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Mentoring undergraduate women survivors of childhood abuse and intimate partner violence

Rosemary C. Reilly

Department of Applied Human Sciences

and

Miranda D'Amico

Department of Education

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec

Abstract

This inquiry describes the role of mentoring for undergraduate women survivors of trauma. It employed a comparative case approach. Interviews elicited stories from participants reflecting the role mentors have played in their life course and educational experiences. Four major themes emerged: fantasy mentors; mentor as mirror; mentor as nurturer and supporter; and mentor as the embodiment of a profession. Issues of women's identity were particularly salient to these themes. Deviant cases provided an opportunity to reexamine the limits of the data and exhibited themes of self-reliance or seeing mentoring as controlling. Implications for mentoring women in higher education are discussed.

Keywords: mentoring, undergraduate women, survivors of childhood abuse, intimate partner violence, higher education

Mentoring undergraduate women survivors of childhood abuse and intimate partner violence

The impact of childhood abuse and adult intimate partner violence is well documented. Researchers have demonstrated that the effect of these events on the future of an individual includes: feelings of shame, guilt, and depression (Webb, Heisler, Call, Chickering, & Colburn, 2007); self-destructive behavior, powerlessness, loneliness, poor self-esteem, and revictimization (Beaulaurier, Seff, Newman, & Dunlop, 2005; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Newberger & DeVos, 1988); increased risk of educational under-achievement (Boden, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2007; Horsman, 2000; Lundy & Grossman, 2005; Authors, 2002); homelessness (Browne, 1993; Wesely & Wright, 2005); an impaired ability to function in the labor market (Frederick & Goddard, 2007; Lindhorst, Oxford, & Gillmore, 2007); and a process of "negative chain effects" predisposing an individual to further negative experiences at later stages of life, such as unemployment, limited social support, and relationship breakdown (Antle et al., 2007; Rutter, 2000). This can result in a pathway of life-long accumulated adversity (Seth-Purdie, 2000 as cited in Frederick & Goddard, 2007).

Incidence of Childhood Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence

Childhood abuse [CA] is the physical, psychological or sexual maltreatment of children. Leeb, Paulozzi, Melanson, Simon, and Arias (2008) define child maltreatment as any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. In 2004, approximately 900,000 children in the U.S. were victims of child maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). It is likely that this underestimates the number of children affected due to underreporting. Considerable evidence exists that suggests that *at least* 20% of all women are adult survivors of

some form of sexual CA (Finkelhor, 1994; Meichenbaum, 1994; Root, 1996); similar

percentages have been reported by women survivors of physical CA (MacMillan et al., 1997).

Intimate partner violence [IPV] is defined as physical or sexual violence, psychological or

emotional abuse (including coercion) when there has also been prior physical or sexual violence

or prior threat of violence, and/or threat of physical or sexual violence by current or former

spouses (including common-law spouses), or current or former non-marital partners

(Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 2002). Available data indicate that IPV is a

substantial public health problem for women in the US: 3,631 women died in 1996 as the result

of homicide (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997). A spouse or ex-spouse murdered thirty

percent of these women. It is estimated that, annually, approximately 1.3 million women are

physically assaulted, while approximately 200,000 women are raped by a current or former

intimate partner (Saltzman et al., 2002). Data on lifetime experiences suggest that approximately

22 million women have been physically assaulted and approximately 7.8 million women have

been raped by a current or former intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Although these

statistics are sufficient to imply the magnitude of the problem, many researchers believe that

statistics on IPV under-represent the incidence (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Straus & Gelles,

1990).

Learning Challenges for Survivors

A variety of learning challenges have been identified for survivors of CA. Hall (2000)

interviewed 20 urban low-income abuse survivors, who were mostly women of color. She found

that sixteen of the participants reported school problems including an inability to read or do

simple arithmetic, difficulty concentrating and remembering, and a general lack of knowledge

about the way things worked in the world. This led to immense barriers in trying to enact adult life skills, in parenting, and in engaging in work to support their families.

Mojab and McDonald (2001) conducted a comparative study among immigrant women of two distinct communities. The purpose of their study was to increase knowledge about the impact of violence (IPV, political violence or war) on immigrant women's learning and to elucidate the relationship between patriarchal, political, social, and economical power structures of violence and the experience of immigrant women's learning in the diaspora. Fourteen women from each community participated in the research. These women represented a cross section of socio-economic and educational backgrounds within their communities. The project focused on informal learning processes: how they wanted to learn or how best they learned. The researchers found that: participants' ability to trust had been significantly challenged; women felt fear, uncertainty, anxiety, stress, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence in many learning situations; and individual support for learning would be necessary for success.

