to the bars. Hayley said, “…obviously we have a contract and so now that I’m 21, there are things I’m limited to… like I know whenever people in my classes go out, I never join them because of Young Life. Which can be a bummer, it can definitely be something where I’m like—I don’t have the same relationships with people here at school as I would if I wasn’t leading.” To go a step further, it makes it more difficult to form a close friendship with these people in hopes of eventually sharing their faith with them. As one participant puts it, non-Christians are more likely to go to the bars; these are the very people that Christians should be meeting but they have an obstacle in their way to do so. In a college town, these leaders are surrounded by a partying atmosphere and sometimes can be tempted to join in. There’s an expectation in college that you must drink (even underage) and go to parties or to the bars in order to be normal; in this case, not to do so would be socially delinquent.

Leaders may experience informal social control because they must keep in mind that they are role models at Young Life events and that they could run into their mentees at the drop of a hat, so they must be constantly acting in accordance with Young Life expectations. Anne put it simply, “And I feel like, especially being a leader, like it was just so important for those kids to see that like not every college student is all about drinking, you know?” Many of them explain this by saying that they are held to a higher standard as a leader. They don’t want to lose credibility in the eyes of their mentees or gain a bad reputation for themselves. They want to set an example for their mentees in the way they live their lives. Abby told me, “it [being a
leader] makes me look at what I’m doing. Like, ‘How’s this gonna affect long-term?’ It’s not just like, ‘Oh, I’m gonna do this right now because I just can.’ It’s like, ‘What’s the outcome gonna be? What are the consequences of what you’re doing?’” Mentorship, therefore, helps mentors to see the long-term consequences of their actions and makes them less prone to impulsivity, another predictor of antisocial or delinquent behavior (Farrington, 2005).

There are a few things that can motivate leaders to hold themselves to a higher standard. First, many of them say that their faith encourages them to stay strong and reminds them that staying away from certain activities is worth it. Elizabeth said, “It’s more like you want to further your relationship with the Lord, so it’s like you’re wanting to do that anyway. It’s not just because you feel like you have to because you’re a leader.” Their faith changes their morals so they may not even have an interest in partying or drinking. Second, a few of them mentioned the community of leaders that surrounds them. Kayla explained, “And that community setting helps you to talk to other people and have things to do and just other people to relate with in case, you know, things are going wrong.” Being surrounded by others who are holding themselves to the same standards can be motivating; you always have someone to spend time with on the weekends in an appropriate way, you have people asking you about your life and keeping you accountable for your actions, and you have others to turn to if anything goes wrong.
Junior Leadership

Ten of the twelve interviewees discussed some sort of junior leadership. These experiences fell into two main categories: official leadership and unofficial leadership. Participants described one or sometimes both types. Overall, the early leadership experiences were a stepping stone to leadership at the college level. They gave the participants confidence because they became familiar with Young Life as an organization and all that went into planning events or mentoring students; it taught them what they could expect when they became full-fledged leaders. Stacy explained, “In high school [as a junior leader], I was in the school—that’s easier when you’re in the school and you get to hang out with your friends and love your friends all day long. Being a [college-age] leader, you’re not in the school with them, so that is harder. So there are definite—you have more responsibility and you’re not in the school as much. And actual leading can be harder—a harder process,” meaning that junior leading is easier if only for the increased contact with mentees. Beth said, “It definitely made me more confident in knowing that I could be a [college age] leader because I did have leadership experience before, so I wasn’t scared to be a [college age] leader.”

Senior year was the pivotal year for many of the interviewees: some of them began junior leadership their junior year, but the leadership role escalated during their senior year. Others junior led only during their senior year. Junior leading could be difficult or even overwhelming at times, participants said, but they recognized its importance in their own lives and in the lives of their mentees. Overall, the
participants said they enjoyed the experiences and they learned that they could make a positive difference. Kayla said, “I figured—you know, I enjoyed it so much and I really did like that experience of leading the cabin that I would see what it would be like to actually be a leader.” To her, enjoying junior leading had a direct impact on her decision to become a leader in college. Junior leadership taught them both relational skills and practical ones, such as how to organize thoughts into a bible study discussion or talk in front of a group. Many of them said that support from their own leaders was key. For some, it solidified their faith as well as solidified their commitment (some described it as a necessity) to continue doing youth ministry. Mercy told me, “…going back to that [junior leading] and just remembering, like, how important that was to not only me but just seeing those girls flourish. I wasn’t something I could get away from. It was something that I felt like I needed to be a part of.”

