Applying a Social Justice Lens to Youth Mentoring: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Practice

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Applying a Social Justice Lens to Youth Mentoring: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Practice

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Highlights

- Applies a unique social justice lens to the field of youth mentoring.
- Suggests ways mentoring programs can empower youth to be critically conscious social change agents.
- Makes program recommendations to reduce potentially reproducing inequality in mentoring.
- Applying a social justice framework may be central to fostering more equitable outcomes for youth.

Abstract Youth mentoring interventions are often designed with the intention of promoting improved outcomes among marginalized youth. Despite their promise to reduce inequality through the provision of novel opportunities and increased social capital to marginalized youth, youth mentoring interventions hold the potential to reproduce rather than reduce inequality. In the current review, we explore literature on youth mentoring that has incorporated a social justice lens. We conclude that there is a need for greater attention to principles of social justice in the design, implementation, and evaluation of youth mentoring interventions. After reviewing the literature, we make recommendations for research and practice based on a social justice perspective and explore alternatives to traditional youth mentoring that may allow for better alignment with social justice principles.

Keywords Mentoring · Social justice · Positive youth development

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Introduction

Traditional youth mentoring interventions pair an adult volunteer with a disadvantaged young person with the goal of fostering a meaningful, supportive relationship. This supportive intergenerational relationship, in turn, is thought to hold the potential to promote improved developmental outcomes in the youth (Rhodes, 2005). Youth mentoring programs, which have grown in popularity over the past few decades, are frequently upheld as valuable approaches to reducing disproportionate negative outcomes among youth experiencing conditions of disadvantage (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013). The popularity of youth mentoring in the U.S. may be attributable, at least in part, to its adherence to American values of personal responsibility and Protestant work ethic (Walker, 2005). As some have argued, mentoring interventions, by nature, can imply that the source and solution of disadvantaged youths' problems lie at the individual level (DuBois et al., 2011).

At their core, mentoring programs often rely on exposure to successful, middle-class adult volunteers to offset risk and promote improved outcomes and upward mobility among disadvantaged youth (Deutsch, Lawrence, & Henneberger, 2014). In fact, in most cases, youth and their mentors differ across a host of demographic factors including class, race, and ethnicity. The prototypical mentor is a White, middle-class adult and the prototypical protégé is an economically disadvantaged youth of color (Freedman, 1993; Liang & West, 2007). Given that the success of youth mentoring interventions is largely dependent on the ability of protégés and mentors to build a meaningful relationship—which so often occurs across difference—attention to issues of power,

privilege, and difference in youth mentoring is warranted. Further, there is a need for critical reflection on the ways in which youth mentoring interventions may serve to reproduce rather than reduce inequality (Colley, 2003).

Social justice, a central tenet of community psychology, emphasizes equal access to resources, dissolution of power hierarchies, and the empowerment and promotion of wellness among marginalized populations (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Cook, 1990; Freire, 1970a, 1970b; Prilleltensky, 2001; Torres-Harding, Siers, & Olson, 2012). With the ultimate goal of engaging in change-oriented action, social justice has been conceptualized as a process of shared decision-making among those with varying levels of power (Toporek & Williams, 2006). Finally, social justice definitions underscore the need for those in positions of power to work actively to ensure the even distribution of opportunities and resources (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). Applying a social justice lens to youth mentoring involves careful consideration of the unique backgrounds and experiences that mentors and protégés bring to the mentoring relationship. Considering that mentors tend to belong to groups that occupy positions of power in society whereas protégés tend to belong to marginalized groups, a closer analysis of how mentoring interventions promote effective mentoring across difference is needed. Further, given that mentoring relationships are inherently hierarchical, it is worth investigating the extent to which mentoring interventions attempt to reduce power hierarchies so as not to replicate processes of oppression and marginalization that protégés are often subject to in their daily lives. Ideally, mentoring interventions are designed not only to avoid further marginalizing youth, but also to create more equitable and just circumstances for the youth they serve.

Current Study

Although a social justice perspective clearly lends itself to the study of youth mentoring, the extent to which this perspective has been applied to the field of youth mentoring to date is unclear. Thus, the current paper reviews the literature on youth mentoring with a specific focus on articles that have incorporated a social justice perspective. In reviewing this literature, our aims were to document trends in the literature and identify implications for research and practice. In addition, we highlight alternatives to traditional youth mentoring that may align more closely with principles of social justice. Collectively, our review and recommendations are aimed toward increasing the likelihood of promoting improved youth outcomes via mentoring interventions, while also empowering youth to become critically conscious agents of social change within and outside of their communities.

Methods

Our review of the literature focused on identifying youth mentoring research that incorporated a social justice perspective. We limited our search to empirical articles that addressed mentoring between adult mentors and adolescent protégés (including youth aged 10–25), as we felt that the application of social justice principles to youth mentoring relationships may be most relevant for this particular age group. A preliminary search was conducted in order to assess the state of the literature based on the key terms used. The final literature search was conducted through PsychNet, EBSCO, PubMed, Psychiatry Online, Web of Knowledge, and ERIC search engines using the key terms: "mentor*" AND "social justice" AND "adolescen*". We also included key terms that were related to social justice in single searches in each respective search engine (i.e., "social justice" OR "social change" OR "power") and we used a similar approach to identify studies that included the age group of interest (i.e., "adolescen*" OR "youth" OR "teenager"). An exhaustive list of search terms per search engine is available from the first author. In addition to these searches, we searched the table of contents of journals devoted to the study of mentoring or youth–adult relationships by visually scanning the titles for words pertaining to social justice.

Results

Our review of the literature on social justice and youth mentoring yielded slightly over 50 relevant empirical articles. All of these articles devoted at least some attention to issues of social justice in youth mentoring. After carefully reading all of the articles discovered through our search, we determined that the majority of these articles fell into at least one of the following four categories: mentoring across difference, mentoring and empowerment, mentoring and critical consciousness, and mentoring and social capital. Thus, we have organized our review by these categories in an effort to synthesize the literature that has considered principles of social justice in youth mentoring.

Mentoring across Difference

Mentors and protégés often differ across a host of social identities, with race, ethnicity, and class differences being most common (Deutsch et al., 2014; Sánchez, Colón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, & Berardi, 2014). Few studies have investigated the role of class, race, ethnicity, or gender differences in youth mentoring, and the limited research that has been conducted has focused simply on whether or not matching based on any of these demographic characteristics

may lead to better youth outcomes (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sánchez, 2006; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Gaddis, 2012; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Kanchewa, Rhodes, Schwartz, & Olsho, 2014; Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002). Though relevant — particularly in the context of evaluative research of mentoring programs—it is important to note that the vast majority of this work has been limited in its ability to truly test the potential benefits of having a racially/ethnically or social class-matched mentor among protégés from marginalized groups. Furthermore, most mentoring programs only allow for same-gender matches, which has mostly prevented an examination of the potential benefits of gender-matching in mentoring relationships (for exception see Kanchewa et al., 2014). Though researchers have noted that shared demographic characteristics may play a role in facilitating mentoring relationships, particularly among protégés from marginalized groups (Liang & Grossman, 2007), the data employed to examine these questions have included very few matches within marginalized social identity groups (Gaddis, 2012; Rhodes et al., 2002). Moreover, this work has largely failed to consider the role of matched and mismatched social identities between mentors and protégés from a social justice perspective; for example, whether a shared background is related to increases in youths' racial or ethnic identity development or sense of empowerment, or if positive relational characteristics (regardless of match status) are key. Therefore, researchers have not been able to identify whether (and which) match characteristics have the potential to foster more equitable outcomes for youth.