Survivors in University

Though the exact percentages have not been substantiated in the undergraduate population, it is reasonable to assume that a significant number of women who currently attend university are survivors of CA and/or are experiencing IPV. Horsman (2006) suggests that there is no evidence to support that any less than half the population of women in Canada in educational programs are attempting to learn in the face of current or past violence. This represents a noteworthy yet invisible population, who may need specialized services to support their education, given the difficulties survivors have (Hamilton & Browne, 1999).

In educational contexts, support has been seen as an especially key element to the retention and achievement of women students who are survivors of trauma. Brooks (2008) examined the

connection between women's experiences with interpersonal violence and their educational experiences in graduate school. Interviewing 11 female graduate students who had experienced interpersonal violence, she found that support, especially from faculty, was crucial for participants to recognize their own growing expertise and resulting increase in self-confidence. Many women were able to increase their sense of personal authority and recognize a change in their attitudes toward themselves and their lives. However, these women already had an undergraduate education, and a track record of academic success.

This study arose out of the emergent trends we observed while conducting several pilot projects examining the effects of violence on learning and career choice of undergraduate women (Authors, 2008; 2002). Several participants highlighted the valuable contributions others had made to their healing, learning, and school endeavors. We were intrigued and wanted to know more about how survivors benefited from mentoring, and the types of relationships that were formed. Our purpose in this study, conducted as a follow-up to the previous research, was to describe the types of mentoring relationships that benefited women survivors of CA and IPV, and the impact these relationships had on their healing processes, life course, and university studies.

<div align="center">RELEVANT LITERATURE</div>

Mentoring Women

Mentoring has been seen as a major predictor of academic and career success for women, and its absence as a limiting factor or deterrent to women's development (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Douvan, 1976; Kram, 1988). Mentoring provides ongoing opportunities to develop, refine, and expand ones skills and knowledge; it has also been confirmed as a critical aspect of professional advancement. Women who have had good mentors tend to experience and express their sense of

competence in their endeavors, and make those efforts an important pillar in their identity

(Arnold, 1995; Josselson, 1996).

In addition, mentoring has been shown to play a central role for women who have been

marginalized in some educational or career fields: African-American pregnant or parenting teens

(Klaw & Rhodes, 1995); adolescent girls at-risk (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1996); mature

African-American women during college reentry (Munford, 1996); women pursuing religious

(Schaller, 1996), scientific (Murphy & Sullivan, 1997), senior management (McKeen & Burke,

1989) and senior administrative (Twale & Jelinek, 1996) education and careers. However, little

attention has been paid to the mentoring needs of women marginalized because of CA or IPV.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study explored the types of mentoring relationships that benefited women survivors of

CA and IPV, and the impact these relationships had on their healing processes, life course, and

educational trajectories.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Notwithstanding the major debate concerning a distinct feminist methodology

(Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), we have conducted this inquiry using feminist epistemological

and methodological frameworks. A basic assumption guiding our research is that family violence

is a patriarchal process, whose casualties are women, men, and children. We view gender as an

organizing principle and seek to make visible the distortion that family violence has on a

woman's development, in order to highlight and end women's unequal social position. We do

this by presenting women's experiences using their own voices. Our approach is informed by the

following principles (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Meis, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise,

1993):

- Research relationships are collaborative.

- Emotions of the researcher *and* the participant are valuable aspects of the process.

- Researcher subjectivity is a powerful asset.

- The researcher must effectively blend the multiple realities held by the researcher and the participants.

- The researcher must be aware of issues surrounding authority, power, and privilege.

- Feminist ethics demand the avoidance of exploitation and abuses of power. Issues of access, control and interpretation, and a responsibility towards participants and society are central organizing frameworks for the research design.

Methodologically, we established relationships with participants, emphasizing trust, reciprocity, and empathy. We engaged authentically with participants by revealing our multiple identities (Connolly & Reilly, 2007) as women, teachers, mentors, mothers, and as a survivor, when appropriate, in an effort to support participants. We negotiated the meanings and interpretations of the results with the participants and were self-reflexive about what we were experiencing and learning. We disseminate these results in order to produce research that is educationally and socially transformative.