Official junior leadership in Young Life

The most obvious example of this is the role of Wyld Life leader, which Olivia discussed: “Yes, I was officially a Wyld Life leader. I definitely enjoyed going to camp with them. Cuz they looked up to me a lot because I seemed so much older than them. But still at that age where they felt like they could tell me a bunch of stuff, you know?” Wyld Life is the middle school version of Young Life. College age mentors form the backbone of the ministry, but it is not uncommon for high school
students to become leaders as well, even as early as their sophomore year. College leaders often choose mature high school students for this position. They may even accompany middle school students to retreats and summer camp trips. The high school mentor is a role model for the middle school students; she must be aware that she is always being watched and modify her behavior accordingly. If she builds enough trust, the students may engage in life-sharing with her as they would a college age mentor.

Another example, which encompasses several tasks, is when a high school student takes on duties delegated by their own leaders in order to help the ministry as a whole. Several participants mentioned being involved in the planning and/or execution of club, in partnership with their leaders. Many gave a lecture or shared their testimony (life story revolving around conversion to Christianity) in front of the group at club. Some also were involved in campaigners or female bible studies, either as full leaders or as helpers. They may have been invited to periodic team meetings attended by the college age leaders. Elizabeth explained the scope of her involvement as a junior leader: “Once a month we would be—five of us seniors would be invited to the team meeting so that we could hear what they were planning on doing…They would let us be a part of club and stuff, like I gave a club talk once, I gave campaigners once…They like really handed the ministry over to us more than anything. So that was really cool. Yeah, we helped basically with a lot—we didn’t really go as in depth as they did but we had a big partnership in that.” Summer camp was another popular way that junior leaders could get involved. A few of them helped to lead a cabin, meaning
that they encouraged nightly discussions with their group and led the group through the daily activities.

*Unofficial junior leadership in Young Life*

Even when they weren’t asked, several girls took it upon themselves to be a leadership presence in their schools—specifically with underclassmen. Many of them said that they invested time and relational energy into underclassmen—often checking up on them, spending time with them outside of Young Life events, and encouraging them. Blair said, “I gave people rides to some clubs and campaigners or like rides home, and I would try to be really friendly with them. No one ever really took me aside and asked me to do that…I guess there were just a few girls and I really wanted them to “get it” and like when we would go to camp I would try to like spend time with them and I just wanted to be friendly to them, like to be an older, nice girl.” Some seniors even discipled younger girls (met with them periodically to discuss faith-related matters). The biggest answer that participants gave was that they simply gave rides to Young Life events. They might have also been involved with fundraising efforts or advocacy in their schools.
Junior leadership outside of Young Life

A few participants said that they assisted in other ministries and/or mentoring programs, such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), Girl Scouts, sports teams, and church youth groups. They helped with leadership on retreats, planned events for mentees, and led discussion groups. Beth talks about when she was involved in FCA: “And then my senior year I became a middle-school leader for FCA regionally. So I went on a middle school retreat and I had a group of about nine girls that I led and I followed up with them after the retreat so I was their leader for a little bit and that was cool. I got a lot of experience just like leading younger people.”

What it Takes to be a Mentor

Participants were asked about the skills and qualities that are required to be a successful mentor. This question was difficult for many respondents to answer, but all of them said at least a few things about the topic. Olivia stumbled over her words as she looked for an answer to my question, “Oh gosh, that’s a hard question, Mol. Maybe just (pause) to (pause)… That is a good freakin’ question.” Many respondents implied that characteristics of a good leader are hard to grasp, undefinable, and cannot be written down or taught (however, several of them were able to name specific characteristics). and she wasn’t the only one who had difficulty answering. In the literature, the definition of a mentor varies as well; it seems that a mentor looks differently in every mentoring relationship (Dubois and Karcher, 2005; Hamilton and
Hamilton 1992). Although their role is similar to that of a teacher, coach, or counselor, they are a unique entity of their own (Hamilton and Hamilton, 1992).

Anne said that, “Young Life is one of those things that the people who want to lead are already good leaders. Like in their own ways. It’s not really something you can teach somebody how to be.” Other participants said mentoring was not just about book knowledge or practical things (knowing scripture from the Bible, ability to pray out loud, ability to talk about Jesus well), as what might have been expected during their mandatory leader training course.

