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Investigating Mentors' Perceptions Of The Effectiveness Of Using Resiliency-Building Strategies Within An At-Risk Adolescent Intervention Program

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INVESTIGATING MENTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF

USING RESILIENCY-BUILDING STRATEGIES WITHIN AN AT-RISK

ADOLESCENT INTERVENTION PROGRAM

By

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Abstract

This research study seeks to enhance previous mentoring literature (Converse & Lignugaris, 2008; Cavell, Elledge, Malcolm, & Faith, 2009; Devenport & Lane, 2009) by further identifying the strategies and skills which help mentors form quality relationships and ultimately impact the resilience of at-risk adolescent mentees. Specifically, this study investigates volunteer mentors' perceptions of incorporating the positive coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation within the initial stages of the mentoring process. Participants in this study are divided into two groups: the Coping Strategies (CS) Group and the Untrained Group (UG). The CS Group mentors have been individually trained to use the aforementioned coping strategies prior to being matched with mentees. The Untrained Group consists of mentors who received no formal training. Semi-structured interviews, which were conducted between three and four months into each mentoring relationship, reveal that focusing on relationship building and creating a level of comfort and trust with mentees were viewed by mentors from both groups as the paramount objectives during these beginning stages. Active listening is identified by a majority of participants as crucial for establishing a connection between mentor and mentee, building trust within the relationship, and engendering meaningful dialogue during beginning mentor sessions. Ultimately, this study finds that active listening training can be useful for helping mentors establish the foundation for a quality mentoring relationship, as well as for the use of additional coping strategies.

Chapter One: Introduction

This research centers on volunteer mentors' perceptions of incorporating coping strategies within the mentoring process to positively impact the behavioral and academic development of identified at-risk adolescent mentees. Specifically, I focus on mentors using four strategies that have been identified in the existing research to enhance resiliency and development of adolescent youth: active listening, emotional management, conflict resolution, and the facilitation of a future orientation. In this study, I examine how these strategies are incorporated into the mentoring relationship and how mentors are able to teach their mentees to utilize these strategies to positively cope with adolescent stressors. Mentors' efforts to teach may encompass techniques such as modeling behaviors, instructing mentees on how to utilize the strategies successfully, or a combination of both. Further, the present study evaluates each mentor's perception of how the incorporation of these strategies directly or indirectly affects the academic and behavior outcomes of the adolescent mentees, as well as the quality of the mentoring relationship.

As discussed in the following chapter, a review of existing literature identifies early adolescence as a crucial transition period between childhood and adolescence. Physiological development marked by puberty, increasing egocentricity, a shift in social roles, and significant transitions in academic environments all have the potential to exert tremendous pressure on the early adolescent (Thornburg, 1983; Buchanan, Eccles, &

Becker, 1992; Caissy, 2002; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). Interestingly, it has been

asserted that today's early adolescent environment includes an increasing number of

situations in which adolescents perceive their surroundings to be antagonistic. A loss of

community in urban neighborhoods, shifts in the American family, growth of media

influences, the absence of mature guidance, increased exposure to chronic poverty, and

secondary institutions characterized by increasing control has led to an environmental

mismatch for the developmental needs of the current adolescent generation (Carnegie

Council for Adolescent Development, 1989; Peterson, Kennedy, & Sullivan, 1991;

Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). The negative effects of stresses and strains induced by

this early adolescent transition have been well documented. Stress literature has

demonstrated links between adolescent strain and low self-esteem, poor psychological

states (depression and anxiety), and negative emotionality (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-

Ford, & Blyth, 1987; Peterson et al., 1991; Larson & Asmussen, 1991). Adolescent strain

has also been associated with negative behavioral outcomes through Agnew's (1985)

general strain theory. Hoffman & Cerbone (1999) have argued that the perception of

these environmental stresses and strains tends to be magnified by this group, which can

lead to various emotional or behavioral adaptations, including at-risk behavior.

Resilience is a concept introduced by late twentieth century stress literature which

reflects a process of positive adaptation in the presence of risk (Garmezy, 1993). The

concept has been equated with effective coping strategies that result from a host of

individual factors, environmental factors, or the interplay of both. The use of positive

coping techniques, such as active listening, emotional management, conflict resolution,

and future orientation, has been identified by psychological research as important

practices linked to building resilience against sources of strain (Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 1998; Kyzer, 2001; Aronowitz, 2005). Teaching these strategies to at-risk adolescents has been correlated with positive psychological and behavioral outcomes. Learning these strategies has been associated with increases in adolescents' perceived control, increases of empathy and problem solving abilities, and can help shape their identity and increase their self-understanding (Kyzer, 2001). These outcomes have been identified as the protective processes through which resilience moderates the effects of stress (Luthar, 1991; Werner, 1993).

Mentoring has been recognized and discussed comprehensively as a strategy to enhance the resilience of youth to sources of adolescent strain (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Contemporary mentoring research illustrates that the mentoring process can be an important intervention strategy for positively affecting youth developmental outcomes, but also reveals that there are further underlying influences that may affect the likelihood of positive impact. DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly (2002) argued that the positive academic and/or behavior adjustments of a youth are often conditional on the development of a formidable bond to his/her mentor. Other existing research has primarily highlighted the length and quality of a relationship as significant indicators of a successful mentoring relationship (Dubois et al., 2002; Davenport & Lane, 2009). Nevertheless, most studies do not examine in detail the specific strategies or techniques used by mentors to enhance the quality of the relationship and foster the resilience that may lead to positive youth development. This deficiency in mentoring literature about the role and use of positive coping strategies within the youth mentoring

process has prevented adolescent behavioral researchers from identifying the underlying

mechanisms responsible for observed positive youth development.

      The goal of this study is to address this deficiency in mentoring research by

exploring some of the positive coping strategies identified in existing literature and

further investigate how these processes may be used to enhance the adolescent mentoring

process. Examining mentors' perceptions allows for a more thorough understanding of

how mentors attempt to incorporate coping strategies and under what circumstances each

is thought to be most effective. Qualitative interviews provide significant insight into not

only how these techniques may affect the mentoring relationship, but also if they have

any direct intrinsic effect on the developmental outcomes of the adolescent. The findings

of this study have the potential to provide a more detailed training framework that

mentors of adolescents can utilize to teach these adaptive strategies to at-risk youth.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

  This chapter examines the main components that frame my overall research question. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of this study by defining and describing the main topic areas. First, I will examine the nature of early adolescence, along with some major sources of stress and strain that accompany this period. The early adolescent research presented highlights the transitional nature of this developmental stage. The physical and psychological transformations experienced during early adolescence are further linked as significant sources of daily strain for youth. From there, I will proceed into an examination of early adolescent responses to strain. Strain theory will be presented as a theoretical argument for destructive responses to early adolescent stressors, while resiliency theory will be used as a theoretical argument for constructive responses. In the latter part of this chapter, strategies for facilitating positive youth development in the face of previously discussed adolescent stressors will be reviewed. Research that defines and provides empirical evidence for the success of these techniques will be presented to contribute to the greater understanding of positive coping in early adolescence. Finally, mentoring is offered as an appropriate setting for facilitating these approaches. Mentoring literature will be used to examine what is known about the mentoring process, how mentoring has been used to positively affect youth development, and deficiencies within mentoring research. At the

end of this chapter, I will present a discussion of how the use and incorporation of the aforementioned coping strategies into the mentoring process may enhance the adolescent mentoring relationship and directly or indirectly result in a greater positive youth response to early adolescent strain.

Early Adolescence: A Transition Period

The period of early adolescence is considered a relatively overlooked stage of adolescent development. The term "early adolescence" has only begun to appear in research and social services in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Because of the infancy in research, the concept of early adolescence as a developmental stage has been loosely defined throughout youth literature. Typically, early adolescence is viewed as the transient period which marks the end of childhood and may progress up to the height of adolescence; this may include young adolescents anywhere from ten to fifteen years old (Caissy, 2002). While there is no specific standard that separates the boundaries surrounding early adolescence from late childhood to mid-adolescence, those who study life maturation agree that this period is characterized by immense transformation in physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

The onset of puberty is the most pronounced feature of this developmental change. Dramatic changes in the body and physical appearance over a period of two to four years mark the onset of the physical and sexual maturation from late childhood to young adulthood. Most early adolescents are in a state of transitional growth in which they have begun physical development but have not yet completed such maturation. This physiological development is often linked to other pivotal transformations during this time. For instance, the introduction of pubescent hormones, such as testosterone and

estrogen, has been linked to heightened excitability and a more ready response to stimulation. This sharp sensitivity may result in more pronounced reactions by adolescents to their surroundings. Mood swings, a common stereotype of adolescent behavior, can be looked at as fluctuating responses among the positive and negative environmental stimuli presented to the adolescent. These physical transformations, then, play a contributing factor to the heightened emotional instability that characterizes this period. (Caissy, 2002; Thornburg, 1983; Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1992)

Another transition occurs within the social development of early adolescents. This is brought about by the youth becoming more socially curious and developing an inherent drive for autonomy. A shift in social roles and expectations as a result of physiological changes encourages early adolescents to seek more independence and question previously followed roles. During this time, individuals begin to reach outside of their family for social experiences, companionship, and approval (Thornburg, 1983). Whereas positive social learning in childhood is often characterized by the stability of parental interaction, the period of early adolescence is marked by a desire to validate this social learning though peer relationships. Early adolescents attempt to construct multiple ways of doing things, often resulting in conflict between new and old forms of socialization. As a consequence of a broadened social experience, peer influence fluctuates with parental influence as the predominant source of social authority.

In addition to these biological and psychological transformations, another important change common to early adolescent youth in industrialized nations is the transition from primary to secondary education. This transition has been characterized by critical changes in the educational environment and learning structure of the classroom.

Feldlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles (1988) revealed that the shift to secondary school often involves a transition to a less facilitative classroom environment. Because the social institution of school is a central component of youth activity, this educational transition has the capacity to profoundly affect the psychological, social, and cognitive development of early adolescents.

The transitions of early adolescence are of immense importance for a youth's development into adulthood. Very few developmental periods are distinguished by such overarching change at so many levels. The early twentieth century perspective was that such rapid change brings about a heightened potential to experience difficulty during this timeframe. Hall (1904) and Freud (1958) helped establish the belief that most adolescents experienced normative turmoil as a result of the general conditions associated with the transition from childhood to early adolescence (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Peterson, 1988). More recent research, however, has shown that the majority of adolescents are able to constructively manage the early to middle transition years without any major difficulties (Dryfoos, 1990). Most adolescents actually characterize this early transitional state as a stimulating time for exploration in identity, friendship, and intellectual opportunity.

Stress in Today's Early Adolescent Environment

There is little doubt that today's youth are faced with unprecedented developmental challenges and pressures. Adolescents are spending less time in the company of caring adults than ever before. Furthermore, the sense of community that once existed in urban neighborhoods and some rural towns has eroded in this changed America. The growth of technology and communication has also presented today's youth

with unprecedented choices. The complexity and risks associated with the decisions required of youth demonstrate a marked change from the past. A stream of daily information has increased the vulnerability of the current adolescent generation to new social authorities. The media has become a dominant source of influence for the early adolescent's fears and expectations about the future, their values, and how they interact with others. These sources also contribute to negative stereotypes of adolescents, depicting the cohort as messy, rude, and moody (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1995; Peterson, Kennedy, & Sullivan, 1991).

Clearly, adolescence can be a period of heightened vulnerability to psychological troubles. Quantitative data illustrate that in the United States the proportion of young people who experience difficulties increases during the adolescent decade. It is now believed that a sizable number of early adolescents (estimated 25% to 50%) experience this period as one of quiet distress (Peterson, 1988; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). To better understand how the transient environment of early adolescence and the social conditions of the current generation together can cause distress in a number of today's youth, it is necessary to further discuss the common sources of early adolescent stress and how adolescents perceive stress.

Sigelman & Shaffer (1995) have defined stress as an undesirable state that occurs when an individual characterizes an event as adverse to his or her coping capacities and malignant to his or her well-being. The concept of stress has been an important tool for placing research pertaining to adolescent development within the wider contexts of individual experiences and societal forces (Gore & Colten, 1991). Research has illustrated that adolescents are not strangers to the concept and are, in fact, accustomed to

dealing with a spectrum of stressors each and every day. Throughout this adolescent research, sociologists, psychologists and developmental criminologists have used and operationalized the concept of "stress" synonymously with the term "strain." For the purposes of this study, the terms stress and strain will continue to be used interchangeably.

One of the primary arenas for increasing adolescent stress is the secondary institution. Reviews of middle grade schools have illustrated that a majority of these institutions are falling short in meeting the critical educational, mental health, and social needs of this generation's adolescents. Eccles, Lord, & Midgley (1991) suggest that a mismatch between the developmental needs of the early adolescent and the current educational environment is responsible for an increased risk of experiencing psychosocial stressors. Despite this developmental stage being characterized by social curiosity and a need for increased autonomy, today's adolescents are being placed in large, impersonal institutions which actively promote an environment of increased control. The current middle school environment has further been shown to disrupt social networks and reduce the opportunity for close relationships with adults at a time when adolescents are particularly concerned with peer relationships and in need of adult role models.

Role strain, or the felt difficulty of fulfilling role obligations, has also been discussed as a possible negative consequence of the developmental transition to secondary school (de Bruyn, 2005). The difficulties associated with undertaking the new educational and social roles which accompany this normative changeover are reflected by changing expectations of teachers, parents, and peers. These changing perceptions often lead to interpersonal difficulties, role ambiguity, and role overload or under-load.

Adolescents are postulated to be particularly vulnerable to role conflict, which results from conflicting expectations of various life influences (i.e., parents, teachers, media, etc.).

The challenges associated with the adolescent transient environment of today have also been compounded by more robust economic hardship (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1989; Lichter, Qian, & Crowley, 2005; Evans, 2004; Schaefer, 2012). Increases in the final decades of the twentieth century of the number of American youth living in families under the poverty threshold have contributed to the deterioration of the cohort's economic well-being. Impoverished conditions place families and youth at a higher risk for experiencing strains associated with economic hardship. An increased level of economic deprivation for these poor youth may be considered even more indicative of the changing nature of poverty during this timeframe. As reported by the National Poverty Center, the number of children living in deep poverty (i.e., families with income 50% below the poverty threshold) has more than doubled from 1996 to 2011 (Schaefer, 2012). Poverty has become more difficult to escape and adolescents are now increasingly exposed to a chronic poverty that is characterized by more extreme adverse conditions than the transitory poverty of other generations. In addition to substandard provisions of food and shelter, the poor youth of the current generation are often disadvantaged by reduced accessibility to high-quality public and private services, reduced informal social supports, and the presentation of few developmental paths that promote a conventional lifestyle. The households of today's economically disadvantaged children are crowded, noisier, and more physically deteriorated than previous generations.

The increased exposure to the daily stressors associated with economic hardship is then compounded by low levels of support. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are defined as having weaker social ties, low interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity, and almost no mutual aid (Evans, 2004). Social support networks are often limited under these conditions, strengthening the likelihood that adolescents are dependent upon their peers for dealing with such pressures. Taken together, economic deprivation for the contemporary early adolescent has resulted in the increased likelihood of experiencing socio-emotional difficulties.

Cumulatively, research has illustrated that the current social environment in a number of families, schools, and communities do not foster the appropriate conditions for the academic, social and emotional growth of early adolescents (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Iver, 1993). Using a stage-environment fit perspective, or the notion that there is a mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded to them within their social environments, it has been found that distress associated with many early adolescents may result from this disparity between their developmental needs and the opportunities within their social world. When the early adolescent is placed in a setting not attuned to his or her needs, frustration builds and adolescent problems are amplified. The fit between an early adolescent's psychological, cognitive, and social needs and the social conditions of their environment may also contribute to how the individual adolescent responds to the transient pressures of this period. In maladaptive environments, behavioral attempts to achieve autonomy, significant changes in close

relationships, and a heightened emotional response system all have the potential to act as sources of daily aggravation for today's adolescent.

Framing adolescent stress: A developmental approach. Gore & Colten (1991) maintained that an important distinction exists within research in how adolescent stress is conceptualized and operationalized. Developmentalists typically emphasize the life stage, seeking to understand how normal life transitions and experiences can result in the distress of individuals. Physical changes associated with puberty, cognitive developments, alterations in social networks, transitions in schooling, and changes in family dynamics are viewed as the conventional developmental framework for early adolescence. In light of research conducted by the Carnegie Council, developmental theorists have avoided characterizing developmental frameworks as stressful. Instead, those who have adopted the developmental framework have focused their research on the challenges associated with these changes (Peterson et al., 1991). These theorists have also maintained that particular daily life stressors common to the adolescent may be contingent on these biological, psychological, and social developmental experiences.

Studies examining the impact of simultaneous versus sequential change in adolescence have provided prolific evidence for the developmental perspective. The effect of concurrent, multiple life changes can have a profound impact on the psychosocial health of early adolescents. Research has indicated that there are negative consequences for adolescents who experience several transitions at once, especially for girls. While both adolescent boys and adolescent girls exhibited losses in academic achievement and social participation when they experienced multiple transitions simultaneously, adolescent girls suffered significant losses in self-esteem as the number

of life changes increased. The simultaneous occurrence of pubertal changes and school transition has been found to have significant effects, illustrating that it is less challenging for adolescents to experience peak puberty after moving to secondary school. Interestingly, the timing of pubertal changes was also found to hold distinctive effects for girls. Early pubertal developments and simultaneous change were found to place girls at a higher risk for poor self-image and a depressed state. These findings revealed that there may be inherent sex differences in how adolescents are affected by pubertal changes (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987; Peterson, Kennedy, & Sullivan, 1991).

Framing adolescent stress: A life stress approach. In contrast to developmentalists, life stress researchers emphasize the non-normative stressful life events or stressful experiences that can happen to different people at different times. Within the context of early adolescence, this perspective attempts to understand how daily environmental sources of stress may function as the primary mechanisms through which major life transitions have an impact. Life stress research places significance on the daily hassles, or chronic strains and everyday annoyances that can vary in magnitude from day to day (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995; Kanner, Feldman, Weinberger, & Ford, 1987). These negative events may be the daily manifestations of broader issues and concerns of stable life features, such as social roles and personality traits. These daily stress events, or hassles, have been represented as the irritating or frustrating demands that to some degree characterize everyday communications with the environment. The transitional nature of early adolescence may serve to destabilize life features, such as family life and peer relationships, resulting in a greater manifestation of daily hassles.

Life stress research has also focused on extremely adverse life conditions that characterize the environment of a subgroup of adolescents. Social conditions such as poverty, a climate of violence, or familial homelessness are viewed by life stress researchers to be more influential in shaping adolescent mental health than developmental transitions (Gore & Colten, 1991; DuBois, Felner, Henry, & Marion, 1994). Although research findings have indicated that daily stressors were related to increased levels of psychological distress among youths from all socioeconomic backgrounds, it was found that youth who experienced multiple conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage reported a heightened vulnerability to these stressful events.

Research involving life stress has also been able to link normative life transitions during early adolescence with increases in non-normative stressors (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995; Miller, Webster, & MacIntosh, 1992). Parent-child conflicts have been identified as a source of non-normative strain stemming from overarching normative adolescent transitions. The pursuit of autonomy that accompanies pubertal change has been identified as a main source for the frequent conflict between parents and youth exhibited during this period. As adolescents increasingly assert themselves, and parents become less dominant, mild disagreements over matters such as disobedience, homework, or household chores become more frequent. Urban minority adolescents may experience other sources of daily stress, citing being pressured to join a gang and being offered sex by drug addicts for money as their most common hassles. These additional experiences may contribute to increased stress, though further research is necessary to understand the impact on psychological outcomes. Overall, these studies reveal a link between daily experiences and social-emotional functioning during this

period. The findings demonstrate that an increased frequency of daily stressors is responsible for greater emotional distress for adolescent youth.

Qualitative exploratory designs have been particularly useful at identifying the non-normative events which are perceived by adolescents to cause frustration and distress (George& van der Berg, 2011; LaRue & Herrman, 2008). Family and relationship concerns have exhibited one of the highest frequencies of distressors among adolescents, who have cited family arguments, disappointing one's parents, and having to compromise in order to keep family peace as major concerns. Contextual stressors, such as poor social conduct, have also contributed to adolescent dissatisfaction. Adolescents have highlighted lack of peer respect (teasing), bullying, and maltreatment by figures of authority as primary sources of frustration. School and its related components has also been perceived as a significant stressor, and this educational context has been viewed as responsible for inciting a number of emotions, including doubt, anger, and worry.

Taken together, developmental stress and life stress research has provided an overall framework for understanding the nature of stress and its impact on mental health during the adolescent years. From the literature presented, it is quite clear that it is in the nature of early adolescence to provoke a variety of situations, events, and experiences that may play a factor in the experience of psychological distress experienced by a large number of adolescents. It has been argued, in turn, that this heightened vulnerability to sources of stress has the capability of resulting in negative behavioral outcomes.

Adolescent Stress and Negative Outcomes: A Causal Pathway

The recent growth of adolescent stress research has caused many researchers to examine the relationship between adolescent stressors and the negative behavioral

responses which have been frequently observed during this period. Most, if not all, of these studies use Robert Agnew's revised strain theory as the theoretical background to explain these responses. In addition to prior theories of strain (Merton, 1938; Cohen, 1955: Cloward & Ohlin, 1960) which emphasized the blockage of goal achievement as a major source of adolescent frustration and anger, Agnew proposed that the inability to avoid painful or adverse situations, the inability to terminate negative environmental stimuli, and the desire to respond negatively to such stimuli may be more likely than the blockage of goal achievement to result in negative behavioral outcomes (Agnew, 1985). This blockage of pain-avoidance behavior is argued to result in feelings of frustration and constitute a major source of strain for the adolescent.

Strain and negative emotionality. Each strain experienced during adolescence increases the likelihood that individuals will experience a range of negative emotions, most notably anger (Agnew, 1985; Larson & Asmussen, 1991; Agnew, Brezina, Wright, & Cullen, 2001). General strain theory maintains that anger can be especially conducive to delinquency, because it increases an individual's level of felt injury, energizes the individual for action, lowers inhibitions, and creates a desire for revenge. The link from strain to negative affective states may be especially pertinent to adolescence, which has been previously characterized as a period of extreme emotional states.

Negative emotionality and behavioral responses. Modifying his original theory of strain, Agnew (2001) argued that the negative emotions experienced by adolescents create pressure to minimize the effects of strain, for which delinquency is viewed as one possible response. Delinquency may be a method for achieving positively valued goals, for protecting or retrieving positive stimuli, or for terminating or escaping from negative

stimuli. Agnew has postulated that a consideration of different types of strain might reveal differential effects on delinquency through negative emotionality. This is more aligned with research that focused on negative emotions as intervening mechanisms between exposure to interpersonal strain with delinquent outcomes (Agnew, Brezina, Wright, & Cullen, 2002; Bao, Haas, & Pi, 2004). The key intermediary variables of negative emotionality and low constraint (having low social control, low social support, and/or the unavailability of conventional coping resources) have been found to condition the effect of strain on delinquency, so that strain is much more likely to lead to delinquency among those high in negative emotionality and low in constraint. Anger has been found to be the most extensive causal factor to delinquency, exhibiting significant effects on delinquent outcomes. Resentment has also emerged as significantly related to delinquency. Anxiety and depression have only been positively associated with school deviance (i.e., misbehavior, poor attendance, and poor academic performance). The stronger impact of anger on more serious delinquent outcomes, and the link between anxiety and depression and minor offenses, reinforces Agnew's theoretical conjecture that negative emotionality connects strain and delinquency.

A recent study of general strain theory has examined the specific sources of strain that may lead to adolescent delinquency through negative emotionality. A study by Hollist, Hughes, & Schaible (2009) focused on the extent to which negative emotions, in the form of anger, anxiety and depression, play a role in the effect of maltreatment (child abuse and/or child neglect) on general delinquency. The authors sought to understand if a higher magnitude of this particular strain (i.e., extended duration, frequently occurring and difficult to avoid, and hard to reinterpret as inconsequential) may be more likely to

generate negative emotions and impact delinquent behavior. Findings revealed a significant association between maltreatment and all forms of delinquent behavior (i.e., general, serious, and substance use). It was also confirmed that negative emotions are key intervening mechanisms. When the effects of anger, anxiety, and depression were controlled, the effect of maltreatment on delinquency was greatly reduced. Though this study is useful for illustrating negative emotionality as a linking variable between strain and delinquency, the focus on such a severe form of strain diminishes the generalizability of such results to the general adolescent population.

  Delinquency as a coping response to strain. One of the major criticisms of general strain theory has been its inability to explain the selection of delinquent versus non-delinquent adaptations for adolescents dealing with strain. The concept of coping has strengthened general strain theory by helping researchers dispel this theoretical criticism. Agnew (2001) has reasoned that the link between certain stressors (and not others), negative emotionality, and delinquency may be a result of an individual's behavioral coping strategies that are intended to terminate, reduce, or escape from the straining events. Individual traits (interpersonal skills, temperament, etc.) are believed to influence the selection of either positive or negative coping strategies by influencing an adolescent's ability to engage in cognitive, emotional and behavioral coping. The larger social environment may also make it difficult to engage in positive behavioral coping or enhance the attractiveness of delinquent coping responses (Agnew, 2001). Agnew (2001) denoted that social support has the potential to be a deciding factor in selection of positive or negative coping behaviors. He stated that adolescents with conventional social support should be more able to respond to objective strains in a non-delinquent manner.

A few studies have found evidence for general strain theory's argument that non-delinquent versus delinquent coping selection is affected by the internal and external factors mentioned above (Mazerolle & Piquero, 1997; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000). These studies have focused on three factors presented by Agnew (1992) as influential on the selection of delinquent responses to strain: moral constraints against deviance, exposure to delinquent peers, and a behavioral propensity toward deviance. Behavioral propensity toward deviance included individual-level characteristics such as low self-control, impulsivity, and antisocial personality tendencies. Results from the above-mentioned studies have revealed that delinquency increases as levels of delinquent peer exposure and behavioral propensity increases. This is true within all categories of strain (low, medium, and high), conforming to the expectations of general strain theory. Similar findings were observed across decreasing levels of moral beliefs, as well as increasing levels of exposure to total risk which are all conditioning measures. Levels of delinquent participation were further magnified as conditioning influences moved from low to high levels. Figures for respondents who experienced low levels of strain and participated in delinquency were greatly reduced when delinquent peer exposure was also low, behavioral propensity was also low, and moral beliefs were also high; conversely, levels of delinquency individually increased when exposure to delinquent peers and behavioral propensity were high, and moral beliefs were low (Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000). In all levels of strain, the strain-delinquency relationship was augmented when risks were high and diminished when those risks were low. These results are more aligned with expectations derived from general strain theory.