A grounded theory approach was used to explore mentoring (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We developed a preliminary definition of mentoring as a relationship in which a more experienced person facilitated the development of a less experienced woman survivor over a sustained time period. Dimensions included: role models who had influenced and supported a life, educational, or career path; professionals who had shared knowledge and contacts in order to support personal development and healing; and sponsors or coaches in new areas of education or career. We formulated a tentative hypothesis to explain the phenomenon on the basis of the cases reported in

the study and our own insight. Analysis and theory development were iterative; we compared the data generated from one case, regarding the fit between the hypothesis and the data, and reformulated as required. We redefined the phenomenon in response to the comparisons with each succeeding case. We then delimited the hypothesis by comparing it with negative cases, reformulating or redefining as necessary with the participants.

In order to make sense of the mentoring patterns we observed within the data, we have also drawn on relational-cultural theory [RCT], rooted in the work of Jean Baker Miller (1976) and her associates at the Stone Center. RCT contends that, unlike most human developmental theories that centralize separation-individuation processes, development is fostered by "relatedness," being in relationships based on mutual empathy and empowerment. These relationships nurture the well being of everyone involved. Growth occurs "in connection" when individuals move towards greater mutuality, empathic possibility, emotional availability and responsiveness (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Isolation and separation ("disconnection") are seen as the fundamental source of suffering and inauthenticity in people's lives (Miller, 1988). Though RCT was initially developed in the context of women's psychological development, it is increasingly being applied to all human experience (Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Since we were interested in exploring and illuminating a phenomenon that was not well illustrated in the literature, we selected a qualitative methodology, since this was conducive to providing a foundation of description. We employed a cross-case comparative approach

(Merriam, 1998), since it is flexible in describing multiple realities; transferable to other

participant groups; and congruent with our values as researchers (Riddell, 1989).

Interviews were an interactive process, minimizing hierarchical relationships in favor of a

collaborative approach (Oakley, 1981). We used an open-ended conversational format to

facilitate the development of trust and rapport, and a maximum exploration of mentoring

experiences. We elicited stories from the participants, since stories reflect consciousness and

meaning-making processes (Vygotsky, 1987). The interviews reconstructed their relationships

with mentors or role models, past experiences with CA or IPV (being aware of boundaries and

privacy issues), and the here-and-now identities of the participants.

Participants

Ten women were participants in this study. All had past experiences of CA (as defined by

Leeb et al., 2008) and belonged to various racial, social class, and ethnic groups: 6 women were

of European descent while 4 were women of color; about 45% described themselves as "working

class", while most of the others were self-defined as "middle class;" and they represented 15

different nationality combinations (in fact, three women were immigrants to Canada). They

were enrolled in an undergraduate program at the time of this project, with a range of number of

completed credits. Five of them also experienced various degrees of IPV (as defined by Saltzman

et al., 2002).

Sampling

Since this project was concerned with undergraduate women who had experienced violence,

we used the procedure of purposive sampling. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested this method,

since random sampling may not produce the kind of sample that the project required. We

recruited undergraduate volunteers in a major Canadian city using flyers. We established various

methods for contact that allowed prospective participants various degrees of anonymity before

consenting to participate. Participants were given maximum freedom and control over their

participation, the timing and length of the interviews, and the depth of the probing. Participants

were encouraged to self-select out of the study if they found the focus too distressing, and in fact,

quite a few did. We acknowledge that this might have biased the sample, but we feel that,

ethically, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and our feminist stances, this was a key

element of an ethical research design.

Phases of Inquiry

We conducted all interviews in person, and each interview was audio taped, while

maintaining ethical considerations of privacy and emotional distress. We used the format of the

three-interview series (Seidman, 2006).

1. **Orientation and overview**. The first interview addressed issues of informed consent

    (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interview then proceeded to a focused life history in which

    the participant's mentoring relationships were described and placed in context, concentrating

    on interactions with role models. Past experiences with childhood violence (being aware of

    psychological boundaries, privacy and signs of distress) were also determined by means of a

    checklist developed by the authors. This interview lasted approximately two hours.

2. **Focused exploration**. The second interview concentrated on the concrete details of their

    present experiences with mentors, including their here-and-now identities as women and

    emerging professionals. Generally, this interview lasted approximately ninety minutes and

    took place approximately three weeks after the first.