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported feelings of inadequacy for their positions; many of them seemed reluctant to answer what a “good leader” was, because they felt unqualified to put a label on something that they did not even feel they had mastered. Many said that when they compared themselves to other leaders, they didn’t feel up to par. Blair certainly wasn’t the only one who said something like, “It’s tough cuz I struggle with feeling inadequate at what I do and I think I’m not a good leader: I compare myself to other people that are leaders at other schools or even with my coleaders and I’m like, “I suck.” But it’s not supposed to be like that. Everyone’s different and has their different strengths and weaknesses, so you just have to forget that and then people have different ways of doing things.” Anne laughed as she said simply, “I still don’t know how to [mentor]. I mean, really, it’s like—it’s one of those things where you go with your gut instincts and pray that you’re not doing damage!”
Many reported that there cannot be one type of “good leader,” because everyone has different weaknesses and strengths and can use them to their advantage. Hayley told me, “I don’t think there’s (pause) a definition of a good leader, exactly. I think it can look at lot of different ways. I don’t think that there’s one type of person that’s like: that’s what you should be striving for. I think it can look a million different ways. I know a lot of really good leaders, and I know they all do it really differently. They all place more importance on certain things and like it works for them.” They said that anyone has the potential to be a good leader; mentors may not always have the answers but they learn more all the time through practice and they can constantly improve. Many of them did not necessarily feel qualified to be mentors, but they felt compelled to do so because they were mentored in high school and felt a drive to give back.

Characteristics of a Good Mentor

Hamilton and Hamilton (1992) that the best type of mentor is one who builds a relationship with a mentee, introduces the mentee to new options, and develops both the mentee’s character and competence. Other researchers found such attributes as “authenticity” / “being real,” “empathy” / “believing in the mentee,” “collaboration,” “companionship,” “caretaking,” “trust,” “fun,” “reaching out,” “emotional support,” and “promoting skills” to be important; several of these I found in my study as well, among other attributes (Deutsch et al., 2012:66:123; Spencer, 2006: 296; Spencer and
Liang, 2009). Spiritual mentorship is unique to other types of mentorship, and these types of mentors may rely on the community support, as well as take care not to pressure their mentees to believe anything that they believe (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001; Matton et al., 2005). Twenty characteristics of a good mentor emerged in the course of the interviews for my study. The most common answer was “patience,” followed by faith-related answers, “sacrifice/selflessness,” and “love.” Table 1 below includes the list of characteristics, each with descriptions and example quotes.