Rhodes' theoretical model of youth mentoring suggests that mentoring has the potential to facilitate positive identity development (Rhodes, 2005). Marginalized youth are often situated in contexts (e.g., school) in which they are faced with discrimination that can lower self-efficacy and undermine achievement (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008). Though identity development is a key developmental task for all adolescents (Erikson, 1968), feeling positively about one's group membership may be of particular consequence for youth who belong to groups that are stigmatized by society (García Coll et al., 1996). For example, youth of color with greater racial pride tend to display better concurrent and prospective outcomes, such as higher educational attainment (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013; Chavous et al., 2003; Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Wittrup et al., 2016). Further, some research suggests that racial pride can help inoculate youth from the effects of discrimination (Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008). Thus, mentors' capacity

to support adolescents' racial/ethnic identity development may influence an array of outcomes traditionally targeted by youth mentoring interventions (e.g., academic success).

Demographically matched mentors may offer shared life experience that could counter the effects of discrimination and demonstrate possibilities for adolescents' future selves that are less commonly depicted in their everyday lives or the media. Moreover, an adult with a shared identity could be more relatable. A mentor who seems more relatable to a protégé may be able to develop a trusting relationship based on their shared experience, demonstrate ways to cope with discrimination, or expand youths' notions of future possible selves. Interestingly, the results of qualitative investigations have indicated that shared racial/ethnic background within a mentoring relationship may be particularly valued by youth of color. Garraway and Pistrang (2010), for example, found that Black male youth in their study felt that sharing their mentors' racial background allowed for greater mutual identification over shared experiences (e.g., experiences with discrimination) and interests. They also noted that they felt more confident in the advice given from mentors who shared similar personal experiences as opposed to advice given from other helpers who could only give advice based on theoretical knowledge. Shared life experiences also led mentors to report feeling more empathy toward their protégés, which fostered greater trust in these mentors. In their study, Garraway and Pistrang (2010) found that Black male mentors commented on what they perceived as opportunities to provide positive role modeling to Black male youth that countered negative stereotypic images of Black males in the media. Previous studies have documented the importance of possessing racially/ethnically matched role models among youth who belong to historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups as these role models can provide youth with models of who they can become (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Zirkel, 2002). Findings indicated that youth of color were aware that Whites are successful, but they were not exposed to as many images of successful people who looked like them. Thus, youth of color—especially those who are economically disadvantaged—may be more motivated by mentors who look like them, as these mentors demonstrate that success is possible, even in spite of oppression, disadvantage, and unequal opportunities.

Still, there may be within-group heterogeneity in the degree to which having a racially/ethnically matched mentor matters to youth from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and youth who place greater value on racial/ethnic similarity may be more likely to benefit from this type of match. One study that focused on the mentoring experiences of underrepresented ethnic minority high school students attending a summer enrichment program in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) found that

students from underrepresented ethnic minority groups were more likely than White students to both place importance on having a racially/ethnically matched mentor and to not have access to racially/ethnically matched mentors (Syed, Goza, Chemers, & Zurbriggen, 2012). The authors noted that though possessing a racially/ethnically matched mentor was not a top priority for all students from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups, among those students who placed importance on having such mentors and who also reported receiving mentoring from those mentors, participation in the mentoring program was associated with gains in sense of identity and belongingness as a science student. This finding speaks to the potential of racially/ethnically matched mentors to expand notions of possible future selves among youth from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups. Seeing adults who look like themselves in careers that interest them may help these youth to identify with and persist in their pursuit of those careers, particularly when individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups are highly underrepresented in those careers (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995).

Similarly, adolescent girls may especially benefit from female mentors who work in traditionally male-dominated fields. Girls are often not encouraged to engage in the activities that lay the groundwork for such career paths. In particular, girls from economically disadvantaged or racial/ethnic minority groups may be exposed to few media depictions of women from shared backgrounds working in fields such as business, science, or technology. The limited research that has explored the role of female mentors in adolescent girls' lives supports the notion that female mentors can influence girls' self-efficacy and boost their confidence to learn new skills and pursue traditionally male-dominated careers. Spencer and Liang (2009) point out that while research suggests that girls face unique stressors and barriers to psychosocial wellbeing (e.g., body image concerns) during adolescence, little work has examined how youth programs may support these specific needs through mentoring or how female mentors, in particular, may support girls' skill development. While their study was not aimed at comparing gender-matched to unmatched dyads, Spencer and Liang (2009) found that female mentors appeared to support the positive development of their female protégés via instrumental support specifically targeted at skill development. In another intervention, low-income Bangladeshi girls paired with a volunteer mentor were provided the opportunity to observe their mentors as they worked in an office setting (Sperandio, 2008). This program resulted in girls having an expanded understanding of possible future employment and increased self-respect as a result of a caring relationship with an employed woman (Sperandio, 2008). In a study of another all-girls mentoring program,

adolescent girls from lower-socioeconomic status backgrounds reported increased academic self-efficacy, higher perceived likelihood of attending college, and expanded career aspirations as a result of having a close relationship with a Big Sister (Maldonado, Quarles, Lacey, & Thompson, 2008). Taken together, these studies indicate that having a female mentor may counter negative messages related to marginalized girls' ability to achieve the same academic and career successes as their male counterparts.

The needs and voices of sexual minority youth are often ignored in school contexts due to institutional stigma and/or disciplinary inaction of teachers who witness harassment related to homophobia (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth—particularly those from low-income or racial/ethnic minority backgrounds—may be at higher risk for entering the juvenile justice system, school dropout, and homelessness, in part due to more frequent experiences of familial rejection and peer alienation (Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012). Research suggests that not only are sexual minority youth less likely to have a mentor, but they—as well as prospective, sexual minority mentors—may perceive mentoring programs to be discriminatory toward sexual minority mentors and protégés (Mallory, Sears, Hasenbush, & Susman, 2014). Being exposed to positive images of LGBTQ+ adults may help LGBTQ+ youth develop a less stigmatizing self-image in the context of a society that stigmatizes members of the LGBTQ+ community (Grossman & D'Aguelli, 2004; Herr, 1997; Kosciw, 2004). Some evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ students who report the presence of supportive adults in schools display higher post-secondary aspirations and academic achievement (Kosciw, 2004; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). Gastic and Johnson's (2009) examination of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health revealed that many of the sexual minority youth in their study had informal mentors, half of whom were teachers. Sexual minority males who had a teacher-mentor were more likely to pursue secondary education than non-mentored sexual minority males, which speaks to the possibility that teacher-mentors can offer ways for adolescents to cope with experiences of bias they may face in the school context. Similarly, one qualitative study of sexual minority youth with natural mentors (i.e., mentors who are part of a young person's pre-existing social network) indicated that sexuality-matched mentors may offer informal support for youths' self-acceptance, ability to cope with familial and peer stressors related to their sexual identity, and positive identity development (Torres, Harper, Sánchez, & Fernández, 2012). In a review of literature examining the mentoring experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, Rummell (2016) points out that the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ youth dictate unique mentoring relationship needs.