3. **Reflection on meaning**. The third interview allowed participants the opportunity to reflect

    on the meaning that mentoring had played in their lives and to delineate the benefits that may

have come to them as a result of being mentored, in light of the data generated. They were asked to comment on the data's accuracy, analyze its meaning and implications, and clarify any ambiguities or inconsistencies. This interview lasted approximately two hours and took place approximately four weeks after the second interview.

Analysis Procedures

We created a general framework for processing the data, and used it consistently across the cases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data reduction occurred as we provisionally categorized the interview text into similar themes (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). We gave each theme a metaphoric title that attempted to capture its essence. We reviewed the data to check for consistency and relevance, until the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were fulfilled: exhaustion of data sources, saturation of themes, emergence of regularities, and overextension. We subjected the data to various procedures to insure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

<div align="center">FINDINGS</div>

The participants in this inquiry revealed different types of mentors with distinctive mentoring processes at various stages of their healing, development, and educational studies. Though every woman did not proceed through each stage, there was a good degree of overlap among participants. Depending on the nature and intensity of the CA and/or IPV, women seemed to enter into mentoring relationships at different points, contingent on the impact the abuse had on their identity. The following descriptions are elaborations of these themes. We have selected passages from the words of some of the participants that most aptly describe the theme.

Fantasy Mentors

Contrary to our initial conceptualization of mentoring as a relationship with a more experienced person over a sustained period of time, an initial theme involved mentors or role models that were either fictional or were figures not directly in relationship with the participant. Survivors that endured long-lasting and intense forms of physical *and* sexual abuse by family perpetrators, with accompanying isolation and disconnection, identified their earliest mentors as fantasy, historical, or religious figures. Cinderella, Albert Schweitzer, the Virgin Mary or martyred women saints were some examples that were cited by the four women who experienced extreme abuse in their early childhoods. Julietta [1], who was sexually abused as a child by multiple family perpetrators, and later lived with an extremely violent husband for twenty years, stated, "Just from fairy tale books, because I didn't have much… just role models from books… people who did things… good things." Because she shared a birthday with him, Abe Lincoln was an influential role model for her that represented freedom from domination and enslavement.

These models were often developed between the ages of five to nine years, but could extend until mid-life depending upon the extent of the isolation from supportive relationships. These models embodied the psychological need for survival of these women at that time: deliverance, safety, triumph, the ability to endure, faith, and humanity. These women struggled to find some element of commonality with these figures in order to construct a sense of self and agency that had a measure of hope and enabled them to survive. Several women disclosed that they often would mimic dimensions of these role models' lives in their own; for example, Vivian, sexually abused from the age of three to ten and beaten regularly by her first husband, compared herself and her cleaning habits to Cinderella, believing that "… one day I would be rescued from all this, if only I would persevere." This identification with fantasy mentors provided a sense of

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

connection to a "person" where there was none in reality. Furthermore, this connection helped to provide a role model of triumphing over great adversity, and allowed the participant to borrow this model's identity to support her own.

Mentor As Mirror

Women who created a fantasy mentor then proceeded to speak of meeting a living one at a point in their lives when they were in need of a real and solid connection. Other women, who had experienced distressing abuse but not isolation, often cited this type of mentor as their first. There were a total of seven women whose stories described this category of mentor. Teachers were the most frequently reported type of mentor. These relationships often developed between the ages of eight to sixteen years. For Kara, a fifth grade teacher was instrumental in combating the marginalization she internalized as a result of intense physical abuse at home and being placed in remedial classes in school because of her brother's history of learning difficulties. "She [the teacher] saw in me the 'real' me. Not what everyone else saw. She saw in me what I wanted to see in myself." Again, this type of mentoring relationship could extend to mid-life, depending upon the devastating effects abuse on the woman's identity. For those few women who experienced sexual abuse but not from a member of their immediate family, a parent or relative, who had experienced extreme hardship, was also seen as a mentor. Doreen was a forty-year old woman who had experienced multiple childhood victimizations of a sexual, physical and psychological nature and as an adult had an overly controlling boyfriend. For her, an aunt who lived in Europe was a powerful mentor.

> I had a lot of contact with her, and would visit her often when I was young. She
>
> had had a hard life. And I saw her as a heroine. She dealt with a lot of adversity…
>
> a lot of heavy duty problems in the family. But she carried on. And she was very

strong. And I thought, "She can do this. Ordinary women can do this. So I can do

this. I can survive. I can go on."