Table 1: Characteristics of a Good Mentor

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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quote(s) to Illustrate</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Making yourself available to the mentee</td>
<td>Spending time with the mentee outside of Young Life events. Even if a mentor has a busy life, they should not make the mentee feel as if she is being “scheduled in,” but as if she is important and a priority for the mentor.</td>
<td>“Even though she’s super busy—she’s married, she has a job, she has a real life—but also just makes time for us and it would never seem like she was just kinda scheduling me in, but it was like the highlight of her week.” (Mercy)</td>
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<td>2. Getting to know the mentee on a personal level</td>
<td>Taking an interest in the mentee’s life and striving to learn more about her</td>
<td>“That’s what [Brittney] did for me; she got to know who I was and could connect with me based on my interests and all that kind of stuff.” (Stacy)</td>
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<td>3. Accommodating</td>
<td>Going out of her way to make sure the mentee feels included, welcome, and comfortable at Young Life events</td>
<td>“She would text me all the time, making sure I was informed about all the events going on, which was cool cuz it really made me feel included.” (Olivia)</td>
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<td>4. Sacrifice</td>
<td>Putting a mentee’s needs before her own; giving up time for the mentee</td>
<td>“You need to be self-sacrificing with your time because that’s what your ministry is and that’s what you should be doing.” (Stacy)</td>
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<td>5. Being “real”</td>
<td>The mentee ought to feel she can be herself around the mentor and talk to her about anything without judgment. The mentor ought to be honest with the mentee and acknowledge her own faults as well.</td>
<td>“I’d never want them to feel like I’m above them or that they can’t share things with me because they’re afraid of what I might think or say.” (Karsyn)</td>
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<td>6. Role modeling</td>
<td>Setting an example for the mentee in life and in faith</td>
<td>“And she really just taught me how it was to live my life for Jesus and really taught me how to live life in general.” (Stacy)</td>
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<td>7. Patience</td>
<td>Even if a mentee is stubborn, immature, selfish, or apathetic at times; Even if the mentor isn’t getting the results she expected in the time limit she expected</td>
<td>“You have to be patient with them and like let them develop and like not be too pushy with them. Cuz they’re not so willing to open up all the time, and that’s ok. So it takes time.” (Blair)</td>
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<td>8. Commitment</td>
<td>To a long-term mentoring relationship that does not end abruptly or without warning</td>
<td>“You have to be committed to doing this, because you can’t just like stick around and then just disappear…Cuz some of them don’t really have stable people in their lives.” (Blair)</td>
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<td>9. Open-mindedness &amp; Boldness</td>
<td>Willingness to step outside a comfort zone and do things that might be scary or intimidating at first; Boldness to approach students even if it’s uncomfortable or intimidating</td>
<td>“You have to be willing to keep going back into situations where it’s awkward and nobody talks to you.” (Abby)</td>
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<td>10. Communication Skills</td>
<td>Listening to what the mentee means, regardless of what she says; Willingness to not always be the one to talk; Intentionally encouraging discussion of deeper and more personal subjects</td>
<td>“It takes honesty and listening… and you have to be able to listen and sort of read in between the lines of what people say.” (Anne)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>With mentees, mentees’ parents, coleaders, etc.</td>
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<td>Love</td>
<td>Loving the mentee exactly as she is, even if she makes mistakes or doesn’t love the mentor back; Offering encouragement and support to the mentee; Seeing the mentee’s true potential and wanting her to succeed</td>
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<td>Faith</td>
<td>A firm relationship with the Lord keeps the mentor feeling refreshed and capable to mentor their mentees. Keeping in mind that the mentor is doing God’s work may help her keep her focus on a higher purpose. Using Christ as a model for how you live your life. Since Young Life is a relational ministry, a mentor must first build a relationship with the mentee and then introduce them to the gospel, instead of being “pushy” about religion. Teaching the mentee about faith and about life, if they so choose.</td>
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<td>Passion</td>
<td>Specifically passionate about the age group that she is mentoring; but also passion and caring for people in general</td>
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<td>15. Community &amp; Accountability</td>
<td>Having other leaders or other Christians around you who understand and can encourage you to be a better leader and a better Christian</td>
<td>“I think one of the things that makes you a good leader is when you have community—when you have friends that know you and can hold you accountable and you can be doing—like if you’re not doing well, then you are trying to do something about that.” (Hayley)</td>
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<td>16. Grace</td>
<td>Willingness to forgive when a mentee makes a mistake</td>
<td>“A lot of times when a kid comes up to you for the 15th time that week and says, “I sinned again,” and it’s the same one that you’ve been trying to help them with, it can be so frustrating, but you have to be super forgiving and offer them a lot of grace and I think those are Jesus’ attributes that we should have, you know?” (Olivia)</td>
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<td>17. Flexibility</td>
<td>Willingness to work with what comes at you in your leadership position</td>
<td>“Things are almost never going to go the way you want them to. Even if you have a plan, they never go the way you want them to (laughs). So I think just having an open mind and being really flexible.” (Kayla)</td>
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<td>18. Perseverance</td>
<td>Not giving up on a mentee</td>
<td>“Just perseverance, definitely. Keeping in contact with these kids, keeping going. Sometimes it’s very very hard…but you need to keep going and you can make a huge difference in their life.” (Stacy)</td>
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<td>19. Practice</td>
<td>You don’t always know what you’re doing when you first get placed, but you must be willing to try new things and figure out what works.</td>
<td>“I think it’s just a lot of doing it, too. You just have to go out and do something to see what works and what doesn’t work.” (Abby)</td>
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20. Humility

Acknowledging weaknesses and asking for help. Realizing it’s not about you, but for a greater purpose.