Rummell suggests that formal programs are well-positioned to train mentors to provide appropriate support. Therefore, identifying inclusive approaches to formal mentoring and developing evidence-based programs designed to serve some of the unique needs of LGBTQ+ youth could play an important role in fostering healthy development among sexual minority youth. Finally, while mentoring appears to hold promise for supporting LGBTQ+ youths' unique needs, studies comparing the potential benefits of sexual-orientation-matched versus mismatched mentors to counter the effects of sexuality-based discrimination in school settings and broader society have not been conducted.

The previously described literature, focused on the potential benefits of identity-matched relationships for helping youth challenge negative societal messages about their ability to succeed, supports the notion that mentors can function to improve pride in youths' marginalized identities and may have distinct benefits when matched on certain demographic characteristics. Though demographic or identity-based similarity between mentors and protégés may be an important factor, it surely is not the only determinant of successful mentoring relationships, and similarity does not guarantee shared experience or appropriate support regarding protégés' positive identity development. Additionally, although mentors from similar backgrounds may be able to serve as relatable role models, they may also find it challenging to mentor youth with whom they share a social or cultural background—particularly if they are part of a marginalized group—and therefore may benefit from program support for these challenges. In Garraway and Pistrang's (2010) study, mentors commented on the risk of over-identification with a protégé from a similar background, and the need to protect themselves against re-traumatization that may result from supporting a protégé who is going through something the mentor went through as a youth. Similarly, according to Bass and Kaufman (1996), sexual minority adults may be hesitant to mentor LGBTQ+ youth in order to protect themselves from reliving their own traumatic experiences as an adolescent, and because they may concurrently face encounters with homophobia as an adult in the workplace (DeJean, 2007; Gastic & Johnson, 2009). Concerns related to over-identification speak to the importance of training mentors to prepare for the issues that can arise in a close relationship with a marginalized youth, regardless of whether they share social or cultural backgrounds.

Evidence suggests that non-matched mentors can also offer support for youths' identity development. One facet of racial/ethnic identity development, identity exploration (e.g., examining racial/ethnic history and participating in cultural activities; Marcia, 1980), may occur within some non-ethnically matched mentoring relationships. In a recent study focused on adolescent girls, there were no differences in the extent of ethnic identity exploration among youth paired with racially/ethnically matched and non-matched mentors (Peifer, Lawrence, Williams, & Leyton-Armakan, 2016). Mentors' level of ethnocultural empathy (empathy toward people of racial/ethnic backgrounds different from one's own), however, predicted protégés' ethnic identity exploration, which has been identified as one component of developing subsequent positive feelings about one's cultural background and increased self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor, Vargas-Chanes, Garcia, & Gonzales-Backen, 2008). Although limited in scope, this study indicates that non-raically/ethnically matched mentors may be as capable as racially/ethnically matched mentors of bolstering racial/ethnic identity development. Because identity development is a key task of adolescence, particularly among youth from stigmatized racial/ethnic groups, explicitly addressing ways to facilitate identity development among adolescents from marginalized backgrounds should be a priority for mentoring organizations.

It is worth noting that sharing a marginalized identity does not preclude the possibility that a mentor could be uncomfortable or unprepared to discuss factors pertaining to social identity with their protégés. Thus, while mentors from similar backgrounds may be able to better relate to what youth experience, they are not necessarily better equipped to facilitate youths' positive identity development. Moreover, the potential for youth to feel misunderstood or disempowered in mentoring relationships may not be unique to identity-mismatched relationships. Youth can still perceive adults from shared marginalized backgrounds as authority figures, thereby potentially posing a barrier to youth–adult communication. Among marginalized youth, feeling heard in a relationship with an adult may be particularly valuable. Thus mentors from all backgrounds who are well trained in supporting the developmental needs of marginalized youth may be able to provide a supportive relationship wherein youth can become more confident and proud of their various social identities.

Findings from the previously described studies suggest that having a mentor who is matched on a demographic characteristic such as gender or race/ethnicity and mismatched on an attainable characteristic (e.g., higher socioeconomic status) may be particularly helpful to marginalized youth. However, as we noted, while shared demographic backgrounds may offer an entry point for adults to better relate to their protégés, shared background does not guarantee a beneficial relationship for youth. Further, some research indicates that with appropriate training and support, non-demographically matched mentors may

be able to overcome differences and effectively support youths' identity development. Therefore, programs that use a social justice framework to guide mentors from all backgrounds may be key to addressing the specific needs of marginalized youth, which may ultimately, promote more favorable youth outcomes.

Mentoring and Empowerment

Marginalized youth may feel disempowered as a result of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. While intended to reduce inequality, mentoring is inherently hierarchical given that a mentor is an older, more experienced adult. Thus, the power dynamics in a mentoring relationship, are worthy of attention due to the risk of recreating existing structures of oppression. Moreover, mentors can communicate the same stereotypes or biases that youth encounter elsewhere. Alternatively, relationships with mentors might be a source of empowerment to the extent that mentors actively work to neutralize power hierarchies and partner with youth.

Empowerment, which broadly refers to individual and community processes of "gaining control and mastery [. . .] in order to improve equity and quality of life," is a key principle of social justice (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Rappaport, 1984). Scholars have proposed a number of models of empowerment, but generally, empowerment processes include capacity-building, an increased understanding of oppressive forces, and supportive ties among individuals in a community (Freire, 1970a, 1970b; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment processes may have developmental benefits to youth ranging from improved self-concept to stronger social bonds (Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003; Chinman & Linney, 1998). Because mentors are tasked with supporting a young person's development and are unique in their multidimensional role wherein they provide emotional support, companionship, and guidance (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005), mentoring relationships may be an avenue to facilitate youth empowerment. A shift in perspective on mentoring from deficit-based to strengths-based may lessen the likelihood that a mentor will recreate oppressive power structures. While a deficit-based perspective can promote the notion that marginalized youth need support from middle-class adults to make up for "deficits" in their self or home environment, a strengths-based perspective is centered on the notion that *all* youth possess assets and resources. Using a strengths-based perspective, mentors serve to support youth to identify and capitalize upon their existing assets and resources. This is illustrated by Spencer's (2006) qualitative study of long-term Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentoring pairs, in which she noted that a potential key contributor to long-lasting mentoring

relationships was a shift in mentors' orientation toward the relationship from one aimed at helping a "needy" young person (deficit-based) to one aimed at fostering a protégé's ability to reach his/her full potential (strengths-based). When youth perceive themselves as having the resources to address challenges, they may better understand their own strengths, experience more self-efficacy, and feel more confident taking on leadership roles.