A revised strain theory. Agnew (2001) has reorganized his previous argument by asserting that strain is most likely to lead to delinquency when individuals lack the internal skills and external resources to cope with their strain in a legitimate manner, are low in conventional support, are low in social control, blame their strain on others, and can be individually disposed to crime. He hypothesized that some types of strain are more likely to result in crime than other types because they influence the ability to cope in a noncriminal versus criminal manner, as well as influencing the perception of costs of noncriminal versus criminal coping. Strains most likely to result in delinquent coping are thought to be seen as unjust, are seen as high in magnitude, are associated with low social control, and create some pressure to engage in criminal coping (Agnew, 2001). Further research is required to examine the validity of which strains are more likely to result in delinquent coping strategies, as well as to identify models for how these strains can influence adolescents to cope in such a manner.

One of the primary strengths of Agnew's revised theory of adolescent strain is its flexibility with incorporating existing theories unrelated to strain into his model. The ability to cope constructively, which has been studied extensively, may serve to validate Agnew's rationale for the selection of delinquent coping behaviors. Building on previous strain theory research, Broidy (2001) hypothesized that anger and other negative emotional responses to strain are each associated with the availability of legitimate coping strategies. When controlling for legitimate coping skills, she found that strain-induced anger will increase the likelihood of using illegitimate outcomes. Broidy (2001) suggested that those who report experiencing anger and responding to strain with illegitimate coping strategies may have learned through experience that conventional

coping strategies do not alleviate this emotion. To better understand these links, it is essential to review research that has illustrated the strategies engaged by adolescents in order to adapt to sources of strain in a positive manner.

Resiliency and Positive Responses to Strain in Adolescence

"Resilience" refers to patterns of positive adaptation despite exposure to experiences or conditions associated with negative outcomes (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2002). It is necessary to understand the impact of strain, as well as the general behavioral and emotional consequences to stress, to fully understand how some individuals are able to deal with such circumstances in a productive manner (Garmezy, 1993; Kumpfer, 1999). Previously reviewed data has illustrated that environmental factors (family life, school setting, socioeconomic status, etc.) have the potential to negatively affect social development. But for the youth who do not demonstrate dire consequences as a result of exposure to multiple risk factors, adversity may serve to help these youth face new stressors and grow from the experience.

One of the theoretical weaknesses concerning resilience has been the inability of researchers to uniformly conceptualize and operationalize the concept. While early risk research tended to label youth who developmentally flourished despite being exposed to a host of risk factors as "invulnerable," more recent research has avoided using this term since it assumes that these youth are inherently stress-resistant without taking into account the changing nature of stress during this period (Garmezy, 1993). Risk research has since settled on the term "resilience," which has included more accurate representations for this aspect of human behavior. The term is descriptively appropriate

as it suggests an individual under adversity can bend, lose some power and capability, and yet subsequently recover to the prior level of adaptation.

Resilience research has typically focused on understanding the mechanisms that account for these good outcomes, including the presence of protective factors or processes which may moderate the effects of stress and risk. Dispositional attributes have been observed within resilience research as constituting a major class of protective factors. In a study that focused on a greater specification of the ways in which such variables are involved in resilience, Luthar (1991) explored a host of personality variables to help understand this relationship. An internal locus of control, or the belief that forces shaping one's life are largely within one's own control, was found to be involved in protective processes for assertiveness in the classroom (Luthar, 1991). In contrast, those with an external locus of control (the belief that forces shaping one's life are out of one's own control) demonstrated greater declines in functioning with increasing stress levels.

Environmental context has also found to be influential on risk and resilience. Evidence of both internal and external buffers is substantiated by the Kauai Longitudinal Study (Werner, 1993). The researchers examined the sample population's susceptibility to negative developmental outcomes after exposure to serious risk factors, such as perinatal stress, poverty, parental psychopathology, and disruption of family unit. They subsequently labeled about one-third of the cohort as high-risk. While over two-thirds of these individuals labeled high-risk demonstrated serious learning or behavior problems, mental health problems, and delinquency records by age ten, a sizable number of these children grew into competent, confident, and caring young adults (Werner, 1993).

This finding influenced the researchers to compare and contrast the behavior and care-giving environments of the resilient youth to those of their high-risk peers who had developed serious coping problems. The data revealed a causal pathway beginning in infancy that led to a number of protective factors which characterized the environments of the resilient youth. Resilient children were described as being more active and easy to deal with, elicited positive attention from family members and strangers, and were more advanced in communication, locomotion, and self-help skills than high-risk children. As the cohort aged, teachers reported that the resilient children remained friendlier, had better reasoning and reading skills, demonstrated many interests and engaged in more activities than their high-risk counterparts. These youth also sought and found emotional support outside of their own family, which promoted self-esteem and self-efficacy within resilient youth. Overall, the Kauai Longitudinal Study (Werner, 1993) provided a great first look at some of the protective processes that bring about changes in life trajectories from risk to successful adaptation, while also demonstrating responses to negative circumstances for this age are affected by both environmental processes and individual differences (Werner, 1993). However, this study failed to take into account individual differences in the availability of conventional coping mechanisms or the presence of negative emotionality when considering the outcomes for these youth.

In addition to protective factors and processes, resilience within youth has also been equated with positive coping. In fact, the concepts of "coping" and "resilience" have been used throughout research interchangeably, however, coping usually refers to the efforts to enact or mobilize personal resources, while resilience has referred to the successful outcomes of these efforts. Many studies have sought to examine resilience by

observing the various types of coping strategies that lead to positive outcomes when adolescents are exposed to high-risk environments (Connor-Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Thomson, & Saltzman, 2000; Compas & Wadsworth, 2002; Hampel & Peterman, 2006). Primary control coping is identified as those strategies used to directly alter a stressful problem or one's emotional reactions to it, including problem solving, emotional expression, and emotional modulation. Secondary control coping has been recognized as efforts to adapt oneself to the stressful circumstances or enduring fallout from stressors, including strategies like acceptance, cognitive restructuring, distraction, and positive thinking. Disengagement coping consists of actions that attempt to orient oneself away from a stressful circumstance or from one's emotional reactions. These strategies can include avoidance, denial, and wishful thinking.

Connor-Smith et al. (2000) found that primary and secondary control coping tend to be specifically related to lower internalizing and externalizing of problems, while disengagement coping responses to stress are related to behavioral-emotional problems. Secondary control coping was also found to be used more often and accounted for more variance in adjustment problems than did primary control coping. The success of primary and secondary control coping by adolescents, however, may be impacted by the level and type of stressor. While youth who experience family conflict have been found to adjust positively after utilizing secondary control coping, neither primary nor secondary control coping predicted fewer adjustment problems for youth experiencing economic strain. When youth experience increased economic strain and family conflict, they tend to use disengagement strategies, which have been associated with more emotional and behavioral problems. It is reasonable to assume that adolescents exposed to higher levels

of economic and family stress may choose disengagement due to the inability to mobilize

primary control strategies or due to absence of social resources available to these

children.

Incorporating Positive Coping with Adolescents

The literature on positive coping is important when considering intervention for

high-risk adolescents. It is evident that adolescents can engage in a wide range of

emotional and behavioral techniques to cope with strain. Resilience, however, has shown

to play a mitigating role in the ways that adolescent respond to strain negatively.

Teaching adolescents how to incorporate positive coping skills has the potential to

enhance their resilience. The presentation and instruction of techniques that foster coping

strategies, as well as the correction of ineffective coping strategies, may serve to enhance

the buffering effects associated to the relationship between stress and adjustment. While

there is an abundance of literature regarding strategies to enhance positive coping within

high-risk adolescents, this section focuses on four specific techniques that have been

identified to be highly successful in dealing with this subgroup: emotional regulation,

conflict resolution, facilitating future orientation, and active listening.

Emotional regulation. Originating from emotion research in the field of

developmental psychology, emotional regulation has emerged as a widely studied

independent domain observed throughout coping literature. "Emotion regulation has

referred to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when

they have them and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p.

275). Emotional regulation includes automatic or controlled strategies for monitoring,

evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2002). Some of the

specific processes involved with regulating emotions or moods can include the following: "situation selection" refers to an individual's effort to regulate emotions by approaching or avoiding certain people, places, or objects; "situation modification" constitutes active efforts to modify an event in order to alter its emotional impact and "attentional deployment" encompasses the strategies for changing emotional focus. These techniques include efforts of distraction, concentration, and rumination. Once a perceived emotional circumstance has been handled, individuals engage in "evaluation" to assess their capacity to manage the situation and make necessary modifications to the cognitive steps taken. By consciously reflecting on how situations, persons, and objects bring about negative or positive emotions, adolescents may be able to better recognize these circumstances in the future and modify the intensity of their impact.

The emotion regulatory goals of individuals often include decreasing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions. Research on emotional experiences has indicated that the development of positive emotionality may prove to be a link in the coping process of individuals in high-stress situations (Gross, 2002; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Correlations between resilience and emotion reports have indicated that high resilience is associated with more experiences of happiness and interest, as well as composite indexes of positive emotionality. The experience of positive emotions can contribute to the coping process in resilient participants by aiding in their ability to down-regulate lingering negative emotions. "Cognitive reappraisal," a tactic that is employed early in the emotion-generative process, refers to a cognitive change strategy that involves redefining a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that limits its emotional impact. Individuals who utilize this strategy are more likely to interpret

stressful events in an optimistic way and are more active in their attempts to repair negative moods. Cognitive reappraisal has been associated with greater positive emotion experience and expression, and lesser negative emotion experience and expression (Gross, 2002).

Given this link to a less negative emotional experience, Mauss, Cook, Cheng, & Gross (2003) predicted that those who use cognitive reappraisal might also be very adept at down-regulating anger emotions as well. They hypothesized that individuals who measured high on reappraisal use would self-report less anger and negative emotion experience and greater positive emotion experience than individuals low on reappraisal during anger provocation. Their data revealed a significant effect of use of reappraisal on anger experience, negative emotion experience, and positive emotion experience. High appraisers, when compared to low appraisers, reported less anger, less negative emotion, and more positive emotions; furthermore, this held true during the anger induction and at the baseline measurements. The baseline differences between high and low appraisers in anger experience reveals that even a relatively neutral context can function as a mild anger provocation for low reappraisers. The findings demonstrate that cognitively changing the way one sees an emotionally charged situation may be crucial to how an individual chooses to control his or her anger.

Though Mauss et al. (2003) established a link between emotional regulation strategies and the reduction of the negative emotional impact from high-stress situations in adolescence, studies that examine the effects of successful intervention programs that incorporate emotional regulation processes have been relatively sparse. A recent study tested the hypothesis that an emotion-based prevention program would accelerate the

development of emotion and social competence in preschool children partially fills this void (Izard, King, Trentacosta, Morgan, Laurenceau, Krauthamer-Ewing, & Finlon, 2008). The goal of emotion-based prevention is to increase young children's ability to understand and regulate emotions, utilize emotions, and reduce maladaptive behavior. Within this study, an emotion-based curriculum was added into the existing curriculum of the Head Start system, a collaborating organization designed to serve rural towns. The emotions course lessons mainly focused on four different emotions: joy/happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. Each lesson began with the teacher doing a puppet show that illustrated the gist of the lesson, followed by a period consisting of interactive games relating to aspects of the emotions. Another part of the lesson included the teacher asking the children if they would like to report to the class what in particular cause them to feel the featured emotion. The aim of this program is to help the children learn about event-emotion relations, individual differences in emotionality and emotion responding, as well as lay the foundation for empathy learning. Each lesson ended with the interactive reading of an emotion storybook designed to provide the children with the opportunity to experience the emotion vicariously.

Data from the study revealed that the emotion-based prevention program accelerated the development of emotion knowledge and emotion regulation for some of the children. The program significantly increased emotion knowledge in four-year-olds (but not younger ages) When compared to the control condition, children who participated in the program had greater decreases in negative emotion expressions, negative classroom encounters, externalizing behaviors, and anxious/depressed behaviors. While this research (Izard et al., 2008) identified a successful intervention

method for increasing emotional knowledge and emotional regulation within a school setting, its applicability to the adolescent environment is limited. It is not likely that adolescents would respond or participate in the activities that make up emotions course lessons, as the content is clearly geared towards a younger audience. Applying such a program to this age group would likely result in the mitigation of any effects on emotional regulation observed within this study. Evaluations on emotion-based courses that are geared towards the interests of the adolescent age group are needed to validate the impact of such a group-based intervention strategy on emotional regulation.

Conflict resolution. Skills involved in constructive conflict resolution processes have also been highlighted as essential for building resilience in adolescents. Though most literature has associated conflict with negative outcomes, positive functions of conflict can result in personal and social change. Deutsch (1994) argued that the conditions which give rise to cooperative or competitive social processes are central to fleshing out constructive or destructive processes of conflict resolutions. In "constructive conflict," adversaries interact to solve the problem they face together by seeking a mutually acceptable outcome and can provide a basis for ongoing relationships. To develop constructive solutions to conflicts, an individual requires skills involved in establishing a cooperative, problem-solving relationship with another and an ability to look at conflict from an outside perspective. Taking the perspective of the other, distinguishing between needs and positions, and reframing issues in conflict to find common ground, furthermore, are tools that can be used to build constructive conflict resolution behavior.

Johnson & Johnson (1994) argued that constructive controversy can be an important variable for children and adolescents learning how to manage disagreements constructively. Constructive controversy refers to an open-minded discussion of opposing views about how a problem can be solved. It is argued that this practice emphasizes intellectual disagreement and temporarily interrupts the decision making process. Constructive controversy is suggested by the researchers (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) to contribute more information to the discussion, elaborate the material being discussed, present more rationales, and make higher level processing statements. Thus, constructive controversy teaches adolescents how to make creative, high-quality decisions that integrate the best information and reasoning from both sides of the conflict.

In his doctoral dissertation, Kyzer (2001) maintained that strengthening creativity and empathy skills were also essential to an individual's ability to resolve and cope with life's conflicts. His study analyzed the empathetic and creative characteristics of adolescents in relation to the ways they resolved personal/interpersonal conflicts and adversity on a daily basis. It was expected that creativity would enhance problem solving abilities by generating novel and effective solutions to different problems. Empathy, or the tendency to be open, sensitive and considerate of others' attempts to share emotions, was thought to aid in cooperative forms of conflict resolution. His data illustrated that empathy was linked to problem solving strategies used by participants for interpersonal conflict (Kyzer, 2001). He also found a link between employing creativity and participants' perceived ability to handle and resolve conflict. Fostering the development of creative solutions for resolving conflict, as well as emphasizing empathetic feelings

towards an adversarial opponent, may be beneficial for establishing long-term constructive conflict resolution strategies in adolescents.

While this research has clearly signified the potential impact of constructive conflict resolution strategies, more data is needed that demonstrates the effectiveness of conflict training in teaching students how to manage conflicts more constructively. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell, & Fredrickson (1997) evaluated the effectiveness of teaching adolescents procedures for managing conflict constructively by reviewing a conflict resolution training program in an American suburban middle school, with 176 students grades five to nine who were randomly assigned to classes. The training program combined integrative negotiation and perspective reversal procedures. "Integrative negotiation" involved focusing disputants on finding a mutually satisfying solution to problems while "perspective reversal" focused participants on viewing a conflict from both points of view. Cooperative learning procedures, which included role playing, drill and review exercises, and small-group discussions, were used to teach the nature of conflict, how to engage in integrative negotiations, and how to mediate classmates' conflicts.

In the pre-test, most students indicated that they would have used strategies other than negotiation to resolve their conflict. In the post-test, over three-fourths of those students involved in the conflict resolution program listed the negotiation steps outlined in the program as the procedure they would use to resolve conflicts. The scores of the experimental condition were significantly higher than that of the control condition. The results indicated that middle school students can learn the procedures necessary to negotiate constructive resolutions to their conflicts and apply taught negotiation

procedures to resolve actual conflicts. More research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of applying constructive conflict training in individual or small-group situations.

Clearly, purposefully engaging constructive conflict resolution practices can influence how adolescents distinguish and interpret stressful situations. Teaching adolescents to understand alternative perspectives in conflict, to use constructive controversy within the problem solving process, and encouraging empathetic and creative decision making skills have been linked to the enhanced resolution abilities of adolescents. Employing these strategies that focus on cooperatively finding solutions to conflict can have significant positive impact on how adolescents cope with conflict in their environment.

Facilitating future orientation. Maintaining a future orientation assumes increasing importance during the transitional period of adolescence (Markus & Nurius, 1996; Nurmi, 2005). "Future orientation" is a relatively broad concept that encompasses the expectations, hopes, and fears individuals have, how far into the future such expectations are projected, how people feel about their futures, and tools they have developed to attain their goals (Markus & Nurius, 1996). It can include a wide range of cognitive processes, such as acquiring knowledge about time and the future, anticipating and estimating the likelihood of future events, planning and decision making concerning one's future and exploring future opportunities. "Possible selves" is a concept that describes an individuals' consideration of future possibilities based on past and present personal experiences and understanding of self. The term complements conceptions of

self-knowledge and represents individual's ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and future optimism and future-directed behavior.

Future orientation plays a particularly important role during adolescence as teenagers are expected to make important decisions concerning their future selves (Nurmi, 2005; Aronowitz, 2005). It is argued that adolescents who feel connected with a caring, competent, and responsible adult are able to envision a more positive future for themselves. This connection may assist adolescents to be motivated by the future, be aware of their own interests and values, have information concerning future opportunities, be able to construct effective plans, and have strategies for dealing with the problems that can occur when handling these particular challenges. Troubleshooting a problem and presenting information regarding all possible options for a situation have also been cited as meaningful in these adolescents' coping decisions. Coaching and countering stereotypes, moreover, have been found to enable youth to set higher expectations for themselves. Taken together, these behaviors have been observed to foster resilience in adolescents who had previously experienced a significant crisis in their social world.

The applicability of promoting such strategies within the adolescent environment in order to change behavior has not been studied extensively. Among the few, Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee (2002) conducted a study in which they developed a nine-week after-school activities-based intervention that focused on youths' abilities to imagine possible selves. The goal of the program was to develop a sequence of activities and tasks that would provide youth with experiences of creating and detailing more explicit possible selves. The researchers designed the program to include a small-group, active learning

paradigm within which youth could gain a sense of their own vision of the future and learn to develop strategies to help attain that vision. Three cohorts of low-income, urban African American middle school students participated in weekly after-school session over a nine week period during the school year. Intervention and non-intervention youth were compared at baseline and at year-end through in-class completion of questionnaires. Students' possible selves and strategies for attaining these expectations were assessed using open-ended probes. Results indicated that structured intervention does indeed have the capacity to shift youths' self-concepts in a positive direction, as the group who participated in the program showed significant improvements in academic motivation and engagement, and school bonds. The intervention youth also reported that less frequent trouble at school. Furthermore, focusing on positive interaction strategies that gave the youth the opportunity to see the connections between present and future at their own pace was found to be directly related to competencies in changing possible selves. The use of a small-group paradigm permits a greater likelihood for participating youth to see the connections between present and future at their own pace. Future research is needed to provide larger samples and add longitudinal perspectives to the impact of instruction on positive self-concepts.

Facilitating a future orientation incorporates cognitive processes that are essential for expanding self-concept and imagining a positive future. Optimism, hope, and how confident one is about achieving future objectives aid adolescents in developing a coherent view of the self that can increase motivation and goal attainment. Establishing and influencing these mechanisms can take on additional importance because adolescence is regarded as a period of heightened sensitivity to future endeavors. The

development of possible selves, furthermore, may be crucial steps for realizing future goals and may help shape identity and self-understanding in a period characterized by transition, stereotypes, and anxiety.

Active listening. Good listening is necessary for building the supporting relationships that help foster resiliency in adolescence (Jones, 2011). "Listening" is not just hearing, but rather involves the construction of meaning from all the signals that the speaker is sending. It is argued that good listeners get intellectually and emotionally involved with what they hear by giving complete attention to the speaker, asking relevant questions and responding to both verbal and nonverbal messages. Teachers who model good listening habits, manage the classroom well and communicate effectively all affect listening skills achievement. Such skills include watching the speaker, striving to understand, formulating questions, identifying main points, and responding to what is heard.

Good listening has also been argued to play an active role within the support process for adolescents. Supportive listening is a central mechanism of providing, perceiving, and actively receiving beneficial emotional support. Emotional support, in turn, helps another successfully cope with environmental stress (Jones, 2011). Supportive listening can differ from other types because it requires that the support listener demonstrate emotional involvement (through nonverbal cues or suggestive language) when responding to the support seeker (Jones, 2011). Jones (2011) also maintains that a centered listening approach may help the distressed individual validate his/her difficult emotional experiences by explicitly acknowledging them in conversation, and enticing elaboration on his/her current emotional state.

Myers (2000) examined listening as a therapeutic interaction in a qualitative study with five female undergraduate clients and two therapists. This study provided rich, in-depth data derived from interviews with participants. After a year of therapeutic sessions, interviewees elaborated on their experiences of being understood or listened to within their relationships with each of the therapists. The findings revealed important processes that were integral to successful communication. In particular, attentiveness and feedback were identified as important factors to the participants' experience of knowing they were being listened to and understood. Paraphrasing, clarifying, questioning, and attending to details were strategies included in this framework (Myers, 2000). The details provided by this study reinforce the value and importance of listening as a therapeutic process.

There has been very little research which reviews or evaluates programs designed to teach active listening skills to the adolescent youth. Very few programs have been designed to work with students on enhancing listening strategies, and the few that are in existence have focused primarily on college-level and pre-professional cohorts. Usually, programs focus on improving the active listening skills of those individuals who engage with adolescent youth, such as parents and education professionals. Graybill (1986) conducted a study which examined the effects of an active listening training program on parents of children between grades four and eight. The program consisted of two hour group sessions held weekly for six weeks. The counseling intervention adopted within this study focused on skill acquisition. Parental attitudes of understanding and knowledge of active listening responses were enforced through interactive readings, lectures, handouts, and discussions. Parents were instructed on how to formulate and express

active listening statements, how to incorporate active listening into natural conversation, and to use active listening when disciplining children.

Outcome measures included parental attitudes, knowledge of active listening skills, and exhibition of such skills, as well as measure of children's attitudes and behaviors. Parents who participated in the counseling program reported increases in their knowledge of how to respond to children's feelings. They also illustrated significant changes in active listening skills, rating high in both skill acquisition and usage with their children. Though this study demonstrated that parents can be taught to use active listening concepts, there was no evidence that this training affected children's attitudes or behaviors (Graybill, 1986). Also, the study did not examine the possibility that adult development of active listening strategies may reflect upon youth development of active listening. Further research is needed to understand how adults who use active listening strategies in their relationships with youth can impact the development of those youth's own active listening skills.

"Active listening" encompasses a variety of communicative skills designed to alleviate the negative affect of individuals of all ages. By demonstrating and learning proper communication skills, adolescents may be more suited for soliciting social support within their proximal relationships. The listening abilities of caregivers within these relationships, moreover, can have a significant impact on the building of resilience within these youth. By paying attention to details, maintaining eye contact, and providing crucial feedback, proximal support relationships can more effectively help adolescents cope with negative environmental crises. More research that implements and evaluates the impact

of programs designed to strengthen the active listening skills of the adolescent population is needed.

Mentoring: A Prospective Intervention for Establishing Resilience in At-Risk Youth

Resilient outcomes for adolescents are achieved by providing the skills necessary to deal with everyday stressors in a conventional manner. As evidenced in the previous section, introducing positive coping techniques has the potential to bring about these positive changes in strained adolescents by reducing the impact of negative emotionality and decreasing negative behavioral responses (Graybill, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 1997; Izard et al., 2008). Nevertheless, these research studies fail to provide a consistent and generalizable medium for providing adolescents with these indispensable tools. It is further necessary to look at some of the natural relationships held by adolescents to better understand where the instruction of positive coping skills is most beneficial for producing resilient outcomes.

One of the most extensively researched intervention strategies for promoting adolescent social support has been mentoring. According to Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam (2006), "Mentoring involves a caring and supportive relationship between a youth and a non-parental adult" (p. 692). Their research presented a conceptual model of the mentoring processes that influences developmental outcomes. It was proposed that mentoring affects youth through three interrelated processes: by enhancing youth's social relationships and emotional well-being, by improving their cognitive skills through instruction and conversation, and by promoting positive identity development. These processes influence youth development by providing opportunities for escape from daily stresses, corrective emotional experiences, and assistance with emotional regulation

(Rhodes et al., 2006). Mentoring also has the ability to alleviate some of the relationship tensions and conflicts that arise throughout development, especially during adolescence. Evidence has suggested that when youth develop engaging connections with their mentors, their capacity to relate well to others also increases. Youth may become more open and increasingly likely to solicit emotional support to cope with stressful events or chronic adversity.

Many studies have examined the positive impact that mentoring can have on the adaptation to adolescent stressors (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro, 2002). Natural mentoring relationships have been inextricably linked to more positive school outcomes and decreased problem behaviors. This can include a lesser likelihood of being a gang member, hurting someone in a fight, and risk taking. Having a mentor has also been positively associated with psychological well-being outcomes, including reported levels of high self-esteem and high life satisfaction (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005). Even more impressive is that these positive effects have held true under both compensatory (positive factors in an adolescent's life may counteract or neutralize the effects of risk factors) and protective (factors may modify the relationship between risks and outcomes) models of resiliency. Having a mentor has been found to partially offset the effect of negative peer influence for problem behaviors and school attitudes, while the mentoring relationship was found to modify the effects of risk factors on school attitudes. While it has been shown that mentor relationships have direct effects on behavioral outcomes, it has also been suggested that the role of indirect effects can be crucial for helping adolescents avoid negative influences (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro, 2002).

While the above research has identified the positive impact that a mentoring relationship can have on an adolescent youth, mentoring research, as a whole, is inconsistent. This variance has prompted mentoring researchers to evaluate the characteristics of successful mentoring relationships in an effort to better identify how mentoring can lead to resiliency within these youth. The longevity of the mentoring relationship has been found to be an important mediating factor underlying the beneficial outcomes from mentoring (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005: Rhodes et al., 2006). Because a personal connection is at the heart of mentoring, sufficient time is needed for the relationship to develop and unfold. When compared to adolescents who were in relationships that terminated early, adolescents engaged in mentoring relationships that lasted a year or longer have reported significant improvements in the areas of self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, parental relationship quality, school value, and decreases in drug and alcohol use. Research has suggested that long-term ties provide opportunities for stronger and more influential bonds to develop between mentors and youth.