Mentors of this type were seen as mirrors that reflected an unknown competence, ability,

strength, and sense of self that lay deep within the survivor, but was only accessible through the

mentor's eyes and in relationship. The mentor saw qualities within the survivor that she herself

did not know existed. Therefore, the mentor functioned as an external source of identity, self-

esteem, value, and capability. It was only through seeing the mentor believe in her worth that the

survivor was able to believe in herself. Many survivors credited the relational connection with

these mentors as saving their sanity. Wendy, who experienced harsh physical punishment both at

home and in school credited her auntie's loving attention as the reason she survived.

Mentor As Nurturer And Supporter

As survivors outgrew their relationships with their first mentor, they often moved on to a

more profound mentoring relationship. As well, women who experienced emotional, verbal, or

psychological abuse often entered the mentoring process at this theme. There were a total of

eight stories regarding this category of mentor. For the many women who described this type of

mentoring relationship, there seemed to be no particular age at which this developed; adult

"transitions" or life changes seemed to be the thread that bound these women's experiences

together. This type of mentor was often described using growth, caring, and protection

metaphors, e.g. a gardener or guide. Emlyn, who grew up in an addictive family system filled

with extreme neglect and emotional abuse, formed a close relationship with a female biology

professor, who sparked her interest in environmental activism. "She cared for me… nurtured me,

psychologically… just like we did with the plants." These mentors validated the process of

growth out of pain many of these survivors were experiencing. It was during this type of

mentoring relationship that survivors spoke of "internalizing" a stronger sense of identity characterized by self-attributions of worth, ability, and competence. As Kitty, who was physically and emotionally bullied for years by classmates noted, "She [a professor] made it real for me. And as I watched her, and talked to her about it, I thought, 'I can do this kind of work.'" The mentor facilitated the growth of self, and strengthened a positive and agentic connection to self within the context of a chosen field of study or in reentry into school.

Mentor As The Embodiment Of A Profession

For those women survivors who were well on their way into a specific career course of study, mentors then assumed the role most commonly seen within educational and vocational contexts, i.e. the sponsor or coach who helps one learn the ropes, provides knowledge, contacts, and support within a specific field or career. This mentor was often a living example of successfully combining career and family, and co-constructed with the survivor a unique vision of self as a professional (Douvan, 1976; Gilbert, Hallett, & Eldridge, 1994; Kram, 1983). Grace was verbally and psychologically abused in her family for as long as she could remember, and described her relationships with lovers as abusive. She was studying a career that required periods of time when she was supervised. Though some supervisors were not deeply engaged in a relationship with her, one in particular took Grace under her wing, having long talks with her about the field, about balancing family and career, and, as she stated, "… just getting to know the whole me." Only four stories were gathered concerning this category of mentor. This type of relationship was a deepening one brought forth from the previous theme of nurturance of self. The survivor began to assume the role of colleague with the mentor in the arena of work. The relationship with the mentor served as a plan for future action as a professional, and the mentor also functioned as an introductory guide into a community of practice with other professionals.

Becoming The Mentor

Only one participant expressed the desire to become a mentor to others in order to help "break the cycle of violence," as expressed by Julietta. This participant explicitly saw her career and mentoring as an indispensable part of her own healing process; Julietta's new career path was seen as a way in which to transform the pain of the past. Mentoring others was seen by her as a necessary condition to fulfill this pledge. "I have to do this… help others along the path. Otherwise, they will be as alone as I was. And I cannot have that happen."

Negative Cases

Negative cases are cases that do not fit the general trend found in the data, and therefore provide researchers with opportunities to re-examine why those cases have happened in such an atypical way (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Seale, 1999). Re-examination of the data using a "deviant case analysis" approach (Mays & Pope, 2000) helps refine the analysis and allows for the modification of ideas and assumptions. This can lead, eventually, to a richer and more complex theory and emergent explanation. In the context of this inquiry, a negative case was defined as a participant who did not have a mentor or did not see mentoring as something she wanted to engage in. These two deviant cases constitute a revision to our original research question (Patton, 2002), limiting our findings about mentoring to specific kinds of experiences: physical and sexual CA.

