


EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Cultural humility development in adults serving as mentors for youth: A qualitative evidence synthesis

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Abstract

This qualitative review synthesizes evidence regarding how cultural humility (i.e., critical self-reflection, challenging inequity) may be influenced by the experience of serving as a mentor in a youth program. A systematic search identified 35 qualitative studies with findings that address this question. Thematic synthesis of extracted data identified the following six themes, all but one of which pertains to ways in which serving as a mentor appeared to have enhanced the cultural humility of the adults involved: (1) humanizing others: awareness of experiential differences, (2) reflecting inward on one's own identity, biases, and opportunities, (3) connecting with others, (4) recognizing environmental influences on human development, (5) envisioning contributions to community change, and (6) counterevidence: deficit-oriented attributions. Findings indicate that mentor cultural humility development primarily entailed individual and interpersonal awareness with relatively less evidence of increased awareness of and action to change inequality. The identified themes provide promising directions for future research as well as potentially useful avenues for incorporating consideration of cultural humility more intentionally in the development and evaluation of mentoring programs for youth.

KEYWORDS

cultural humility, mentor outcomes, qualitative evidence synthesis, youth mentoring

Highlights

- Themes describe mentors' enhanced awareness of others' experiences, and own biases and opportunities
- Findings indicate relatively less evidence of environmental reflection and action
- Most programs were facilitated within higher education that included ongoing support

Youth mentoring can be defined as a relationship between a young person and an older, more experienced adult who is providing intentional support to benefit the young person's development (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). Youth mentoring programs commonly facilitate relationships between youth and adults from different economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (Garringer et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2017). In a 2016 national survey conducted by MENTOR on mentoring programs in the United States, out of 413,237 youth 33% of youth identified as Black, 24% identified as White, 20% as Latino/Hispanic, 7% as Multiracial, 4% as East-Asian, and 12% as another

racial identity (Garringer et al., 2017). Further, 51% identified as low income, 27% were in a single parent household, and 8% had incarcerated parents or family members. Last, 60% identified as girls, 38% as boys, and 2% as gender neutral or transgender, with boys being 25% more likely to be on the waiting list in community-based mentoring programs. Out of 193,823 mentors, 53% identified as White, 15% identified as Black, 10% as Latino/Hispanic, 5% as multiracial, 5% as East-Asian, and 12% identified as another racial identity. Further, 52% identified as women, 47% identified as men, and 1% identified as gender neutral or transgender. Many of the

cross-cultural relationships that are facilitated by these programs involve mentors who experience greater societal privilege relative to their mentee (e.g., White mentor and youth of color; Albright et al., 2017). Given the potential contrast in lived experiences between mentors and mentees, it is possible that mentors are being exposed to perspectives and inequalities experienced by mentees that they have not personally faced.

Conceptual frameworks of youth mentoring highlight the potential reciprocal nature of mentor-mentee interactions in formal mentoring (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2005). Reciprocity in mentoring refers to mutual sharing in the relationship wherein mentors and mentees can both impact one another through the exchange of perspectives and feelings (Lester et al., 2019). With regard to shared cultural understanding, research illustrates that mentors' understanding of social inequality can grow as a result of mentoring youth with specific experiences that may have not been exposed to previously (Duron et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2022; 2023; Simpson et al., 2023). Yet, there is relatively limited consensus on if and how adult mentors' understanding of diversity and societal inequality may change during mentoring. Lesser attention to mentor development may be due to the ways in which adults are commonly positioned as experts who impart knowledge upon younger mentees (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). A greater understanding of how adult mentors' worldviews may change through formal youth mentoring can inform not only program practices (e.g., mentor training), but also strategies for catalyzing mentors' reflections for community action.

Consideration of adult mentors' worldviews is needed because programs primarily serve youth from minoritized social groups (i.e., youth of color, low-income youth; Garringer et al., 2017) and mentors may cause harm to youth if they lack cultural responsiveness (Albright et al., 2017; Liang & West, 2007; Sánchez et al., 2021; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Specifically, mentors who lack cultural responsiveness can implicitly or explicitly cause harm to youth, particularly youth of color, by perpetrating forms of oppression (e.g., racial discrimination) within their interactions in the youth mentoring relationship (Sánchez et al., 2014). These harmful interactions can have a variety of detrimental consequences for the youth (e.g., cultural mistrust) and damage the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Sánchez et al. (2014) argued that race, ethnicity, and culture are important factors that shape youth experiences in mentoring relationships and programs and that in view of this the cultural competency of mentors and staff within programs needs further inquiry. Specifically, race, ethnicity, and culture are factors that can impact how youth go about selecting and building trust with their mentors along with specific outcomes that may be of interest to youth for healthy identity development (e.g., ethnic identity; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Sánchez et al., 2014).

Subsequent calls to action extended this initial scholarship by proposing that empowerment lenses (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016), social justice approaches (Albright et al., 2017), and critical mentoring (Weiston-Serdan, 2017) be utilized by researchers and practitioners within the mentoring field. An empowerment lens can be conceptualized as viewing youth as assets and encouraging involvement from youth to be active in transforming their community and personal wellbeing (Kim et al., 1998; Travis & Leech, 2014). A social justice approach is one in which the focus is placed on promoting systemic change and building a more equitable society by analyzing power, centering identity, and encouraging collective action (Ginwright & James, 2002). Critical mentoring is a term coined by Weiston-Serdan (2017) where mentoring is informed by cultivating critical consciousness within youth and empowering them to navigate the world with a social justice lens. Taken together, these works sought to problematize adult mentors' biases, worldviews, and cultural responsiveness within youth mentoring relationships, and specifically the ways in which programs may reify inequality by not attending sufficiently to limitations in the cultural awareness of mentors (Sánchez et al., 2021). Collectively, this scholarship provides an impetus for synthesizing evidence about changes to adults' worldviews and related behaviors as it can inform future research and practice in this area.

CULTURAL HUMILITY AND RELATIONAL MENTORING

Cultural humility is a useful conceptualization to understand how adult mentors think about their own biases and worldviews in relation to their mentoring relationship and broader society. Originally developed by Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) within the medical field to reflect patient-provider interactions, the term has been widely used to study relational dynamics across disciplines. Cultural humility can be defined as the lifelong process of self-learning about one's own view of how the world works, how this worldview influences one's interactions with others, actions that one can take to change societal inequities negatively impacting minoritized social groups (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Moreover, cultural humility also focuses on institutional accountability toward their practices and histories with client populations (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998), such as the role mentoring programs have historically played in training and recruiting diverse mentors who serve minoritized youth. Based on a review of literature, Foronda (2020) further defines cultural humility as:

“...the recognition of diversity and power imbalances among individuals, groups, or communities, with the actions of being open, self-aware, egoless, flexible, exuding respect,

and supportive interactions, focusing on both self and others to formulate a tailored response. Cultural humility is a process of critical self-reflection and lifelong learning, resulting in mutually positive outcomes.” (p. 9).