Other studies have focused on the relationship quality as an important factor in determining the aforementioned positive outcomes of mentoring. For example, Cavell, Elledge, Malcolm, & Faith (2009) investigated the degree to which the quality of the mentoring relationship predicted outcomes for aggressive children in two different mentoring programs, PrimeTime and Lunch Buddy. Primetime was a multi-component intervention that combined community-based mentoring, parent and teacher consultation, and problem solving skills training. The Lunch Buddy program involved school-based mentoring in which children were paired each semester with a different mentor who

visited twice weekly during scheduled lunch times. The sample for this study included 145 children from over thirteen different public schools who matched a behavioral description of an aggressive child. Participation in the project spanned two academic years, ensuring that any data obtained related child outcomes to relationship quality would not be confounded by variability in the duration of mentoring. Measures of behavior difficulties, mentor relationship support, mentor relationship conflict, and teacher student relationship support and conflict were collected using child, mentor, and teacher reports. These outcome variables were assessed pre-treatment, post-treatment, and at one and two year follow-ups, enabling the researchers to observe any lasting impact from the mentoring relationships.

As originally predicted, the children in the Lunch Buddy program rated their mentoring relationships as less supportive than did children in the PrimeTime program. In addition, relationship quality predicted parent-rated outcomes, but only for children in the PrimeTime program. PrimeTime children who reported lower levels of conflict in the mentoring relationship were rated by parents as better behaved immediately following the interventions, and PrimeTime children whose mentors reported higher levels of relationship support were rated by parents as better behaved at the follow up periods. PrimeTime mentors and mentees were also found to hold more similar perceptions of relationship quality when compared to Lunch Buddy mentors and mentees. Researchers maintained that extensive training and supervision enabled PrimeTime mentors to preserve relationship satisfaction in the face or conflict. Forming and sustaining a quality relationship can be considered an important factor in a mentor's ability to impact variables associated with resilience within these youth (Cavell et al., 2009). Overall

findings extended previous research that has suggested a link between the quality of

mentoring relationship and treatment outcomes for adolescents. The sample utilized can

be considered a strength of this study as evidence supporting mentoring programs for

aggressive children is particularly hard to find. The use of student, mentor, and teacher

reports, furthermore, allowed for an extensive review of outcome variables which

distinctively depict the impact of mentoring relationship quality. While this research

serves to extend previous literature on the effects of the duration of mentoring

relationships, the use of relationship quality as an independent variable offers only a

partial view of how the many processes operating within mentoring help enable positive

youth development.

Very few studies have inspected the actual strategies that mentors use to enhance

the quality of the mentoring relationship. A study conducted by Converse & Lignugaris

(2008), which investigated the impact of a school-based mentoring program on academic

and behavioral outcomes for at-risk youth, has provided some insight into the underlying

mechanisms may be responsible for the development of such quality relationships. The

study centered on sixteen at-risk students who were referred to the mentoring intervention

program based on disciplinary behavior. Mentors consisted of thirteen faculty and staff

members who volunteered to participate in the program. These mentors participated in

two training sessions that reviewed effective mentoring practices, effective

communicating through active listening, and trust building. The training required mentors

to role play five active listening skills, including eye contact, open body language,

resistance to distractions, paraphrasing, and mirroring questions. The program facilitator

also provided biweekly training refreshers and idea sharing via e-mail during the

eighteen-week mentoring intervention. Semi-structured interviews were conducted following the mentoring period that targeted mentors' overall impression of the program, which training elements were particularly beneficial, and if mentees had commented to their mentors about the mentoring program.

The data reported illustrated that the most common activities during mentoring sessions included talking about school, talking about non-school topics, mentor listening, sharing food, playing a game, and helping with homework (Converse and Lignugaris, 2008). Mentors who depicted the quality of their relationship in a positive light reported more incidents of listening to their mentee talk, sharing food, and playing games categories. It was found that the mentors who more frequently used active listening skills during mentoring had more successful interactions with mentees than mentors who used guided icebreaker activities. These mentors frequently reported relaxed sessions in which the conversation seemed to flow. Information from this study revealed that a more flexible, mentee driven session, in which the mentor takes on the role of active listener, is likely to lead to a more quality mentoring relationship. Because this study included only a small number or mentors and mentees from one mentoring program in one junior high school, however, these results need further testing for wider applicability. Replication of this study using various school settings, demographic areas, and age groups will help advance these findings.

Davenport & Lane (2009) also conducted a study seeking to identify factors that impact the mentor-mentee dynamic by evaluating a longitudinal mentoring intervention designed to enhance to the coping skills of youth athletes. The authors maintained that adolescent athletes were a suitable selection for this study because they can be

susceptible to experiencing a number of potential stressors that are related to sport, academics, social relationships, and developmental issues. The study population consisted of twelve volunteer players from an under-seventeen junior national netball squad. Interesting enough, mentees collectively identified volunteer mentors who would facilitate the coping intervention. Mentors attended a training day where facilitators prepared them for their role and provided an opportunity to ask questions and meet fellow mentors. Telephone and/or e-mail contact, moreover, was maintained with mentors every couple months to offer support, provide an opportunity for questions, and monitor progress. Qualitative data was collected in two ways for this study. Mentors and mentees were asked to submit a monthly diary in which each reflected on the coping skill addressed and the mentoring relationship. Individual interviews with mentors and mentees also provided information on skills linked to effective mentoring and recommendations intended to enhance the mentoring interventions.

In-depth interviews with eight mentees indicated that mentor qualities such as understanding, approachable, friendly, supportive, good listeners, genuine, and someone older/having authority contributed to establishing an effective relationship. Mentors, in addition, identified the qualities of understanding, approachable, good listener, knowledge of issues/experience, adaptable/flexible, encouraging, supportive, empathetic, impartial patience, and able to inspire/motivate as those that aided the quality of their relationship. A number of athletes commented that mentors were particularly effective when they acted as a sounding board, by providing emotional and instrumental support during difficult times. The amount of time spent with a mentor was also perceived to be a highly influential factor by all participants in terms of coping gains and personal

satisfaction. Overall this study provides some support for mentor characteristics which may contribute to form a quality mentor partnership. Allowing mentees to take part in the selection of mentors differentiates the design of this intervention from typical mentoring programs. However, though this study was able to explore and identify specific mentor characteristics which may have an impact on the quality of the mentor relationship and subsequent resilience outcomes for youth involved, specific strategies or mechanisms that are naturally utilized by mentors within the mentoring process which may also contribute to such effects were not addressed. As such, more research is needed that reviews those strategies and skills mentors use to enhance their relationships and foster coping behaviors in mentees. This body of knowledge is crucial for understanding the mechanisms mentors use to influence adolescent youth's behavior, thus helping to further create intervention strategies that are successful at building resilience with youth.

Conclusions

Research in this chapter has illustrated that today's early adolescent environment is characterized by difficult transitions, anxiety, and an increasing number of environmental risks. Strain has been labeled as an important apparatus for demonstrating the effects of both individual experiences and societal forces on social development during the adolescent years (Gore & Colten, 1991). Stress research has illustrated that adolescents are not strangers to the concept of strain and are, in fact, accustomed to dealing with a spectrum of stressors each and every day. Though literature has indicated that most adolescents are able to navigate through this transitional environment successfully, these environmental stressors have been linked to a number of negative psychosocial outcomes for some individuals. These outcomes have included poor self-

image, depressed state, a greater experience of negative emotions, low perceived social competence, and low friendship support (Peterson et al., 1991; Larson & Asmussen, 1991; Kanner et al., 1987. General strain theory (Agnew, 1985) further maintained that increasing experience of negative environmental stimuli places adolescents at a greater risk for negative behavior outcomes. It has been argued that stresses and strains act on psychosocial behaviors by broadening the range of negative emotions experienced (Agnew et al., 2002).

One of the major criticisms of strain theory has been its inability to explain the selection of delinquent versus non-delinquent adaptations for adolescents dealing with strain. A resilience framework and positive coping strategies have been presented as mediating influences between strain and the behavioral adaptations of adolescents (Agnew, 1992; Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000; Broidy, 2001). Effective coping by adolescents, which can be brought about by the presence of protective factors or processes, has been observed to moderate the effects of stress and risk on these negative behavioral outcomes (Compas et al., 2001). Literature has illustrated that these mechanisms are significantly interrelated with the psychosocial adaptations of adolescents to environmental stressors (Connor-Smith et al., 2000; Compas & Wadsworth, 2002). A review of strategies designed to enhance specific positive coping techniques has further pointed to the capacity of mentors to influence adolescents' resilient behaviors.

Mentoring has been discussed as a progressive intervention strategy for enhancing these behaviors. Studies have noted that the mentoring process can have significant influences on adolescents' adaptation to stressors (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005;

Zimmerman et al., 2002). While a few studies have identified the length and quality of the mentoring relationship as distinguishing factors that affect the capacity to build resilience, few studies have identified and associated the specific strategies and skills used by mentors to influence adolescent coping behaviors.

The present study seeks to fill a void in the literature about the specific approaches used by mentors to build resilient qualities in at-risk adolescents. The study focuses on the four specific strategies previously identified as successful for enhancing coping behaviors: emotional regulation, conflict resolution, facilitating future orientation, and active listening. Observing mentoring relationships that utilize these approaches effectively will provide a first-hand account of the mediating effects of these processes within a socially supportive relationship. These understandings may aid in the design of future intervention programs designed to build resilience in adolescents who face multiple environmental risk factors.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

   The goal of this study is to identify mentoring strategies which are successful in fostering quality mentoring relationships, along with resiliency among at-risk youth. This chapter describes the methods utilized within this research to explore mentors' perceptions of applying four identified positive coping strategies found to be useful when working with at-risk adolescents: emotional regulation, conflict resolution, future orientation, and active listening. The methods are designed to gain a better understanding of how mentors choose to apply such strategies within their relationship, when and how such strategies can be beneficial, if the inclusion of such approaches leads to more positive mentoring relationships, and if mentors link the use of such strategies with resilient outcomes for their at-risk mentees.

   Qualitative methods are the main source of data for this study. Semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to express their perceptions and ideas in their own words, making this format ideal for identifying how the training and use of such techniques are perceived by mentors to impact their relationships and mentees (Esterberg, 2002). Information collected from these interviews will be useful for identifying the central characteristics of the resiliency-building strategies which are perceived to be responsible for changes observed in adolescent risk behaviors. The qualitative approaches provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of coping strategies on the

mentoring process and the at-risk youth being mentored. In the remainder of this chapter, these methods will be discussed in detail.

Population and Setting

The principal investigator was referred to a volunteer mentoring program that deals directly with at-risk adolescents in a school setting. For the purposes of this project, the program will be known as "Scholastic Mentors." The program was located in a metropolitan area in Northeast Florida and served middle school adolescents from primarily low socioeconomic neighborhoods (average income below poverty level). After spending six months observing the program and volunteering as a mentor, the researcher contacted the Project Manager for the Scholastic Mentors program and solicited permission to conduct a study with the consent of their volunteer mentors. A letter was secured from the program's Executive Director providing authorization for participation in recruiting participants, for use of their facility as the setting for the interviews, and for access to select files (See Appendix A).

Methodological Approach

This section explains the methodology used within this study. It begins by describing the qualitative aspect of this study, including sample details, the qualitative data source, and a description of analysis.

Qualitative methodology. The purpose of this research was exploratory, with an end goal of gaining insight as to how the introduction of coping strategies may serve to enhance mentoring relationships and further impact positive outcomes for adolescent mentees. The qualitative research vehicle is semi-structured, in-depth interviews with mentors of at-risk adolescents at Scholastic Mentors. In-depth interviews are an effective

tool for understanding the social processes within the mentoring dynamic. The semi-structured nature of these interviews also enhanced the researcher's ability to explore this topic by creating an open exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Guiding questions, discussed in more detail below, were used to facilitate the understanding of how resiliency-building strategies are engaged and implemented by mentors, what types of situations or adolescent stressors they were applied to most effectively, and how mentors perceived the impact of using such strategies. The interviewee's responses, however, shaped the order and structure of each interview.

The in-depth interviews for this study centered around two groups of mentors. Mentors in first group, the Coping Strategies group (CS group), were individually trained in four resiliency-building strategies before the start of the mentoring process: active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and facilitating future orientation. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, these four coping strategies have all been correlated with increases in adolescent pro-social behaviors (Gross, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Aronowitz, 2005; Jones, 2011). The trainings lasted about forty-five minutes to an hour and took place at the end of the first month of school. The CS group mentors were given a handout detailing these four positive coping strategies (see Appendix C), and during the training the principal investigator explained how these four strategies have the capacity to enhance resilient outcomes in adolescent youth. Each strategy and its theoretical basis were carefully reviewed by the researcher with the CS Group mentors. Each positive coping strategy was defined, its key features highlighted, and a range of possible applications of these strategies within the mentoring process was presented. Examples of situations in which the strategies could be utilized were also

discussed. Mentors were asked if they understood each concept presented within each strategy before the researcher moved on to the next technique. The CS Group mentors were not given any instruction on how they should implement the strategies, but were simply asked to employ the strategies within their relationship to the best of their ability. These mentors was asked to take notice throughout the semester to the employment of these strategies within their relationships, including details that highlighted how they were applied, the timing of their use, situations in which the strategies proved useful/not useful, and mentors' own perceptions about using such strategies within the mentoring process. They were also told to contact the researcher throughout the semester if any further questions or concerns arose about the use of these strategies.

Mentors in the second group, known as the Untrained group, comprise the rest of the interviewees. Mentors in this group were given information about the purpose of the study, but received no information or training regarding the four resiliency-building strategies. The Untrained group helped to determine the extent to which coping strategies are organically engaged (or not) within mentoring relationships, and uncover any other processes that may be useful in fostering positive mentoring relationships and resilient youth outcomes.

Recruitment. Because of the limited number of volunteer mentors working at each school within the Scholastic Mentors program, participants were selected using convenience sampling techniques. Mentors from two participating schools in the Scholastic Mentors program, both located in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, were used for this research project. Participants in the CS group were recruited from one school while participants from the Untrained group were recruited from the other school.

The use of two different schools ensured that the two groups were highly unlikely to be in communication in regards to the resiliency-building strategies. Originally, it was projected that eight to ten mentors from one school would be utilized for the CS group, and eight to ten mentors from the other school would be designated as the Untrained group. In total then, there was expected to be between sixteen and twenty volunteer mentors interviewed, all of which had participated in the Scholastic Mentors program over the preceding semester.

The "Program Advocates," employees of Scholastic Mentors located within the school setting, agreed to be the point of contact for securing interviewees. The Program Advocates are responsible for maintaining communication with mentors designated to their school, effectively pairing those mentors with at-risk adolescents on their caseloads, and tracking their adolescent student's risk outcomes throughout the school year. This position in the agency enabled Program Advocates to be active and efficient interviewee recruiters for this study. They initiated recruitment by informing prospective mentors about the study at the beginning of the school year. Program advocates then explained to mentors that the study was part of a graduate thesis research project, the goal of the study was to better understand some of the factors that are responsible for successful mentoring relationship and positive youth outcomes, and that participation would include an initial training and then, following the first semester, an interview.

If a mentor expressed interest in participating, Program Advocates informed the researcher and arranged for a time to meet the mentor prior to being matched with a student mentee. The principal investigator met with each mentor before being matched to further outline the purpose and requirements of the study, answer any questions about the

study, and exchange contact information. As mentioned previously, mentors in the CS group were also trained in the four positive coping strategies, and asked to implement such strategies within their mentoring relationships. Mentors were told to either contact the Program Advocate or the researcher for any further questions regarding participation in the study. The Program Advocates sustained weekly contact with the participants to ensure interest was maintained and communicate any changes in willingness to participate to the principal investigator.

Participants. A total of thirteen mentors were interviewed with seven in the CS Group and six in the Untrained Group. Due to changes during the semester-long mentoring process (discontinuing relationships, discontinuing interest in participating in research, etc.), this number was less than projected, but still provided substantial in-depth interview data for the study. Each of these mentors were assigned to a same-sex, early adolescent who was entering the sixth grade and had been designated as "at-risk" by the Scholastic Mentors program based on academic, behavioral, or family counseling referrals.

Data about participant age, gender, and race collected during qualitative interviews were used to construct frequency distributions to better highlight the demographics of the sample mentor population. The average age of the sample population was 42. The youngest mentor (minimum) was 19 years of age while the oldest mentor (maximum) was 64 years of age. Concerning gender, 38.5% (five mentors) of the participants were female while the remaining 61.5% (eight mentors) were male. Of the thirteen mentors interviewed, 76.9% (ten mentors) were identified as Caucasian while the remaining 23.1% (three mentors) were identified as African-American. Prior experience

with mentoring relationships varied among those interviewed. While only two mentors reported being a mentee during their own adolescence, every interviewee recounted having mentor-like influences on their path to adulthood. Six interviewees reported having at least one year's experience as a youth mentor, five interviewees had no prior experience as a mentor for adolescents, and two interviewees had prior experience tutoring adolescents. Each mentor was asked to provide a pseudonym for use in the final paper. Below are their selected names and a brief description of each subject.

Ms. Jones (CS group): a 59-year old Caucasian female. Ms. Jones grew up in a small town and reported having a good family foundation, despite her parents' divorce when younger. She was especially close to her grandmother growing up and described her as loving, caring, and charitable. Ms. Jones had prior experience as a mentor in a community-based mentoring organization. Her motivations for volunteering included an affinity for working with the early adolescent age group and being approached by her employer.

Chelsea (CS group): a 19-year-old African-American female. Chelsea was raised in a low socioeconomic neighborhood in a single parent home. She described her childhood as difficult, stating that she did not always have a great relationship with her mom and was frequently in trouble for behavior at school. During her childhood, she became close with her grandmother, who taught her how to act in different situations and to always keep an open mind. Chelsea did not have any prior experience in a mentoring relationship. Her motivations for joining the program included an affinity for volunteering and having extra time.

Jake (CS group): a 34-year-old Caucasian male. Adopted at a young age, Jake stated that was raised by very caring, wonderful parents. As an adolescent, Jake had a mentor who not only helped him improve his academics, but taught him how to act professional. He has served various roles within the social service realm as a foster parent and an adolescent sports-based mentor. Jake decided to volunteer with the Scholastic Mentors Agency because they were easy to access when compared to other agencies.

Stein (CS group): a 31-year-old Caucasian male. Stein grew up in a two-parent household in a suburban middle-class neighborhood. He described his upbringing as easygoing, stating that his immediate family helped him appreciate the good and stay clear of the bad. Stein reported having several law enforcement figures as positive influences when younger through his experience as a volunteer. His prior experience as a mentor included working with a police-based mentoring program that was geared towards middle school students. His decision to volunteer with this organization was based off the requirements for a current scholarship.

Shirley: (CS group): a 54-year-old Caucasian female. Shirley described her upbringing as difficult, stating that her mother was mentally ill and she was responsible for taking care of her siblings at an early age. She reported being closely bonded to her aunt, who she described as somebody to talk to and support her through normal growing pains. Shirley had prior experience as a mentor in an inner-city community-based program. She decided to volunteer as a mentor because her kids no longer needed her as much and she wanted to work with youth.

Mr. Nice Guy (CS group): a 32-year-old African-American male. Mr. Nice Guy was raised in a middle-class suburban community in a two-parent household. He reported

having close mentoring-like relationships with a few of his teachers while in school. Mr. Nice Guy had one year's experience as a mentor with the Scholastic Mentors program before this study. Giving back to the community and helping a youth on his/her journey through life were cited as reasons why he decided to volunteer as a mentor.

Yuri (CS group): a 22-year-old white male. Yuri came from a stable two-parent family and was raised in a small town. He reported having an aunt and uncle who were influential to his growth and development. According to Yuri, his aunt and uncle helped him to keep an open mind and showed him the world outside of their small town. Though he has had no prior experience as a mentor, Yuri was involved in peer tutoring programs during high school and middle school, in which he helped younger students with academic work. He decided to volunteer with the Scholastic Mentors program because he missed tutoring and wanted to give back to the community.

Cameron (Untrained group): a 26-year-old Caucasian male. Cameron was raised by his mother in a middle-class, suburban neighborhood. Though his parents divorced when he was young, he reported having positive relationships with both his mother and father. Cameron stated that several teachers and ROTC commanders were sources of positive influence when he was younger. Prior to this study, he did not have any experience as a mentor. Cameron mentioned free time and wanting to give back to youth as reasons he decided to volunteer as a mentor.

Amanda (Untrained group): a 63-year-old Caucasian female. Amanda reported growing up in a stable household in a suburban, middle-class neighborhood. Her ballet instructor was influential in her development, helping to her to exhibit poise in social situations. Though she has worked with youth prior to this study, she has no prior

experience as a mentor. Amanda stated that she became horrified when reading some of the statistics about youth drop-out rates and decided that she would like to volunteer as a mentor in her spare time.

Alex (Untrained group): a 27-year-old Caucasian male. Alex described his youth as easygoing, despite his parents' divorce at age ten. He stated that his grandmother was a strong influence on him growing up as she was responsible for his home-schooling. Alex mentioned that she helped engender his faith and provided a strong moral compass. Prior to this study, Alex had no prior experience as a mentor. His motivations for becoming a volunteer with the Scholastic Mentors program included becoming aware of the need for mentors in the community and the time commitment being compatible with his schedule.

Jeff (Untrained group): a 64-year-old Caucasian male. Jeff was raised in a two-parent household in a rural neighborhood with five brothers. He remembered his adolescence as a positive experience, stating that he had great relationships with both parents. Jeff reported a few mentor-like relationships with his teachers during junior high, but he had never participated in any mentoring programs. Before this study, Jeff had no prior experience as a mentor. He decided to volunteer with the Scholastic Mentors program because he had some extra time after retiring and wanted to give back to his community.

John (Untrained group): a 62-year-old African-American male. John recalled being raised in a stable two-parent household in a working class neighborhood. He noted that he had a great relationship with an English teacher during adolescence, and remembered her as being instrumental in his affinity for reading. He was also especially close to his pastor who influenced him in a spiritual manner. John reported having prior

experience as a youth tutor, but had never been involved in a mentoring relationship before this study. He decided to volunteer as a mentor because he recognized a need in the community and thought that he could positively influence and motivate a young adolescent.

Marie (Untrained group): a 55-year-old Caucasian female. Marie had a somewhat challenging upbringing, growing up in a household with seven other children and abruptly transferring from private to public education during her early adolescence. She conveyed that a couple of teachers from her Catholic school had a positive influence on her, from developing her interest in mathematics to providing a prime example of consistency, fairness, and professionalism. Marie reported having one year of experience with the Scholastic Mentors program before this study. Marie was influenced to become a mentor because of a city-wide campaign to attract youth mentors. She also believed that the time obligation would fit her schedule.

Setting. Interviews were typically conducted within the school where the mentor volunteered. Program Advocates provided access to a private, quiet portable conference room or school media center. In a few cases, at a mentor's request, an interview site of the local coffee house was deemed more convenient. Interviews lasted an average of one hour.

Protection and consent. Before initial matching with mentees, the study was explained to the mentors in both groups at their respective school locations to secure interview arrangements for later in the year. Interviews were audio recorded onto an iPad with the voluntary permission of the participants. Once the interview began, the recording application on the iPad was turned on until the interview concluded. The Institutional

Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Florida approved this project (see

Appendix E). Participants were read a form of consent at the beginning of each interview

(see Appendix B) that explains participation in the interview was voluntary and that the

subject could end the interview process at any time without any repercussions. The

confidentiality of information about the subjects as well as information about the

subject's mentee was assured, and contact information for the IRB at UNF was provided

to participating mentors in case of future questions or concerns. Participants each signed

the document if they agreed to the following questions:

- I have read and I understand the procedures described herein.

- I agree to participate in the interview.

- I am 18 years of age or older.

   The interview. The interview was structured by Guiding Questions. There were

two sets of Guiding Questions with slight differences as appropriate for the CS Group

and the Untrained Group. Specifically, areas such as the mentor's background,

motivations for mentoring, a typical mentoring session, sources of mentee stress/strain,

and the mentor's perceptions were the same in both sets of Guiding Questions, but

questions dealing with the mentor's use of coping strategies differed between the CS

Group and Untrained Group (See Appendix D for the entire set of Guiding Questions for

both groups). Questions regarding the participant's background focused on information

pertaining to his or her childhood, positive influences within his or her life, the

community in which he or she grew up, prior experience with the mentoring process,

reasons for volunteering, and any preconceptions about being a mentor. Participants were

also asked to provide a detailed account of a typical mentoring session. When it came to

questions about stress, participants were asked about some of the problems faced by their mentees.

Questions dealing with the mentee's use of strategies differed between the CS and Untrained Groups. The questions for the Untrained Group generically asked about strategies or skills used by the participants throughout the mentoring process, how the mentees generally responded to the use of these strategies, and how the subjects' approaches changed over time. The questions for the CS Group specifically focused around the four resiliency-building strategies (active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and facilitation of future orientation) that these participants were instructed to use within their mentoring relationship at the beginning of the study. These questions centered on the participant's personal definition of each strategy, how the participants incorporated each strategy into the mentoring process, and the participant's perceptions of how the mentee responded to the use of these strategies. Finally, questions pertaining to the participant's perceptions of developmental outcomes of his or her mentee for both groups concentrated on any observed behavioral or academic changes of the mentee. Within this group of questions, CS Group mentors were asked to what extent those changes could be attributed to the strategies incorporated within the mentoring process.

Guiding Questions served as a general outline for the interview and were followed up by typical probes used in in-depth interviews to uncover a more detailed account of the mentor relationship, the use of the coping strategies, and perceived impacts. Consequently, initial questions evolved based on the responses received by each subject. This type of semi-structured interviewing allows a respondent the time and scope to talk

about their opinions on a particular subject while allowing the researcher some discretion in guiding the focus and exploring areas of interest (Esterberg, 2002).

Interview analysis. The principal investigator transcribed the narratives from the recordings and uploaded each transcription onto a secure University of North Florida server. The narratives were typically transcribed within twenty-four hours after the interview, and were uploaded onto the secure server within eight hours of transcription. Following transcription, the researcher read and reviewed thoroughly to become familiar with the data. Open coding (Esterberg, 2002) was initially used to distinguish themes or categories that might be present throughout the transcripts. This coding process involved organizing significant motifs from the interviews into categories. After categories begin to emerge, focused coding (Esterberg, 2002) was used to distinguish specific examples of major themes within the interview transcripts. The objective of focused coding is to identify recurrent patterns and outline interconnections among sub-themes within the general topic. Each identified theme was linked with a color key. Information and quotes central to each motif were highlighted in the transcripts with the appropriate code to help the researcher easily identify information. These coding strategies have been shown to make patterns more easily identifiable, as well as lead to rethinking of the general topic (Hsiung, 2010).