“I think that was humbling for me to just see Jesus work in ways that I wasn’t expecting and that it’s not about necessarily the ministry, it’s about how he’s changing hearts. And that it’s not about anything that I’m doing.” (Jill)

The Phenomenon of Mentoring While Being Mentored

All twelve participants commented on this subject. At first, I did not ask about it, but when the first few respondents brought it up without being prompted, I included a question about it on the interview question list. Anne’s comment tied together all the participants’ answers best when she said, “I think some of the biggest ways to transfer from being a mentee to a mentor is just staying a mentee. Like, finding another mentor to help you through the transition and keep mentoring you through. I don’t think you ever really transition from being a mentee to a mentor. I feel like our entire lives, we’re gonna be … a mentee to somebody. It’s always nice to have that age of wisdom, I guess you could call it. To turn to when you really—cuz I mean, I was a Young Life mentor for three years, but there are still situations that I’m just like, ‘I have no idea how to handle this.’” Literature is lacking on this topic. The only references to this phenomenon refer to a mentoring organization offering support and resources to the mentors (Keller, 2005; Coyne, Duffy, and Wandersman, 2005). The closest reference in literature to a mentor mentoring another mentor is from Hamilton and Hamilton (1992), which again discusses how the mentoring organization itself might provide
someone for the mentor with whom to discuss mentoring challenges, brainstorm solutions and new ideas, and who can offer support in general.

A common thread to describe this theme was the “pouring analogy,” which was mentioned by five participants without being prompted. For example, Stacy talked about older women in the community in this way: “And I think they pour into a lot of the women leaders in Young Life…And then I take all that and take all the love from the Lord and all that kind of stuff, and I pour it into my girls.” The analogy is that mentorship is a bucket. To mentor, one must “pour out” their mentorship from their bucket into the buckets of the mentees. However, in order to be able to pour anything out, of course the bucket must be filled by some other source; in this case, another mentor. It is common lingo among Young Life leaders that I hear frequently. The implication is that one cannot be an effective mentor without simultaneously being mentored. The transition from mentee to mentor is not fixed, but fluid. One is continually mentored by a network of sources even as she mentors others. Seven sources were mentioned in the course of the interviews; some participants mentioned multiple.

**Older adults involved in Young Life**

Half of the participants (six) talked about an older adult who was involved in Young Life and who mentored them in some way. An area director is a paid staff member whose job is in essence to lead leaders and build up the Young Life program
for any given “area,” in this case including six high school programs, one middle school program, and one college program. He often meets with leaders to check in with them or to address specific issues. He holds a mandatory meeting once a week for the leaders, trains prospective leaders, and holds a weekly bible study for males. He is in frequent contact with all leaders. However, since Young Life does a lot of gender-specific mentoring, his wife, [Sam] has become very involved in meeting with female leaders to offer advice or wisdom. Karsyn mentioned her by saying, “And also meeting with [Sam], an older woman in the community to mentor me in that and just offer support and encouragement in mentoring other people. I think that we need that backbone of support that’s just greater than our own.” Other committee members meet with leaders for support and encouragement, and one woman is especially well-known for doing so; she holds a weekly bible study for female leaders and their friends.

Former Young Life leaders

Eleven of these girls were involved in Young Life in high school, and several made a connection with their hometown leader(s). Of those, five said that they still keep in touch with those leaders, sometimes multiple times a week. Mercy said, “I still hang out with [my former leader] all the time. She’s still my mentor whenever I go home.” Visiting home for a summer or winter vacation provides the participants with a time to reconnect. Even if contact is infrequent, participants are able to look back on
how their leader mentored them and use that as a model for how they will mentor others.

_Coleaders_

Four participants said that they were mentored in some way by their coleaders. Coleaders are people who also mentor students from the school in which you are a mentor. Participants said that when they first began leading, they frequently watched older members of their team who had more experience, specifically older females.

Elizabeth said, “But my older girl leader, I look to her a lot because she knows what she’s doing. She’s been there for three years now so she knows the kids and knows the area better, so when I see her contacting girls and how she acts around the girls, then I’m like, “Ok, that’s how this area does it,” or like “This is how she does this,” and “This is what’s effective for her. So I look up to her a lot to see—I don’t know. Not to copy-cat her, but just to get a feel for how she does ministry so I can—I don’t know—work with that, I guess.”

Sometimes they watched and then modeled their older coleaders when they were unsure of what to do in a given situation. These girls offered them support and encouragement as well as practical tips on how to approach specific students or how to give a good bible study lesson.

