Youth Mentoring: do Race & Ethnicity Really Matter?

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The Debate:
Proponents of same-race matches

- **Homophily**: better equipped to understand
- **Natural pick**: adolescents select same-race mentors
- **White guilt**: could hinder capacity to address important issues
- **Critical feedback**: minority youth sensitive to being judged by white mentors
- **Lack of role models**: undermine cultural identity
- **Ethnic communities should step up**
The Debate:
Proponents of cross-race matches

- Long wait lists
- Effective relationships: cross-match relational challenges can be overcome
- Other factors more predictive of relationship quality: type of activities, shared interests, mentor training
- SES more important
- Cross-race matches bridge social distance
Research

- Outcomes: Are Same-Race Matches Necessarily More Beneficial than Cross-Race Matches?
- Process: Do Ethnicity and Race Affect the Way Mentors and Mentees Relate?
- Application: Translating Research into Practice
Are Same-Race Matches More Beneficial than Cross-Race Matches?

- mixed findings from studies on formal mentoring programs
- no differences in the frequency of meetings and duration of relationships when matches were based on:
  - shared interests
  - geographic proximity
  - preferences for same-race pairs

(Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002)
Limitations of outcome studies

- These quantitative studies don’t pick up nuances and complicated feelings regarding race
- Outcome variables likely to be affected by race are not included in these studies
- Effect sizes small
Stronger effects

- **Relationships** characterized by
  - consistency
  - closeness
  - structure
  - duration
  - quality
Effect sizes increase with greater use of theory- and empirically-based practices

(Rhodes, Positive Youth Development in Schools and Communities, 2008)
Do Ethnicity and Race Affect the Way Mentors and Mentees Relate?

- Cultural values (collectivism vs. individualism)  
  (Sanchez & Colon, 2005)
- Degree of cultural sensitivity of mentor  
  (Liang et al., 2006)
- Perceived similarity & initial attraction  
  (Liang & West, 2008)
Perceived Similarity & Initial Attraction

- Youth tend to seek mentors from the same racial or ethnic background or gender (Sanchez & Colon, 2005)

- Same-race matches matter to many youth mentees and have a potential impact on initial attraction and expectation (Liang et al., 2008)

- Perceived similarity associated with mentees’ level of satisfaction with the relationship and mentors’ fondness of mentees (Ensher & Murphy, 1997)

- Surface vs deep similarity (Liang et al., in press; Ortiz-Wlaters, Gilson, 2004)
Do Ethnicity and Race Affect the Way Mentors and Mentees Relate?

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- Degree of cultural sensitivity of mentor  
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- Perceived similarity & initial attraction  
  (Liang & West, 2008)
- Degree of cultural mistrust of mentee  
  (Steele, 1997)
- Feedback provided to the mentee  
  (Cohen et al., 1999)
“Doing” Race/ “Doing” Difference

- Meaning of race does not always replicate broader structures of inequality
- Meaning of race is not only imposed from outside the mentoring relationship, but can emerge through interaction between participants
Research Implications

| Insight: Quantitative outcome research mixed and limited | Action: Need to identify what enhances the quality of a mentoring relationship through qualitative and process oriented research |
Research Implications

**Insight:**
Process oriented research reveals that insensitivity towards race and culture can lead to problematic relationships.

**Action:**
Mentor training is critical given the shortage of same-race mentors, particularly for male youth of color. Ongoing training and support for mentors should be characterized by special attention to cultural issues as the most well-intentioned mentors may make critical errors that negatively impact these relationships.

(Rhodes, 2002)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insight: Mentoring field tends to oversimplify explanations of race and power dynamics, assuming the salience and meaning of structural inequalities</th>
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<td>Action: Qualitative research needed to reveal the dynamic interplay between structural power and interpersonal power</td>
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<td>Raise awareness among mentors and mentees regarding these dynamics</td>
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THANK YOU!