Limitations

Like all research, this study has limitations. For instance, information obtained about the mentors in the qualitative interviews is indicative of mentors at this particular school, and in this particular program. The goal of this qualitative research, however, is to be exploratory and rich rather than generalizable. This work gets at a deeper

understanding of the mentor/mentee relationship and the ways that strategies are engaged within this dynamic at the organization Scholastic Mentors. It does not necessarily apply to the entire population of at-risk youth, mentors or mentees.

Finally, while the three observed variables marking risk behavior (grades in math and language arts, number of absences, and number of behavioral referrals) used by the Scholastic Mentors program have all been associated with school-related risk behavior, these three measurements do not encompass the entirety of risky adolescent conduct. Behavior outside of the school setting was beyond the scope of this study. This research focuses on the effects of school risk behavior only.

Conclusions

As previously stated, the goal of this research was to explore some of the social processes within the mentoring dynamic. As such, it was necessary to take a qualitative approach to fully understand the perceptions of volunteer mentors who participate in such relationships. Qualitative interviews were viewed as an appropriate vehicle for uncovering a depth of information about the characteristic of the early mentoring relationship environment, as well as the engagement of positive coping techniques within the mentoring process. The semi-structured nature of these interviews, furthermore, highlighted the variety of ways in which these strategies can be utilized by allowing a more open exchange between interviewing mentors and the researcher. Ultimately, this approach provided direct knowledge about some of the intricacies of the adult/youth mentoring relationship, as well as intimate perceptions of the strategies and skills utilized by mentors to positively impact adolescents.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The following chapter discusses the findings from the in-depth qualitative interviews and descriptive statistics analysis conducted for this study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with information about the participants of this study, as well as their perceptions about their mentoring relationships, the four identified coping strategies, and the impact of both on behavioral outcomes of their mentees. First, I will examine the participating mentors' backgrounds, highlighting details such as demographics, prior experience with mentoring, and expectations for their mentoring relationships. From there, I will identify commonalities in the setting and structure of the mentoring relationships. This section will overview where sessions typically took place, what type of activities were engaged by mentoring pairs, and how sessions naturally progressed. In the latter part of this chapter, I will go into detail about the four identified strategies used by the CS (Coping Strategies) Group: active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. The discussion of CS Group mentors' perceptions will illustrate how mentors use the strategies in their mentoring relationships, the impact of such strategies on the mentoring relationship and youth behavioral outcomes, and the applicability of such strategies within this type of relationship. I will also identify any additional strategies CS Group mentors found to be useful for mentoring at-risk youth. I will address how the Untrained Group mentors

facilitated their relationships and produced resilient outcomes for their mentees. This section will demonstrate to what extent Untrained Group mentors naturally incorporated the identified coping strategies into their relationships, as well as identify any additional strategies found to be useful in this type of relationship. Finally, I will cover Untrained Group mentors' perceptions of the impact of the mentoring relationships on youth behavioral outcomes. Within the conclusion of this chapter, I will present a discussion of the themes which have emerged from these findings.

Mentor Backgrounds

Guiding questions used in the qualitative interviews were designed to elicit a detailed depiction of each mentor's background. The background variables which emerged through the data as having an impact on mentors' current relationships are discussed below.

Prior experience. At the time of the interview, six mentors reported having at least one year's prior experience mentoring adolescent youth as a part of an intervention program. Two mentors, additionally, reported having at least one year's prior experience tutoring adolescent youth as a part of scholastic programs. The remaining five mentors interviewed had no prior experiences working with adolescent youth in this type of environment. During interviews, mentors reported on prior relationships with adolescents and discussed how experiences and knowledge about role expectations were able to generate a positive impact on the current mentoring relationship.

One of the most frequently cited lessons from these previous relationships was the altering of role expectations as a mentor. Jake, for instance, discussed how his prior experience as a mentor had taught him that he would not always be able to solve every

problem he came across. When asked what he took away from his prior experiences as a mentor, Jake stated, "I definitely learned through working in social services that there is a lot of grey, and that you know, sometimes, you just have to have the strength to not be able to solve the problem." Yuri discussed how his previous experiences working with youth humbled his preconceptions about the responsibilities of a mentor. Rather than expecting to be the catalyst for a dramatic transformation, Yuri came into his current relationship hoping to be a friend to his mentee. He stated, "I guess I wasn't really expecting to be like some life-changing figure, more of just someone who would help them get through what they were…you know, give a different perspective to their problems."

Mentors with previous experience also discussed the importance of building the relationship in order to make a positive impact on the mentee. This correlates with mentoring research which suggests forming a quality, long-lasting mentor relationship may be key for potential positive youth outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2006; Cavell et al., 2009). Stein, who reported having at least one year's prior experience as a mentor, noted, "I think the biggest thing, and I use that every time I get a new mentee, is you have to have a relationship with the person first and you have to really have their buy-in or their trust before you can really make a difference. And if you don't have that, you're going to have a challenge."

Some mentors even mentioned specific qualities and actions which may lead to better relationships. When asked about how his prior experience has impacted him as a mentor, Mr. Nice Guy replied, "Just patience, because I am not a patient person. So just patience, and all good things come if you put the work in." By learning to be patient, he

was better able to build a rapport with his mentee. Marie, moreover, discussed the importance of listening in this type of relationship. When asked what she learned from her previous experiences, Marie exclaimed, "To listen more. Every age group has their filters, but you know, you're talking to a twelve year old who tells you about difficult things that have happened in their life and their family." Marie's testimony about what she learned from her prior experiences as a mentor highlight some of the insight garnered from the study conducted by Converse & Lignugaris (2008), which specifically outlined listening as a crucial part of mentoring adolescents.

Interviews also revealed information about the five mentors who had no prior experience in a mentoring relationship. Of those mentors, most lacked knowledge about the role expectations of a mentor in this type of relationship. Jeff was confused about his role as a mentor. When asked about his prior expectations about being a mentor, he stated, "I didn't know much about what a mentor does, probably still to a certain degree." Amanda cited how her lack of experience prevented her from having knowledge on how others achieve successful mentoring relationships: "And it's one thing that I wish I had had a little bit more experience on because I didn't understand what I was getting into and how to handle it. What am I doing here? What? And I never understood that…I just need a little bit of help here because I'm feeling as though I am wasting my time and I'm wasting my mentee's time." Cameron, on the other hand, presented a focused understanding of what his role as a mentor would entail prior to his relationship. He recalled, "I just wanted to offer perspective on different situations. For me, it was going to be more of a let's talk about whatever's going on with you, and if I can give you a way to think about something or see something differently, or if you're struggling with a

subject that I can help you with, then I'll do just that. So I came in pretty open to whatever it became." Despite his lack of experience, Cameron was confident that he could draw from his own experiences to positively impact his mentee.

Of the mentors with no prior experience, the majority expressed a desire for acquiring more knowledge about mentoring relationships and the mentoring process, and individually reached out to others with more experience to help them through the initial stages of the mentoring relationship. When Amanda experienced uncertainty about her role during the first few sessions with her mentee, she reached out to a friend who had experience dealing with youth to obtain focus and direction. She recalled, "And I actually spoke to a friend of mine who's a social worker, and I said to her, 'I just need a little bit of help here because I feel like I'm wasting my time…I'm just playing games.' And she said, 'Are you talking.' I said, 'Yes, I'm talking.' She said, 'But that's how you gain her confidence and you'll earn the loyalty…It will develop.'" Amanda's discussion with her friend provided her the reassurance that she was doing what was needed as a mentor. Alex also talked to others that had knowledge about mentoring relationships. He stated, "I talked to people that were in charge of the different aspects of the mentoring program to learn about it. My inquiring helped make it clear that you don't have to feel like you're going to come in and solve all the problems…it's not on you to fill in that role. That was helpful, to not have that pressure maybe put on me that was something that was expected." By talking to people involved in the program, Alex expanded his own expectations of the role a mentor assumes in this kind of relationship. After seeking out advice from others, these mentors felt more equipped in the beginning stages of their

relationships about what the expectations were and how to successfully facilitate the relationship.

Expectations of challenges. The level of prior experiences and knowledge of the role of a youth mentor influenced the types of challenges mentors expected to encounter within their relationships. Of the mentors interviewed, most had some sort of prospective notion about the types of challenges they expected to encounter. Two mentors in this group, both without prior experience, revealed initial preconceptions about the problems their mentees might be encountering and their own ability to help them with those difficulties. Originally, Ms. Jones assumed that her mentee would be having academic difficulties, and was unsure about her ability to help her mentee overcome that challenge. She stated, "I wasn't sure what kind of level she would be at, and um, what my knowledge would have to be to help her. Because I know when I was in sixth grade is a lot different than what the sixth graders learn now. So I wasn't sure if I was at the level that she needed." Alex, on the other hand, felt that some of his mentee's difficulties would stem from his social environment. He recalled, "I thought, you know, home life and life circumstances might be difficult. I thought maybe I'd kind of hear more about problems or difficult situations that my mentee has been put in." Alex, furthermore, questioned his own ability to relate to his mentee's situation and help him overcome these social issues. He stated, "Say if my mentee had grown up in a difficult neighborhood and just situations that I had never really encountered as far as violence or drugs, that's one thing I wasn't really sure about and haven't really gotten into that much."

Other mentors felt that the biggest challenge they would encounter in their mentoring relationship would be to make a connection with their mentee. Mr. Nice Guy

recalled, "My greatest fear was that I wasn't going to be able to connect or wasn't going to be able to help out." Jeff, furthermore, maintained that making a connection can be difficult due to differences in life development. He stated, "I think that the challenges are making a connection, you know, how to connect and whether you're being successful connecting or not. And I still think that's a big challenge today to the child or the individual, as well as to the mentor, because there's such a difference in experiences and where they are and where I am in life." These mentors recognized that there are a number of variables involved when attempting to make a connection in this type of relationship, and prioritized making the connection as the biggest challenge to having a successful mentoring relationship.

Impact of Setting

During the interviews, mentors had the opportunity to comment on the setting of their mentor sessions and their perception of its impact on their relationship with their mentees. Most of the mentors interviewed reported having a set place within the school environment to conduct their mentoring sessions each week. Though every mentor in the Untrained Group reported having a set location, only some of the mentors in the CS Group had a steady place to conduct their mentoring sessions. Typically, these mentors opted for a quiet environment that offered some form of privacy. The school's media center was the most popular choice. Alex recalled, "They've got, at the school, a media center where there's several tables in the back…it's a typical media center or library where it's quiet but there's a little bit of interaction with other people." Secluded conference rooms and the school's courtyards were also mentioned as typical settings for mentoring sessions. Each of these mentors reported that these settings created a sense of

comfortability for both parties during the mentoring session. Mentors most often cited privacy or seclusion as an advantage of choosing this type of environment.

Other mentors in the CS group varied the settings based on the activities planned for the session. Stein reported having a number of different settings: "It was moved, we never did the same. One time we would be in the police officer's office, the next time I would bring lunch and we would be in the courtyard, next time we would do the library, we've sat in the conference room for the principal, so we kind of changed the setting each time." Mr. Nice Guy also chose to vary the location of his sessions, saying, "So we're in the Program portable, um, I'll have my iPad or we'll just walk around school, or we'll be in the computer lab." Though the environment in which their mentoring sessions took place varied, both of these mentors similarly felt that the overall environment selection created a sense of comfortability for both parties during the mentoring sessions.

For yet other mentors, having a multitude of locations for their mentoring sessions was not by design, but rather due to extraneous variables. When asked about the location of his mentoring sessions, Jake replied, "Well originally, that's been one of my issues. There isn't…there hasn't been a specific place where we can work. We started out in a little mini office…and then we weren't allowed to use that anymore, and they put me in a tiny, about this sized, office in the library…and then they moved us to the portable." These mentors reported feeling uncomfortable with one or more of the settings utilized for their sessions. Shirley stated, "Most of the sessions were distracted…The courtyard, we would sit outside, that was ok. But that was a little two relaxing. And then I didn't like the library at all because you just had to be quiet." Jake also expressed that he was slightly distressed about not having a set place to conduct his sessions, "I complained

about that a couple of times…I'd like a better environment, I'd like a specific, just a place where we can, you know, work I guess."

These mentors also expressed a desire to return to a previously used location that offered a sense of comfortability for their sessions. Shirley claimed that when she and her mentee were able to sit in a private room, both were a lot more comfortable, specifically stating, "That was a thousand times better." Jake also reported on the benefits of when he and his mentee were able to work in a private room, "Oh the group room, it was comfortable. There were places to sit, there were games, you know, things to do besides chat." Both of these locations afforded Shirley, Jake, and their mentees a level of seclusion and comfort that could not be attained in the other settings offered to them.

The presence of others was another detail about the environment of the mentoring sessions prominent in the interviews. Most mentors stated that there were usually others present during their mentor sessions while a few mentors identified their sessions as completely private. Other mentors stated that others were present only during some of their mentoring sessions. Of the mentors who affirmed the presence of others during their sessions, most felt that this presence impacted their time with their mentees. These mentors typically argued that having others around served as a form of distraction to the session. When asked how his mentee responds to the presence of others, Stein replied, "I mean, if there's no one else around, he will remain more focused. If there's others around, he would have what I call 'it's a squirrel' moments every five to seven minutes and get distracted and off task." These mentors felt that the presence of others created a level of distraction which negatively impacted the mentoring sessions. Shirley's experiences best illustrate this sentiment, "There were other students a couple times…one

time, another lady had four kids at another table. And this, with this girl, that tiniest little distraction was just enough to take you off of a topic or discussion. And then you'd have to spend another ten minutes getting her back to where you were." Privacy was identified as an environmental feature which enabled a level of focus and comfort for the mentees during the sessions. Mr. Nice Guy further mentioned benefits of being alone with his mentee, "When it's just the two of us, we're focused. And then he opens up or mentions things that he wants to talk about that he doesn't really want other people to hear."

Session Structure and Activities

Mentors were also asked in the interviews to comment about the nature of their typical mentoring session. Each mentor expanded on how sessions typically began, progressed, ended, and the type of activities which took place during their meetings. When asked about how sessions typically started, every mentor interviewed depicted some exchange of small talk between mentor and mentee. This small talk mostly consisted of catching up on personal life since the previous session. Ms. Jones noted, "We just pretty much walk to the media center and you know, I kind of ask her how her week's been since I last saw her and what she's been doing and that sort of thing." Stein also caught up with his student in the beginning of his sessions, "It usually starts with getting some reports on if he has any homework…and then we would about his brothers, how his personal life is, what he's doing, you know, if he's going to be with his mom or dad this weekend." These initial conversations were generally kept light and informal.

Interview data further revealed that these typical, small talk conversations were initiated differently among the mentoring pairs. Seven of the mentors interviewed stated or alluded to the mentors posing questions in order to initiate these beginning

conversations. In his interview, Cameron gave specific dialogue that he might present to his mentee in order to start their session. He stated, "Typically, I just walk in and say, 'How's your week going? Did you have any trouble with anything? Did you get a referral? How are classes going?" John also detailed the types of questions he might pose, and some of his reasoning behind posing questions. He stated, "So I try to get a rundown of what's been going on and home life and all that stuff. I'll pose the questions because he's very soft-spoken. He's a great kid but he's very soft-spoken." Because of his mentee's reticent nature, posing questions was somewhat of a necessity for John to initiate conversation.

Two mentors also spoke about how initially posing questions has helped their mentee initiate conversation in later mentoring sessions. Yuri indicated that he would often ask questions initially, and his mentee would become more participatory as the session progressed. He stated, "I'd usually pose the questions, at least to begin with. But then he'd usually open up and he wouldn't really ask, but he'd just start telling stories." Stein, furthermore, talked about the progression of dialogue throughout the relationship. When asked who typically instigated dialogue, Stein reported, "Usually he'll just start talking at this point. At first I had to probe and ask a lot of questions. Now, he'll just start talking because he knows I'm going to ask."

Data from the other interviews identified how these initial conversations were instigated by a combination of the mentor and mentee posing questions. When asked who started conversations at the beginning of sessions, Jake replied, "Probably a combination. He usually asks about what I've been doing, you know, do you watch this or that or the other thing. I guess I'll lead it off, you know, 'How's school?' That kind of thing." Marie

also spoke about the shifting nature of conversation initiation in these sessions, "It actually varies. She's a talker, and she can chatter away and sometimes that's what she needs, so I'll listen. I might ask a few questions, but sometimes, I'll come in with questions." These mentors each reported that they typically would pose questions to their mentees, but on occasion, the mentees presented the mentors with conversation pieces.

From the initial conversation, the mentoring sessions seemed to diverge in a number of different directions. Similar to the findings of Converse & Lignugaris (2008), the most common activities included talking, sharing food, playing games, and helping with academics. Some of the mentors stated that after opening their sessions, academic tutoring became a focus. Ms. Jones stated, "And then she lets me know if she had any homework to do. So from there we concentrate on that…of course we do it first, and then we can kind of catch up on other things." Alex also concentrated on academics during the bulk of his sessions, "Usually there's a new unit that they've gone over each week and if there's something that he's got questions about or he's struggling with, he'll usually bring that up after I ask him. And I'll say do you want to go over some problems and talk about it. And usually we will." Each of these mentors noted that while academics took a strong focus for the bulk of the session, dialogue was an essential part of this activity. Yuri, for example, spoke about how conversation was fluid throughout tutoring activities. He recalled, "I mean, we'd talk for a little while, but usually within the first five or ten minutes or so we'd start some math. And then we would either talk more along, as the tutoring was going on. Like he'd be doing a problem and we'd talk about one of his pets or something."

Though the majority of mentors mentioned the inclusion of more relaxed activities, such as playing games or eating lunch, a few mentors reported that these activities comprised the bulk of mentoring sessions. Jake discussed how eating lunch and playing games created a relaxed atmosphere for his mentoring sessions, "We sit and chat and eat. Or when we're done eating, we'll do a puzzle or a game, he'll get up and down and move around a bit, but um, we'll talk about his home or whatever kind of comes up." Amanda spoke about how playing games with her mentee was a way to create dialogue within the mentoring sessions. She recalled, "We play games and we talk. We play games and we talk. And you know, she tells me how her sisters are, and we talk about school, school work, what she wants to do." Though each of these mentors engaged in structured activities during their mentoring sessions, each alluded to the dialogue between the mentor and mentee as the primary focus of the session. These mentors used these activities to create an atmosphere in which conversation occurred more openly.

Two mentors designed their sessions to take on specific foci based on the current nature of the mentee and his/her challenges. Stein discussed how his sessions would progress in two different directions depending on his mentee's report of behavior and academics. He stated, "Depending on if it's a reward one, we'll talk about his successes and you know, he'll get his reward, lunch or whatever that may be. If it's not, like today is, it would be more low-key and you know, 'Why did you do this?' And kind of have a lot of thought answers." Jeff articulated a similar type of progression with his mentoring sessions, "If I know he's having some issues with a certain area, we'll talk through that a little bit, and this is probably in terms of his studies…so we'd look at assignments…and use the computer to you know, sort or reset himself in that area…And we also have a

session of play. I've used…I've used a game called dominoes, and we'll play dominoes together." Again, the prevalence of conversation is apparent with these mentors, along with the use of structured activities and academic assistance. As with the previously mentioned mentors, the activities utilized are designed by the mentors to facilitate dialogue during the sessions.

The remaining mentors identified discourse specifically as the activity which encompasses the majority of their mentoring sessions. Shirley professed, "My goal was just to be a sounding board for her because a lot of these kids don't have anybody to talk to at all. So you know, the intent is to try to get her to do some work, but I usually never did work with her. She would just chat, chat, chat chat." Cameron reiterated this sentiment of striving to converse with his mentee. He stated, "Having established the comfort level, we talk about personal life a lot, almost every week. I'm just somebody to listen to him I guess." Though the range of topics for conversations varied among these mentors, the value of conversing with their mentees was evidenced by the prominent role it had in mentoring sessions. These mentors stressed dialogue in order to demonstrate the supportive nature of the relationship and engender an environment where mentees felt comfortable discussing a variety of subjects. This corroborates findings in previous research which suggests listening and relaxed activities are frequently used by mentors to enhance the quality of the relationship (Converse & Lignugaris, 2008).

Lastly, mentors reported closing out sessions in a relatively similar manner to one another. Most mentors would give a five minute notice about the session coming to an end, and often let their mentee know the date of their next visit. Some mentors chose to provide a wrap-up of the current session for their mentee. Cameron would make sure his

mentee had the opportunity to discuss everything he wanted to before closing out the session. He would ask, "Is there anything else you want to talk about? Anything going on? Anything you want to ask me about?" Jeff, on the other hand, would focus on the upcoming week, "Sometimes we talk about what he's going to be facing in the next week and you know how he goes about it." One mentor chose to set a task for their mentee to accomplish before the next session. Stein stated, "Well the consistent goal would be for him to bring things to the table with what he learned in his core classes, and to bring a report of if he was in trouble and if so, what he did, why he did it, and what the consequences were." Other mentors reminded their mentees to contact them in between sessions if necessary. Shirley recalled, "She has my number. I'd say whenever you need me, and I'll be back next week or whenever." While there was no standard procedure for closing out mentoring sessions evidenced in the interviews, mentee awareness of a following session was a common thread. The mentors interviewed also reported discussing if there would or would not be a session the following week with their mentees.

Sources of Strain and Impact for Mentees

Mentors reported a number of sources of environmental strain for their mentees. As noted earlier in this study, the terms stress and strain are synonymous. This section discusses these strains and their perceived impact in greater detail.

Academics a prominent strain. The mentors interviewed identified a number of challenges and issues in their mentee's lives that served as a source of daily stress for these youth. The most frequently identified source of strain for the adolescent mentees was academics. The majority of mentors stated or alluded to academic difficulties of the

mentee and/or the risk of their mentee falling behind their grade level as a prominent concern. At the time of this study, the adolescent students who served as mentees were transitioning from elementary education into a middle school environment. This transition, as previously suggested by Gore & Colten (1991), may have contributed to these academic struggles. Variables associated with this transition are prevalent in a number of mentors' responses. For example, Cameron felt that communication with adults in the school environment was largely responsible for his mentee's academic struggles. He reported, "It's not so much that things are difficult, as much as it's just communication. I feel like he's got a lot of problems with his teachers and administrators at the school…things aren't being communicated to him where he understands what expectations are." When discussing difficulties associated with this transition into secondary education, Jake also stated, "Keeping track of his homework is one of them." Mentor testimonies corroborate research findings which have found that most secondary classrooms and school environments do not meet the developmental and psycho-social needs of early adolescents in transition (Eccles, J.S., Lord, S., Midgley, C., 1991).

Some of the mentors seemed to think that their mentee's academic challenges were a matter of motivation. Jake reported, "He gets good grades in the classes that he's interested in and he gets bad grades in the ones that he's not interested in. It's all an attention issues, you know, motivation I guess." John corroborated this sentiment, "Now math is a particular challenge to him, but I think that's the only one. I think the rest of them is motivation. And he can even do the math if he was motivated, you know." Though each of these mentors felt that academics were a principal stressor in their mentee's adolescent environment, most of them identified underlying issues responsible

for these academic challenges. In particular, behavioral and personality characteristics, communication, and motivation were identified as the primary mechanisms through which academic strains manifested.

   Family and home environment: An additional source of strain. Family relationships and home environment was the second most common source of stress for adolescent mentees discussed by mentors in the interviews. This supports research which has indicated that relationship conflicts and disadvantaged social conditions can act as sources of daily stress for adolescents (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995; Miller, Webster, & MacIntosh, 1992). The majority of mentors stated that their mentees experienced at least one family/home environment stressor throughout their relationship, including poor relationships with parents or siblings, family income, unsafe neighborhood environment, and/or abuse. A couple mentors described the internal structure of the home environment as challenging for their mentees. Mr. Nice Guy discussed how his mentee had to take on adult responsibilities at home. He reported, "I mean, he's responsible for a lot at home because both of his parents work. So I would say taking care of his brothers and stuff like that, because he's pretty much running everything with them." Shirley discussed how abuse and neglect were an unfortunate part of her mentee's home life. She stated, "Well her dad was in jail. Her mother's rights were terminated almost a year prior to that…by the time she got to her current school, she was with a foster home…and then there was an incident and they had to pull her out of there…There was zero, not much stability." Relationships with family members were also viewed as stressors in the mentee's home environment. Some mentors discussed how family ties were not always indicative of a healthy home environment. Cameron

mentioned, "His parents aren't together either. You have relationships with your parents where you know, 'I feel like my mom doesn't care,' or, 'My dad moved on without us,' or, 'My brother used to be close with me, now he's got a girlfriend. And he doesn't pay any attention to me.' So those kinds of things, just general relationships." Parental divorce, single-parent homes, and strained sibling relationships were communicated as common stressors for these youth.

Other mentors provided an account of family stressors associated with a low socioeconomic demographic. Yuri felt that the neighborhood environment presented a risk factor for his mentee, "The only thing that I remember him mentioning that was a little odd was that cops were you know, driving by the house and that he mentioned hearing gunshots one night…more of the environment, like externally, than internally." Two mentors also discussed family income as a stressor for their mentees. Amanda stated that her mentee brings up the issue of money frequently, and money often becomes a focal point of their conversations. Alex also felt that financial issues were burdening his mentee. He reported, "Without his dad there, his mom has to do a lot. And I know he said like maybe for Christmas, maybe he didn't quite get what he was hoping for, maybe there just wasn't enough money in the home."

Impact of strain: negative emotionality. Agnew (2002) argued that strains experienced during adolescence can lead individuals to experience a range of negative emotions. During qualitative interviews, mentors discussed how these prevalent academic and family stressors often affected their mentees' emotional disposition. Jeff maintained that the observed academic struggles were a cause of disappointment for his mentee. He recalled, "I see a sense of disappointment in his eyes when he knows the consequence of

his actions has resulted in poor grades." Cameron's response indicated that the communication problems in the middle school environment were a major source of frustration for his mentee, "I think he's hurt by it, I think he's hurt by the fact that he's held accountable for things that he feels aren't in his control at school. And then when he goes home, that follows him. You know, if he has a bad grade that he feels he didn't deserve, and then his parents are upset about, you know, I think that hurts him." Cameron also mentioned that his mentee gets angry when he feels he is treated unfairly. He recalled, "He does get mad if he gets in trouble for something that he doesn't deserve. I think he struggles with that, you know, when other people don't hold up their, what he anticipates would be their end of the bargain or what's expected of them. I think he struggles with understanding or accepting that sometimes people in life aren't fair."