As described, an important component of cultural humility includes not only learning about others but also critically examining oneself and the power structures within society.

In addition to cultural humility, other relevant terms are frequently used across disciplines to conceptualize learning in this area, such as cultural competence (Sue, 2001) or critical consciousness (Watts et al., 2011). Scholars have reviewed tensions among these terms and others, as well as their respective merits depending upon the inquiry and context (Danso, 2018; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). With this landscape in mind, we use cultural humility as a unifying term to understand mentors' development in this area but recognize other terms that may be related or discussed within the literature reviewed. Indeed, the relational and system-level focus of cultural humility has useful applications to mentoring relationships by encompassing not only how mentors think about their mentee's experiences but also how adults serving as mentors reflect on their own social positioning, interact with their mentees, and act to reduce societal inequities impacting youth.

One area of study on mentors' cultural humility development in formal youth mentoring is through training and support. Research has examined the effectiveness of standalone mentor training (e.g., Anderson & Sánchez, 2022), as well as ongoing peer support through service-learning mentoring programs (Marshall et al., 2015). Although this body of research is growing, it indicates that program experiences outside of the relationship may play a role in bolstering mentors' cultural humility. Such training may cover the importance of learning about one's own social identities or communicating across cultural differences. While the training and support is important, it is also just one aspect of the formal mentoring experience. That is, mentors may be learning through their interactions with youth and families, staff, and other mentors. Understanding how cultural humility develops through organic learning experiences of mentoring a youth may illuminate areas for further research and program support.

In conjunction with models of mentoring that emphasize reciprocity and mutually influential processes (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2005), as well as calls for equity-driven approaches to mentoring (Albright et al., 2017; Weiston-Serdan, 2017), relational mentoring provides a theoretical background for the present synthesis of evidence of how an adult's cultural humility may change through the experience of mentoring a youth (Miller, 1976). Relational mentoring is grounded in relational cultural theory in clinical practice which

focuses on growth within social interactions and the contextual factors that influence relationships (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Miller, 1976). Several aspects of relational mentoring have implications for cultural humility in youth mentoring, including bi-directional and nonhierarchical learning, systemic understanding of social identity and power, and emphasis on both mentor and mentee outcomes (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Relational mentoring encompasses mentors' cultural humility development by focusing on social systems rather than solely on individuals and by recognizing continual learning amongst both mentors and mentees. Additionally, in contrast to a singular focus on the mentee's growth and outcomes, relational mentoring emphasizes that studying the reflections, behaviors, and outcomes of both mentors and mentees is needed (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Relational mentoring models offer an alternative to ideologies that position adults as the expert in the relationship by focusing on bidirectional learning that takes place in youth mentoring.

CURRENT STUDY

Previous scholarship on relational mentoring and social justice in mentoring inform the current review by asserting that mentors can develop alongside mentees in formal mentoring programs. Although research has quantitatively examined changes to mentors' cultural biases over the course of the mentoring relationship (e.g., Simpson et al., 2023) or following mentor training (e.g., Anderson & Sánchez, 2022), attention to the existing body of qualitative evidence on how cultural humility may develop through program participation is also warranted. The current review fills a gap in the literature by analyzing existing qualitative evidence about how mentors change through a formal mentoring relationship, which may include mentor interactions with youth, families, staff, and other mentors. Synthesizing qualitative evidence can be particularly informative for given the multifaceted nature of cultural humility that may not be adequately captured by quantitative methods. Indeed, reviewing existing qualitative research may support more intentional integration of cultural humility into program practices and evaluation. This current synthesis aims to answer the question: What are the ways in which cultural humility can develop among adults who mentor youth in formal mentoring programs?

METHOD

The current review focuses on a subset of qualitative studies identified through a published scoping review of the ways in which adult mentors are influenced by the experience of formal youth mentoring (Anderson & DuBois, 2023). Scoping reviews involve high-level

mapping of existing evidence on a given topic to inform future research. Because they do not involve in-depth analysis of findings, they can be used as a precursor to full systematic reviews when sufficient evidence is warranted (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Cultural humility was one of the most reported outcomes for mentors in the prior scoping review, thus motivating further analysis to better understand gains in this area within the identified literature. This current review is a qualitative evidence synthesis in which evidence is synthesized across primary qualitative research to develop analytic themes (Flemming & Noyes, 2021; Lockwood et al., 2015).

In the initial review, formal youth mentoring was defined as structured programming in which adult mentors were paired with youth for relationships beyond a one-time meeting (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). Criteria were: (1) published between 1990 and 2020; (2) focused on formal youth mentoring relationships between youth mentees (<18 years old) and adult mentors (>18 years old); (3) provided empirical evidence related to mentors' personal development (e.g., health, career); and (4) focus could not be solely focused on training evaluation, as we were interested in understanding relational and programmatic experiences.

The search for the initial review included systematic searching of four online academic databases (APA PsycINFO, ERIC, Ovid Medline, and Web of Science), gray literature searches on Google Scholar, examination of references from sources identified for the review, and inquiries from mentoring researchers and practitioners on a youth mentoring listserv. Screening of identified articles was conducted by the current review's first and third authors using Covidence. Researchers met regularly to apply the inclusion criteria, discuss conflicts, and refine the process. Identified studies ($n = 3155$) were screened by both researchers for eligibility through title/abstract screening and followed by full-text screening of remaining articles ($n = 167$) led primarily by the first author. A final 96 studies were identified in the initial scoping review (for search teams and additional details see Anderson & DuBois, 2023).

To be included in the current review, the initial 96 studies were restricted to qualitative studies that presented evidence on mentors' cultural humility development in the relationship. Of the originally identified studies, 33 studies reported cultural humility or civic engagement changes among mentors. These terms were operationalized as the understanding of one's social identities and power differences in relation to others and understanding and taking action to change societal barriers impacting marginalized communities (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Foronda, 2020). In addition to the originally identified articles, the original search process was replicated to include articles published between January 2021 and September 2022. This search resulted in an additional 361 unique articles. These articles were screened for inclusion via abstract screening and

subsequent full-text screening of relevant articles by the first author. These procedures resulted in the additional two new articles, resulting in 35 articles included in the current review. Figure 1 represents the PRISMA diagram (Page et al., 2021).