Rhodes' (2005) model of mentoring relationships posits that mentors ideally support youths' social relationships, cognitive skills, and identity development. Therefore, mentoring relationships may be well-suited to facilitate youth inclusion in social change efforts (Rhodes, 2002, 2005; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Engaging in social change efforts can have immediate benefits to participants, and ultimately, help to change structures such that greater benefits unfold to youth and their communities over time. Each component outlined in Rhodes' (2005) model of mentoring complements participation in community or social change organizations, as youth involved in social change movements can develop relationships with important others in their community, learn new skills (e.g., leadership and communication strategies), and experience a heightened sense of agency (Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005). Shared decision-making has been considered key to youth empowerment and better-quality youth–adult relationships (Hart, 1992). Still, there are instances when adult-driven decisions could be useful, or in some cases, necessary to increase the likelihood of successful community organization. For example, youth may not have the practical skills or resources needed to organize certain events, and therefore adults could provide scaffolding for executing the ideas developed by youth (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Wong et al. (2010) point out that this approach does not undermine the voice of youth but instead can increase the likelihood of successful endeavors. In a qualitative examination of an intervention in which youth partnered with adult practitioners to address local "quality of life" issues, adults were tasked with understanding the levels and types of support youth needed at each stage (Cargo et al., 2003). The support required by youth decreased over time, and adult practitioners were tasked with continuously assessing their involvement. This speaks to the potential of adults to offer dynamic support that is responsive to youths' changing needs over time or across domains. Mentoring within community organizations may offer an opportunity for young people to experience this type of tailored individual support and a broader social experience in which they are seen as assets to their community (Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005).

In their commentary on youth mentoring, Liang, Spencer, West and Rappaport (2013) posit that a systemic,

asset-based approach to mentoring may extend the benefits of youth mentoring to produce community, social, and individual change. This commentary centers around issues of youth empowerment and discusses the possibility of bringing a youth–adult partnership (Y–AP) approach to youth mentoring. Y–APs have been identified as having the potential to support positive youth development and engage youth in their communities as agents of social change. In Y–APs, youth are viewed through a strengths-based perspective as "agentic, empowered, and competent" (Liang et al., 2013, p. 122). Youth may feel more efficacious when initially engaging in community change efforts with an adult mentor who can offer partnership or an apprenticeship for learning new skills (Liang, Brogan, Spencer, & Corral, 2007; Mitra, Sanders, & Perkins, 2010). Further, Y–APs have the potential to foster a sense of community for youth (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Whitlock, 2007; Zeldin, Camino et al., 2005; Zeldin, Larson et al., 2005), which can increase youth's motivation to engage in other social organizations. Further, youth in mentoring partnerships may be able to identify community needs that may not be visible or understood by adults. Additionally, addressing social justice issues could inspire youth to encourage their peers or families to participate alongside them. Early engagement in community activism could also meaningfully influence youths' future engagement and leadership in their communities. Indeed, a critical understanding of social justice issues in young adulthood may shape later career decisions (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). Through coaching, teaching, and connecting protégés to resources they may not otherwise have access to, mentors may be able to support youth without undermining their agency (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Mentoring programs that focus on young people's strengths and leadership rather than adult-driven activities appear to increase youths' sense of empowerment while simultaneously serving an educational function and providing support for skill-building. The risk of potential negative effects of power dynamics inherent in intergenerational relationships warrants attention from researchers and practitioners. By encouraging protégés to take on meaningful projects in their community, mentors may be better able to serve as guides and partners rather than authority figures. Moreover, by jointly engaging in social change efforts, mentors and protégés alike may be able to work toward building greater critical consciousness.

Mentoring and Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness involves a fundamental understanding of oppressive social elements, hierarchical structures, and one's place in society, and it is developed through education, analysis of personal experience, and critical dialogue (Freire, 1970a, 1970b; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). In Hillman's (2016) critical commentary on formal mentoring programs, he notes that programs run the risk of recreating oppressive structures and reinforcing neoliberal values as a result of patriarchal and capitalist foundations. He points out that while the goals of mentoring are centered on facilitating healthy youth development, some programs ultimately reinforce notions of individual responsibility for overcoming obstacles, while neglecting to consider the broad implications of social inequalities. As a result, mentoring programs, while established with good intentions, can reinforce messages of individual deficits and risk. While Hillman (2016) acknowledges that his commentary excludes mention of the potential for mentoring to promote social justice, his review echoes the voices of other scholars who have pointed out common aspects of mentoring program approaches that are misaligned with social justice (Achinstein, 2012; Colley, 2003; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016; Walker, 2007; Weiston-Serdan, 2017).

Nevertheless, some literature has demonstrated the possibility for mentors to receive training that fosters critical consciousness. Social justice work and critical education are considered primary catalysts for critical consciousness. With appropriate training, mentors may be able to partner with their protégés to expand their understanding of the ways societal structures privilege or oppress their communities. Research has shown that co-learning and open dialogue within mentoring relationships may not only bolster the development of critical consciousness, but also promote relational closeness and better youth outcomes (Wong et al., 2010). Diversi and Mecham (2005) posited that an empowering relationship with an adult can simultaneously support youth development and equip youth with skills to engage in higher level thinking and "re-interpretation" of marginalized identities as assets. Hidalgo's (2011) ethnographic examination of a college preparation program for Black and Latino/a youth also demonstrated the potential for supportive interventions to incorporate broader aims related to the tenets of social justice such that students were able to "resist inequities in transformative ways [and] gain knowledge and skills to empower their home communities" (p. 601). This form of resistance fits within the engagement aspect of critical consciousness, wherein individuals break out of passive roles to engage in critical analysis and re-interpretation of marginalized identities. While the program described by Hidalgo (2011) was not a traditional one-to-one mentoring program, students worked closely with adults who were able to provide relationships that facilitated "transformative forms of resistance." Thus, this program may offer useful information for mentoring relationships aimed at meeting similar goals. If mentors are first trained in

engaging in such topics with protégés, incorporating social justice-oriented conversations, education, and activities may not need to be seen as supplementary, but rather fundamental to traditional programming.

A critical component of mentor training using a social justice framework appears to involve education about inequality and guided self-reflection. Although focused on teacher-mentors, Achinstein's (2012) investigation of diversity and equity training revealed that training tapped into two levels of knowledge: teacher- and student-level. She suggests that effective training for mentors focuses on mentors' own identity, knowledge, biases, and receptiveness to change, as well as an understanding of protégés' social contexts, assets, and challenges. In addition, training should address ways to flexibly interact with youth from a variety of backgrounds. By promoting knowledge of equity issues and encouraging mentors to explore their own backgrounds, Achinstein suggests that mentors may be able to work toward critical consciousness. The idea of a parallel learning process may be particularly useful to introduce to mentors who have different cultural backgrounds than their protégés: both parties will encounter new challenges in a relationship characterized by difference, and therefore this concept may allow mentors to empathize more with the protégé role.