Negative emotionality and negative behavioral responses. The negative emotions produced from stressors in the mentee's school and home environments occasionally resulted in negative behavioral responses. Shirley and John noted that their mentees' anger resulting from poor home life contributed to unhealthy behaviors. Shirley reported, "Well, you know, when she was at school, the fighting started. There was a lot of discussion about what to do with her anger…her way of dealing with that is to fight because that's how she was taught by her mom." Not only did the mentee's anger issue result in behavioral consequences issued by the school, but it also negatively impacted her academic progress. Shirley described,

> If you're a ten year old kid and you're taken from your mom, and you're going from foster home to foster home, sleeping in a different bed and a different family's bed, and siblings telling, 'Don't touch my stuff, that's my bed, you're not going to stay here long,'…you can't expect a child to…school is secondary. She's a mess. She's got zero, you know, very low self-esteem. A lot of kids would just internalize it and maybe be quiet, you know, pull away. Her, on the other hand,

she's very angry. And she acts out. So mentally, you know, that lack of stability and movement precludes her from even thinking about studying.

John noted that responsibilities at home were negatively affecting his mentee's attendance. As discussed earlier, John's mentee was being held out of school by his mom in order to babysit his baby sister. The increased pressure at home negatively impacted his mentee's academic progress, and ultimately resulted in contact by a truancy officer.

Coping Strategies Group

As noted in the Methods chapter, the CS Group attended a training session which outlined the four coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation that have been previously linked with positive youth outcomes. During this training, these mentors were given a handout detailing these four positive coping strategies (see Appendix C), and were instructed to utilize each strategy within their mentoring relationship. Mentors' responses concerning each coping strategy were organized into three focus areas. The first focus area discusses the specific concepts within each strategy utilized by mentors, as well as how mentors engaged such concepts within their relationships. The second focus area discusses the application of such strategies within the mentoring relationship, while the final focus area centers on any perceived benefits of utilizing such strategies which extend beyond the relationship. Finally, mentors' perceptions of the training in general and any additional strategies they utilized within their mentoring relationships are also covered in this section.

While the majority of the mentors interviewed exhibited a working knowledge of the coping strategies given to them and were able to present examples of their use within their mentoring relationship, it is worth noting that one mentor explicitly stated that she had not been fully implementing the strategies within her relationship, which

undoubtedly affected her answers concerning the use, applicability, and impact of each specific strategy. The other mentors reported using the strategies given to them at the beginning of the relationship, and one mentor specifically mentioned that they were actively looking over the Coping Strategies Handout throughout their relationship. Stein reported, "Fortunately I kept the pamphlet that you gave me at the beginning so just to kind of make sure I covered it and had some stuff throughout the semester. Since you took the time to meet with me in the beginning I figured I would do my hardest." Another mentor, Yuri, brought his Coping Strategies Handout with him at the time of the interview.

Active listening. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, active listening encompasses a variety of listening techniques. Tools such as watching the speaking, providing feedback, and becoming emotionally and intellectually involved have been identified as necessary for building supportive relationships (Jones, 2011). CS Group mentors were trained to utilize such skills within their mentoring relationships.

Use. The majority of mentors in the Coping Strategies Group demonstrated a working knowledge of the concepts behind active listening as outlined by Jalongo (1995) and Jones (2011), and consistent with their training. When asked to define active listening, two mentors focused on making sure the listener understands the speaker. Jake, however, felt that one had to go beyond just hearing to be actively listening. He stated an active listener is, "Somebody who's paying attention, and looking for cues in what they're saying, you know, the subtle layers and things like that…You have to be able to find, you have to ask the right questions, and you have to listen to the answers." Jake's statement is consistent with the Coping Strategies handout (Appendix C) that

accompanied the training for the group. The handout emphasizes attentiveness and feedback as important factors in the feeling of being listened to and understood. Other mentors included specific active listening concepts from the handout in the definitions of active listening they provided during their interviews. For example, Stein specifically spoke about maintaining eye contact, ensuring comfort, and providing feedback as important tools for conveying active listening. Yuri, moreover, highlighted attentiveness and appearing genuinely interested as tools he used when conversing with his mentee. Modeling good listening behavior, such as maintaining eye contact and having relaxed body language, and appearing genuinely interested in the conversation by asking questions or repeating parts of the conversation were specifically listed in the Coping Strategies handout (Appendix C).

Several mentors were also able to provide a specific example of using active listening in their mentoring relationship. Yuri recalled demonstrating he was listening by relating to his own life. As conveyed during training, techniques like this are important to build empathy as a listener. He stated, "I tried to…like he would get on a rant about a pet or what not, I would try to ask about it more, try to relate to him my childhood growing up with animals, things like that. When he talked about school, I'd relate what I was doing and stuff like that." Shirley mentioned making sure her mentee felt comfortable was a big part of active listening, "I would always make sure I sat next to her. Never sat across from her, never." She also spoke about reading her mentee's body language. Shirley stated, "If you're truly actively listening and actively participating, then you get to know if a child's having a bad day or a good day…Their whole demeanor, they might be more tired. She would, if she didn't have breakfast by the time I saw her, she was

just…she just wasn't…not here, not present." Jake reported that it was important for him to be focused on what his mentee says, rather than what he does. He stated, "Being open to…not being distracted by the other things he might be doing. If he wants to get up and move around or something like that, just let it go. You know, he's a kid, he doesn't want to be sitting in a chair the whole time." Giving undivided attention and refraining from passing judgment were also important active listening concepts discussed during the training. These mentors not only understood the concepts underlying active listening, but also demonstrated its use within their mentoring relationship.

Further, mentors reported encouraging their mentees to utilize active listening skills within their relationships. Stein specifically tried to instill good listening skills in his mentee. He reported, "I would make him look at me when he was talking, especially when he was in trouble. If he would be looking the other way, I would pretend like I didn't hear him and make him repeat it when he was looking at me." Shirley, furthermore, found that making her mentee repeat things was a useful tool for developing her listening skills. She described, "I would make her repeat things. Like I wanted her to know my phone number. So every time I saw her, and to this day, I still say, 'What's my number?' And make her repeat it." These mentors used active listening techniques to ensure their mentees were listening properly during mentor sessions.

Applicability. Mentors discussed how incorporating active listening had positive effects for their mentoring relationship. The most frequently mentioned effect of using active listening was helping to establish the mentor relationship and demonstrate support. Jones (2011) and the National Mentoring Center (2003) have previously suggested that good listening plays an essential role within the support process for adolescents. Several

mentors felt that active listening was instrumental in establishing connections in the beginning of the relationship. Stein reported, "I tried to do it from the beginning just to try and make common grounds. You know, the faster you become acquainted with someone, the better any good relationship is going to be. I tried to be empathetic to him and to show him that I was actually listening and try to be his friend." Stein found that the creation of the relationship is entirely based on listening, and specifically discussed trust as a positive benefit of active listening. He stated, "It's all like I said, creating the relationship and buying their trust. And these are techniques I used to buy his trust." Shirley also mentioned building trust as an important effect of actively listening. She stated, "I think that it helped her see that I really was there, and I wasn't just going to be another person that came and left. I think I had to prove to her that I was listening to her."

The majority of the CS group mentors believed active listening engendered more meaningful conversations within the mentor sessions. A few of the mentors talked about how active listening helped their mentees open up during conversations. Ms. Jones felt that active listening helped improve dialogue by showing her mentee that she had a vested interest in the conversation. She stated, "I think if you were actively listening to what they were saying, you're showing them you're interested in their opinion and what they think…She's a little quiet. And at first, her answers were kind of short and just a few words. But now that we're a little more comfortable with each other she gets a little more detailed and talks more openly." Stein also noted how certain listening techniques helped his mentee become more open during mentor sessions. He reported,

> You know, I always gave him my undivided attention, and made sure we had eye-level. I mean just the open ended question whenever I started with everything at the beginning to create the relationship and kind of get a feel...Open ended questions just allow you know, other things to come about versus yes or no

answers. Then he started. I didn't have to ask because he would just bring it to the table.

Stein felt that active listening made a huge difference in the quality of his conversations with his mentee. He discussed how his mentee did not automatically present information when requested, and he often needed to demonstrate that he was listening to his mentee in order to establish a more open discussion. Stein stated, "Being in a comfortable place, repeating what they have to say, whether it's a mentee or a job interview, it's important. It shows again that you're interested and comprehending. And open ended questions just allow other things to come about versus yes or no answers."

Some of the mentors also commented on how active listening was particularly useful for demonstrating support to at-risk youth. Ms. Jones and Mr. Nice Guy argued that these children often have no one who listens to what they have to say, and active listening helped illustrate their support as mentors. Ms. Jones stated, "I think in some situations that has to do with a lot of their problems, that people don't listen to them or maybe don't pay attention to what they say or what their thoughts are or opinions of things." These mentors further felt that demonstrating this support is necessary in order to understand some of the underlying issues which plague the adolescent mentees. Jake stated,

> Some kids don't have social skills. And you have to be able to really listen well to what they're saying to understand what they are actually saying. You have to read the body language, you have to combine several conversations and examine the behavior of those conversation and how they react to a specific topic or something like that. And if you don't, you might miss something important.

Finally, Shirley commented that active listening and subsequently, demonstrating support, are the most important features of a relationship with an at-risk youth. She argued that the youth involved in this type of mentoring program often encounter people

who do not follow through with their relationships. According to Shirley, active listening distinguishes a mentor's commitment to the relationship to his or her mentee. She exclaimed, "You know, if you're not going to do that [active listening] than don't do it. You're wasting your time and you're not being fair to the kid…kids are smart. They know if you're listening to them. You know, they know if you're trying to feed them just a bunch of bull to satisfy your needs, or if you're really there for them."

  Impact. CS Group mentors reported that active listening had benefits for their mentees that extended beyond their own relationship. In other words, the coping strategy of active listening was something that the mentee could engage in his or her life. Yuri spoke about how using active listening may have allowed his mentee's own listening skills to develop, which subsequently may have affected other relationships. When asked about the positive effects of active listening for his mentee, he stated, "Making him aware of good communication skills, which transcend beyond just, you know, the classroom. They go for personal relationships, professional relationships, being able to hold a conversation, and respond to questions and statements, etc. It definitely is learning how to do that and feel confident doing that at an early age." Chelsea also felt that using active listening would positively affect her mentee in different environments. She stated,

> I think it affects all areas, like in class, socially, personally, like at home and stuff, and then growing up. I think if they did take the active listening and how to talk and stuff like that, that relationships will probably get better because people will come to them or talk to them. And then I think it will be a better relationship with a teacher too because now you can see where they're coming from.

These mentors felt that the use and modeling of good listening skills within their mentoring relationship would ultimately lead to stronger listening and communication skills by their mentees in other meaningful relationships.

Emotional Regulation. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, emotional regulation refers to the processes by which an individual limits negative emotions and their impact (Gross, 1998), including monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions. Techniques such as distraction, rumination, and the concentration of positive emotionality have been linked to changes in the emotional focus of the individual (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2002; Gullone et al., 2010). CS Group mentors were trained to utilize such skills within their mentoring relationships.

Use. The majority of mentors in the Coping Strategies group identified some of the principles behind emotional regulation as useful. These mentors pinpointed various aspects of concepts previously discussed by Gross (2002) and Tugade & Fredrickson (2004). For instance, Chelsea and Yuri both indicated the use of cognitive reappraisal, or the redefining of a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that limits its emotional impact (Gross, 2002). Chelsea stated, "So I think emotional regulating is controlling your emotions but in a certain way that you don't overreact. Like if someone says like a horrible joke, you can let them know that it like hurt your feelings or whatever without yelling or getting violent." In his interview, Yuri discussed how he often sought to limit his mentee's responses to external stimuli. He stated, "I guess it's keeping your feelings in check, putting on a good face sometimes when you shouldn't, not letting external, outside things affect what's going on in your school, professional, personal life. I guess if you're feeling angry, not hitting someone or something of that nature, yelling, I guess."

The mentors who were able to define the concept of emotional regulation also provided examples of using some of the techniques behind the strategy. Two mentors

spoke specifically about how important it is to address emotions in general. As discussed

in the Literature Review Chapter, reflecting on emotions, whether they be positive or

negative, allows adolescents to better recognize these circumstances in the future and

modify the intensity of their impact (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2002; Gullone et al., 2010). By

acknowledging the emotions of their mentees, Stein and Shirley felt that were illustrating

that it is acceptable to have emotions. Stein reported, "I just think, you know, emotions

play a big role in anyone, especially at this age. So you know, making sure you're

addressing the negative, rewarding the positive, and you know…and showing and talking

about it. Whether it's good or bad, happy or sad, you know, emotions are normal."

Shirley spoke about how it is particularly important for her to acknowledge her mentee's

anger. She stated,

> We had talked about her scenario with her mom and she said, 'I get mad when you talk about my mom.' And we talked it through. It's just through talking to her but letting her know that what she feels is ok, but there might be a better way. So I acknowledge her anger. Tell her it's ok for that, but I also want you to try and see it from this, you know, from this way, a different perspective.

Shirley also suggested more positive ways of acknowledging anger, such as journal

writing, to her mentee.

Stein also spoke about the importance of exhibiting positive emotionality for his

mentee. The development of positive emotionality has been linked with the coping

process for individuals in high-stress situations (Gross, 2002; Tugade & Fredrickson,

2004). Stein stated, "I really just try to always be positive. You know, make sure there

was no negativity. If there were negative things that we had to talk about, you know, turn

it into a positive." When asked to provide a specific example of this, Stein replied,

"Whether it's him getting in trouble, you know, focusing on the negative but how we can

fix it next time. This is what the outcome could be if he said nothing. So end it with a positive note." Stein stated that he really stressed positive emotions because he was unsure if his mentee experienced that in any other facet of his life.

Applicability. The majority of the mentors felt that the use of emotional regulation strategies had benefits for their mentoring relationships. Helping mentees to better understand emotions and how to control them was one way mentors emotionally supported their mentees. This emotional support, in turn, built trust within the mentoring relationship. When asked about this impact, Yuri responded, "Definitely, you don't want to seem like the person who doesn't care, you want to be, like I said, more of a friend. It's good to have empathy and show that you know, you're a person just like them and that you can relate to their feelings." Shirley also felt that emotional support helped build trust in the relationship. She stated, "They're like anybody else, they want love. They just want a friend, they want somebody to understand what they are dealing with."

These mentors also believed that introducing emotional regulation strategies into their mentoring relationships was particularly useful for working with an at-risk adolescents, especially for those mentors reported that their mentees often exhibited anger. Stein spoke about how negative emotions were the only ones his mentee seemed to understand. When discussing the use of positive emotions, Stein said, "I think that it's not talked about at all, so he doesn't really understand. He knows mad, yelling, you know that type of…that's really all the stuff he knows." Shirley also commented how emotional regulation techniques were particularly valuable within her mentoring relationship. She stated, "With her, yes, especially because of the anger. Like we were talk about earlier, anger was becoming a real factor for her. And what she could do when that happens, or

trying to come up with different skills to you know, vent some of that energy." Some of

the at-risk mentees were perceived by mentors as having little instruction in how to

handle negative emotionality constructively. In turn, introducing emotional regulation

techniques within the mentoring relationship was viewed as a natural platform for

enhancing such skills.

> *Impact.* A couple of the mentors discussed how using the concepts behind

emotional regulation had benefits that extended beyond the mentoring relationship.

Mentors felt these techniques positively impacted behavioral outcomes for their mentees

by helping them deal with their negative emotionality in a more constructive manner. For

instance, Stein noted that focusing on positive emotions helped his mentee re-evaluate

some of his negative emotions and better empathize with the feelings of others. He stated,

> He may have had his feelings hurt at some of the things but I think ending it on a
> positive note really, you know, opened his eyes. Not everything is going to be
> good, but he focused…you know, he would get upset when he felt people were
> picking on him, and when you kind of turned it around and you know, how do
> you think they feel? And really opening emotions of others as well, he would kind
> of get quiet and start thinking.

By helping their mentees empathize with the feelings of others in stressful situations,

these mentors felt that they would be more equipped to deal with the emotions that often

accompany such situations in a healthy manner.

> It is worth noting that the majority of the mentors felt that their mentees already

had a strong grasp on controlling negative emotions. Jake, for instance, stated that his

mentee hadn't really exhibited any emotional extremes during their time together. He

responded, "Emotionally, he wasn't, he was pretty, there wasn't any extreme emotions,

there wasn't any anger, you know, there wasn't any sadness, there wasn't any depression,

there wasn't any extreme jubilation, he seemed like a pretty normal kid." Yuri also stated

about his mentee, "He was a pretty happy kid. He didn't seem to have too much pent-up anger or anything like that. He never really described too many negative situations where he would have strong emotions going about."

Conflict Resolution. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, constructive conflict resolution takes place when adversaries interact to solve a problem they face together by seeking a mutually acceptable outcome (Deutsch, 1994). Empathizing, distinguishing between needs and position, and open-minded discussions are essential characteristics of handling conflicts in a positive manner. CS Group mentors were trained to utilize such skills within their mentoring relationships.

Use. The majority of mentors in the CS group reported employing a number of positive conflict resolution strategies introduced during their training. When asked to define the concept, most mentors pointed out characteristics of constructive conflict (outlined in Coping Strategies handout provided during training), where two parties solve a problem together by seeking a mutually beneficial outcome (Deutsch, 1994). Yuri defined this concept outright during his interview: "Solving a problem in a way that makes both sides, or how many sides that are involved in a problem, maybe not all mutually happy, but they're all at least partially satisfied."

The remaining mentors used a number of techniques associated with constructive conflict resolution when dealing with their mentees. Chelsea stressed to her mentee the importance of being open-minded and finding common ground. She stated, "I've always been the type of person who puts it into people's heads to always be accepting of all kinds of people. That was one of my main things, is to be open-minded, to not be judgmental, to not be prejudiced." Chelsea talked to her mentee about how understanding

the diversity of backgrounds and opinions of others would lead to less conflict. Stein tried

to get his mentee to understand the consequences to his behavior in conflict situations. He

reported, "When he was being mean to a female, you know, and the conflict resolution

was don't say anything at all. You know, and if you don't say anything at all, yeah you

may have had your feelings hurt, but you didn't say anything. You're a bigger

person…nothing would have happened, there would have been no consequences, you

would have went on with your day." Shirley tried to get her mentee to explore different

options in conflict and the different outcomes associated with those choices. She stated,

"Yeah, we'd talk it through. So it's you know, what could you have done differently?

Because sometimes she thinks that her way is the only way. There is no consequence to

her actions. And I'm like, these are the rules. You can't just go around doing what you

want. You're thirteen or whatever, you know. There are consequences."

A couple mentors seemed to lack knowledge about the conflict resolution

strategies provided during training. In fact, some of these mentors depicted scenarios

within their mentoring relationships associated with destructive conflict resolution

strategies. Mr. Nice Guy recalled one discussion with his mentee about fighting. He

stated, "He saw someone hit his little brother…See that's where I…because if somebody

hit my brother, it would be over. But that's me. And I know you can't say that as a

mentor, I think I did though." In this example, Mr. Nice Guy stated to his mentee that if

he were in a similar circumstance, he would also resort to fighting, which is not

considered a positive technique of resolving conflict. Chelsea also exhibited poor conflict

resolution techniques, though not destructive ones: "Well, I'm a person who like, keeps

things to myself. But I don't think, I don't think that is the thing you should do."

Applicability. A few of the CS Group mentors discussed the benefits of employing conflict resolution techniques within the mentoring relationship. These mentors felt that the constructive conflict resolution techniques were particularly useful when mentoring an at-risk youth because these adolescents are often presented with an elevated amount of conflict situations. Jake stated, "They're the ones that are going to have a lot more conflict in their lives than most people, so yeah, it's very important. Everybody needs that. Everybody is going to have some sort of conflict in their life and nobody's perfect, so it's a good thing to practice." Shirley too felt that at-risk youth were more likely to be in conflict situations. She stressed, furthermore, the importance of a mentor knowing how to react when such conflict situations are presented during a session. She stated,

> They'll talk to you about things eventually. So you have to know how to respond to that if you want to make a difference at all. I mean, if they start talking…if you're mentoring them for three months and they've had a bad day and you're able to get them to tell you why, and they say, "Well, you know, so and so got in my face in the bathroom," kind of thing, you know, and they're talking to you about this stuff, you have to be able to talk back with them.

It is worth noting that a few mentors in the CS Group felt that their mentees were already capable of dealing with conflict in a constructive manner. For instance, Mr. Nice Guy reiterated his comments from when he was asked about the applicability of emotional regulation. He stated, "So this one, like I said, he's pretty even-keel. He doesn't really have a high from what I've seen, he really doesn't have a low. Quite stoic actually." Yuri also felt that conflict situations rarely arose for his mentee. He stated, "We never really discussed much about any, too many problems going on. Like he didn't get into any fights or anything, he had a very close relationship with his sister. So he was just a happy kid, I guess."

Impact. The mentors in the CS Group generally perceived that instruction on constructive conflict resolution strategies had benefits that extended beyond the mentoring relationship. Jake felt that this type of instruction was good practice for future conflicts which his mentee might encounter. He stated, "It gives him another tool in his…assuming that he applies it. The more he experiences conflict, the better he gets at handling it. Practice drills of being in conflict are going to benefit somebody." Stein talked about how conflict resolution allowed his mentee to think before reacting to a situation, "You can come up with positive outcomes to situations and make them maybe think before they do it again the next time." Stein also spoke about how these techniques allowed him to better identify the sources of conflict for his mentee. He reported, "It allows him to identify each conflict, and dig deeper. And you know, come up with outcomes on each one. You know, every time there's a conflict, using different techniques, there's not just one technique that he has to use." Mr. Nice Guy argued these techniques were also useful for showing his mentee how to receive attention positively rather than negatively. He stated, "I mean, usually when he acts out, it's to get attention. But then, if you teach him resolutions, coupled with how to get attention, it makes him a much better person. Because if he gets attention for acting negatively, then he'll just always be negative."

A couple of mentors commented on how introducing conflict resolution techniques can be particularly useful for changing how at-risk youth view or understand conflict situations. Mr. Nice Guy maintained that introducing these concepts can help at-risk youth disassociate engaging in conflict situations as a constructive means for receiving attention. He stated, "Usually when they act out, it's to get attention. But then if

you teach them conflict resolutions, couple with how to get attention, it makes them a

much better person. Because if I get attention for acting negatively, then I'll just always

be negative." Yuri also felt that these techniques can bring at-risk youth out of their

immediate circumstances and de-emphasize the emotionality youth often place in conflict

situations. He reported,

> I feel like a lot of times, at-risk youth, they don't really think outside of their
> immediate situation. So like, if something bad happens to them, that's like the
> world. You know, if someone insults them, that just like shatters…that just really
> upsets them. Helping them realize that not everything that happens is a personal
> slate against you, and that you're not always going to get your way, and there's
> thing to look forward to and things outside of the current issue that you're basing
> your life on.

> While these mentors generally felt that their mentees identified with the concepts

behind constructive conflict resolution they tried to instill within these relationships, they

were reluctant to point out any definitive changes in conflict behavior as a result of such

teachings. When asked how his mentee responded to the conflict resolution strategies,

Stein reported,

> You know, with behavioral issues in school, I would say he understood and he
> responded well. Have some of the things reoccurred? Yes, so I wouldn't say that
> they've been 100% effective. But he's very smart when he understands it. He gets
> the big picture. So using the techniques and using these types of things he's all
> over it, but it's how he applies it in the future that's the challenge.

Shirley also felt that her mentee had grasped some of the concepts behind constructive

conflict resolution, but was still actively using negative conflict strategies to her own

benefit. Shirley stated, "Well, when she doesn't like a scenario, she's figured out that she

just has to act out. Because more foster parents will just make a phone call and say she's

getting too wild for me, pick her up. So she's learned how to raise the conflict to get what

she wants." Shirley went on to say that her mentee's negative behavioral responses had

not been dissuaded by their talks on constructive conflict resolution. "She keeps getting into fights. She's still fighting now and she's taking it to another level."

It is also of note that behavioral outcomes from instructing their mentees in positive conflict resolution techniques were perceived by mentors to be affected by a number of external variables. Stein stated, "There are a lot of things that play into it, you know? Their attitude, their goals, what's driving behind it, who's giving them these techniques, how are they being applied, how are they being followed up, that all comes into play with the final outcome." Stein also viewed the length of time for instruction in such techniques as a major factor for positive outcomes. He thought that his mentee was on the way towards approaching conflict in a positive manner, but more time with such conflict resolution techniques was needed to ensure a positive outcome for his mentee in this area.

Shirley felt that her mentee's previous home life and current involvement in the foster care system were responsible for teaching her mentee negative conflict resolution strategies. These environmental factors, in turn, often counteracted some of her instruction on constructive conflict resolution strategies. "My argument to this is that this was taught to her. The mother taught her, now the system taught her. I think it's what she…the environmental factors that surround this child have a lot to do with how she handles conflict." While she was actively working with her mentee on developing positive conflict resolution strategies, Shirley believed that these environment circumstances were largely responsible for impeding such instruction.

Future Orientation. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, future orientation encompasses the expectations, hopes, and fears an individual has about his or

her future, as well as the active efforts to set and attain goals (Markus & Nurius, 1996;

Nurmi, 2005). Acquiring knowledge about the future, imagining possible selves, setting

goals, and estimating the likelihood of future events are all techniques that can facilitate a

future orientation. CS Group mentors were trained to utilize such skills within their

mentoring relationships.

Use. Almost all the mentors in the CS Group utilized various aspects of the future

orientation strategy previously identified by Markus & Nurius (1996) and Nurmi (2005),

and as incorporated during their training. For example, a number of mentors focused on

the processes by which their mentees acquired knowledge about the future, estimated the

likelihood of future events, and planned and explored future opportunities, all of which

were discussed in the Coping Strategies Handout reviewed during their training. Jake

differentiated future orientation as focusing and preparing for situations that lie ahead. He

stated,

> That's somebody who's thinking about what's going to happen next. I think it's a
> very positive attitude really, because it's somebody who's not dwelling on what
> happened or what is happening, but you know, what's next. They're preparing,
> they're going to be prepared for whatever it is…Someone who's thinking about
> the future is somebody who believes there is a future.

Yuri talked about removing one's self from the present and focusing on how one can

improve the path to the future. He defined future orientation as, "Realizing that the

current moment isn't all that there is in life. Realizing that you have to make sacrifices in

the present to have a better life in the future. That everything you do currently, if not

directly affects the future." Linking the present to future outcomes was discussed during

training as a way for mentors to encourage mentees to envision their possible future

selves.