Data were extracted from all articles by the research team using Excel and Covidence, an online tool for systematic reviews. Extracted data included study characteristics (e.g., year, country), methodological aspects (e.g., design, sample demographics), program characteristics such as program format and training, and study findings. The current study focuses on findings related to cultural humility, and extracted data about program and study features was used to generate study characteristics and contextualize themes.

Quality appraisal tool

Given epistemological and methodological tensions in using appraisal tools for qualitative evidence synthesis (see Carroll & Booth, 2015; Flemming & Noyes, 2021), we utilize Dixon-Woods et al. (2004) prompts for appraising qualitative research. Namely, there are varied tools and tactics to utilizing the results of the appraisal process. In this review, we utilize the prompts to inform the reader of potential methodological limitations of included studies, but did not plan to exclude articles based on appraisal scores. Eleven prompts were used that cover the clarity and suitability of research questions, the description and appropriateness of analysis, the sufficiency of evidence and its interpretation, and the overall contribution. An appraisal was conducted by the first and fourth authors. Ratings are reported in Table 1 and ranged from 5 to 11 with most studies being rated as addressing all 11 possible prompts.

Data analysis

All extracted qualitative evidence related to mentors' cultural humility development was analyzed. Extracted data about cultural humility changes could be drawn from anywhere in the included study, however, data were primarily drawn from results sections. Additionally, study details (e.g., sample demographics) and program details (e.g., type of mentoring program) typically found in the introduction and method sections were extracted to provide contextual details to data about cultural humility changes.

A three-phase, thematic synthesis approach was then used to analyze the qualitative data from the included studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). A summary of the program (i.e., format, program name) was read alongside extracted data to contextualize mentor outcomes (Flemming & Noyes, 2021). First, all extracted data were coded line-by-line and primary codes were applied

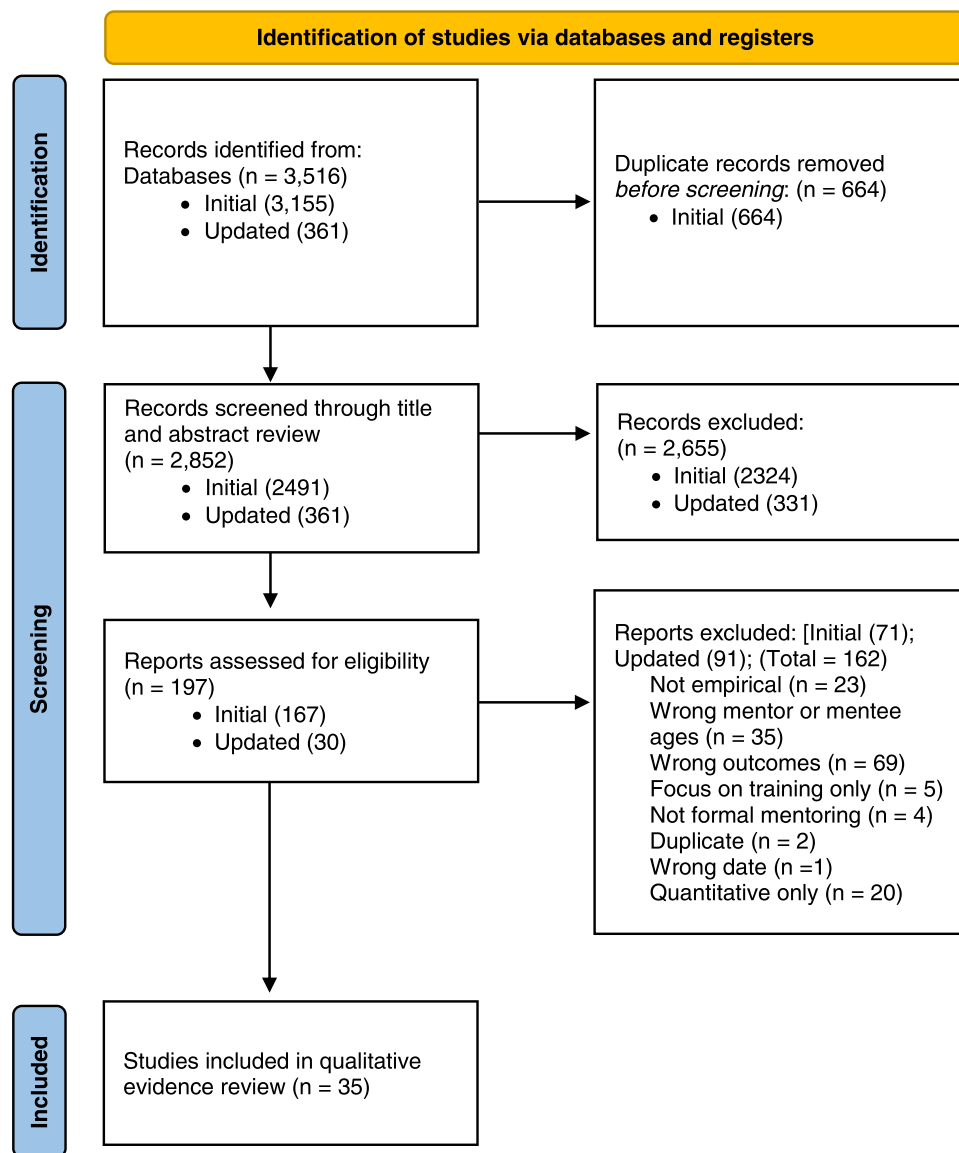


FIGURE 1 PRISMA diagram.

to segments of data. In this phase, codes are closely aligned with the original study findings. All extracted data were individually reviewed in Excel by the first and fourth authors. Each author read the extracted findings individually and developed primary codes for each line of text. In the second phase of thematic synthesis, primary codes are arranged into descriptive themes. The first and fourth authors met to identify instances where primary codes covered similar concepts or used similar phrasing and arranged codes into a hierarchy of descriptive themes. In the third and final stage, analytic themes are developed to encompass the descriptive themes in relation to the stated purpose of the study. In contrast to descriptive themes that are closely derived from the original study, analytic themes aim to extend interpretation to develop explanations. The process of developing analytic themes can be iterative as the researcher aims to

explain all the identified descriptive themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). In our study, the first author drafted an initial set of analytic themes to encompass the previously developed descriptive themes. The first, second, and fourth authors then met to discuss the themes and make revisions that better encompassed all descriptive themes. The agreed upon themes were then applied to the extracted data in NVivo by the first author.