Jill explained, “I feel like watching the girl leaders that were on my team when I first got placed was huge because they were—well really, just even the guy leaders as well—they were really really great and supportive at outlining exactly how you do certain things as a leader, whether it’s like, “This is how you write a club talk,” “This is how you write a campaigners talk,” “This is how you should approach kids,” or just giving tips and helpful ways to do things that Young Life allows us to do that’s out of our comfort zone.”
Peer mentoring

Three participants said that the community of leaders as a whole surrounded them with encouragement and support. Beth told me, “Yeah, it’s just like community. You wanna be surrounded by people that are doing same thing as you to build you up, so being with people around my own age just mentoring me, per se or just, you know, checking up on me has helped a lot.” This allows for peer mentoring and tip-sharing or story-sharing. Leaders from other teams can take an active interest in how one’s mentoring relationships are progressing or what obstacles are presenting themselves. Many leaders live with other leaders, and those roommate relationships can provide additional support and inspiration. Karsyn said, “My roommates, I wouldn’t call them mentors, but I think that they definitely inspire me to do better and to be more. And just knowing their own experiences and their way of going about things I think mentors me.” Accountability groups are another form of peer mentoring. Group members typically meet weekly to talk about personal issues that they are facing and for encouragement necessary to strengthen their faith.

Leaders other than coleaders

Friendships of course are formed even if two leaders are not coleaders or roommates. Often older leaders take an interest in new leaders to make sure that they are adjusting well to their new roles, as two participants discussed. Anne said, “There
were some older Young Life leaders that I could definitely turn to and ask them about different situations and stuff.” Additionally, a weekly bible study for female leaders is a great place to get to know leaders from other teams and build friendships.

*Jesus*

One participant, Karsyn, said that Jesus can act as a mentor and can model what she calls a perfect mentoring relationship. She explained, “I definitely think that Jesus as himself is a good mentor. And obviously God is above that, but Jesus just being that physical evidence of what it looks like to perfectly love and meet other people and be there for them and go through life with them.” A leader can read in the Bible about how Jesus mentored his disciples for a model as to how to mentor high school students, and can also use prayer and a relationship with God to make God/Jesus one’s own personal mentor.

*High school students*

Although Olivia claimed that she regretted not having a formal mentoring relationship through college in which she was the mentee, she pointed out that the high school students often teach her more than she expected them to. This form of reciprocal mentoring isn’t necessarily intended and may even surprise the mentors.
Olivia explained, “I think sometimes my high schoolers teach me more than I teach them… I’ll ask her [a high school girl] a question, thinking I know the answer to it, something I’ve studied for a really long time, and then she comes back with this, like, blow-you-away—like I’ve never thought about it that way, and I’m like, ‘How are you…?’ So I think—cuz that’s probably the one thing that I regret most about college is I never got a mentor or a discipler. And I think that it probably would have helped me a whole lot through struggles. Like [Sam], you know? Or [Elisa] or someone like that. But in a way, my high schoolers have been doing that right along, probably, you know, yeah. Maybe not in such impactful ways, but little by little… Because it feels like, ‘I’m teaching you, you’re teaching me, you don’t even know it,’ you know? It’s crazy how much they don’t know.”

CONCLUSION

Major Findings

The current study used qualitative interviews to examine the transition from mentee to mentor that females undergo in the organization Young Life. The study identified several major findings and themes: (1) initiation into Young Life; (2) the role of gender in mentoring relationships; (3) juvenile delinquency and mentoring; (4) junior leadership; (5) what it takes to be a mentor; and (6) the phenomenon of mentoring while being mentored. The first theme suggested that initiation was usually unstructured and happenstance arising from networking or inviting by peers and Young Life leaders. Familiarity with the Young Life brand encouraged former mentees to sign up to be leaders in the same organization. Age of initiation did not seem to affect the depth of involvement.

The second theme on gender revealed that, in contrast to males, forming an initial relationship with females can be challenging, but once a mentor is able to break
through a mentee’s emotional “walls,” the relationship blossoms. This requires patience and trust-building on the mentor’s part. Meeting one-on-one with a mentee and being emotionally vulnerable in reciprocation are also helpful. Although female relationships are emotionally and relationally-typed, actual experiences do not perfectly match up with these social expectations.

According to findings from the third theme, delinquency is decreased for both mentee and mentor upon involvement in Young Life because each is surrounded by non-delinquent peers, and the Christian faith discourages delinquency. In addition, mentees are provided with a distraction from boredom or delinquency by attending Young Life. Many explained that upon Young Life involvement, they no longer had a need to participate in delinquent activities to be socially accepted. Mentors claim that they reduced their own delinquency because they felt they ought to keep a good reputation and hold themselves to a higher standard of behavior.