Self-reliance. Only one woman, Nadia, who experienced extreme physical abuse at the hands of her mother, did not point to any role model. Instead, she was able to see within herself, against overwhelming outside messages, that she was worthwhile, strong, and able to overcome her situation. "No one else was there for me, *so I decided I had to be there for myself*." However, though a relationship was not formed with another, either real or imagined, one can

conceptualize this statement as forming a strong connection with self—a kind of self-mentoring. Though she did not express a desire to help others by mentoring, she did envision her new career as a "mission" to promote changes in family dynamics. However, she was adamant about being self-reliant and not depending upon anyone, including her current fiancée.

Issues of control. Karen who experienced chronic psychological and verbal abuse regarding her appearance and weight did not speak of these themes at all. She described herself as a "control freak," and saw mentors as threatening. It was as if she saw mentoring as a process of obliteration, and that she was expected to be like "a Xerox-machine and turn myself into a duplicate copy of the mentor." She tended to be very resistant to any efforts the educational system made to pair her with a mentor. In her view, mentoring was not a mutual process but rather indicated individuals were weak and dependent. She preferred to "take little bits" [qualities she aspired to have] from those she met along the way. Though Karen steadfastly rejected connections with others, she still felt a desire to develop her identity by cultivating qualities she observed in others and admired.

DISCUSSION

Since this inquiry occurred in a particular time and place, under particular circumstances with unique individuals (Wolcott, 1990), the emergent themes should be viewed as atypical; however, limited transferability may be warranted. Further limitations are placed upon the data in that the sex of the perpetrator of the CA and IPV were generally male, with the exception of Nadia; it is very possible that very different themes might emerge for survivors of female aggression. At the very least, these themes expand and enrich the repertoire of social constructions about mentoring for women marginalized by violence.

Generally, mentoring supports all aspects of a woman's development, both professional and personal; this was particularly true for survivors of sexual and physical CA. Mentoring for a number of women survivors seemed to take a central role in their healing processes, and the formation and nurturance of self. Not only did the mentoring counter the feelings of isolation or fears of failure that often characterize women's experiences in higher education (Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005), it also served to counterbalance the feelings of isolation that abuse survivors experience. Relational cultural theory suggests that psychological growth and identity formation develop in connection, in that all people yearn for connection with others (Jordan et al., 1991). Mentoring, in the context of this inquiry, can be considered one of these sustaining connections. Growth-fostering relationships, either imagined as in the theme *fantasy mentors* or real as in the theme *mentor as nurturer and supporter,* are created through mutual empathy and empowerment. In the first few emergent categories, identity and sustenance of self came from outside the survivor: from the mentor through connection and relationship, even an imaginary one. A gradual internalization of the mentor's messages then allowed the women survivors to become more solid in their identity, including a new identity in a newly chosen field (Josselson, 1996).

This notion is particularly salient for many survivors, for whom mentoring served to help construct a more healed identity. Mentors provided opportunities for survivors to engage in vicarious learning, one of the four sources of experiential data contributing to the strong belief about one's capabilities (Bandura, 1977). These opportunities allowed survivors to incorporate and self-elaborate beliefs of self-efficacy around their own knowledge and skill competencies both in life and in a university setting. Mentors have been seen as career facilitators for women; for female survivors of abuse, these figures become particularly salient.

However, it is interesting to note that for a smaller number of survivors, mentoring was an activity that held the possibility of identity obliteration. This intense and emotional resistance to mentoring was seen as a survival mechanism, since these women felt any strong influence from another was an assault on their identity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTORING UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN SURVIVORS

Not everyone wants to be a mentor. Not everyone wants to be a mentee. Some women students actively resist the advice and "help" of their mentors (Hansman, 2003). However, given the trends illuminated in this inquiry, it is key for individuals and educational institutions to help women survivors of family violence to see the value of mentoring relationships, and help them to establish these interactions if they decide to proceed. Since the mentee's learning, growth, and development is generally the focus of mentoring relationships, and since survivors of abuse can benefit from such nurturing, the results of this inquiry suggests some important implications for mentoring women survivors in higher educational settings.

Dimensions of Relationship Building

Relationship, and connection through relationship, is perhaps the most fundamental building block of successful mentorship. This is especially true when mentoring survivors of CA. Therefore, it is important for any mentor to build in quality time and energy to maintain clear and open communication. More than likely the mentor will need to put additional energy into initiating and sustaining the mentoring relationship with survivors, since issues of self-confidence and intimidation with authority may interfere with her ability to approach a mentor. The mentoring relationship may be more easily facilitated if a mentor approaches it in a more informal way, since this seems to work best for women in general (Casto et al., 2005).