Authors' positionality and assumptions

The authors had different roles in the review and approached this study from diverse professional and personal positions. As described, this work originated from an initial scoping review conducted by the first and third authors. Given research partnerships

TABLE 1 Presence of analytic themes and quality appraisal rating by included source.

Source	Humanizing others: Awareness of experiential differences	Reflecting inward on one's own identity, biases, and opportunities	Connecting with others	Recognizing environmental influences on human development	Envisioning contributions to community change	Counterevidence: Deficit- oriented attributions	Quality appraisal rating
Banks (2010)	X	X					9
Crawford et al. (2013)	X	X			X		11
Cushing and Love (2013)	X		X		X		5
Dereck et al. (2018)				X			11
Donaldson (2019)		X		X			11
Duron et al. (2020)	X	X		X	X	X	11
Fachin Lucas (1999)	X						11
Fresko and Wertheim (2001)	X		X	X		X	7
Friedman and Herrmann (2014)	X		X				11
Goldner and Golan (2017)	X		X				8
Haber-Curran et al. (2017)	X	X					11
Haddock et al. (2013)	X	X		X	X		11
Harwood and Radoff (2009)					X		11
Herrenkohl et al. (2019)	X	X	X				11
Hughes et al. (2010)	X			X			11
Hughes et al. (2012)		X		X	X		11
Kafai et al. (2008)		X					11
Knoche & Zamboanga (2006)		X					11
LaPointe (2022)		X	X				11
Lee et al. (2010)	X		X	X	X		11
Livstrom (2022)	X	X	X	X	X		11

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Source	Humanizing others: Awareness of experiential differences	Reflecting inward on one's own identity, biases, and opportunities	Connecting with others	Recognizing environmental influences on human development	Envisioning contributions to community change	Counterevidence: Deficit- oriented attributions	Quality appraisal rating
McGill et al. (2015)	X		X				11
Mursky (2008)			X			X	11
Nelson and Youngbull (2015)		X	X				11
O'Shea et al. (2016)	X	X			X		11
Patel et al. (2021)	X		X	X	X		11
Peralta et al. (2018)	X	X			X		11
Raven (2015)	X			X			7
Richardson (2020)							11
Salzman (2000)	X		X				7
Schmidt* et al. (2004)	X						11
Ssewamala et al. (2014)	X	X					11
Taylor & Trepanier - Street (2007)					X		7
Walsh et al. (2015)				X	X		9
Weiler et al. (2014)		X			X		11

outside of the study and shared interest on the topic, the second, fourth, and fifth authors joined at the start of the current review. The first author is a White, U.S.-born woman who is a faculty member trained as a community psychologist and studies youth mentoring relationships. The second author is a Black, U.S.-born, heterosexual, cisgender man, who is a faculty member and studies youth mentoring programs. The third author is a white, U.S.-born, heterosexual male over 60 years of age who received his doctoral training in clinical child and community psychology. The fourth author is a White, Turkish, Muslim, heterosexual, and cisgender woman who is a graduate student in Educational Psychology. And the fifth author is a white, U. S.-born, Jewish, heterosexual, cisgender woman, who is a student studying social work.

In conjunction to different roles and positionalities, several assumptions underlie our review. First, we view youth mentoring programs as designed for the purpose of benefiting youth, while simultaneously holding the potential to be sites of development for both mentors and mentees (Jarrott & Lee, 2022). Next, we view the current synthesis approach to be just one avenue for understanding the ways in which mentors' cultural humility may or may not change through formal mentoring participation. Last, we consider investigating mentor cultural humility changes to be a worthwhile aspect of understanding the processes and outcomes of mentoring programs. Advancing understanding in this area may contribute to future research and practice to advance critical mentoring, empowerment, and community change.

RESULTS

Study characteristics

The 35 studies in this review are described in Table S1. Studies included samples of undergraduates or between the ages of 18 and 22 years old ($n = 20$; 57%), 23 and 34 years old ($n = 7$; 20%), and 45 and 64 years old ($n = 1$; 3%), while 7 studies (20%) did not report age, and there were no studies with an average sample age between the ages of 35 and 44, or older than 65 years old. Included studies were coded based on the race/ethnicity of the sample and included samples with a majority of White mentors ($n = 13$; 37%), a majority of mentors of color ($n = 8$; 23%), diverse samples with no majority ($n = 3$; 9%), and sample race/ethnicity not reported ($n = 11$; 31%). Similarly, samples of mentees included samples with a majority of youth of color ($n = 21$; 60%), a majority of White youth ($n = 2$; 6%), and race/ethnicity not reported ($n = 12$; 34%).

Studies reported evidence associated with mentor participation in 31 unique programs. Mentors were involved through course credit like service-learning

courses ($n = 10$; 29%) or other course credit, ($n = 12$; 34%), volunteering ($n = 8$; 23%), paid/professional ($n = 3$; 9%), or not reported ($n = 2$; 6%). Included studies reflect one-to-one relationships between youth and adults ($n = 11$; 31%), group mentoring ($n = 9$; 26%), dyadic but mentor has multiple mentees ($n = 6$; 17%), or formats combining dyadic and group mentoring ($n = 9$; 26%). Mentors participated in programs predominantly implemented by higher education institutions ($n = 27$; 77%). The remaining programs were administered by community-based organizations ($n = 6$; 17%) and health care settings ($n = 2$; 6%). Most studies reported both initial training and continued support for mentors ($n = 25$; 71%), whereas 7 studies (20%) reported either pre- or post-training but not both, and 3 studies (9%) did not report training details.

Studies used various qualitative methods, including only interview data ($n = 11$; 31%), only open-ended survey response data ($n = 5$; 14%), and only focus groups data ($n = 3$; 9%). Sixteen studies (46%) used other methods, such as reflection journal entries, observations, or a combination of other data sources. All studies relied on mentor report data as opposed to youth- or staff-report data. Additionally, most studies employed a retrospective design ($n = 24$; 69%) to recall experiences, with the remaining 11 studies (31%) analyzing qualitative data over time (e.g., weekly journals).