All mentors in the CS Group illustrated the incorporation of future orientation techniques. As illustrated in the Coping Strategies Handout, discussing mentees' future interests and value are important for facilitating a future orientation (Nurmi, 2005). Shirley was able to link academics to her mentee's future interests. She stated, "She wants to be a lawyer. She wants to work in family court so we've talked about. And we've stressed, actually we talked about that. And I said, 'Honey, if you want to be a lawyer, you have to be able to read.'" Yuri reported discussing the path to college with his mentee.

> He was the one who brought it up to me first about colleges or what not. And then I kind of told him what I did with accounting and all that. Just by doing well in elementary school transcended to, I guess to him it would be middle school, and that would go to high school, and that's how you get into different colleges and get scholarships, grants, et cetera. And that where he was at right now was good to really start caring.

Articulating future interests and aspirations allowed these mentees to imagine possible future selves (Nurmi, 2005). Mentors also stressed how important it was to encourage mentees in their future interests. Ms. Jones stated, "I was encouraging for her. She said that she likes math and that she wants to go into accounting or bookkeeping so I encouraged her to do that if she feels like that is a strong asset for her. And telling her that her studying now is going to make a big difference for her in the future."

Setting goals, a large part of the future orientation strategy discussed during training, was engaged by several mentors. Chelsea even differentiated between setting short-term and long-term goals. She told her mentee, "You know, you have to work hard, there's many goals. Like the short-term goals and then there's long-term goals. And I'd say, 'Well, the short term goal is doing well in school, being positive, getting involved. And that long-term goal is actually getting there, going to college and being successful.'"

Chelsea was able to set up a pathway from short-term to long-term goals for her mentee. "First, work hard in what you do, like doing all your homework, doing well in everything like that. And then like getting involved in the community, talking to teachers if you have a problem, and then going to high school and getting involved in high school, and then going to college." Stein, however, found that it was easier to focus on short-term goals with his mentee. He stated that he sets weekly goals which focused on his mentee's academic challenges. When asked to elaborate on why short-term goals were more useful, Stein replied, "It gains momentum, and it helps him remember, you know, constantly what he's working towards."

Planning ahead was also a future orientation strategy frequently discussed by the mentors in the CS Group (Nurmi, 2005; Arronowitz, 2005). Jake explained to his mentee that it is important to plan ahead, especially when academics are concerned. He stated, "You know, it's important to plan. If you want something, if you want to be, if he wants to, I don't know, do the karate class, then he really needs to think about what he needs to do to get there. Making sure he writes down what his homework is and that kind of thing, talk to the teacher who may have given him a bad grade, that's important." Mr. Nice Guy felt that planning ahead made goals more attainable for his mentee. "It put things into perspective. I mean, your goals aren't as big and your obstacles aren't as big once you put together what you want and make a plan to get there. Then stick to your plan." Ms. Jones also discussed future time management with her mentee. She stressed that it was important that her mentee understand how to plan ahead to ensure that participating in such activities would be feasible for her.

Applicability. Most mentors felt that introducing future orientation concepts was particularly useful to the mentoring relationship. Chelsea stated that these strategies are important, "Because if they don't know that there is something out there besides, you know, middle school and high school, then that's all they're going to do. I'm just going to graduate from high school and that just be it. I feel as if they need to know, even at a young age that there is something past high school." Jake also felt that his mentee really found value in thinking ahead, setting a schedule, and doing what was necessary to achieve his goals. He stated that even if these tools could not be utilized successfully at the time, eventually they will come in handy for this type of youth in the future. Mr. Nice Guy felt that the strategies he used helped his mentee break down the steps necessary to achieve goals and a more positive future. He believed that these youth need to be working towards something, and the strategies under future orientation help them do so.

While the majority perceived future orientation as useful within an adolescent mentoring relationship, a couple mentors reasoned that using these techniques should occur after the relationship has already been established. Shirley responded that it is important to know the adolescent first in order to understand if setting goals is a realistic possibility. She stated, "Know who your child is first, because otherwise, how are you going to set anything real? You don't know what you're setting, right? You can't set her a goal. Or maybe baby steps…you know, maybe one goal from week to week. But nothing long-term until you understand all that." This statement solidifies the feeling of many mentors in the CS group that short-term goals are most effective when dealing with these adolescents. Mr. Nice Guy felt that it is important to have an in-depth understanding of the mentee in order to set goals that were attainable and specifically

geared toward the mentee's challenging areas. Mr. Nice Guy spoke about how viewing his mentee's grades early in the relationship was a mistake. He stated, "I think I saw his grades too early. Because I saw his grades on the first day, without truly knowing the kid. And that was a mistake. I never really got to the why because I was already in, 'Ok, we got to do this, this, and this.'" Mr. Nice Guy believed that it is better to understand the circumstances surrounding his mentee's challenges before coming up with the goals he wanted his mentee to attain.

Impact. Some of the mentors in the CS Group believed that using future orientation strategies had benefits that extended beyond the mentoring relationship. Mentors reasoned that these concepts enhanced a mentee's ability to imagine a positive future, and consequently, impacted behavioral outcomes. Ms. Jones talked about the importance of imagining a positive future. She stated, "Without having goals, or desires for the future, it makes it very difficult to even imagine a future, or one that's successful. Especially ones that they can use their talents for." Yuri, moreover, felt that this positive vision for the future helped his mentee change current behaviors. He reported, "I think if you don't feel like you have a future, there is no sense in trying to change the path you're on. And by having future orientation, obviously you have more…you can direct your life more towards succeeding, not screwing up in some way. A goal is always good to have, even if they are very far away. Just something to aspire to be."

A few mentors felt that focusing on the future helped their mentees with current behavior and academic issues. Just as Oyserman et al. (2002) found that focusing on the future led to improvements in academic motivation and engagement, mentors commented on how goal setting processes impacted their mentees attitudes towards school. Stein

stated, "Well I think you know, academically knowing that you're going to go to the next grade or knowing you're going to be stuck in the same grade and be embarrassed with different students, you know, I think making that a focus has definitely given immediate improvements in those subject areas." Mentors noted that focusing on the future engendered feelings of pride and general positivity within their mentees. Stein noticed the happiness that achieving a goal created in his mentee. He stated, "Oh he's excited, he's excited. Good attitude, you know. He knows he'll get a reward, but you know, it's a balance, so making sure he understands great job there." Yuri felt that the goal setting process was influential in mentee's positive attitude. He recalled that his mentee eventually started bringing in information about his grades on his own because he was so proud. He stated, "He would always just come tell me and talk about what he got on the test or how he was doing. So he was…he seemed to take pride that he was doing better and wanted me to know when he was doing better."

CS Group mentors' perceptions of coping strategies. The CS Group mentors discussed their perceptions of the Coping Strategies training and the four specific coping strategies: active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. In addition, these mentors identified and linked some factors, particularly consistency and time, with resilient outcomes for their mentees. This section discusses both of these topic areas in greater detail.

Coping strategies training perceived as valuable. CS Group Mentors discussed the value of having training in the four identified coping strategies at the beginning of their mentor relationships. The majority of the mentors commented on how the incorporation of this initial training provided a foundation of techniques for them to draw

upon during their developing relationship with their mentees. Jake stated that the training had the capacity to be useful for any mentor. He noted, "Mentors need lots of tools in their box, just like kids need lots of tools in their box. Any skill that you can give somebody to use is a positive thing. If you give that to a mentor, and he or she has the opportunity to use it, yeah, I think it would be a great benefit to them." Stein agreed, "I just think it gives a foundation for someone to go and if you don't have the things that I've had or the past mentor programs, it gives them a foundation to really build off."

A few of the mentors also mentioned that the training might be particularly useful for mentors without prior experience in a mentoring relationship. Chelsea commented on how the training helped with her own lack of experience. She stated, "Like I didn't know anything about emotional regulations until you explained it to me. All those strategies I feel as though are very important." Additionally, Yuri felt that the training might have enhanced the communication skills for mentors without experience. He stated, "Some mentors don't realize what they're really doing and how to break through to kids. They don't take the time to realize what they're doing or they don't realize that they're just having a bad day and it's not the best day to cram word problems on them." Shirley not only believed that this training would benefit those without mentor experience, but also those without certain kinds of life experiences. She felt that those volunteer mentors who don't have families or experience with children, for example, would benefit greatly from learning these types of strategies.

Importance of mentor consistency and time. As previous research has suggested (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005: Rhodes et al., 2006), mentor consistency and the length of the relationship are huge determinants in the successful

development of the mentoring dynamic, as well as for resilient outcomes among mentees.

CS Group mentors' perceptions of these two variables corroborated with this research.

For example, Shirley reported,

> All these people just come and go into their lives, you know, so if you can be a constant. That's why that consistency, for me, when you talk about mentees, I think it's extremely important that if you can be consistent with them as far as you can take them year after year and not switch around, that is probably the most important thing I think a mentor can do.

Stein found that while consistency with the mentee is important, it is also helpful to be consistent with the mentoring agency and family members of the adolescent youth. These mentors reasoned that learning about parental and peer influences may help produce a more complete picture of the mentee's character than just meeting with him/her in a one-on-one session.

Untrained Group

The Untrained Group mentors formed relationships with students from a similar socioeconomic demographic as the CS Group mentors, but received no formal training in the four identified positive coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. The information below is centered on the strategies and skills that came "naturally" to these mentors without additional training to foster their relationships or promote resilient outcomes in their mentees. Interview questions were designed to elicit responses which reflected if the Untrained group of mentors were aware of or happened to use any aspect of the positive coping strategies in which their counterpart, the CS Group, had been explicitly trained. Untrained Group Mentors' perceptions of the impact of their mentoring relationship on their mentee's identified risk outcomes are also discussed in this section.

Strategies/Skills utilized within mentoring relationship. Though the mentors in the Untrained Group did not receive any training on the identified positive coping strategies before beginning their mentor relationships, a number of these mentors still identified some of the techniques within the active listening, conflict resolution, and future orientation strategies as useful to their own mentor relationships and risk outcomes for their mentees. Interestingly, none of these mentors alluded to the use of emotional regulation strategies in their interviews.

Active Listening. Despite receiving no formal training prior to starting their mentoring relationship, every mentor in the Untrained Group mentioned at least one concept that tied in to active listening. Mentors often spoke about the importance of making the mentee feel comfortable, keeping a casual tone, and letting the mentee control the pace of discussions. Cameron stated, "I wasn't trying to make him open up. People want to be heard and understood. People that are closed are closed for a reason and I respect that. I gave him the chance to talk and kept giving him that chance and left the rest up to him. I tried to build a friendship that allowed him to speak to me without feeling threatened." Alex also spoke about setting a casual tone in order to create comfortability. He stated, "I think being open and honest is definitely one thing that helps. And, just you know, trying the best I can to keep it low pressure and not trying to make him share anything that he doesn't want to. I think that helps him know that I'm there for him and whatever he needs or wants to talk about or wants to go over is what we'll do." Being relaxed and using a casual tone have been previously identified by the National Mentoring Center (2003) as two listening techniques linked to building a successful mentoring relationship.

The majority of mentors also talked about the importance of asking open-ended

questions and paraphrasing in order to initiate and clarify conversations. This is

congruent with previous findings which indicate that questioning and feedback are

important factors to the participants' experience of knowing they were being listened to

and understood (Myers, 2000). Cameron reported,

> It seemed like asking questions was key to getting conversations going at first. I tried to ask about thing that I remembered doing when I was in school. "Are you playing sports? What are you learning that is cool? What are you learning that seems pointless?" Over time, he got used to the back and forth and would initiate conversations on his own.

Jeff also utilized open-ended questions to foster communication. He stated, "Well, I've

taken a lot of time in active listening, and I try to use active listening skills with my

mentee. I try to bring him out a little bit more with open-ended kinds of questions and all

that." Similar to some of the mentors in the CS group, these mentors contended that such

active listening techniques led to an increase in quality dialogue during mentoring

sessions.

   Conflict Resolution. A couple mentors in this group also reported using

techniques that are considered conflict resolution strategies. For instance, Cameron spoke

briefly about how he tried to get his mentee to understand different perspectives when it

came to handling conflict situations in his own life. Taking the perspective of the other

and building empathy can be used to build constructive conflict resolution behavior

(Deutsch, 1994). Cameron stated,

> I tried to tell him when I thought something could be done or seen differently. I just tried to give him new perspective. Open his mind to new ways of thinking about his problems. When he thinks someone, like his teacher, doesn't do what they should, I ask him to think about from more than his view. "What else might that teacher have going on? What might they be expecting from him or others that

is not being done?" Then, hopefully, he won't be as upset and he can start to identify a way to resolve the issue.

Understanding consequences was also a conflict resolution strategy used by some mentors. When his mentee was having communication issues with his teachers, Jeff pointed out some of the consequences of handling these situations negatively with. He stated, "I've said, 'You know, those are choices you're going to be making, and some of the choices with respect to education are going to mean your life is going to be either more fulfilling or less fulfilling. I try to give him what the implications are to him as a person."

Future Orientation. Future orientation strategies, such as goal setting, development of possible selves and encouragement (Markus & Nurius, 1996; Nurmi, 2005), were also incorporated by a majority of the mentors at some point during their relationship with their mentees. The goal setting process was a widely used technique among these mentors. Cameron talked a little about setting some short-term goals for his mentees. He stated, "I talk to him about goals. Sometimes we have something we're working towards, sometimes we don't. Right now we have a goal, and it is generally a one-week goal, and it's been going for about five or six weeks. He's supposed to be trying to figure out what his, how his grades work." This ongoing goal was used by Cameron to help his mentee with some of the miscommunication he felt he was experiencing between him and his teachers. Jeff also set weekly goals for his mentee during a portion of their time together. He stated that he and his mentee would talk about what he would be facing in the coming week and set a small goal to accomplish before their next session. Marie even helped her mentee set out a plan to achieve some character related goals. After purchasing a book for her mentee about setting good habits, Marie

and her mentee picked out habits that she could work on improving and discussed some of the way to do so. She stated, "I said, 'Well, let's pick out some of your favorite habits.' You know, having her pick out two things she thought she could apply in the near future and you know, we looked at being with the end in mind. You know, what you've got to do, what you have to do to get there. 'You have to turn in your homework. So begin thinking what you have to do to get there.'"

Mentors also provided encouragement for their mentees to envision possible futures. Providing youth with opportunities to see the connections between present and future at their own pace has already been shown to enhance adolescent competencies for imagining more positive possible selves and changing conduct in order to attain such visions (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002). During these discussions, Amanda would stress the importance of education to her mentee. She would tell her mentee, "You've got to really work at this, and as you get older, you're going to have to work hard. You need your education in life. You get your education, you can do anything you want in the world. So she knows that that is a priority." When John and his mentee discuss future interests, John often feels that he is trying out to be a motivational speaker. John stated that he tries to make sure his mentee feels that he is capable of achieving those future endeavors. He stated, "That's really what all of my sessions have been about really. I want him to walk away from a session, 'You can do this thing. It may not be easy, but you can do this thing.' And I encourage him. I say, 'You have a great attitude, a great spirit, you're a great kid.'"

Additional Strategies. Mentors revealed some additional strategies that they believed were instrumental in building their relationships and influencing their mentees

other than the four this study investigates. For instance, couple of mentors discussed their own personal lives in order to make the mentee feel more comfortable during discussions. Amanda stated,

> Well, she didn't know me. So we just spoke, and I told her about myself. My very first meeting with her, I spent most of the session telling her about myself and why I was doing what I was doing. And I wanted her not to think I was holding anything back from her. I wanted her to understand there were no ulterior motives here. I wanted her to feel comfortable chatting with me and if she didn't, that was also fine.

Alex also felt that discussing and relating his personal life to his mentee helped his mentee open up about his own challenges in the beginning of the relationship. When asked how he got his mentee to discuss some of the issues he was facing, he responded, "I think talking a little bit about me and my background and what I do for a living. Just some of the similar situations we've had with our parents getting divorced I think. Me mentioning that maybe helped him open up a little bit and let him know that it wasn't just him and a lot of people go through that. So I just think that shared experience and me talking about my past." John felt that talking about himself to his mentee increased transparency and created a more natural, two-sided conversation. He stated, "I think it's important to let kids see you as well, not just you sitting on one side of the table and they are on the other and you asking them questions about this and about that. I just think because in many respects it puts you on the same level. I'm a fully grown adult and he's not moved into adulthood, but as I said, my revealing some things puts us on the same level."

Perceptions of Mentee Outcomes. In the following section, Untrained Group mentors discuss their perceptions of the impact of their mentoring relationships on the

risk outcomes produced by adolescent stressors such as low socioeconomic status or academic transition.

Decreases in risk behaviors. The majority of mentors in the Untrained Group commented that there was a noticeable reduction in their mentee's exhibition of risk behaviors by the time they were interviewed. For instance, Cameron noted that his mentee has righted his academics and eliminated behavioral transgressions in school, but still has room for improvement. He stated, "His grades are up. His referrals have stopped. We are still working on getting him to take personal responsibility for those areas in his life he cannot fully control on his own. I am confident he has retained some of what we have discussed and I hope, even if I am not seeing it, it will help him in the future." Alex reported that his mentee demonstrated signs of progress during his mentoring sessions. He stated, "I think he has…he's definitely worked hard on it. Without necessarily seeing all his grades and you know, I know he still struggles. But I think he's made some progress. I think it might be slow progress." Jeff stated his mentee had been showing progress concerning academics, though he had taken a step back recently. He reported, "I would have said yes, but his grades have sort of had a little stumbling point. I think from our first time, to our second grading period, I really saw some improvement in him and he was happy with it. And where we left each other this last week was you know, sort of heading towards an abyss."

Increased positive emotionality. A number of mentors also felt that the time spent mentoring had brought about positive effects for their mentee's attitude and well-being. Amanda reported that her mentee was noticeably happier to see her as their relationship progressed. She commented, "I think that we obviously have a more developed

relationship now. I asked her if she liked having a mentor. And I asked her if she liked me and was she happy with me as her mentor. You know, we've discussed all that. And oh no, she wants to have a mentor. She likes it, and she does not want to change." Her mentee exhibited a positive change in attitude because of the relationship. Alex also commented on a noticeable change in attitude, "I think he, just with our relationship, as we've seen each other more and more and gotten more comfortable, I think you know, he's been more maybe showing a little bit more of his personality and comfort with the process."

Some mentors noticed that this attitude change extended beyond just the mentoring relationship. These mentors reported that mentees also demonstrated a positive outlook on school. Alex noted, "Even though it's math, you can tell he doesn't always like math, I think he looks forward to being able to get the extra help and the preparation. And you know, the last couple times I've been there he seems maybe a little bit more upbeat about it." John also reported that his mentee had exhibited an increase in confidence when it came to his academic struggles. He stated, "He's confident and because he's confident, I'm confident that he's going to do what he needs to do academically to move on to seventh grade. So as long as he maintains that level of effort, he'll be fine." Lastly, Marie commented on how her mentee has become more future oriented. She reported, "It's like she's even seeing…I don't know if it's she's sharing with me or she's seeing them, but we're talking about just events a little further out."

Perceptions of mentor relationships. When asked about contributions to the observed positive changes, the majority of the mentors in the Untrained Group felt that the mentoring relationship had been a contributing factor. Alex felt that the mentoring

relationship was instrumental in positively influencing his mentee and giving him the necessary tools to succeed. He stated, "I think having…yeah, I think having someone else he can, you know, bounce ideas off of or having someone else there, especially in an area he's struggling with, definitely helps. I just think any sort of positive influence where you know, as mentors we're there to help and help him improve his skills and to be a positive influence in his life. So I think I've seen signs of that." Some mentors hoped that the positive changes made by their mentees were influenced by their discussion, but also recognized that other environmental factors may come in to play. John stated, "I would hope that if he makes some progress that it would be due partly because of our conversations. Because there are other things going on too." These mentors believed that their mentees benefitted from participating in the mentor program, but felt that while the mentoring program was one form of support for youth, each mentee could receive support other ways as well.

A few mentors also felt that the positive changes observed for their mentees may be attributed to the consistency they showed as mentors and the length of their mentoring relationships, rather than anything they individually brought to the mentor relationship. Interestingly, this was also a point noted among some CS Group mentors, as discussed above. Marie commented, "Having a consistent mentor would help anybody. You know, I would like to think it was me that made the difference, but you know, having a long-term mentor is critical to any student." She went on to note that it is the development of trust that can result in a positive influence for adolescent mentees. She stated, "It's just really being able to trust someone, to build a relationship, to have an expectation. It's the trust bank. I'm building a trust bank. I don't know if they have people they can trust or

ask them to see their report card or caring about them or, you know, telling them it gets better."

Conclusion

This chapter discussed mentors perceptions in four key areas linked to both the success of their mentoring relationships and the production of resilient outcomes for their mentees. First, it identified the various factors about mentor backgrounds, including perceptions about the importance of prior experience. Specifically, mentors who had prior experience working with youth were more readily able to identify role expectations within this type of relationship and placed a greater importance on establishing the relationship in order to positively impact the youth. Mentors without prior experience seemed to have more uncertainty about their role as a mentor and often expressed a desire to learn more about how successful mentoring relationships can be achieved. Interview data also revealed that the setting has the capacity to positively or negatively impact mentoring sessions. A quiet, secluded setting with minimal visibility from others was cited by mentors as the most ideal environment for keeping youth focused during mentoring sessions. Mentors also revealed that sessions can include a number of different activities. While mentors often engaged their students in games, assisted with academic work, and even ate lunch, discussion between the mentor and mentee was the most prevalent activity during mentoring sessions.

CS Group mentors revealed an abundance of information about the four identified positive coping techniques of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. Active listening techniques such as paraphrasing, open-ended questions, and eye contact were utilized by all mentors in this group and were perceived

as being essential for establishing a connection within these newfound relationships. Emotional regulation techniques such as cognitive reappraisal and positive emotionality, as well as conflict resolution techniques such as constructive conflict and empathy, were utilized by some of the mentors. Others felt that these two strategies may not have been applicable to their particular mentees. Finally, future orientation techniques such as goal setting, envisioning future possible selves, and encouragement of future endeavors were designated by mentors as important tools for dealing with at-risk youth. Mentors in this group felt that the incorporation of these strategies into the mentoring relationship helped lower the negative behavioral responses which placed these youth as at-risk. CS Group mentors additionally identified consistency and the length of the mentoring relationship as important variables for producing such resilient outcomes in at-risk youth.

The interviews with the Untrained Group mentors revealed that they automatically engaged some forms of these identified strategies within the mentoring relationships without formal training. For instance, active listening and future orientation strategies were commonly used by the Untrained Group mentors within their relationships. Most of these mentors felt that these relationships had positively impacted their mentees, citing that school-identified risk behaviors had been reduced and mentees demonstrated increased positive emotionality. These mentors also noted that there may be other contributing factors to these observed changes. Ultimately, comments from mentors in both groups demonstrated that the utilization of the identified positive coping strategies have the capability of enhancing the quality of the adolescent mentoring relationship. This will be more fully developed through the analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze the findings from the qualitative interviews conducted with mentors in this study. The findings illustrated the use of four specific positive coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation within mentoring relationships. In this chapter, I will first demonstrate how the common adolescent strains for mentees in this study are consistent with strains identified in previous research. Then, a discussion of the study participants' perceptions of the quality of their mentor/mentee relationships will be examined in light of literature that discusses the impact of high-quality mentoring relationships on lowering adolescent strains. Importantly, this chapter then identifies the study's unique contribution of integrating the four identified positive coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation, into adolescent mentoring relationships. The chapter will ultimately reveal how mentors identified active listening, specifically, as the coping strategy that serves as the foundation for the relationship and the use of the other three strategies. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that the use of positive coping strategies can positively impact adolescent mentoring by engendering a more quality relationship between mentors and mentees.

Adolescent Strains Consistent with Literature

During in-depth interviews, mentors reported a number of stressors in their mentees' adolescent environment which directly correlated with the adolescent environmental stressors identified in the Literature Review (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1989; Gore & Colten, 1991; Lichter, Qian, & Crowley, 2005; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). In this study, one of the most frequently observed environmental stressors for adolescent mentees was the academic environment. Some of the mentors felt that the transition from primary education into the middle school environment contributed to this academic strain (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Fedlaufer, Midgley, & Eccles, 1998). Stein, for instance, discussed how he would often receive reports from his mentee or the program advocate about his mentee's academic struggles. Stein argued that the poor grades were not the result of his mentee's misunderstanding of the material, but instead, resulted from his mentee transitioning from a primary school environment with a moderate workload and uniform grading structure to a secondary school environment characterized by a high volume workload and numerous grading systems. As a result of this transition, Stein's mentee struggled to keep up with the amount of homework being given to him and had not fully acclimated to the various grading expectations set by his teachers. As suggested by Feldlaufer et al. (1998), school transition can be classified as a significant developmental stressor for early adolescents. Transitioning from having one teacher for the majority of core classes in primary education to having a number of teachers for core classes in the middle school environment may contribute to difficulties in understanding and keeping up with

expectations. These difficulties contribute to the academic distress of the youth and can result in poor academic performance, as seen with Stein's mentee.

In another case, Cameron felt that his mentees' academic distress did not stem from struggling to grasp the academic material, but was the result of poor communication between the adults in the school environment and his mentee. He stated, "It's not so much that things are difficult, as much as it's just communication. I feel like he's got a lot of problems with his teachers and administrators at the school…things aren't being communicated to him where he understands what expectations are. Disciplinary action is taken without knowledge of what the situation is, and that's very frustrating." As suggested by Eccles, Lord, & Midgley (1991), the typical middle school environment is one of increased control in which the opportunity for positive relationships with adults is reduced. In a developmental stage characterized by a need for intimacy with adult role models and increased autonomy, this distinct school environment has the potential to place tremendous pressure on early adolescent students. Evidenced by Cameron's report, the source of his mentee's environmental strain stems from a poor environment fit within his middle school. He stated, "To me, what's frustrating to talk to him about that frustrates him is the teachers and the administration not seeming to understand or want to help or take an interest. And I think he struggles with that, you know, when other people don't hold up their…what he anticipates would be their end of the bargain or what's expected of them." At a time where Cameron's mentee feels school and classroom expectations have not been properly communicated, Cameron's perception is that the adults in his school punish his mentee for misunderstandings rather than initiate a caring adult-student relationship or properly explain expectations for him as a student within this

school. Cameron further reported that this route of increased control has led to frustration for his mentee as he feels the adults in his school environment refuse to listen to him and often treat him unfairly. He stated, "I think he's hurt by it. I think he's hurt by the fact that he's held accountable for things that he feels aren't in his control at school."