Hughes et al. (2012) noted that college students who participated in service-learning courses while simultaneously serving as a mentor for a lower-income youth reported being more understanding of the social inequalities that contributed to youths' underachievement in schools, which prompted them to re-conceptualize their understanding of the circumstances facing marginalized youth. In the interest of fostering critical consciousness among college student mentors, the service-learning program incorporated class discussions of poverty and oppression, and required ongoing reflective focus groups. The program guided students in learning about the challenges faced by marginalized youth, examining their own biases, and identifying strengths in protégés' communities. In a program oriented toward increasing African American girls' interest in STEM fields (GO-GIRL), mentors and middle school protégés partnered to conduct research related to girls' and women's issues. Mentors met weekly for training on constructivist pedagogy in addition to weekly meetings with their protégés, during which they taught age-appropriate lessons on statistics and social science survey research. Mentors reported feeling as though they had developed "enhanced awareness and understanding of sociocultural, economic, and other contextual factors that shape the lives of their mentees" through social justice education, self-reflection, and their relationship with a protégé (Brown, 2010; Slaughter-Defoe & English-Clarke, 2010). The results of these studies highlight the potential of mentoring programs to improve mentors' critical consciousness, which also may result in improved relationships with protégés.

While it is problematic to rely purely on the relationship with a marginalized youth as a way to promote critical consciousness among privileged mentors (i.e., further tokenizing marginalized youth and placing the responsibility for mentor learning on the protégé), it is possible that comprehensive and appropriate training can build critical consciousness among mentors. Mentors who have a solid understanding of systems of oppression and who have thoroughly examined their own biases may then be able to build upon their knowledge and benefit youth by partnering with protégés in critical consciousness-building activities. Importantly, fostering critical consciousness among mentors and their protégés may reduce the possibility that mentors will impose damaging stereotypes on youth and possibly propel mentors to become engaged in social activism alongside their protégés (Colley, 2003).

Mentoring and Social Capital

In part, mentoring programs have aimed to connect marginalized youth with adults from more privileged backgrounds to narrow inequality through the provision of social capital. Although adults in youths' communities provide significant social support to youth and play a critical role in their development, marginalized youths' communities of origin may have limited access to certain resources that could facilitate social mobility. Racial and economic segregation systematically limit the types of educational and employment opportunities available to marginalized youth that are readily available to their affluent, white counterparts. For example, schools with a higher proportion of low-income students are more likely to be underfunded, have higher student-to-teacher ratios, and less tangible support (e.g., textbooks) for academic success (Borman & Dowling, 2010). Several studies have found that students with positive bonds with teachers or administrators in school display better social and academic outcomes and are less likely to drop out (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Some suggest that schools can be a key source of social capital, particularly for low-income youth (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Dika & Singh, 2002; Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Teachers in underfunded schools, however, may be less able to develop one-on-one relationships with students compared to those working in more affluent schools due to increased demands on their time and energy (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Outside the school context, as well, marginalized youth may have fewer connections to adults (e.g., parents, friends' parents) who can provide academic support above and beyond that given in the classroom.

Mentors from privileged backgrounds may be able to link youth to social capital that could create more equitable circumstances for later achievement (Keller, 2005). Mentors with a college education, for example, may be able to provide academic tutoring or informational support to youth who would like to attend college. Contact with a mentor also may expose youth to mentors' social networks, which could connect them to additional resources such as information about career options, enrichment opportunities, and access to other adults (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Jarrett et al., 2005). Additionally, adults who can serve as volunteer mentors may have more time to spend with youth; for example, they may be college students, retirees, or hold jobs that require fewer hours, while parents who are burdened by socioeconomic disadvantage may have little time to connect their adolescent child to activities or people who could facilitate opportunities for advancement (Grossman & Bulle, 2006). The more time that mentors spend with youth, the more opportunities there are for dyads to build a stronger relationship and for mentors to link youth to social capital within and outside their communities.

However, it is worth noting that the provision of social capital may be impossible if mentors do not develop high-quality relationships with protégés (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Mere exposure to a mentor from a privileged background is likely not sufficient to link youth to the social capital that could promote positive development or facilitate social mobility. Moreover, there is a risk that these mentoring experiences could amplify negative messages youth receive elsewhere in their lives (e.g., only people who are different from them are capable of being successful), or could suggest to youth that the only way they can be successful is to escape from their communities of origin. For example, Cammarota (2011), in a commentary on white teachers working in urban settings, posits a "white savior complex" (i.e., volunteering with the intention of rescuing marginalized individuals from their risky communities) may reinforce a deficit-based view of marginalized youth and their communities. Baldridge (2014) points out that individuals acting as "white saviors" are not likely to advocate *with* marginalized communities to affect change, which is a key component of mentoring aimed at empowering youth and reducing inequality. As Gaddis (2012) notes, "the human capital of an adult is important, but a high-quality relationship between two individuals must come first." As evidenced by the literature on premature termination (e.g., Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006), mentors who are unaware of the oppressive forces at work in their protégés' lives may be less able to develop a relationship in which their protégé benefits from their social capital. Though mentors may have experiences and connections that adults in their protégés' networks do

not, they also are less likely to have experienced the far-reaching consequences of marginalization. For example, a white middle-class mentor may be embedded in a network that ascribes to the "bootstrap" narrative of American achievement, endorsing the notion that hard work is sufficient for upward social mobility regardless of challenges an individual may face. This narrative neglects the reality that oppression systematically restricts or denies individuals access to resources and opportunities for social mobility. Therefore, there is likely a risk of mentors from privileged backgrounds indirectly or directly communicating to youth that they should simply work harder or follow the same path that the mentor followed to obtain their social status. This may increase the likelihood that mentors will blame youth —and consequently, youth will blame themselves—for having difficulty overcoming the barriers posed by an unjust system. Youth who internalize pervasive messages about personal inadequacy as the driver of their current life circumstances may be even less likely to overcome the challenges posed by systematic oppression.

Perhaps a way to avoid reinforcing this narrative, and to facilitate access to the social capital already embedded in youths' networks, is to equip mentors with the skills to help young people engage with their pre-existing social networks (Keller, 2005; Keller & Blakeslee, 2013). Mentors may be able to serve the role of facilitator by encouraging youth to participate in activities and develop relationships with other adults in their community. Freedman (1993) suggests that adults who are working to connect youth to pre-existing social resources could pay specific attention to mentor-rich environments. Youth who become more engaged in their pre-existing social networks with a supportive mentor by their side may feel better able to develop relationships with other adults in their communities who can connect them to social capital (Keller & Blakeslee, 2013; Zand et al., 2009). Given that many formal mentoring programs set up temporary relationships, these approaches to fostering youths' social capital and enhancing network connections may be particularly valuable to ensure that the potential benefits of mentoring endure beyond the termination of the relationship.

High-quality relationships appear to be foundational to mentors' ability and willingness to effectively link youth to social capital, just as they are critical for making mentoring an empowering experience for youth. As noted previously, mentors may possess resources that can facilitate youths' participation in social change efforts and allow their protégés to connect with other influential adults in the community. Using a social justice framework to help mentors navigate differences between themselves and their protégés may be a way to increase the likelihood of connecting youth to social capital, which has traditionally been considered a goal of mentoring. Finally, using novel,

network-oriented approaches to broadening the reach of mentoring beyond the dyad may allow mentoring programs to better serve youth in both the short- and long-term.