Analytic themes

Six analytic themes were identified from the included evidence (see Table 1). When discussing these themes, relevant demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, income) of mentors, mentees, and programs is included where possible. However, several studies either did not report mentor or mentee demographics or did not describe mentor demographics within their qualitative findings. Each analytic theme and associated descriptive themes (noted in italics) are discussed in turn.

Humanizing others: Awareness of experiential differences

One analytic theme refers to growth in mentors' understanding of diversity among individuals and within groups (e.g., racial, ethnic, or economic). In line with Foronda's (2020) definition of cultural humility as encompassing recognition of diversity, mentors' awareness involved learning about the experiential realities and histories of other cultural groups. This was described as occurring through increased proximity to new groups and relational exchanges within the program.

Studies described mentors increased *exposure to diverse experiences* through formal mentoring. For

instance, the PERACH mentoring program paired low-income mentees whose families had recently immigrated to Israel from Middle Eastern and North African countries with mentors from higher economic backgrounds with more distant familial immigration experiences (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001). A mentor described “I think that I came in contact with another kind of population that I didn't know before” (p. 155). Similarly, mentoring presented a window to expose mentors to their mentee's living environments that they have not personally experienced or may not have seen otherwise (Goldner & Golan, 2017; Hughes et al., 2010; McGill et al., 2015). Mentoring provided mentors visibility to experiences unlike their own.

Mentoring also gave some mentors *personal connection to minoritized experiences*, in which the topics (e.g., racism, poverty) they learned about from mentees went from being distant ideas they held entering programs to being more personally relevant. In a mentoring program for justice-system involved youth (Duron et al., 2020), findings highlighted that this was the first time some mentors had been exposed to social issues through someone they knew personally. Mentoring was an opportunity to contrast media portrayals and learn about the actual youth and communities involved. Building a personal connection to mentees and program youth through mentoring was described as a humanizing process through which mentors “put a face” to social issues (e.g., teen pregnancy, poverty; Hughes et al., 2010; Livstrom, 2022).

Improved *cross-cultural understanding* was also described (Cushing & Love, 2013; Friedman & Herrmann, 2014; Patel et al., 2021). While sometimes specifically named as cultural competence or understanding, studies also described mentors' growth related to their knowledge of others' perspectives and cultures. That is, mentors described increased awareness of cultural practices (e.g., religious traditions; Fresko & Wertheim, 2001) or learning about different viewpoints than their own (Livstrom, 2022). In addition to general cultural awareness and knowledge, results suggest that mentors also gathered knowledge of others' experiences with adversity, highlighting gained knowledge about challenges pertaining to economic or education among program youth (Ssewamala et al., 2014; Schmidt et al., 2004). Further, findings indicated that mentors improved their understanding of differences between social groups by learning about groups outside of their own. This evidence reflected mentor recognition of diversity within larger groups, such as mentors' recognizing the presence of economic, racial, and social diversity among participants in the broader program (i.e., Young Women Leaders Program; Lee et al., 2010), or racial diversity among mostly African American mentees, albeit without naming Whiteness among predominantly White women mentors (Banks, 2010).

Reflecting inward on one's own identity, biases, and opportunities

A second analytic theme pertains to how mentoring appears to have, in some instances, sparked reflection among mentors about their own life experiences and social positioning. This theme aligns with our guiding definition of cultural humility as encompassing self-awareness, self-reflection and critique of one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions (Foronda et al., 2015). Evidence often involved mentors' contrasting their own lives to the experiences of their mentee or other program youth. Further, mentoring is characterized in some cases as having prompted mentors to reconsider negative ideas that they hold about others.

Mentors' *awareness of privilege and opportunities* describes reflecting on the resources and access to opportunities they had growing up that were often different from those of their mentees. For example, school-based mentoring contributed to mentors' reflection on how their educational experiences were often more privileged with higher quality resources compared to their mentees (Hughes et al., 2012). Other instances involved mentors' reflecting on the absence of barriers in their own lives that their mentee experienced, such as language biases against English language learners (LaPointe, 2022) or environmental risks leading to juvenile justice involvement (Duron et al., 2020). Limited evidence pointed to mentors' reflecting on racial privilege, specifically (e.g., Hughes et al., 2012). Instead, when addressing privilege, studies often discussed it as the presence of educational access without a specific connection to a system of racial or economic privilege. Some mentors described *feeling lucky and appreciative of their own opportunities*, particularly in contrast to their mentee's experiences. Namely, studies reported evidence of mentors' increased awareness of the quality of social support from their own family and friends or access to educational opportunities (e.g., Haddock et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2012). Both awareness of privilege, and feelings of appreciativeness to one's own opportunities reflect self-reflection and introspection that are a part of cultural humility.

Evidence also pointed to mentoring as a vehicle for *racialethnic identity exploration and regard*. In contrast to the previous descriptive theme, which focused largely on unspecified privilege as illuminated by differences between mentors and mentees, this theme focused on learning about one's own racial/ethnic culture (i.e., a form of self-reflection in cultural humility). Instances demonstrated that mentors enhanced their understanding of their own racial/ethnic identity through shared identity with mentees or other program mentors (O'shea, McMahon, Priestly, Bodkin-Andrews and Harwood, 2016). In a study of an Aboriginal mentoring program including both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mentors, the Aboriginal mentors reported

improved self-worth and cultural learning about their own community because of the mentoring experience (Peralta et al., 2018). Similar findings emerged in a study of the Latino Achievement Mentoring Program, which strived to pair Latino high school students with Latino college mentors, or culturally sensitive mentors from different ethnic backgrounds (Knoche & Zamboanga, 2006). Several Latina/o mentors described enhancing cultural ties to their ethnic group, and that they joined the program to learn more about their culture and make contributions to their community (Knoche & Zamboanga, 2006).

Mentoring program participation also was reported in some studies to have sparked mentor attention to their limiting beliefs about other individuals and groups. *Reduced judgment of others* is described as mentors' developing a general understanding to take another person's experiences into account and reserve preconceived ideas about them (Duron et al., 2020; Weiler et al., 2014). This theme reflects notions of the importance of not judging someone before knowing them (O'shea, McMahon, Priestly, Bodkin-Andrews, and Harwood, 2016). Relatedly, some mentors appear to have modified their beliefs by *rejecting deficit views about youth and others*. Evidence involved mentors' enhanced knowledge of how society often focuses on youths' mistakes or deficits (Haddock et al., 2013). In one study of a fellowship program for an ethnically diverse groups of teachers serving as mentors to predominantly African American high school students, the combination of professional development and classroom interactions with students was concluded to have increased mentors' awareness of youth assets and redirection of their attention toward deficits in their environments (Donaldson, 2019).