School was not the only social environment of the mentees where conditions did not appropriately match the needs of the early adolescent. Some of the mentors also reported that changing relationships with family members in the home environment created strain for their mentees. Cameron stated, "His parents aren't together either. You have relationships with your parents where you know, 'I feel like my mom doesn't care,' or, 'My dad moved on without us,' or, 'My brother used to be close with me, now he's got a girlfriend.'" Cameron indicated that the changes in his mentee's family relationships may have created an environment that was ill-suited for his needs of intimacy as an early adolescent. This is comparable to research conducted by Eccles et al. (1993) which indicated that distress associated with many early adolescents may result from the disparity between their emotional needs and opportunities within their social world. When the early adolescent is placed in a setting not attuned to his social-emotional needs, frustration builds (Eccles et al., 1993). This frustration, in turn, may contribute to how the individual adolescent responds to other transient pressures of this period.

Lastly, a large portion of the environmental stressors reported by the mentors interviewed derived from their mentees' low socioeconomic status. While Alex and Amanda specifically noted that their mentees were often concerned about the lack of money for their households, one mentor reported that neighborhood safety was also a prominent concern for his mentee. Yuri stated, "The only thing that I remember him

mentioning that was a little odd was that cops were you know, driving by the house and that he mentioned hearing gunshots one night…more of the environment, like externally, than internally." As outlined by the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development (1995) and Lichter et al. (2005), impoverished conditions place families and youth at a higher risk for experiencing strains associated with economic hardship. These families and youth often worry about being homeless, whether there will be enough money for food, and if bills will be paid on time. Engaging in fun and stress-relieving family activities is also limited due to a lack of financial resources. Additionally, the depiction of the above mentee's neighborhood accurately illustrates living conditions in a disadvantaged neighborhood, which are characterized by little interpersonal trust and norms, weak social ties, and high rates of violence (Evans, 2004). While most associate the home environment with safety and security, living in these conditions increase the likelihood that families and youth associate their home environments with fear and anxiety.

Other mentors alluded to the increase in adult responsibilities as a result of the economic hardships for their mentee's families. Mr. Nice Guy mentioned, "I mean, he's responsible for a lot at home because both of his parents work. So I would say taking care of his brothers and stuff like that, because he's pretty much running everything with them." These increased responsibilities would even impact his mentee's school life, as his parent would often keep him at home to babysit his younger brother. As indicated by Evans (2004), impoverished children live in a chaotic environment characterized by lower structure and greater instability. Disadvantaged children are also more likely to be exposed to family turmoil and violence. This type of strain was evidenced by Shirley

when discussing her mentee's upbringing. She stated, "Well her dad was in jail. Her mother's rights were terminated almost a year prior to that…by the time she got to her current school, she was with a foster home…and then there was an incident and they had to pull her out of there. She alluded to sexual abuse. It was a bad scenario." The testimonies given by these mentors highlight some of the characteristics of disadvantaged families and neighborhoods identified in the Literature Review chapter which have the potential to increase the strain experienced by early adolescents placed in these environments.

Quality Mentoring: Creating a Foundation

To help the mentees cope with various types of strain, mentors often noted that it was essential to establish a quality relationship. Engendering a close bond with their mentees and building trust was part of this process. This sentiment was consistently expressed by those mentors who had previous experience in youth mentoring relationships. Stein reported, "I think the biggest thing, and I use that every time I get a new mentee, is you have to have a relationship with the person first and you have to really have their buy-in or their trust before you can really make a difference." Cameron further discussed how developing a genuine relationship was more advantageous than providing corrective measures for the positive development of his mentee. He stated, "It is not your job to force them to be who you think they should be. You are there for them. Be an ear and a shoulder and help them learn to make their own decisions." These perceptions are consistent with the research previously conducted by Cavell et al. (2009) which investigated the extent to which a close trusting bond between mentor and mentee, an indirect measure of relationship quality, predicted outcomes for aggressive children in

two different mentoring programs. This study found that mentors who primarily focused on building rapport and developing trust within the relationship produced consistent and positive perceptions of relationship quality between mentors and mentees. These comparable perceptions demonstrated that mentors had established a strong connection to their mentees, indirectly signifying the development of a quality relationship (Cavell et al., 2009). Establishing this strong connection further positively influenced the impact on mentee behavior outcomes as evidenced by parent ratings. While it was beyond the reach of this thesis project to compare mentor and mentee perceptions of relationship quality, findings from Cavell et al. (2009) are somewhat supported by the perceptions of participants in this study who clearly emphasized developing a close connection as an integral part of establishing a quality mentoring relationship and positively impacting adolescent mentees.

Mentors also reported that developing a close bond and establishing trust was created through a number of techniques, including the selection of a stable, semi-private setting, selection of light conversation topics, and openness during discourse. Jake discussed how engaging in semi-structured activities was a way for him to build trust and fluid dialogue in the beginning stages of the relationship. Reporting on his efforts to make his mentee comfortable, Jake stated, "We sit and chat and eat. Or when we're done eating, we'll do a puzzle or a game. He'll get up and down and move around a bit but um, we'll talk about his home or whatever kind of comes up." This strategy is corroborated in existing research which highlights approaches used by mentors to enhance the quality of the relationship. Specifically, the research presented by Converse & Lignugaris (2008) found that the integration of semi-structured activities, such as talking about non-school

topics, sharing food, and playing games, was related to mentors viewing their relationship in a more positive light. Those mentors, moreover, had more successful interactions with mentees than mentors who used guided icebreaker activities. As evidenced by Jake's testimony above, mentors in this study often engaged in such semi-structured activities in order to build rapport and successfully interact with mentees. He argued that the quality interaction which resulted from such activities was necessary to have a successful relationship with his mentee. Jake stated,

> I think success lies in the ability to reach a human to human level with your mentee. They have to think of you not as an adult who they have to meet with, but with another person they want to spend time with and hang out or whatever. And if I was teaching a class, I think that is what I would focus on, I would make sure these people know how to interact with kids, and not freak out about behaviors. And not, I don't know, not act as professionals every minute of the day and have fun. Because I think they'll be more successful if they can get on a level where the kid is comfortable talking to them.

> In another case, Amanda specifically spoke about how she developed a close

bond with her mentee by being open, caring and honest during initial dialogues, and by thoughtfully explaining the purpose of their mentoring relationship. She stated,

> Well, she didn't know me. So we just spoke, and I told her about myself. My very first meeting with her, and I spent most of the session telling her about myself and why I was doing what I was doing. And I wanted her not to think I was holding anything back from her. I wanted her to understand there were no ulterior motives here. I wanted her to feel comfortable chatting with me and if she didn't, that was also fine.

These comments corroborate the research conducted by Davenport & Lane (2009), which highlighted factors thought to impact the mentor-mentee dynamic. In their study, data from in-depth interviews with adolescent mentees indicated that the mentor characteristics of being understanding, friendly, and genuine contributed to the quality of their mentoring relationships (Davenport & Lane, 2009). Amanda felt that this allowed

her mentee to have a more complete picture of her as a person and possibly feel more comfortable in revealing information about herself.

Participants in the Davenport & Lane (2009) study also noted that being encouraging and supportive listeners assisted the establishment of a quality connection. These mentors were able to provide emotional and instrumental support during difficult times by listening closely to their mentees. Shirley's comments about being a sounding board for her mentee were particularly supportive of findings from their study. When asked what type of role she expected to take during the initial stages of the relationship, Shirley responded, "You know, just somebody that could offer somebody, a child, some help with homework or just being a sounding board…My goal was just to be a sounding board for her because a lot of these kids don't have anybody to talk to at all." By taking the role of listener, Shirley perceived that her mentee felt increasingly comfortable expressing her thoughts and feelings. In turn, Shirley hoped this comfort would help her mentee be more open to the feedback she offered. These insights corroborate interview data of mentees which revealed that mentors were particularly effective when they listened closely (Davenport & Lane, 2009).

As evidenced by their comments in this study, mentors perceive the quality of the mentoring relationship to be highly influenced by their ability to establish a strong bond with their mentees. Cumulatively, the importance placed on establishing this connection by the mentors in this study is consistent with the previous research that demonstrated links between such connections, quality mentoring relationships, and positive youth outcomes (Cavell et al, 2009). Comments highlighting the strategies used by mentors to establish such bonds were also in accord with previous research (Converse & Lignugaris,

2008; Davenport & Lane, 2009). The selection of structured activities, taking on the role of listener, and being understanding and supportive were discussed by mentors as integral for connecting with their mentees and establishing quality relationships.

Integrating Positive Coping Techniques into Mentoring: A Unique Approach

While coping research has identified active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation as useful strategies for helping adolescents cope with strain in a positive manner (Mauss et al., 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Nurmi, 2005; Jones, 2011), little research has been conducted to determine how such strategies fit into youth intervention programs specifically. Further, it is difficult to apply findings from existing literature to adolescent intervention because of the sample population and structural design of these studies. For instance, Izard et al. (2008) conducted a study which tested the hypothesis that an emotion-regulating prevention program would accelerate the development of social-emotional competence. While the research demonstrated that the emotional regulation program resulted in less negative emotion expressions and less externalizing behaviors, the study's use of preschool children as a sample population does not significantly apply to emotion-regulating prevention programs serving adolescent youth. Other research, such as that conducted by Johnson et al. (1997), studied the impact of a conflict resolution intervention on youth coping responses. While this study utilized adolescents for their intervention program, it did not provide a structural design that could be replicated on a large scale. The intervention program designed to teach adolescents the procedures for managing conflict constructively consisted of exercises designed for large groups. Though findings demonstrated that adolescents could successfully be taught to use such conflict resolution

techniques, the "large group" nature of such conflict training is not easily applied to the individual or small-group situations typical of adolescent intervention programs.

As discussed in previous chapters, research surrounding one of the most frequently utilized adolescent intervention strategies, mentoring, provides some evidence for building resilience and minimizing the negative outcomes associated with increased adolescent strain (Zimmerman et al., 2002). Taken as a whole, however, this research has inconsistent application. This inconsistency has prompted mentoring researchers to evaluate the intricacies of the mentoring relationship in order to more accurately pinpoint the characteristics or techniques within these relationships which lead to positive outcomes for adolescents. Most studies have typically outlined the longevity and quality of the mentoring relationship as integral factors for mitigating the effects of adolescent stressors (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2006; Cavell et al., 2009). A couple such studies, including Converse & Lignugaris (2008) and Davenport & Lane (2009), explored and identified specific mentor characteristics, such as being understanding, approachable, supportive, and a good listener, and analyzed their impact on the quality of the mentor relationship and subsequent resilient outcomes for youth involved. The importance of these characteristics for enhancing the quality of the mentoring relationship was confirmed by a number of mentors in this study. For instance, Stein stated, "That's where the relationship all started, the comfortability, that's where it all started and I think it ends in the same place. You know, making sure that they feel you're being genuine, you understand, you're receptive."

Clearly, existing studies outline a number of the characteristics which make one person more able to establish a quality connection during the mentoring process and

positively impact an adolescent youth (Converse & Lignugaris, 2008; Davenport & Lane, 2009). Yet, as noted above, studies that examine the integration of the four coping strategies above into this type of adolescent intervention program are rare. As such, this study fills two voids. First, by training mentors to use four identified positive coping strategies (active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation) within their mentoring relationships, and interviewing them about their perceptions of the application for adolescent mentees, this study provides new dimensions of understanding about the effectiveness of positive coping strategies in mentoring relationships. Second, the results of this study extend existing research in ways that have practical implications. Specifically, by examining the results of integrating specific positive coping strategies into adolescent mentoring relationships, this study provides insight into ways that mentoring organizations can structure and strengthen the training process of mentors to ensure that these volunteers are increasingly capable of forming a quality mentoring relationship with an adolescent.

Perceptions of Active Listening

A major finding in this study was the emphasis mentors placed on active listening in the adolescent mentoring relationship. When asked which strategy in the Coping Strategies Handout best helped mentors to address the challenge areas of their mentees and build resilient outcomes, the CS Group mentors overwhelmingly identified active listening techniques. The majority of mentors in the Untrained Group also identified active listening concepts as a crucial part of engendering positive outcomes for their mentees. Below is an in-depth discussion of some mentors' perceptions on active listening and its role in this type of adolescent intervention strategy.

Active Listening as Foundation for Relationship Building. A number of
mentors commented on how active listening concepts were an integral part of building
their mentoring relationships. These mentors believed that the active listening techniques
enhanced the overall quality of the mentoring relationship by improving conversation,
sparking the mentee's interest, creating trust, and ensuring a relaxed atmosphere. For
example, Shirley discussed how actively listening to her mentee helped to gain her trust.
She stated, "Kids are smart. They know if you're listening to them. You know, they know
if you're trying to feed them just a bunch of bull to satisfy your needs, or if you're really
there for them. I think that it [active listening] helped her see that I really was there, and I
wasn't just going to be another person that came and left. I had to prove to her that I was
listening." The support for active listening is congruent with previous research which
suggests that active listening concepts help increase adult's knowledge of how to respond
to an adolescent's feelings and effectively demonstrate emotional support to the
adolescent (Jones, 2011; Converse & Lignugaris, 2008; National Mentoring Center,
2003; Graybill, 1986). Mentors' perceptions in this study confirm this sentiment that
relationships in which the adult takes on the role of active listener are more likely to lead
to a quality relationship with an adolescent.

As discussed in previous chapter, this study focused on the initial stages of
mentoring relationships. The prominence of active listening, consequently, may have
been influenced by a necessity during these initial stages of the mentor relationships.
Shirley suggested that active listening was so important for these novel relationships,
"Because a big piece of it is that that's all she'll let me do. I mean, you have to listen to

them to gain their respect, to make any kind of impact, whether it's their schoolwork or whatever. They have to feel…they have to feel positive." Jake confirmed this notion,

> To have a relationship with anybody, it's important to listen and to feedback, and to be rebounding and that kind of stuff. I mean, the more I understand what he's saying the better I can help him with it. Listening is what we're here for, you know? I'm looking for information from him, and you know he's a kid, he's not just going to be able to list, he's not a robot, he's not going to list off…you have to be able to find information, you have to ask the right questions, and you have to listen to the answers, and find what you can help with within what he says.

The perceived benefits from using active listening concepts, such as gaining trust and building rapport, were viewed by CS Group mentors to be most useful for these beginning interactions in their relationships. CS Group mentors were able to develop a better concept of their mentees as individuals, and vice versa. This confirms findings from the National Mentoring Center (2003), which suggested that effective mentors tend to initially focus on utilizing active listening techniques in order to build trust, rather than immediately trying to change or reform behavior. Active listening techniques such as making eye contact, undivided attention, and open-ended questions are also thought to have a positive effect on how a mentor is initially perceived by the mentee.

It is of note that the Untrained Group mentors also believed that active listening was the most important activity within the initial stages of their mentor relationships. Jeff specifically mentioned active listening as the most instrumental tool for creating the relationship. He reported, "Frankly, that's the only way I can connect with my mentee is active listening. I would say in terms of my background, I have some exposure/training in that. I was in a business situation most of my life, relative to my career, so it was not in teaching or education, but it was certainly in developing a relationship." This was echoed by Marie, who felt that mentors first must listen to build trust, and then proceed to

influence their mentees. When asked about the benefits of listening to her budding

relationship, she stated,

> Well, [listening] builds a rapport, it's almost an expectation. We're going to sit
> down, we're going to talk about how our week's been. You're really building a
> relationship. If the student doesn't feel comfortable with you and doesn't trust
> you, it's not going to proceed beyond that. So first, there has to be a comfort level,
> a level of trust, and sort of commonality.

The pervasive use of active listening concepts from mentors in the Untrained Group

could be tied to these mentors' previous experiences with adolescent youth. As

illustrated by the National Mentoring Center (2003), successful mentors typically focus

on building a relationship with the adolescent rather than directly attempting to change

antisocial behaviors. Certainly, mentors' previous experiences in mentor relationships or

working with adolescent youth in any capacities could have been influential in the

selection of approaches in their current relationships. Experienced mentors were more

concerned about building a relationship with their mentees and gaining trust during these

beginning stages. This may have led to the use of active listening techniques in order to

foster such trust, despite not being directly instructed to utilize such concepts within these

relationships. While there is no current mentor research which directly supports the

relationship between mentor's previous experience and a stronger focus on building a

quality relationship, this finding demonstrates that previous experience in the mentoring

paradigm may help mentors to emphasize the importance of relationship building

techniques, such as active listening, in these initial stages.

Active Listening As a Foundation for Other Coping Strategies. A number of

CS Group mentors found that the use of active listening concepts within their relationship

laid a foundation to utilize the three other coping strategies identified during their

training: emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. During her interview, Shirley provided a scenario in which active listening concepts were present while she was working with her mentee to help regulate her emotions. She reported, "There are some times when she…you can tell by her body language, like it's escalating. Like it's too much for her. So I'll say to her, 'Ok, we're going to move on. Let's talk about something else.' And I'm able to veer it. And that's good. But then the next time we meet, she's not afraid to talk to me about it. A lot of times she'll be the one that brings it up." As identified in the Literature Review, emotional regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence the nature, timing, and impact of their emotions (Gross, 1998). Though the two had been working to defuse an emotionally-charged situation, Shirley was able to use non-verbal cues to determine that her mentee was becoming uncomfortable with the topic and quickly changed gears in order to avoid upsetting her mentee. The avoidance of this emotional escalation through active listening techniques helped Shirley's mentee feel more comfortable readdressing the emotional regulating practices at a later date.

Yuri was one mentor who outlined the interaction between the four identified positive coping strategies in great detail during his interview. While he maintained that active listening and the other coping strategies intertwine to produce resilient outcomes for adolescent mentees, he noted that the additional coping strategies would not be effective without some of the benefits produced by active listening. When asked which strategy he found to be most effective in producing resilient outcomes for his mentee, he stated,

> Definitely active listening. With at-risk I think it would be active listening because I feel like active listening kind of both gives and takes from the other

strategies. Like I feel like they are more of a cycle than an individual process. They all feed off each other. You can't be future oriented with a person if you don't know what they plan for their future and like they don't have a relationship with you, which I feel like you build through active listening. And it's hard to get people to open up about their problems for conflict resolution type situations if you don't listen to them, or they feel like you're not listening to them.

These comments reflect a common sentiment among the mentors that the successful application of the other identified coping strategies was contingent upon the use of active listening. Without the trust and relationship foundation brought about by the use of active listening, mentors argued that the strategies of emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation would not be as effective within their mentoring relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the findings in light of existing research, corroborating and adding to it in several ways. As previously noted, the typical adolescent strains that emerged among mentees in this study are consistent with those found in adolescent strain research. As perceived by the mentors interviewed, mismatches between school environment and adolescent developmental needs, low socioeconomic status, and family relationships were all found to be significant sources of daily stressors for adolescent mentees. The unique application of identified positive coping strategies within adolescent mentoring relationships was also discussed in this chapter. This study adds to mentoring research by using in-depth interviews to examine strategies that mentors utilize to impact the quality of their mentoring relationships. Mentors' application of the four identified coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation further builds upon coping strategy research by exploring their effectiveness within mentoring, one of the most widely used adolescent intervention approaches. As discussed earlier in the chapter, mentors found that the integration of such coping

strategies enhanced their mentoring relationships, as well as helped to mitigate negative behavioral responses of mentees. These results have the capacity to assist mentor organizations in restructuring and strengthening the mentoring training process in an effort to ensure that mentors have the knowledge to form successful relationships with adolescents. The overwhelming effectiveness of active listening techniques in fostering an open line of communication, creating trust, and building a quality mentoring relationship was an intriguing result. In fact, mentors not only felt that active listening was needed to build a foundation for their relationships, they also noted that the use of active listening acted as a foundation for the use of the other identified coping strategies. Without the bond and rapport that resulted from using active listening, CS Group mentors argued that the incorporation of conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and future orientation would not have been as effective. Additionally, a few mentors even suggested that active listening techniques were often useful during the incorporation of the other identified strategies. Lastly, evidence from Untrained Group mentor interviews suggests that previous experience in the mentoring paradigm influences mentors to place emphasis on building trust and creating quality interpersonal communication, resulting in a greater use of active listening concepts. Ultimately, this chapter illustrated that the utilization of active listening can be crucial during the initial stages of mentoring relationships By enhancing the likelihood that a trusting bond is formed between mentor and mentee and acting as a foundation for the use of other coping strategies, adolescent mentors' use of active listening increases the likelihood that adolescent mentees are positively impacted by such youth intervention program.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Review

Experiences during the early adolescent period often have significant implications for a youth's development into adulthood. Overarching change, which includes physiological maturity, a shift in social roles, and the transition from primary to secondary education, has the capacity to augment the challenges and pressures experienced by youth during this timeframe (Caissy, 2002; Eccles, 1999; Feldlaufer et al., 1988). Even more concerning, a sizable number of youth are at-risk for experiencing additional stressors associated with economic hardship during adolescence. In addition to the normative stressors mentioned above, these at-risk youth are often subject to low levels of support, reduced accessibility to high-quality public and private services, and the presentation of few developmental paths that promote a conventional lifestyle, increasing the likelihood that these adolescents are dependent on unconventional means for dealing with such pressures (Evans, 2004). While youth mentoring has been established as a strong, prospective intervention strategy for promoting adolescent social support and reducing at-risk behaviors associated with adolescent stressors, mentoring research outlining the impact of these relationships on adolescent youth has been quite inconsistent (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro, 2002). The mentoring field has recently recognized the importance of evaluating and critiquing mentoring practices in an effort to better identify how and why only certain

relationships successfully produce resilient outcomes for the involved adolescents. Though this new direction has revealed promising evidence that the longevity and quality of the mentoring relationship may be causal links in the production of positive youth outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2006; Cavell et al., 2009), it is essential for mentoring research to continue to uncover the more underlying processes responsible for such resilient outcomes in order to engender consistently successful youth mentors.

The purpose of this study was to explore some of the tools and strategies mentors can use to ensure at-risk youth are increasingly capable of dealing with environmental stressors in a positive and conventional manner. As noted in the Literature Review chapter, coping, or the efforts to activate personal resources in order to deal with stress, is an important concept when considering intervention for at-risk adolescents. In an effort to reduce the impact of stressors, at-risk adolescents, who are characterized by an inability to mobilize social resources and support, are more likely to utilize disengagement coping strategies, or those that attempt to orient oneself away from a stressful circumstance. This style of coping, unfortunately, often leads to further behavioral-emotional problems (Connor-Smith et al., 2000). Though coping literature has demonstrated that these adolescents can be taught to utilize positive coping techniques to reduce the impact of negative adolescent stressors (Graybill, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 1997; Izard et al., 2008), these research studies have not offered a consistent and generalizable medium for providing at-risk adolescents with these indispensable tools. To better understand in what context the instruction of positive coping skills is most

beneficial for producing resilient outcomes, coping literature must further investigate some of the natural relationships held by adolescents.

This study engages the mentoring paradigm as an intervention medium in which at-risk adolescents can be exposed to techniques that foster a more positive, conventional coping style. Specifically, this thesis project investigated how explicitly incorporating the four identified coping strategies of active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation were perceived by mentors to impact mentoring relationships and risk outcomes for mentees. Because this research was meant to be exploratory, qualitative methods were desirable as the main source of data collection for this study. Semi-structured interviews, in which participants are able to express their perceptions and ideas in their own words, were ideal for identifying how mentors choose to apply such coping strategies within their relationships, when and how such strategies can be beneficial, if the inclusion of such approaches leads to more positive mentoring relationships, and if mentors link the use of such strategies with resilient outcomes for their at-risk mentees. With the consent of Scholastic Mentors, a youth mentoring organization which serves at-risk adolescents from primarily low socioeconomic neighborhoods in Northeast Florida, two groups of mentors were identified and designated for participation. Mentors in the Coping Strategies group were individually trained in the above-mentioned positive coping strategies before the start of the mentoring process and asked to incorporate such strategies within their relationship at their own discretion. Mentors in the second group, known as the Untrained group, were given information about the purpose of the study but received no information or training regarding the four identified coping strategies. The inclusion of the second group served

to measure the extent to which such coping strategies are organically engaged (or not) within mentoring relationships, and uncover any other processes that may be useful in fostering positive youth outcomes.

A number of key points can be taken away from this study's findings. First, mentors reported a number of stressors in their mentees' adolescent environment which directly correlated with the adolescent environmental stressors identified in the literature review, further illustrating that the characteristics of disadvantaged families and neighborhoods have the potential to increase the strain experience by early adolescents (Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development, 1989; Gore & Colten, 1991; Lichter, Qian, & Crowley, 2005; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Additionally, mentors' focus on establishing a relationship foundation highlights previous mentoring research's emphasis on relationship quality. The majority of these mentors stressed ensuring the comfortability of their mentee and building a solid foundation for the relationship as integral parts of being able to positively influence. Choosing a semi-secluded environment, conveying a friendly disposition, opening up about personal life, and disclosing the nature of the relationship were some of the many ways mentors naturally enhanced the quality of their relationships.

Active listening was also identified by both CS group mentors and Untrained group mentors as a valuable strategy mentors can use to enhance the quality of their mentoring relationships during the initial stages of the mentoring process. Mentors perceived active listening to be crucial for finding common ground with their mentees, opening lines of communication, building the necessary trust to discuss sensitive topics (i.e., sources of strain), and ultimately influencing coping responses for mentees. The

overwhelming use of active listening techniques by Untrained Group mentors, furthermore, revealed the significant role this strategy naturally plays within this stage of the mentoring relationship. For CS group mentors, active listening techniques served as a foundation and were often present for the use of the other identified coping strategies: emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation. While these other positive coping strategies introduced within the training session were also highly regarded as integral to this type of mentoring relationship, it was thought these strategies would be most valuable after the relationships were already established, leading to a greater emphasis on active listening strategies.

The impact of training mentors in these positive coping strategies also revealed important differences between mentors with and without experience in youth relationships. As revealed by interview data from both groups, mentors without experience initially express uncertainty in their role in the relationship, their ability to influence their mentee, and general knowledge of these types of strategies. While some inexperienced mentors in the Untrained Group were able to obtain helpful information from those experienced with youth relationships, inexperienced mentors in the CS Group noted that the training in positive coping strategies helped them feel more comfortable with their role as a mentor, depicted a general foundation for what their experience would be like, and provided the tools and confidence necessary to make a positive impact on their mentees. This training session placed these mentors on a more level playing field with the experienced mentors who already had a working knowledge of their role in the relationship and the methods useful for positively influencing youth.

