



Supports that White Mentors and BIPOC Mentees Need

Submitted by: Savannah B. Simpson & Elizabeth B. Raposa

There is often a mismatch between volunteer mentors' backgrounds and the diverse youth they serve. Many mentors are White, female, and college educated, while youth referred to mentoring programs are often male, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), and come from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. This contrast between the demographic make-up of

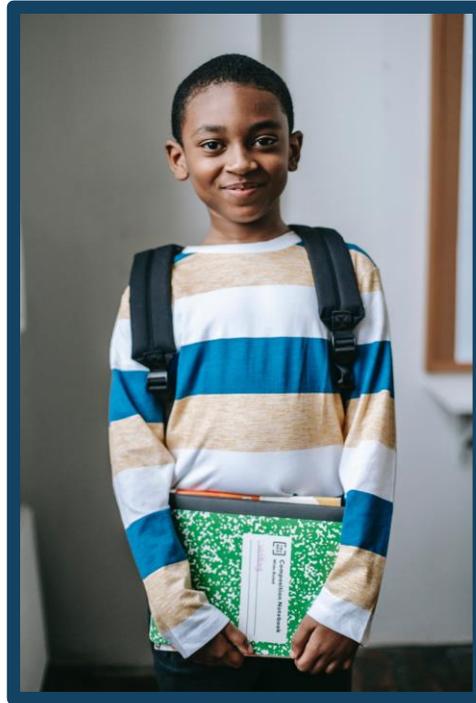


Figure 1 Photograph Photo by Katerina Holmes: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/smiling-black-child-standing-in-classroom-and-looking-at-camera-5905497/> CCO

volunteer mentors and that of youth, raises

“Findings suggested that White mentors matched with BIPOC youth showed a greater appreciation than White mentors matched with White youth for the role of discrimination in the lives of Black Americans after one year in their mentoring relationship.”

concerns regarding the potential risks associated with assigning White mentors with privileged backgrounds to work with BIPOC youth and their families. This approach might be especially problematic as an equity issue, considering that volunteer mentors often receive minimal training and support, especially in larger programs.

Highlights

There is often a mismatch between volunteer mentors' backgrounds and the diverse youth they serve.

Anti-racism training and applying a social justice framework throughout the mentor-mentee relationship may be important to their success.

Recognizing and addressing mentor biases is a step in dismantling the structural racism that may be reinforced by well-intentioned mentors who are unaware of their own biases. We examined whether and how White mentors' beliefs about discrimination towards BIPOC individuals influence outcomes in youth mentoring programs. The findings from our research can provide valuable insights for future work on the development of targeted training and support systems that help mentors navigate their biases and foster more equitable relationships with their mentees.

Methods

A large, nationwide, community-based mentoring program with chapters across the United States paired college student volunteers with elementary school youth from under-resourced schools. Self-report surveys were used to collect mentor and youth demographic information and mentors' beliefs about racial and ethnic discrimination before starting a 9-month mentoring program. Mentors were randomly assigned to mentees (this random assignment is quite unusual and allows us to eliminate some of the typical "noise" related to matching procedures in youth mentoring studies). Following one academic year (nine months) of the typical mentoring program, both mentors and mentees were surveyed about their beliefs about racial and ethnic discrimination as well as their perceptions of the mentoring relationship quality.

Results

- White mentors may enter programs without fully understanding the impact of discrimination their BIPOC mentees experience.
- White mentors' racial biases can shift over the course of working with youth in a mentoring program and can predict mentoring relationship quality. For example, we found that White mentors matched with BIPOC youth showed greater changes in their beliefs that discrimination limits opportunities for Black Americans, compared to White mentors matched with White mentees.
- Mentoring programs should assess and address mentors' racial biases to minimize harm for BIPOC youth.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

The current study's unique focus on White mentors' beliefs about racial and ethnic discrimination and the impact of these beliefs on mentoring relationships aligns with Community Psychology's emphasis on understanding social contexts and systemic challenges for marginalized groups of youth. By addressing the complexities of mentor-mentee dynamics, particularly in relation to racial and ethnic attitudes and the disparities they can perpetuate for BIPOC youth, the study underscores the importance of inclusive mentoring programs for community well-being. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for mentor training and support procedures that foster cultural sensitivity and awareness, aligning with Community Psychology's focus on promoting social justice and equity.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: There is a need for further investigation into the complex interplay between White mentors' beliefs about racial and ethnic discrimination and their actual interactions with BIPOC youth. This could involve exploring how these beliefs influence mentor-mentee conversations, mentors' goals within the mentoring relationship, and/or diverse, long-term youth outcomes. Future work should also examine effective strategies to challenge problematic racial attitudes that mentors may hold, such as research-driven mentor trainings around cultural sensitivity.

Practice: Mentoring programs may consider anti-racism training and a social justice framework to augment mentors' comprehension of systemic inequities, fostering more inclusive engagements with their mentees. For mentors encountering challenges in supporting their mentees' racial/ethnic identities, implementing regular check-in meetings can provide guidance and access to resources, bolstering mentors' ability to offer culturally responsive and effective assistance to their mentees.

Social Action: Our research findings highlight the critical need to uncover and address systemic inequalities that exist for BIPOC youth, even within well-intentioned intervention efforts like mentoring programs. These inequalities must be addressed through a combination of structural and individual-level or interpersonal interventions. For example, in addition to training mentors in anti-racism, programs can shift their recruitment processes to recruit more mentors from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

Similar Settings: Our work highlights the importance of understanding the beliefs and biases that White volunteer mentors might bring to their work with BIPOC youth, and the fact that even well-intentioned programs can inadvertently perpetuate structural racism. Therefore, it is vital for research to delve into these themes within youth mentoring to both uncover problems in our existing frameworks, as well as shape mentor screening tools and interventions that address potential biases (e.g., anti-racism training, support procedures). Ultimately, this research aims to ensure culturally sensitive and impactful mentoring for all youth.

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