Last, evidence included reports of mentoring having facilitated mentors' *interrogation of biases and stereotypes* that they held before and during the mentoring experience. One study of predominantly White service-learning students working with youth in high-poverty high schools indicated that a small subset of mentors acknowledged new awareness about harmful ideas they held about people living in poverty, as well as the impact of racist comments that they previously made (Hughes et al., 2012). Other studies also described mentors' changing racist attitudes and ideas. For instance, in a study of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), which supports Indigenous high school youth, the authors described how non-Indigenous mentors unlearned racist stereotypes about the Indigenous community (O'shea, McMahon, Priestly, Bodkin-Andrews, and Harwood, 2016). Further, another study including a small sample of racially diverse college students pointed out how White mentors changed negative stereotypes held about communities of color with which they partnered with during the academic course and mentoring program (Livstrom, 2022).

Connecting with others

A third analytic theme pertains to the ways in which mentors' interactions and relational capacity improved during the experience. This theme focuses on growth in mentors' interpersonal-level attributes and perspective-taking to incorporate greater attention to diverse cultural and identity-related experiences. This theme aligns with definitions of cultural humility as involving ego-lessness, sharing, and supportive interactions (Foronda et al., 2015).

The descriptive theme of *relating patiently with others* included evidence of how mentors enhanced their ability to relate to and communicate with individuals who had different experiences than their own. Studies described how mentors learned the importance of being patient in their interactions with youth by listening and learning from a different perspective (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001; LaPointe, 2022; Livstrom, 2022). For instance, in a study of medical student experiences mentoring high school students from underrepresented backgrounds, a mentor described talking with his mentee about a polarizing topic of addiction and learning to communicate in an understanding manner (LaPointe, 2022). They stated:

“[Talking with my mentee about addiction] was a good learning experience for me, too. To not just be like, “No, you're wrong.” Which is why I was like, “Why do you think this is and what do you think that is?” ...It taught me to be patient and kind and to explain sensitive or complex ideas in simpler ways. It overall really helped me communicate and build better relationships with students in the high school age group.” (p. 93).

Similarly, Goldner and Golan (2017) indicated how mentors developed new skills to relate to elementary school students who were selected to be mentored by their teachers for having low adjustment and well-being. One mentor stated, “I realized that I had the patience and the ability to explain things to young children” (p. 9).

Relatedly, mentors' *cross-cultural empathy* involves evidence of the ways in which mentors engaged in perspective-taking about others' experiences. In contrast to cross-cultural understanding, which was more focused on cognitive ideas and knowledge, empathy was often described relating more toward mentors' emotions and feelings terms. That is, the mentoring experience was found to have apparently provided mentors with a vantage point into their mentee's challenges in their home life, to which mentors then described having feelings of sensitivity and empathy toward a situation they had not experienced before (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001; LaPointe, 2022).

The final descriptive theme included mentors' enhanced *sense of community*, or feelings related to being



connected to and in community with others because of the mentoring experience (Lee et al., 2010; Nelson & Youngbull, 2015). Illustratively, ongoing meetings in the STUDIO mentoring program provided college student mentors with a sense of belonging on campus by providing opportunities to connect with mentors who shared their racial/ethnic identities, as well as learn from mentors with dissimilar racial/ethnic identities (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). Evidence indicates that mentoring is a possible avenue for connection to others within the program and the broader community (Goldner & Golan, 2017).

Recognizing environmental influences on human development

A fourth analytic theme pertains to mentors reflecting on or recognizing the role of environmental-level factors in society in the diversity of human well-being, education, and health. This theme encompasses how mentors deepened their awareness of the broader ecology through the experiences of their mentees and their families. Overall, this theme connects to prior definitions of cultural humility encompassing a awareness of power imbalances within groups and communities (Foronda, 2020).

Studies described mentors' improved *awareness of the role of family systems in youth experiences*, or how the family context influences their mentee and other youth. In a service-learning course grounded in family systems theory (i.e., understanding of subsystems within families and their role on development), mentors made connections between course content on subsystems and their understanding of their mentees' experiences within their families (Haddock et al., 2013). Findings from other studies pointed more generally to mentors' understanding that interpersonal and financial challenges within their mentee's family could influence their mentee's life and educational experiences (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001; Hughes et al., 2012).

Included studies also provided evidence of mentors developing *awareness of inequalities in society*. This involved a general awakening to the complexity of structural inequalities (Haddock et al., 2013), as well as an enhanced awareness of inequalities within specific institutions that programs were focused on, such as education (Derck et al., 2018; Raven, 2015; Walsh et al., 2015) or the justice system (Duron et al., 2020). For example, college mentors in a service-learning course that provided mentoring to youth in high-poverty schools became more aware of gaps between higher and lower-income schools, such as lower teacher expectations and limited access to educational resources in their mentees' schools (e.g., textbooks; Hughes et al., 2012). A mentor in this program stated, "Without exposure to the issues we talked about in class and seeing them first-hand in the public school system, I don't think

a person could fully understand the emergency of these issues in our society" (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 371). In another study of predominantly White mentors working with predominantly Latinx justice-involved youth, some mentors learned through their relationships that the justice-oriented challenges their mentees experienced were complex and derived from social systems, rather than individual choices alone (Duron et al., 2020). As illustrated by these examples, the location of the mentoring program (e.g., school-based, justice-involved programming), may offer opportunities for reflection about environmental inequalities related to the institution in which it was situated.

Envisioning contributions to community change

A fifth analytic theme pertains to mentors' emergent thoughts about changing the conditions within youths' lives and the broader community. The evidence supporting this theme suggests that formal mentoring stimulated mentors' ideas about how they could make a positive change in their community following their mentoring program experience. Evidence within this theme aligns with definitions of cultural humility by focusing on recognition of one's role in changing inequalities and power imbalances in society (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015).

Studies described how mentors exhibited *concern and interest in community change*, in which they were more attuned to the local issues in their community and their own future involvement (O'shea, McMahon, Priestly, Bodkin-Andrews and Harwood, 2016; Taylor & Trepanier-Street, 2007). For example, Harwood and Radoff (2009) described how in the service-learning course with mentoring of middle schoolers, mentors deepened their understanding of the main community concerns such as a shared perspective on young people, issues related to race and class, diversity ignorance, stereotyping, or intolerance, hate speech, gangs, and homelessness, awareness of local community needs that need changing. Another study of service-learning reported that mentors became more aware of community needs and the importance of focusing on what local youth think about possible solutions to these concerns about racism and discrimination (Cushing & Love, 2013). Additionally, college student mentors in Campus Corps discussed plans to continue volunteering again in the future after their service-learning requirement (Haddock et al., 2013). By and large, this evidence was associated with programs that also involved a broader service component or support structure. It's possible that service-learning provides a community-oriented framing that is not present in other formats.