Discussion

Collectively, the findings of this body of research suggest that applying a social justice framework to mentoring programs may facilitate reaching traditional program goals (e.g., academic achievement) among marginalized adolescents who are contending with structural oppression. Moreover, research findings indicate that applying a social justice framework is critical if programs are committed to preventing damaging relationships, empowering youth to reject negative societal messages, and helping youth to become critically conscious agents of social change. While mentoring may have been originally conceptualized as a process through which to reduce inequality, it appears that the language and practices adopted by programs may, at times, work against this original and foundational goal (Colley, 2003; Hillman, 2016). In the absence of programmatic efforts to prevent the re-creation of oppressive structures within mentoring programs and relationships, mentoring interventions may be ineffective, at best, and harmful to youth, at worst. However, mentoring programs that help youth reject negative messages and stereotypes about their abilities, capitalize on preexisting assets and resources, and develop a positive identity hold the potential to narrow disparities across a variety of domains (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Gaddis, 2012; García Coll et al., 1996; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Marginalized youth who are equipped with tools to understand and challenge oppression may be the most effective advocates for social change. As a result of oppressive structures, however, marginalized youth may not have sufficient access to information, skills, and tools needed to become critically conscious social activists. Well-trained formal mentors could become significant resources for catalyzing this aspect of their protégés' development. Yet the burden for preparing mentors for this feat rests on mentoring programs, who must turn their attention to careful recruitment, screening, and mentor training practices that better align with principles of social justice.

Program Recommendations: Recruitment and Screening

Recruitment language is likely the first target for better aligning mentoring programs with a social justice perspective. In a commentary on "Anti-Blackness in Mentoring," Weiston-Serdan and Daneshzadeh (2016) state that programs often use language that suggests that marginalized individuals should adopt the behaviors and values of the group in power, calling for mentors who will be tasked with "helping young people make the 'right' decisions, helping them dress well, helping to cultivate the resilience we think they'll need to survive in this America." When recruitment materials imply that the primary task of mentors is to save youth from their risky home environments, programs may appeal to volunteer mentors who wish to impose middle-class values and "fix" youth, rather than those who recognize youths' strengths and desire to collaborate with youth to affect social change (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Conversely, advertising that involves language related to social justice, learning, and partnership may be more effective in recruiting mentors interested in acting as collaborators rather than saviors. Weiston-Serdan (2017) recommends that programs reorient their recruitment and match process to prioritize youth preference, because we cannot assume which characteristics of a potential mentor are most important to a protégé. As she points out, many organizations rely primarily on white, middle-class mentors, and this shift necessitates intentional changes in recruitment practices to invite more diverse groups of adults to serve as mentors.

Most mentoring programs have a screening process for prospective mentors to prevent harm to protégés. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBSA) has an extensive screening process that requires a formal application, in-person interview, background check, references, and an initial meeting between youth, parent, and mentor (BBSA, 2016). However, beyond discussion of screening aimed at preventing physical or sexual abuse, screening processes appear to do little else to weed out potentially harmful mentors. These programs, for example, seem to pay little attention to the potential of mentors to inflict psychological harm via racial bias or unawareness of privilege. While a screening process such as that employed by BBBS is indeed comprehensive in regards to some risks such as criminality, it does not necessarily take into account problematic motivations for mentoring (e.g., white savior complex) or potential biases that are likely to reduce adult volunteers' capacity to provide appropriate mentoring for marginalized youth. The previously mentioned notion of mentoring as a way to "fix" youth may contribute to incompatible expectations between mentor and protégé regarding the relationship, thereby increasing the likelihood of dissatisfaction for both. Of note, mismatched expectations of mentoring relationships have been associated with premature termination (Spencer, 2007).

The potential for mentors to cause psychological harm due to misguided or inappropriate approaches to working with marginalized youth is arguably left unexamined by traditional screening processes. Mentors who lack understanding of power, privilege, and oppression may be

particularly at risk of engaging in practices that could contribute to poor relationships or premature termination. Unfortunately, very little work has attempted to outline ways that programs might filter out individuals who are likely to cause psychological harm. While there are clear instances in which mentors should be turned away from mentor programs (e.g., history of having harmed a child), determining a person's capacity for becoming a mentor who can provide appropriate support for marginalized youth from a social justice perspective may be difficult, and programs with long waitlists may be reluctant to turn volunteers away. Nevertheless, mentoring programs and their funders should be careful not to presume that the mere presence of a mentor is better than no mentor. Previous research, indeed, has found that protégés do not benefit from poor quality mentoring relationships and moreover, mentoring relationships that terminate prematurely can be harmful to youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). A shift in recruitment and screening practices might be one way to increase the likelihood that the adults who volunteer as mentors will be amenable to learning how to employ principles of social justice in their relationships with young people.

One recruitment and screening strategy that could send a novel message regarding the mentor role is to include protégés in the process (Hart & Michel, 2002). Protégés are in a unique position to identify subtle indicators that adults may be inappropriate for programs, largely because they have the best insight into youth experience. Lindsay and Rayner (1993) note that involving young people in screening volunteers can communicate a message that youth voice is valued in the organization, which could help screen out adults who would be likely to create or reinforce hierarchies within mentoring relationships. Moreover, participating in recruitment and screening (e.g., interviewing adults and making important decisions alongside program staff) is likely an empowering experience in and of itself. If mentoring programs are indeed committed to social justice, which involves attention to youth voice and collaborative processes, youth participation could be considered a cornerstone of recruitment and screening processes.

Finally, preliminary screening cannot be relied upon as a sole determinant of who will be a good mentor. As Deutsch and Spencer (2009) point out, mentor-protégé dyads are often left to their own devices after being matched and are rarely given opportunities to engage with other dyads. Even with thorough screening, it is not certain whether a mentor will employ the skills learned in program training. Early check-ins or assessments of budding relationships may be one way to monitor which relationships will benefit from continued support (Rhodes et al., 2005). Periodic re-screening (e.g., background

check) has been suggested for programs that require a one-year commitment to protégés (Garringer, 2014). Re-screening could also include assessments (including data collection from both mentors and protégés) of the extent to which mentors are integrating principles of social justice into the relationship.

Program Recommendations: Training

Appropriate training may help mentors to actively support counter-narratives that can empower youth and advance social justice. In particular, mentors require support for building the skills needed to support protégés who come from different cultural backgrounds than their own. Further, program training must include specific education about identities that are marginalized by society (Fresko & Wertheim, 2006; Hughes et al., 2012; Ratio & Hall, 1999). Training recommendations fall primarily in the following domains: (a) putting youth "in context" for mentors through education, (b) cultural competency training and guided self-reflection (i.e., examining personal biases and stereotypes), and (c) collaborative learning opportunities for mentor-protégé dyads beyond the initial match.

Putting youth in context first requires an understanding that marginalization is systematic and cannot be solved by encouraging youth to assimilate to white, middle-class norms (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Mentors in one program that employed targeted training and education about "poverty, segregation, White privilege, economic inequities, unemployment, high school dropout, and related topics" reported a better understanding of inequality, identified protégés' preexisting strengths, and engaged with youths' families and communities (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 770). Spencer (2006) noted that when mentors did not share their protégés' backgrounds or experiences, holding a better understanding of the contextual and systemic challenges facing their protégés helped mentors to be more supportive and empathic. In addition, she found that the ability to hold authentic conversations regarding difference did not naturally emerge for all mentoring pairs over time, indicating that programs cannot trust that these connections will occur on their own if given enough time. In other cases, not being able to successfully navigate these differences may contribute to premature termination.