The fourth theme suggests that junior leadership during junior or senior year provided mentees with a stepping stone to leadership in college. Junior leadership allowed mentees to learn leadership skills (both practical and relational) and built their confidence. The current study did not find a difference between an official and an unofficial leadership experience with regards to predicting future involvement.

According to the fifth theme, good mentors are hard to define—although participants were able to list several important characteristics, including patience, sacrifice/selflessness, and love. Each mentor has their own strengths and weaknesses,
and they learn successful techniques with practice. Several participants reported feelings of inadequacy as a leader.

Finally, the sixth theme revealed that participants were often mentored as they mentored—either by older adults, former leaders, coleaders, peers, God and/or Jesus, and high school students. Many gave the “pouring analogy”: mentorship is held in a bucket that must continually be filled by someone else as the mentor pours it into the mentee’s bucket. This finding was unexpected and emerged naturally during the course of the interviews.

Program Implications

Young Life is an organization comprised heavily of leaders who were former mentees. The current study reveals implications for how Young Life (and other similar organizations) might build its leader pool. The current study suggests that mentees are most likely to transition to a mentor role when they are given early leadership opportunities in high school. There does not appear to be a difference between official or unofficial leadership roles: the important thing is that the opportunity teaches the mentees leadership skills and builds their confidence that they could successfully take on a leadership role in college.

Before a mentee can become interested in a leadership role, however, she must reach a certain depth of involvement in the organization and sustain a close bond with her leader. Involvement can be encouraged by networking and inviting students and making them familiar with the organization’s brand (in this case, Young Life). A
female mentor can build a relationship with her mentee by being patient, building trust, meeting one-on-one with the mentee, and being emotionally vulnerable in reciprocation.

Even after a mentor has taken an official mentoring position, retention remains important. The current study indicates that it is very likely that mentors view themselves as inadequate. Although no mentor is perfect, it may be important for organization leaders to evaluate mentors on their strengths and give feedback for encouragement. Another idea would be to provide leaders with a personal questionnaire so they can discover strengths and weaknesses in mentoring style, how strengths can be put to use, and how weaknesses can be improved upon. In addition, retention rates can be improved if a mentor is provided with some type of mentoring support: either from a more experienced leader or adult, or from peers.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study is not without limitations. All participants were known to the researcher prior to beginning the interview process, although this is both a limitation and strength. It may have provided bias for participants who wanted to present a certain image to the interviewer and researcher, whom they knew personally. However, knowing the researcher might have prompted the participants to offer more detailed or personal information than they would have offered a stranger.

The study consists of twelve participants in one organization and in one geographic location, so it is relatively small and specific. Future research might
include a larger sample, a different organization, and/or a different geographic location. In addition, males are not included in the sample because their mentoring style is assumed to be very different from females’ mentoring style. Future research should include a replication of this study using male participants in order to ascertain if their styles are truly different, and if so, how.

It is important to understand youth mentoring in a social context. Efforts to improve youth mentoring relationships are valuable because of the multitude of benefits generated by these relationships, both for mentee and mentor.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TEMPLATE

1. Can you tell me about how you became a leader for Young Life?

2. Can you tell me about your involvement in Young Life while you were in high school?

3. How did being involved in Young Life in high school affect you? Do you think you benefitted from it?

4. Besides Young Life, did you have any other mentoring experiences in high school?

5. Did you ever play a “junior leader” role while in high school? It could be official or unofficial.

6. Do you think your mentoring experiences in high school (Young Life or otherwise) had anything to do with your decision to become a leader in college? If so, what was the relation?

7. Can you tell me about the relationship between you and your leader(s) while in high school?

8. Did you ever share personal details of your life with your leader while in high school?

9. Can you tell me about the relationship between you and your [high school/middle school/college] girls(s) now that you are a leader?

10. Can you think of a time or times when a Young Life girl shared details about her life with you? Can you tell me about that?

11. Did being involved in Young Life keep you out of trouble in high school? If so, how so?

12. Does being a leader keep you out of trouble or hold you to a higher standard of behavior?

13. What is unique about being a female leader compared to being a male leader (that you know of)?

14. What does it take to be a good leader?

15. How did you learn/how do you know how to be a good leader?
16. Are there any mentoring practices that your leader used which you now use?

17. Are you still being mentored even as you mentor others? Does it help you in leading?

18. Is there anything else that you can tell me about your transition from mentee to mentor?