Mentoring participation also was reported in some instances to have facilitated *awareness of avenues for youth advocacy*, or potential ways to ameliorate the inequalities they saw experienced by youth. Specific

avenues for advocacy included personally supporting families (Patel et al., 2021), identifying community initiatives or programs (Haddock et al., 2013; Peralta et al., 2018), or conducting service alongside their mentee in the program (Lee et al., 2010). Although mentors' ideas about advocacy derived from program support (e.g., class readings; Hughes et al., 2012), some mentors' attributed advocacy beliefs through their interactions with their mentees and learning their perspective (Livstrom, 2022). Last, studies illustrated how mentoring sparked mentors' *intention to help others in the future*, such that they viewed helping others as important and were motivated to help others again. Undergraduate and postgraduate mentors working with youth in public care left the program with motivation to volunteer again in the future (Crawford et al., 2013). Similarly, following the AIME program, most mentors reported a desire for future community involvement (O'shea, McMahon, Priestly, Bodkin-Andrews, and Harwood, 2016). The authors note the potential impact of this outcome given the considerable scope of mentoring in Australia.

Counterevidence: Deficit-oriented attributions

A few studies provided evidence of mentors sharing harmful ideas during mentoring program participation. Evidence involved mentors exhibiting deficit-views about youth and families or locating youth challenges at the individual level rather than environmental causes (Duron et al., 2020). For instance, in the PERACH mentoring program pairing higher income mentors with lower-income mentees, some mentors struggled to bridge differences and understand their mentee's economic context, turning to deficit attributions about the child and family (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001). Although a small set of included evidence, this theme demonstrated that changes to cultural humility were not universal among mentors. Given the nature of data collection and publishing, mentors may be less prone to describe negative ideas and authors are less likely to include them if they are not the explicit focus of the study.

DISCUSSION

Qualitative evidence included in this review points to ways in which mentor cultural humility development can occur in formal youth mentoring. Our analytic themes are supported by prior literature in several ways. For instance, intergroup contact theory underscores how mentors' may enhance their understanding of others' experiences through mentoring. This theory suggests individuals who engage in some type of contact with people with different identities than their own (i.e., spending significant time with someone of a different racial/ethnic background) are less likely going forward to

be prejudiced towards individuals that do not share their group status (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Allport, 1954; Davies et al., 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Further, the findings emphasize the importance of considering the concept of social distance (i.e., the lack of connection between different social groups) between mentors and mentees (Brewster et al., 2020). A recent quantitative study of formal youth mentoring aligns with this finding, wherein White mentors paired with youth of color exhibited greater changes to their beliefs about discrimination facing Black Americans (Simpson et al., 2023). It is possible that the amount of social distance between the mentor and the youth may influence how impactful these intergroup interactions are for the mentor (see Conner, 2017). Overall, previous research highlights the possibility that mentors' awareness may develop through proximity to diverse perspectives within the interpersonal context of a mentoring relationship.

We also identified the ways in which mentors' self-awareness, reflection and critique enhanced through formal mentoring (Foronda et al., 2015). For example, one descriptive theme was related to identity exploration primarily among mentors of color working with youth with similar identities. Prior research focused on K-12 teachers has indicated that teachers of color felt a special commitment to serve in schools that were low-income and primarily youth of color and this commitment impacted their retention (Achinstein et al., 2010). It's possible that a similar phenomenon occurs with mentors of color in formal mentoring relationships with youth of color. This finding also extends prior quantitative research on the role of racial/ethnic matching in mentoring, which largely indicates a mixed picture of shared racial/ethnic matching on youth outcomes (Sánchez et al. 2014; Rhodes et al., 2002). Perhaps qualitative studies focused identity-relevant outcomes like mentor cultural humility tap into the benefits of shared identity not captured by quantitative designs.

With regard to our themes related to mentors' awareness of their own biases and privilege, Ginwright (2022) describes self-reflection as "mirror work," or the difficult process of looking inward toward one's own difficult truths and biases. Awareness of oneself is necessary for liberation within society, such that it can be a precursor to critical allyship where individuals are highly aware of their unearned advantages and are intentional about providing advocacy with those who do not share the same privileges they do (Ginwright, 2022; Nixon, 2019). Prior mentoring research outside of our review has indicated that White mentors reported personal growth shown through the introspection of personal privileges, upbringing, and awareness of their own bias issues because of mentoring Black youth from low-income backgrounds (Jones et al., 2022). This theme also illustrates how humbling it can be when privileged individuals are stimulated to reflect critically on their own lives because of being exposed to different life



experiences that broaden their own perspectives (Grzanka et al., 2020; Whiting & Cutri, 2015). Mentor reflections in this manner may be a necessary ingredient for future community action.

Findings related to connecting with others and community change are supported by prior research and community psychology values. The development of these empathic interactions is noteworthy given prior research outside of this review has found that mentor empathy regarding the lived experiences of their mentees is associated with both mentor- and mentee-reported relationship quality over time (Deane et al., 2022), thus suggesting that mentor growth in this area may be useful not only to the mentor, but also for the relationship. Additionally, we also identified evidence of mentors' enhanced sense of community. This theme aligns with prior research outside of this review indicating that volunteer mentors can develop a deeper connection to their community because of mentoring, particularly if such experiences are associated with underserved populations (Meltzer & Saunders, 2020; Worker et al., 2020). Our finding is noteworthy because the ways that youth in mentoring programs help mentors feel more connected to a community are often an overlooked benefit received by mentors (Albright et al., 2017; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Additionally, a portion of themes point to mentors' increased awareness of privilege and inequalities and their potential to become change agents in their communities. It is likely evidence within this theme relates service-learning courses within which many mentors included in this review received course credit, as well as mentoring focus on family as an important part of the mentoring relationship (Keller, 2005; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). The idea that mentors can be advocates for social change in the communities they serve has been discussed previously (Albright et al., 2017; Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Social justice theory, grounded in social cognitive theory, posits that one's planned intentions for social justice behaviors are linked to acting in the future (Miller et al., 2009). Evidence in this theme illustrates that mentoring programs should consider what role mentors can potentially take on in the community after spending time mentoring and learning from youth. Future research should explore whether planned actions take place.