Implications

As previously mentioned, mentoring has the potential to be a powerful medium by which adolescent youth can be influenced to make better decisions and avoid delinquent outcomes. Though quantitative data has been practical for illustrating which programs are most successful in reducing risk outcomes for youth, this type of investigation has yet to identify any significant variables linked to this success rate other than the duration and quality of the relationship. While such research loosely defines the characteristics of a quality mentoring relationship, it does not explicitly address the strategies and tools often used by mentors to establish such a relationship and positively impact adolescents. In contrast, positive coping research has individually identified active listening, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and future orientation as useful strategies for helping at-risk youth cope with strain in a positive manner (Mauss et al., 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Nurmi, 2005; Jones, 2011). While this research has been valuable for illustrating tools which can be used to promote positive outcomes for at-risk adolescents, little research has been conducted to determine how such strategies fit into youth intervention programs specifically. Further, the structural designs and sample populations used within these existing studies make it difficult to apply findings to such programs.

The exploratory nature of this study is particularly meaningful to mentoring research because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of why only some, and not all, mentoring relationships result in resilient outcomes for at-risk adolescents. By using qualitative interviews to investigate the characteristics of the early mentoring relationship environment, as well as mentor perceptions of the contributing factors to

successful mentoring relationships and positive youth outcomes, a unique contribution is made to existing mentor research. This study identifies the characteristics and strategies mentors perceive as valuable to the formation of a quality relationship with an at-risk adolescent, and further solidifies the association between quality mentoring relationships and positive youth outcomes. The incorporation of positive youth coping strategies into the adolescent mentoring paradigm, specifically, supplements resilience building literature by assessing their value and impact within a widely-used adolescent intervention approach. By incorporating these identified techniques into the mentoring paradigm, this study builds upon such research by illustrating how such strategies fit into a youth intervention program, whether their use is considered effective by those involved, and whether their use within such an intervention is perceived to lead to an increasing amount of resilient outcomes for youth.

Additionally, this study's unique supplement to existing mentor and positive coping research has practical implications. The information gathered from this study should be used as a preliminary investigation for fully understanding the ways in which mentoring programs can strengthen these types of relationships and positively impact the youth they serve. As evidenced through the Findings and Analysis chapters within this research, the nature of beginning mentor relationships calls for a strong focus on establishing a connection, building trust, and creating dialogue. Active listening strategies were identified by mentors in this study as a valuable tool for establishing such a relationship foundation, as well as a foundation for the use of other positive coping strategies. This knowledge of the intricacies of the beginning mentoring relationship and the tools considered useful to mentors can and should be utilized by mentoring

organizations to strengthen and focus their mentor training. The inclusion and emphasis of active listening strategies within training for beginning mentors, for instance, can assist these agencies in identifying the shortcomings of some volunteer mentors within this type of relationship environment and ensure that these individuals are presented with necessary tools to make them increasingly capable of forming a quality mentoring relationship with an adolescent.

Finally, while this study's qualitative design provides a depth of understanding about early mentoring relationships and the incorporation of positive coping techniques, it is important to acknowledge that mentors' perceptions may have been shaped and affected by other factors, the investigation of which was beyond the scope of this study. For example, mentors' backgrounds and life experiences, along with their race, socioeconomic class or gender may all have contributed to their interpretation of events. The researcher recognizes this as a potential limitation of this study and an additional dimension to consider in future research.

Future Directions

While this research provides a greater understanding of the effectiveness of incorporating identified positive coping strategies in the beginning stages of a mentoring relationship, it provides only a snapshot of these strategies' value within this intervention paradigm. Because mentors only had about three months before reporting to work with their mentees and utilize such strategies within their relationships, mentors reported that a few of the strategies were not yet applicable. As the Findings and Analysis chapters illustrated, the relatively short time-span for this study in relation to the mentoring relationships involved may have impacted the perceptions of mentors concerning the

utilization of the positive coping strategies. Mentors primarily focused on building the relationship during this time, for which active listening was viewed as the most valuable tool. It is recommended that future research about the use of such positive coping strategies within mentoring relationships also conduct reporting at one and two years into the relationship. This will ensure that the investigator fully understands the impact of each strategy on these relationships and resilient outcomes for youth at various stages of the mentoring relationship.

The volunteer mentors who participated in this study and the Scholastic Mentors program were a part of a school-based mentoring service. Unlike most community-based mentoring programs, these mentors are only able to see their mentees for a limited amount of time and only on school property during normal hours of operation. The degree of freedom in choice of activities and session settings may have a substantial impact on how these mentors perceive their mentee's challenges, their relationships, and their potential impact when compared to those mentors who are engaged in community-based relationships. It is recommended that future research be conducted using samples from community-based mentoring programs to fully understand the skills and strategies that these mentors use to impact their mentees, as well as their perceptions about being trained in positive coping strategies and their usefulness within this type of relationship.

Conclusion

As previous literature has demonstrated, youth intervention through mentoring, as well as training youth to use positive coping strategies, each have the capacity to produce resilient outcomes for adolescents. This existing research, however, has fallen short in fully answering how these resilient outcomes can be consistently attained. By

investigating the incorporation of such strategies within the mentoring paradigm, this study provides a deeper understanding of how such strategies can be used within a widely conventional intervention method. This study also reveals mentors' perceptions of the value such strategies can provide to help mentors establish a quality mentoring relationship and subsequently impact adolescents' responses to strain. Together, this research provides a foundation for better understanding and strengthening the mentoring process, which may result in the increasingly consistent production of resilient outcomes for at-risk adolescents by mentoring programs.

Appendix A

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Communities
In Schools

Jacksonville

September 25, 2012

Communities In Schools of Jacksonville
One Riverside Ave., Suite 400
Jacksonville, FL 32202

To Whom It May Concern:

Communities In Schools is an organization that strategically aligns and delivers needed resources to help at-risk students face daily challenges inside and outside the classroom. With United Way funding, the Achievers For Life program matches students with mentors who provide a positive influence, encouragement, and hope for youth surrounded by a variety of negative influences. We are committed to supporting the University of North Florida's venture and feel that this research project is critical to our mentoring mission.

We will assist University of North Florida researchers with obtaining qualitative data by providing access to volunteer mentors in the Achievers For Life program who have voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for the study. To the best of our ability, we will provide accommodation to conduct interviews through the use of our offices, which are voluntarily provided by Duval County Public Schools. Provided that the researchers maintain confidentiality and anonymity, information pertinent to mentee's behavioral and academic outcomes, as maintained in our files, will be provided to support the quantitative component of this research.

We look forward to participating in this research with the University of North Florida, and they have our full support for this Project.

Sincerely,

Signature Deleted

Melissa Conger

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

My name is Nicholas Dzoba and I am a student at the University of North Florida. I am conducting a research study as part of my graduate thesis project and your help in this project is greatly appreciated. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the strategies and processes used by mentors to foster positive coping in their relationships with at-risk adolescents. Your participation in this interview will help researchers understand the dynamics of teaching positive coping strategies to these youth and could be used to further strengthen mentoring programs.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can terminate the interview at any time. You are also free not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering. Deciding not to answer questions or to end the interview will not be associated any negative consequences. The interview can last from one to two hours. Your real name will not be used for the purposes of this study. I will ask you at the beginning of the interview to choose a name that you want me to use in the final draft of this study so that anyone reading it will not be able to identify you.

This interview is being audio-recorded using an iPad. Consenting to this study means you consent to being audio-recorded. The purpose of audio recording the interview is to ensure all the information we discuss is accurate. Once the interview is complete, I will transcribe it and the audio recording will be destroyed. Your pseudonym will be applied to the transcription. Interview transcripts will be uploaded and stored on a secure UNF server.

This interview is for the purpose of academic research and you will not be judged based on your answers. Measures will be taken to ensure that the information discussed will be confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this research project or the University of North Florida's procedures regarding rights of the subject please contact:
UNF IRB Chairperson, UNF Institutional Review Board, or irb@unf.edu

By signing this document, you agree to the following statements:

- I have been read and I understand the procedures previously described.
- I agree to participate in this procedure and I have received a copy of this description.
- I am 18 years of age or older.

Nicholas Dzoba
University of North Florida

Dr. Jennifer Wesely – Faculty Advisor
University of North Florida

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

Appendix C

Strategies for Promoting Positive Coping in At-Risk Youth

<u>**Active Listening**</u>

- **Model good listening behavior.** This includes:
  - o Making eye contact
  - o Having open (relaxed) body language
  - o Conversing at the same eye level (sitting)
  - o Giving undivided attention
  - o Appearing genuinely interested by asking open-ended questions
  - o Refraining from passing judgment.
- **Attentiveness and feedback are important factors in the feeling of being listened to and understood.** Paraphrasing, clarifying, questioning, and attending to details should be modeled and encouraged to help develop these skills.
- **Try to understand the world from the mentee's perspective** and asking questions when you don't understand. Supportive listening involves demonstrating emotional involvement when responding to your mentee and is an effective tool for building trust.
- **Improve mentee's listening skills by encouraging him/her to:**
  - o Watch the speaker
  - o Formulate questions when something is not understood
  - o Identify main points
  - o Respond to what is said.

<u>**Emotional Regulation**</u>

- **Model empathy** by trying to understand the mentee's feelings and perceptions when discussing sensitive topics, and challenging the mentee to understand how others may feel or perceive similar situations.
- **Help the mentee to evaluate his or her attitudes, values, and feelings**. This encompasses having the mentee consciously reflect on how situations, persons, and objects bring about negative or positive emotions.
- **Challenge the mentee's way of thinking about a subject** to motivate and lead the mentee to greater creativity and understanding.
- **Dispute the negative views** that mentees may have of themselves or of relationships with others and **promote positive emotions** such as joy, contentment and interest.
- Help the mentee to actively modify the emotional impact of a situation through situation selection. **Situation selection refers to an individual's effort to regulate emotions by approaching or avoiding certain people, places, or objects**.
- Instruct the mentee to use cognitive reappraisal, especially in anger-inducing situations. **Cognitive reappraisal refers to redefining an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that limits its emotional impact.**

Conflict Resolution

- **Encourage cooperative solutions for solving conflicts**. In constructive conflict, adversaries interact to solve the problem they face together by seeking a mutually acceptable outcome.
- **Promote the negotiation skills of the mentee.** Have the mentee describe what he or she wants, how they feel, and the reasoning underlying those feelings.
- **Encourage the mentee to take the perspective of the other, to look at the conflict from an outside perspective, and to distinguish between needs and positions.** These strategies, along with external feedback on their use, can help the mentee to reframe issues in conflict so that a common ground can form.
- **Encourage the creativity of the mentee in conflict situations.** Creativity enhances problem solving abilities by generating novel and effective solutions to different problems.
- **Model and encourage the use of an open-minded discussion of opposing views about how a problem can be solved.** This consists of a process of argument and counterargument aimed at persuading others to adopt, modify or drop positions. This strategy can teach the mentee to make high-quality decisions that integrate the best information and reasoning from both sides of the conflict.
- **Use conflict as an opportunity for moral growth** by engendering skills of self-awareness, perspective taking, listening, and emotional management.

Facilitating Future Orientation

- Look forward with the mentee: discussing the mentee's **interests, values, goals, concerns, doubts, and fears** as it pertains to his or her future.
- **Encourage the mentee to envision their possible future self**, or the individual idea of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming.
- **Setting goals and elevating expectations are important tools for envisioning a positive future.** It encompasses actively exploring opportunities, setting minor objectives to lead to goal obtainment, helping the mentee plan ahead, and encouraging behavior regulation to increase long-term success.
- Model decision-making: **troubleshooting problems and presenting information regarding all possible outcomes for situations can promote a greater understanding for future consequences.** Social comparison can also be a quality tool for furthering the mentee's understanding of future outcomes.
- **Encourage, support, and motivate your mentee for a successful future.** This encompasses fostering a belief in the youth's ability to succeed, countering stereotypes, providing information concerning future opportunities, and strategies for dealing with problems that can occur.

If there are any questions regarding the definition or use of these strategies, please feel free to contact me. **Email works best!**

Nicholas Dzoba

Appendix D

Interview Guiding Questions

Mentor's Background

- Age/Race/Gender
- Would you describe your childhood as easy-going or difficult? Why?
- How would you describe your relationship with each of your parents?
    - Were your parents actively involved in your upbringing? If so, in what ways?
- Was the type of influence of your immediate family on your growth and development as a person positive or negative? How so?
- Who was there outside of your immediate family that you considered a positive influence growing up?
    - How would you describe your relationship with this person?
        - What was the extent of your relationship? In other words, how often were you in contact?
        - In what ways did this person influence your thoughts and development?
        - What was one thing that you took away/learned from that relationship?
- How would you describe the community in which you grew up? [if more than one, ask participant to pick the one they lived in the longest]
    - Did you know your neighbors?
    - Were there any community activities that your neighborhood held?
    - Did you feel safe in the community in which you grew up?
        - Why or why not?
    - Do you feel the community you grew up in had any positive or negative impact on your development as a person? How so?

Preconceptions/Motivations For Mentoring

- Do you have any prior experience with mentoring, as a mentor or a mentee?
    - If so, can you briefly describe what that experience was like for you?
    - Was it positive or negative? How/why?
    - What is one thing that you took away/learned from that relationship?
- Did you research how to have a successful mentoring relationship prior to becoming a mentor?
    - If so, what did you learn from your research?
- What are some of the reasons you decided to volunteer as a mentor?
- What exactly did you hope to get out of the mentoring relationship originally?
    - Did this change as time went on? Why/How so?
    - Can you give me an example?
- Do you think you had any preconceptions or certain expectations about being a mentor going in to it?

- o If so, what were they?
- o What type of role did you expect to take?
- o Did you have any expectations about your mentee?
  - If so, what were they?
  - Were those expectations met? Why or why not?
  - What kind of challenges did you think you were going to encounter within the relationship?
    - What was your plan for overcoming those challenges?

Typical Day

- How would you describe the setting in which your mentoring sessions typically take place?
  - o Has the setting varied or stayed the same? In what ways?
  - o Does your mentee seem to prefer one setting over another?
    - If so, which?
    - Why do you think this setting was most comfortable for your mentee?
- Are you usually alone with your mentee or are there often others around?
  - o Have you noticed any differences in your sessions based on location?
    - Like what?
- What time of day do your sessions typically take place?
- How long is a typical session?
- Take me through a typical session with your mentee.
  - o How does it usually begin? Does he/she usually start talking or do you pose questions?
  - o Did this change with each session? Or has it changed over time?
- How does the session typically progress?
  - o Do you normally stick with discussing one main topic or do you usually address multiple subjects in one meeting?
  - o Does talking usually take up most of the session or do you do more?
    - Can you give me some examples? Play games? Help with homework? Eat?
    - Did this change over time? How so?
- How do sessions typically come to an end? Do you try to wrap it up? Or does your mentee let you know he or she wants the session to end?
  - o Has this changed with each session or over time?
  - o Do you discuss the time of your next session with your mentee? Do you make any plans/goals for that next time?

Problems

- What type of challenges/problems has your mentee discussed with you?
  - o Are they typically school-related? Family-related? Issues with friends?
  - o Can you give me some examples?

- o Have these challenges changed throughout the course of your relationship?
- Which issues usually concern your mentee the most?
- How do you perceive these issues affecting your mentee?
  - o Do these issues typically make them angry/sad/depressed?
  - o Why do you think that is?
- In your experience with your mentee, do you feel that the problems experienced by your mentee affect other aspects of his/her life? For instance, do you feel that a problem your mentee experiences at home affects his school life?
  - o Which aspects of your mentee's life appear to you to be most affected by these problem areas?
    - ▪ Why do you think that is?
  - o What type of challenges do you think affect your mentee the most? Why?
- If you had to pick one thing, what do you think has been the greatest challenge/problem your mentee has faced within the time span of your relationship?

For Untrained Group:

Strategies for Mentoring

- In the beginning of your relationship, did you perceive that your mentee easily confided in you about issues in his/her life or was it difficult to get him/her to open up?
  - o How did you deal with that?
- Were there any strategies/skills you have that were useful in fostering a more open line of communication with your mentee?
  - o What were they?
  - o Why do you feel your mentee responded positively to these strategies?
  - o Was there any specific strategy you used in that you found effective at building trust?
  - o How do you perceive that using these approaches changed the course of your relationship?
  - o Was there any specific strategy that you found to be non-effective?
- I have asked about problems/issues your mentee has faced about which he/she has talked with you.
  - o Typically what sort of responses did you offer when your mentee communicated them to you?
    - ▪ In other words, did you offer advice, just listen, etc.?
  - o Why did you decide to take that/those approaches?
  - o Did your approach depend on circumstances regarding the issue at hand?
    - ▪ If so, what were those circumstances?
    - ▪ Do you believe the approach you took was the best response for dealing with those circumstances? Why or why not?

- How did your mentee respond to these approaches? Positively/Negatively?
- In what ways? Why do you think that is?
- Did your approach to dealing with your mentee's biggest issues or concerns change over the course of your relationship?
  - If yes, how so?
  - Did you have any trial and error when it came to how to respond to him/her? In other words, did you try some strategies that didn't work out so well and then moved on to other ways of helping him/her?
    - What response approaches did not work?
      - Why do you think they failed?
- Let's take the problem of… [Use a specific one mentioned above]. Specifically, how did you handle/address that issue?
  - Were there any challenges you faced when helping your mentee solve this issue? How was the issue resolved? Do you feel like how you handled this situation in particular made a difference to your mentee?
- Were there any strategies you used that you found to be effective at teaching your mentee how to handle similar issues in the future?
  - In other words, is there anything you feel you did that will make a difference in how your mentee might handle these problems by himself/herself?
    - Can you give me an example?
  - How did your mentee respond to this approach?
  - Why do you feel this/these approach(es) was/were particularly effective?
  - What in particular do you feel your mentee learned from your response on how to handle similar situations?
  - Were there any challenges in getting your mentee to understand this?
    - What were they?
    - Were you able to overcome them?

Perceptions of outcomes

- Do you feel that your mentee has improved in his/her problem areas?
  - If so, in what ways?
  - To what specifically would you attribute these changes?
- Is there any area or issue that your mentee had in which you did not observe a positive change during his/her time with you as a mentor?
  - If so, why do you perceive that no change occurred there?
- Are there any issues/problems that your mentee communicated with you that you felt unequipped to handle, or that overwhelmed you?
- In your opinion, are there positive results you saw in your mentee that can be attributed to just having a mentor, as opposed to not having one?
  - Or having you as a mentor specifically?
  - Is there anything specifically that you did/brought to the table that may have contributed to any positive results observed?
  - Why or why not?

- Do you believe there were ways you dealt with your mentee that were particularly useful to him/her?
    - Can you give me an example?
    - If you were teaching a class of mentors, what in particular would you instruct them to do/say that would result in positive results for their mentees?
- Can you describe any ways you could have handled your interactions with your mentee differently that would have resulted in a more positive result?
    - Do you plan to try to improve your relationship?
        - How?

For CS Group:

Strategies for Mentoring

Active Listening
- In your own words, can you please provide a brief definition of the concept of active listening?
    - Did you try to incorporate active listening into your mentoring relationship?
        - Can you provide a specific example of where you demonstrated active listening?
        - At what point in time within the relationship did you utilize these active listening skills?
- How do you feel your mentee responded to your use of active listening techniques?
    - Can you provide an example?
    - Did you encourage your mentee to use active listening?
        - In what ways?
- I'm going to ask you about any positive changes you might have observed from using active listening strategies with your mentee.
    - Were there any specific active listening concepts that you found to be useful?
    - Where there any times you felt active listening was most effective?
        - Why do you think that was?
    - Do you feel that your active listening improved your relationship with your mentee?
        - In what ways? Why or why not?
    - Do you feel that by actively listening to your mentee you were better able to help him/her with the issues/problems that he/she was having?
        - How so?
        - Why do you think that is?
- Now let me ask you if there were times you felt active listening was not useful or effective?

- - - Were there any specific active listening concepts that you found to be less useful or made no difference?
        - Why or why not?
- In general, do you feel that active listening is a useful tool for dealing with at-risk youth?
    - Why or why not?
    - What do you feel are the most important/positive effects from using active listening in your mentor relationship?

Emotional Regulation
- In your own words, can you please provide a brief definition of emotional regulation?
    - How did you try to incorporate these concepts into your relationship with your mentee?
    - Can you provide specific examples of when you instructed your mentee to regulate his/her emotions?
    - How did you challenge the mentee to evaluate his/her attitudes, values, feelings?
        - Can you provide a specific example?
        - Do you feel that this lead to a greater understanding of these feelings/values for your mentee?
            - Why or why not?
- Overall, how effective do you feel you were at understanding your mentee's emotions and perceptions when discussing sensitive topics?
    - Were there any specific ways you helped regulate these emotions that you found to be effective?
- In what ways do you feel your mentee responded to you instructing emotional regulation?
    - Can you provide an example?
    - Did this response change at all over time? How so?
- Do you feel that demonstrating emotional support is a useful tool for building a relationship with a mentee?
    - Why or why not?
    - What do you feel are the most important/positive effects from demonstrating emotional support in your mentor relationship?
- Now let me ask you if there were time you felt teaching emotional regulatory processes was not effective?
    - Were there any specific emotional regulation strategies that you found to be less useful or made no difference? Why or why not?

Conflict Resolution
- In your own words, can you please provide a brief definition of conflict resolution?
- In what ways did you incorporate the concepts behind conflict resolution into your mentoring relationship?

- o Can you provide a specific example of where you demonstrated the principles of conflict resolution to your mentee?
- How capable do you feel your mentee is at dealing with conflict?
  - o In general, did you find any problem areas when it came to how your mentee deals with conflict
- Where there any situations in which using conflict resolution was effective?
  - o How/what/why?
  - o Where there any specific conflict resolution techniques to which your mentee responded more positively?
    - ▪ Which?
      - • Why do you think that was?
- Were there any situations where using conflict resolution strategies with your mentee was not effective?
  - o Why do you think that was?
- In general, do you feel that your introduction of conflict resolution techniques has changed how your mentee perceives, defines, or handles conflict? How so?
- Do you feel that introducing conflict resolution techniques is a useful tool in general with an at-risk youth?
  - o Why or why not?
    - ▪ What do you feel are the most important/positive effects of introducing conflict resolution strategies in your mentor relationship?

Future Orientation
- In your own words, can you please provide a brief definition of future orientation?
  - o In what ways did you incorporate the concepts behind future orientation into your mentoring relationship?
    - ▪ Can you please provide a specific example of when you facilitated your mentee in thinking about the future?
- In what ways did you discuss your mentee's future interests?
  - o Was this a subject your mentee was interested in talking about?
  - o Did you address any concerns, doubts, or fears that your mentee had about his/her future?
    - ▪ What were they?
      - • How did you address this?
- Did you actively set goals for your mentee?
  - o What type of goals were they?
    - ▪ Can you give me an example?
  - o Was your mentee involved in the goal-setting process?
    - ▪ How so?
  - o How did you respond when your mentee successfully accomplished a goal?
    - ▪ How did he/she respond?
  - o How did you respond when your mentee failed to accomplish a goal?
    - ▪ How did he/she respond?

- Do you feel that the strategy of "future orientation" was effective in handling these concerns?
  - In what ways did you find this strategy to be effective? How/why?
- Were there time that employing this strategy of "future orientation" not effective?
  - In what ways did you find this strategy to be not effective? How/why?
- In general, do you feel that incorporating a future orientation for an at-risk youth is a useful tool? Why or why not? In what ways do you feel that focusing your mentee on his/her future has affected his/her behavior/attitudes? Are there any specific strategies that you used that might be useful for other mentors to incorporate?

Additional Strategies
- Were there any other strategies not mentioned that you incorporated into your mentoring relationship and found to be effective?
  - How did these strategies help?
    - How do you feel your mentee responded to the use of this strategy?

Perceptions of Outcomes

- Do you feel that your mentee has improved in his/her problem areas?
  - If so, in what ways?
  - To what specifically do you attribute these changes?
- Is there any area or issue that your mentee had that you did not observe a positive change?
  - Why do you feel that is?
- Are there any issues/problems that your mentee communicated with you that you felt unequipped to handle, or that overwhelmed you?
- In your opinion, are there positive results you saw in your mentee that can be attributed to just having a mentor, as opposed to not having one?
  - Or having you as a mentor specifically?
  - Is there anything specifically that you did/brought to the table that may have contributed to any positive results observed?
    - Why or why not?
- Which strategy do you feel was most effective in helping your mentee deal with his/her problems?
  - Why?
- Do you feel that any of the strategies were not effective?
  - Why?
- Do you feel that incorporating instruction about these types of strategies into mentoring training would result in a stronger or healthier mentoring relationship? Why or why not?
- Do you feel there were ways you dealt with your mentee that were particularly useful to his/her growth socially? Can you give me an example?
- If you were teaching a class of mentors, what in particular would you instruct them to do/say that would result in more positive results for their mentee? For their mentoring relationship?

- In your opinion, can you describe any ways you feel you could have handled your interactions with your mentee differently that would have resulted in a more positive impact?
- Do you plan to improve your relationship looking forward?
    - How?

Appendix E

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 4, 2012

TO: Mr. Nicholas Dzoba

VIA: Dr. Jennifer Wesely
              CCJ

FROM: Dr. Katherine Kasten, Chairperson
              On behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Review of New Project Revisions by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#356857-2:
              "Investigating Mentors Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Resiliency-Building Strategies in
              Improving Mentoring Relationships and Reducing At-Risk Behavior in Adolescent Youth"

This is to advise you that your project, "Investigating Mentors Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Resiliency-Building Strategies in Improving Mentoring Relationships and Reducing At-Risk Behavior in Adolescent Youth" was reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and has been declared Exempt, Categories 2 & 4." Therefore, this project requires no further IRB oversight unless substantive changes are made.

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the IRB for review. All participants must receive a stamped and dated copy of the approved informed consent document when possible. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms that might increase risk to human participants must be submitted to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. Please see the UNF Standard Operating Procedures for additional information about what types of changes might elevate risk to human participants. Any unanticipated problems involving risk and any occurrence of serious harm to subjects and others shall be reported promptly to the IRB within 3 business days.

Your study has been approved as of 12/04/2012. Because your project was approved as exempt, no further IRB oversight is required for this project unless you intend to make a change that might elevate risk to participants. As an exempt study, continuing review will be unnecessary. When you are ready to close your project, please complete a Closing Report Form which can also be found in the documents library called "Forms and Templates" in IRBNet.

UNF IRB Number: 356857-2
Approval Date: 12-04-2012
Expiration Date: Exempt - None
Processed on behalf of UNF's IRB KLC

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Vita

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