White, middle-class mentors may feel anxious about the prospect of acknowledging and discussing issues such as race/ethnicity and social class with protégés, and consequently avoid these topics (Chan, 2008). Thus, it is likely that mentoring training programs need to normalize discomfort and equip mentors with the skills needed to engage in effective communication and avoid harm to the protégé (Sánchez et al., 2014). Mentors may also need preparation for the reluctance that some youth may have

to develop a deep relationship with them. In the case of mentoring across social identities, in particular, it may be unrealistic to expect youth to share in adults' enthusiasm for the new relationship considering their developmental stage and previous encounters with marginalization. Diversi and Mecham (2005) found that mentors experienced increased comfort with the cultural differences between themselves and their protégés, in part, by engaging in ongoing reflective conversations with other mentors. Mentors reported greater success in navigating differences in their relationships with their protégés and consequently, more enduring mentoring relationships as a result of these conversations. In addition to helping mentors build their own self-efficacy related to social justice principles, programs should emphasize the benefits of having conversations about social inequality and cultural differences with their protégés.

Weiston-Serdan (2017) highlights critical mentoring, or "mentoring augmented by critical consciousness," as an approach to improve mentoring practices using a social justice framework. Critical mentoring requires an understanding of social justice concepts such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and cultural competence. Weiston-Serdan recommends that programs move toward a critical mentoring framework by making youth voice central to their organization. Approaches to achieving better youth representation in program decisions include explicitly clarifying for adults the centrality of youth voice to mentoring, actively seeking protégés' insights and feedback, and working on projects collaboratively to affect social change. A few examples drawn from the many practical recommendations outlined in Weiston-Serdan's (2017) book include inviting youth to serve on advisory boards or boards of directors, offering youth staff positions, and connecting youth with researchers for program evaluation.

Encouragingly, the findings reviewed in this paper indicate that social-justice-oriented mentor training could yield multiplicative benefits including improved and longer-lasting mentoring relationships, better youth outcomes, and social activism on the part of mentors and protégés. Youth and adults alike can benefit from participating in social change efforts, and both may benefit more when doing so in a partnership (Jones & Perkins, 2005). Most notably, engaging mentoring dyads in social justice-oriented activities could serve as a way to reduce relationship hierarchies and advance the goal of supporting marginalized youth to become empowered, critically conscious agents of social change.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several topics warrant attention in future research in order to more effectively identify and implement programmatic

shifts toward a social-justice-informed framework of mentoring. To start, little is known about the development of curricula for the social-justice-oriented programs reviewed in this paper. In particular, empirical support for curricular content and evidence-based approaches to training mentors in principles of social justice have not been established. Notably, this is a broader limitation of research on mentoring interventions and after-school programs more generally and thus, is not specific to social-justice-focused mentoring interventions. Further, pre- and post-intervention data have largely not been collected on the outcomes of interest described in this paper. While it appears programs informed by the tenets of social justice can produce improvements in traditional outcomes of interest, it is unclear the extent to which they are successful in fostering outcomes more aligned with principles of social justice. Measures that assess adolescents' sense of empowerment, critical consciousness, and identity development could be administered prior to and following the mentoring intervention to elucidate the extent to which mentoring interventions may be influencing these targeted outcomes. For example, Eisman et al. (2016) propose that measures of psychological empowerment, including intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral empowerment, may be useful for programs to integrate into evaluations. With a few exceptions (e.g., Eisman et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), limited work has assessed social justice aspects of youth development in the context of mentoring programs; therefore, more empirical research is needed to fill this gap.

Just as mentoring researchers have increasingly employed rigorous approaches to assessing traditional youth outcomes, more rigor is needed to assess interventions that aim to empower youth, foster critical consciousness, and appropriately link youth to social capital. For example, many researchers utilize random assignment to either intervention or control groups to investigate the potential effects of mentoring programs (by comparing change over time across the two groups). Mentoring programs that include an emphasis on social justice could be evaluated in comparison to a control group to assess whether changes in traditional and social-justice-related outcomes may result from the program (as opposed to developmental changes that may happen for all youth or selection bias). Moreover, youth mentoring programs with a social justice focus could be compared to standard youth mentoring programs to assess potential incremental benefits associated with greater attention to issues of social justice in youth mentoring interventions.

Youth participatory action research (Y-PAR) is one social justice-oriented research approach that may be particularly useful for the evaluation of mentoring programs. Similar to our suggested practice of including youth in mentor recruitment and screening, programs could seek

youth involvement in the development and interpretation of program evaluations. Including youth in program evaluations embodies the notion that youth can be agents of social change. Mentoring research has demonstrated mixed outcomes in terms of improved youth outcomes over time, and researchers continue to investigate ways to increase the likelihood that youth will experience long-lasting benefits from program participation. Encouraging involvement in evaluation may keep youth connected after they have "graduated" from short-term mentoring programs. Moreover, Y-PAR could focus on identifying opportunities to improve mentoring programs rather than just assessing whether or not they work. Ultimately, youth involvement in the evaluation of social-justice-oriented mentoring programs aligns evaluation practices with program practices and can help ensure that programs are more effective in achieving their objectives.

Alternatives to Traditional Formal Mentoring

Notably, formal programs are not the only context in which mentoring relationships emerge. Natural mentoring relationships (NMRs)—mentoring relationships that develop organically between youth and adults from their everyday lives—may be longer-lasting and of better quality than formal mentoring relationships (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Behrendt, 2005). Because they are often extended family members, fictive kin (i.e., non-kin individuals regarded as family), or adults from youths' communities of origin, natural mentors are more likely to share their protégés' cultural background and to be accessible for more regular contact (Hurd, Stoddard, Bauermeister, & Zimmerman, 2014; Hurd, Varner, & Rowley, 2013). Natural mentors may serve as relatable role models who possess more nuanced understandings of the specific advantages and disadvantages their protégés experience. Additionally, research on natural mentors indicates that they have the potential to bolster marginalized youths' ability to cope with the discrimination, perhaps in part by modeling coping strategies (Sánchez, Mroczkowski, Liao, Cooper, & DuBois, 2017). Further, it is possible that natural mentors could be more invested in engaging with youth in activism, given social change efforts could have direct benefits to their own communities.

Research on NMRs suggests that marginalized youth benefit from their presence across a host of psychosocial outcomes (Hurd, Tan, & Loeb, 2016; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010, 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2005). Given that these relationships may be less vulnerable to some of the pitfalls associated with formal mentoring and better aligned with social justice principles, it would behoove formal mentoring programs to consider opportunities to incorporate this

approach into their intervention model. Although formal mentoring programs may be limited in their ability to pair youth with an adult of their choosing, perhaps some degree of mutual selection could be incorporated into the matching process. Allowing youth more selection and ownership of the match would be an empowering experience and one that may lead to more sustainable and beneficial relationships. Taking this a step further, formal mentoring organizations may need to change the structure of their programs to focus on enhancing youths' relationships with adults both within (i.e., natural mentors) and outside (i.e., formal mentors) of their communities of origin.