Safe environments where thoughts, feelings, ideas, hunches, mistakes, and intuitions may be shared are crucial for mentoring relationships, particularly with women survivors. These can be established and cultivated by building into the relationship the values that also nurture climates of creativity and expertise development (Author, 2005): supportiveness and empowerment; helpfulness; listening and questioning for clarity; caring, sensitivity, and empathy; plurality; an openness to disagreement; and challenge within an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984).

Women in academic contexts who are mentored experience an oscillation between being an active subject in their own career development through mentoring and being acted upon by others as the subject of their mentoring attentions. This simultaneous positional movement is necessarily present in successful mentoring (Devos, 2004). However, when mentoring women who are CA and IPV survivors, mentors need to monitor this movement, and help mentees maintain a cadenced vacillation. Too much reliance on self, as seen in the patterns of the negative case of Nadia, will counteract any potential positive influence from the mentor; however, too much reliance on the mentor will diminish a mentee's sense of agency and self-efficacy.

Self-monitoring of this balance is also essential for the mentor as well. Successful mentoring happens within a zone of proximal development (Cole, 1985), the space where culture and cognition create expertise and psychosocial competence. A mentor should view the mentoring process as a socialization process, as the co-participation within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, a mentor needs to monitor the nature of the joint activities that the mentor *and* mentee engage in *together*. The mentor must insure that activities are not too difficult or too easy for the mentee, but fall within a challenging zone of proximal development. The mentor must also assist the mentee to assist herself, providing feedback on the success and

shortcomings of the endeavors. This is especially important for abuse survivors who may have a distorted view of themselves and their capacities. As well, an effective mentor assists the mentee in strategizing about future activity. A socio-historical approach to mentoring, as outlined by Gallimore, John-Steiner, and Tharp (1992), can provide a comprehensive framework for developing mentoring relationships.

Mentoring relationships are easier to establish if a general culture of mentoring is created within an educational system. Institutions of higher education can take an organized and deliberate approach to mentoring, and create an environment where mentoring takes place in planned and natural ways. The texture and quality of planned and natural mentoring differ, and may appeal to women survivors in different ways. Planned mentoring is deliberately structured and created, and relationships are less intense, frequent and sustained. These relationships are less likely to be disturbed by the emotional complications, which can accompany the parent-child features of natural mentoring relationships (Gallimore et al., 1992). Reproducing parent-child dynamics may be especially problematic for survivors of CA. However, natural mentoring relationships arise from contexts, sometimes accidental, which bring mentor and mentee into contact. Natural mentoring often addresses a wider range of issues than planned forms, in particular personal or psychosocial matters in addition to more instrumental ones. Since mentoring about life issues and identity was an important dimension for women survivors within this inquiry, natural mentoring relationships could help address those life issues and self-awareness concerns that influence and impact a woman's ability to effectively enter educational fields. In order to do this, institutions and practitioners might offer a variety of mentoring approaches to women students without identifying their histories of abuse and compromising privileged, personal information and confidentiality. Programs could pair women with several

planned mentors and/or a network of potential natural mentors who provide strengths in different areas. This could be constructed sequentially and one mentor can then contact another when a mentee is ready to move to the next professional level or psychosocial task. A central hub of mentors can also help the mentee to develop an ever-expanding network of mentors. In this way, women survivors can develop a variety of mentoring relationships without revealing their past.

Mentoring within a generalized institutional culture may also happen within a group context. Group mentoring brings a very different perspective to mentoring, as well as different benefits. Mitchell (1999) found that the traditional fixed delineation of roles of mentor-mentee would shift and change in a group context. Those who would request assistance (a mentee) could find their role reversed into one who could lend assistance (the mentor), depending upon the issue, context, or need. This shifting resulted in growing self-confidence, a fundamental issue for women survivors.

Qualities and Skills of the Mentor

A key dimension of successful mentoring is an experienced member of the profession who is sincerely open to creating these relationships and who can recognize and nurture potential and independent growth in others. Qualities such as genuineness, warmth, passion, integrity, commitment, and supportiveness are essential, especially when mentoring women survivors of CA and IPV. Mentors also need to rely on good communication skills, have the ability to challenge, inspire, and develop fruitful relationships, and are emotionally accessible to another individual.