Despite these findings, many of the cultural descriptions were general, with limited evidence in the review demonstrating mentors' reflections about root systems of oppression that create inequalities in society, such as racism or classism. This is an important consideration given that many scholars have identified different types of racism (i.e., systemic racism, anti-Blackness) as critical factors to consider in the lives of youth (Ortega-Williams & Harden, 2022; Trent et al., 2019). The R3ISE framework has combined some of the most relevant and influential theoretical frameworks that inform youth development (e.g., Bioecological Model, Integrative Theory, Social Determinants of Health, and Critical

Race Theory) to create a comprehensive conceptual framework that captures cultural and environmental factors in the youth's life that impact development while considering the impact of racism as well (Iruka et al., 2022). Utilizing a framework such as the R3ISE integrative model within mentoring programs could help not only train mentors on key issues related to social awareness and privilege but also help them identify how these issues could be the result of structural and institutional racism (Iruka et al., 2022). Otherwise, mentoring programs can become an alternative expression of racial oppression and White privilege in U.S. society (Crowley, 2019; Matias & Mackey, 2016). The lack of evidence in these areas, as well as the weighted nature of findings toward awareness of others' experiences could be due to several reasons. First, included evidence focused largely on dyadic mentoring relationships. Thus, mentors' reflections about environmental root causes may be limited in this type of dyadic experience when compared to program models with a community-level emphasis. Second, most studies included majority White mentors, serving predominantly youth of color. Prior scholarship has described how, due to racial privilege, White people are often oblivious to the ways in which being White has influenced their lives until they experience a crisis that forces them to confront their privilege and role in racism (Boyd, 2020; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 2021). Taken together, it's likely that the focus on dyadic relationships between primarily White mentors working with primarily youth of color influenced the greater amount of dyadic-level evidence, as opposed to more systems-level outcomes.

Although evidence suggests that mentors' cultural humility can develop both through ongoing training and organically through relational exchange with mentees, program support had a large presence within the included studies that presented evidence about systems and social change. Most programs provided pre-training and ongoing support, and over half of the mentoring programs in this review were supported through some form of course credit within higher education. Thus, mentors reported enhanced critical self-awareness and action-oriented reflections that were likely, at least in part, a product of more intensive, ongoing program support with an explicit cultural focus. Compared to other volunteering formats (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters), coursework may provide more specific opportunities to learn abstract concepts of diversity and connect them to mentoring observations. Indeed, much of the "critical" self-reflection and awareness of inequality may be a product of mentoring heavily supported by training, and not reflective of all youth mentoring programs.

Implications, strengths, and limitations

While this review focuses on mentor cultural humility in formal mentoring, we do not suggest the onus be on

historically marginalized youth and families to teach mentors, or that programs leverage mentoring as a means to change mentor attitudes. It is important for the safety and benefit of youth to be at the forefront of programming, while simultaneously considering how mentors are learning through their program participation in ways that may impact themselves, youth, and the relationship. Indeed, the goal of this review was to advance understanding of how mentors change in this area as it may inform future research on the topic. As such, findings have several research and practice implications.

First, findings may inform future development of strong evidence-based practices related to cultural humility in screening and training. For example, evidence-based practices could be developed for how programs consider matching and training for mentors who have had limited personal connection to youth from different social backgrounds that their own, as illustrated by our descriptive findings. Additionally, given that the evidence was limited with respect to naming racism or racial privilege, there is a basis for programs to critically examine their practices with respect to being explicit about racism, classism, and other oppressive systems that cause inequalities experienced by program youth (Albright et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2021; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). One example is provided by Sánchez et al. (2021) provide guidance on advancing anti-racist training for mentors, wherein organizations should commit to promoting critical consciousness and social action. Programs can support mentors to engage in community action alongside their mentees, such as participating in a protest march or writing a letter to an elected official (Sánchez et al., 2021). Additionally, programs can consider how former mentors may be engaged as continued partners for social change following their participation in the program. Mentors may leave programs to volunteer elsewhere or advocate on issues pertinent to youth served by mentoring programs. Overall, this review sheds light on how mentors' cultural humility may be enhanced under current practices, while also pointing to an imperative for greater intentionality within the field to fully realize the possibility that such personal growth presents for advancing social justice aims.

Limitations of this review are also important to note. Although a systematic search process was used, it is possible that articles were missed due to the subsetting of studies from the scoping review. The initial strategy aimed to broadly capture mentor development in formal mentoring, and thus the initial search terms reflected mentor personal development outcomes, generally. The tension between specificity and sensitivity to all concepts is a documented challenge of qualitative evidence synthesis (Flemming & Noyes, 2021). It is possible that an alternative approach focused specifically on cultural humility would result in additional evidence. Additionally,

we focus on studies that examine mentors' change over the course of mentoring with evidence specific to mentors' personal cultural humility development. As such, we did not include studies that only evaluated mentor training (e.g., Anderson & Sánchez, 2022), or relationship outcomes like relationship satisfaction (e.g., Suffrin et al., 2016) or match closure (e.g., Spencer, 2007). Although important, we considered these types of studies to be conceptually distinct from studies investigating a mentor's personal change through the formal mentoring relationship. These considerations having been noted, we believe our strategy is appropriate for the purpose of the current study and is in line with ongoing scholarship on varying approaches to qualitative evidence synthesis (Booth, 2019). Last, as with other systematic reviews and meta-analyses, selective reporting of findings in original articles can bias the information generated by this qualitative synthesis, as well as through the re-reading and coding process in the review. For example, it's possible that original others do not report evidence if mentors demonstrated no change in their cultural humility. Additionally, included studies utilize different research questions and methodologies that may make it difficult to generalize findings from this review.

Despite these limitations, the current review contributes to an understanding of the ways in which adult cultural humility may develop in the context of mentoring a youth in a program designed for the purpose of benefiting youth development. Grounded in relational mentoring, this review adds to the understanding of how adults may be influenced by the experience of youth mentoring and, more generally, is responsive to calls for a shift toward greater attention to mutuality in mentoring research (Lester et al., 2019). As youth mentoring and other related community-based programs aim to promote healthy development in communities, and researchers seek to help inform this work, a focus on the mutual development of the youth and adults involved can enhance these goals for community change.

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