There may be a variety of ways to integrate an NMR framework into formal mentoring. A shift in the framework of formal mentoring programs from one-on-one relationships to a broader focus on the importance of youth engaging in positive relationships with adults more generally can communicate to youth that their voice matters and that their communities are places to find support and valuable resources. Network-engaged mentoring (Schwartz et al., Unpublished manuscript) is one approach that is grounded in the understanding that young people's communities already possess resources (e.g., positive, supportive adults) that can support their development. In network-engaged mentoring, the role of the mentor is redefined to reflect more of a facilitator role. In addition to cultivating a meaningful relationship with their protégé, mentors are tasked with integrating themselves more fully into youths' social networks and leveraging their mentoring role to strengthen bonds between their protégé and positive adults within their protégé's social network (this approach was also referenced above in the "mentoring and social capital" section of the results). This approach looks to develop and reinforce supportive intergenerational relationships that will be sustained beyond the duration of a formal mentoring relationship.

Schwartz and Rhodes (2016) similarly call for a more inclusive mentoring model in which the "treatment" approach (i.e., one-to-one mentoring with a volunteer mentor) shifts to encompass the supportive networks that youth already possess. Their proposed framework, influenced by positive youth development theory, attends to the assets and resources already embedded in youths' environments. A novel approach which draws upon this framework, termed Youth Initiated Mentoring (YIM), has focused on building mentoring relationships between youth and adults from their everyday lives (Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013). Although this approach still involves a volunteer mentor and requires formalized training, mentors are selected by youth based on previous positive interactions. Initially, youth are supported in developing strategies to identify and recruit a mentor. Then, youth nominate an adult who is recruited,

screened, and trained. This approach has been incorporated into a residential program for students who have dropped out of school and has demonstrated successful results (Millenky, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2014). Protégés reported that self-selected mentors served as more relatable role models and that similarity between the youth and mentor increased their belief that the mentor understood some of the challenges they faced (Schwartz et al., 2013).

Another related approach is an intervention (Project DREAM) that combines the mutual selection aspect of natural mentoring with an after-school program that engages youth and adults in collaborative activities (Hurd & Deutsch, 2015). This approach aims to nudge along natural mentoring relationships among youth who do not have them and, more generally, to help youth become more skilled at identifying and utilizing positive adults in their networks to navigate challenges and prepare for the future. Youth are first supported in identifying positive adults in their lives with whom they do not yet have a mentoring relationship. These adults are then screened and recruited to participate in an 8-week afterschool program alongside the youth who nominated them. Weekly sessions focus on topics such as personal strengths, identity development, goal setting, role models, planning for the future, effectively communicating with adults, getting support from adults, and making good decisions. This program recognizes the importance of youth choice and youths' ability to identify positive, supportive adults in their community. It also seeks to socialize youth and adult participants toward relationships where youth are empowered to lead and adults are encouraged to play a strong supportive role.

A final new alternative to traditional formal mentoring programs involves providing youth with the skills needed to identify and recruit their own mentors. In an intervention aimed at supporting first-generation students preparing for college, high school seniors participated in workshops to develop and refine the skills needed to access and develop relationships with potentially influential adults as a means of building their social capital at their new institution (Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, & Cunningham, 2016). Through eight workshop sessions, students discussed challenges and benefits to forging relationships with adults. For example, students discussed concerns related to relying on someone other than a family member for support, and were encouraged to consider the different types of support they could seek from non-family versus family members. Workshop sessions focused on identifying potential adult mentors to whom they had access and building the skills needed to reach out to potential mentors. The intervention yielded an increase in participants' interactions with supportive adults and bolstered their self-confidence in establishing new relationships (Schwartz et al., 2016).

The framework of formal mentoring programs has remained largely unchanged since its genesis as an intervention aimed at fostering improved outcomes among disadvantaged youth, yet recent research evaluations have indicated that change to this structure may be warranted in order to ensure larger and more consistently positive effects. A number of new approaches have demonstrated that programmatic shifts may allow for better alignment with principles of social justice and consequently, yield greater and more sustainable benefits to youth participants. Thus, we implore practitioners and researchers to critically examine current practices aimed at fostering supportive youth–adult relationships and consider opportunities to alter and expand current intervention approaches to better serve the needs of marginalized youth.

Conclusions

A social justice framework may be central to reaching the foundational goals of mentoring as an intervention aimed at fostering improved outcomes among marginalized youth. To date, insufficient attention has been paid to the potential of a social justice framework to more successfully promote positive outcomes among youth participants in mentoring programs. Research findings from the current review indicate that mentors may be able to empower youth, seek critical consciousness alongside their protégés, and foster social capital within and outside youths' communities, all to the benefit of youth outcomes. While demographic differences between mentors and protégés can present challenges, findings related to mentoring across difference indicate that mentors may be able to successfully encourage positive identity development, although more research is needed to identify ways in which programs can bolster mentors' ability to do so. Some research suggests that mentors can foster youth empowerment through coaching, co-learning, and providing opportunities for scaffolded skill-building. Additionally, it appears that through seeking a sophisticated understanding of structures of oppression—individually and alongside protégés—mentors and protégés alike can gain greater critical consciousness. Finally, some research indicates that building youths' social capital, a traditional goal of formal mentoring, can be enhanced through the incorporation of a social justice framework. In contrast to the traditional notion that mere exposure to a privileged individual confers increased social capital, research suggests that close relational bonds between a mentor and protégé may be required in order for protégés to reap the social capital benefits available through the relationship.

Moreover, with the right training, mentors may be able to play a role in expanding youths' social capital both within and outside of their communities of origin.

To increase the likelihood of achieving the above-mentioned outcomes, mentoring programs must incorporate targeted recruitment, screening, and appropriate ongoing training. Without attention to the principles of social justice across all components of formal mentoring programs, there remains the risk of further marginalizing youth and recreating oppressive structures. While there are some programs that have applied a social justice framework to their programs, social justice principles have not been uniformly applied to formal mentoring as it occurs in most contexts. Practices such as altering language in recruitment materials to reflect the role of mentors as partners with youth in working toward social justice, as well as selecting adults whose motivations for mentoring align with this role are likely key. Further, ongoing training aimed at building mentors' capacity for mentoring across difference, empowering youth, and developing critical consciousness may strengthen mentoring bonds, yield more favorable youth outcomes, and help facilitate social change. In addition, alternative approaches to fostering mentoring relationships are increasingly being developed and preliminary findings suggest that these approaches hold promise for better aligning mentoring interventions with principles of social justice. Notably, as practitioners increasingly incorporate a social justice framework into their programs, there will be a growing need for program evaluations that assess for incremental benefits associated with new, social justice-informed approaches over traditional approaches. Ultimately, a greater alignment with social justice principles among youth mentoring interventions holds promise to both yield more successful mentoring relationships and foster more equitable and just circumstances for marginalized youth.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This manuscript does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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