The abilities to share power and resources, and to nurture, are particularly salient qualities for mentors of survivors. Mentors must realize the power and influence they have as mentors and be aware of the vulnerability of their mentees due to this power imbalance. As well, an effective

mentor facilitates a mentee's entrance to an inner circle; this theme was an especially key one in this inquiry. This entry process implies that the mentor provides opportunities for a mentee to demonstrate competence in front of peers. In addition, the effective mentor is able to model expert performance, competent decision-making, or the construction of the mentoring relationship. By making implicit expectations about mentoring more explicit, a mentor can foster a dialogue about mentoring processes. This can more effectively support women by providing strategies that can be generalized to other areas of their lives.

Cross-gender Mentoring Relationships

Research on mentoring for women has reported that, because of limited access to female role models in some professions, women tend to have both female and male role models (Basow & Howe, 1980; Kutner & Brogan, 1980). This, however, can be especially problematic for women survivors of violence from male perpetrators, since there may be a perceived potential for romantic or sexual tension, conflict, and exploitation. This may steer women survivors away from male mentors because of a generalized fear towards men extending into academic contexts (Authors, 2008). It is not uncommon for collusion in typecasted roles (Kram, 1988) to occur when men and women assume stereotyped patterns in relating to each other in work settings, such as father–daughter, chivalrous knight–helpless maiden, tough warrior–weak warrior, and macho–seductress (Feist-Price, 1994). It is possible that in the absence of female role models, women survivors are not able to form effective opposite-sex mentoring relationships, and may forego pursuing a nontraditional career path.

Women survivors may also have difficulty initiating and maintaining mentoring relationships with males in leadership positions since men themselves may be reluctant to act as mentors. Men may be worried about sexual harassment issues (Feist-Price, 1994), malicious gossip (Noe,

1988), or may not be interested in cross-gender mentoring (Hansman, 2003). Trust, therefore, is crucial for successful cross-gender mentoring relationships. If both male mentors and female survivor mentees recognize and anticipate the potential challenges of the cross-gender relationship, then the future of effective mentoring relationships can be enhanced. When the possibility of conflict due to gender differences is understood, or past patterns are activated due to a power imbalance, then the necessary adjustments to the relationship can foster learning in the mentoring process.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Though the findings illuminated within this inquiry are limited to the population and context investigated, there are some indications of fruitful avenues for future research. One of these possibilities is the creation of a progressive model of mentoring for undergraduate women who have experienced traumatic life experiences. In interviewing the participants in this project, we got a strong sense that the types of mentoring relationships that were meaningful and significant to them were linked to their life span tasks as well as their healing journey needs, and proceeded in a developmental sequence. Increasing the sample size, partitioning the sample according to age at the time of mentoring, and researching this focus in numerous other educational institutions could reveal a model of mentoring that is reliable, valid, and generalizable. This model could then form the basis for a formal mentoring program as an intervention to improve student retention.

As our deviant case analysis suggested, these findings are limited to women who have experienced sexual *and* physical abuse. Based on the data available, we revised our original research question. However, this delimiting needs to be either corroborated or refuted by seeking

out additional cases of undergraduate women who have experienced physical, verbal, psychological, or emotional CA.

Our final recommendation for future research is to broaden the investigation to undergraduate men who are survivors of CA, IPV and bullying. There is a trend in the educational research literature that highlight a crisis in higher education regarding dropping rates of male attendance and retention. Boys' lack of engagement with school is translating into them trailing girls academically (Gambell & Hunter, 2000) and attending college less frequently. For every 100 women who earn bachelors degrees, only 73 men earn one (Chamberlain, 2008). While some of these trends are due to other factors, future research could identify: 1) to what extent men's disconnection is due to the impact of violence; 2) how this disconnection may converge with or diverge from the trends we identified with women; and 3) how mentoring might play a more significant role in their educational futures.

In conclusion, we believe that increasing the types and number of mentoring opportunities for women survivors of CA is a strong step in sustaining their educational endeavors and success. Creating cultures of assistance and encouragement are especially relevant to student affairs practitioners and policy makers, since their influence and impact suffuses an entire institution, not being limited by disciple or faculty structure. In this way, students services departments can support the development of this invisible population, who may need specialized services to support their education, given the challenges they face.

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