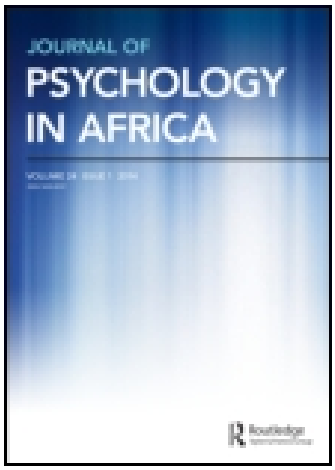

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Mentor Relationship Effects on Perceived Quality of Life by a Sample of Rural South African Teenagers

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This study investigated mentor effects on the perceived quality of life of South African adolescent boys. Participants were 20 adolescent boys that completed the Child Functioning Inventory High School, a standardised measuring instrument. These teenagers also engaged in an interview on their lived experience of same-sex mentors. Findings suggest that the teenagers with an identified mentor experienced a higher quality of life than their peers that do not have a mentor. The teenagers prefer a mentor to be actively involved in their lives and they long for protection and support.

Keywords: adolescent boy, absent father, mentor, mentee, natural mentor relationship, South Africa

A boy needs a father figure, a mentor – someone who believes in him, supports him and stands by him. Mentors are important for personal development and growth (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush & Dong, 2003). This is particularly true for teenagers (Steytler & Strydom, 2008). Ndabazandile (2006, p.14) describes a mentor as a "*reliable counsellor*" or "*director*" – someone who is influential and has experience and who establishes a personal relationship with the boy and helps him to reach his objectives. In the case of male teenagers, the mentor may be his father, an older sibling or another identified adult male (Steytler & Strydom, 2011). This person serves as an example, role model and educator to the younger person – fits him with knowledge, advice, counselling, support and opportunities (Eldredge, 2006; Encarta Dictionary, 2006; Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995).

Pruitt (1999) and Sanders (2004) are of the opinion that children spend more time with brothers and sisters than with any other person (least with the father). Older brothers can forge a closer bond with younger brothers, and mutual relationships between brothers become closer and more supporting as they reach early adulthood (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Pruitt, 1999). However, Sanders (2004) adds that adolescence is the low with regard to relationships between children within the same family setup and that adolescents even can shun interaction, but that they can rediscover each other during early adulthood.

The mentor (who can be a father figure), assists in forming their identity and building their image of what the characteristics in a true man are and what the role of the man is. Bernardes (1997) is of the opinion that, in Western cultures fatherhood is only a status compared to motherhood, which is an active role. However, fathers are often actively involved with their sons, but not always, even though their sons might long for a male person with whom they can identify (Erickson, 1996; Havenga, 2002; Warren, 1998). In the case of an absent father, a mentor, who does not form part of the family setup, can give the necessary support here. Studies show that older adolescents spend less time in the presence of their biological father than younger adolescents (Almeida & Galambos, 1993), perhaps as the older teenagers get more involved with peers.

Mentorship is particularly pertinent to teenagers during their developmentally sensitive period. In rural communities with their dispersed populations, mentors play a critical role in transitioning teenagers on a variety of life skills and attitudes. Posel and Davey (2006) mention that 51.1% of all fathers in South Africa were absent in the lives of their children in 1998. This study sought to investigate the structure and quality of mentor relationships with South African teenagers living in rural communities to better understand mentor effects of perceived quality of life by the teenagers.

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants were a convenience sample of 20 male teenagers from three South African provinces. The mean age of the participants was 16.1 years, the Standard Deviation (SD) is 1.071153 and all participants were Afrikaans speaking. Of the 20 participants involved, 40% were 15 years, 20% 16 years, 30% 17 years and only 10% 18 years of age. These 20 teenagers were selected from a concurrent study of 133 participants regarding mentoring relationships by means of a non-probability sampling (Strydom, 2011). Of the 20 teenagers, 10 were already in a mentor relationship.

Data Collection

We used a survey and qualitative interview for the data collection. All 20 participants completed the Child Functioning Inventory High School (CFI-High) standardised scale (CFI-High, 2001). Only the 10 participants in a mentor relationship completed a self-developed questionnaire, were interviewed on their perception, experience, and needs within their mentor relationship.

Survey. The CFI-High is a standardised scale that is developed by Perspective Training College in South Africa (Faul & Hanekom, 2009). The CFI scales measure 24 – 28 different areas of functioning. These areas of functioning are divided into five sections, which are; positive functioning, self-perception, trauma dynamics, relationships and decision-making abilities (Faul & Hanekom, 2009).

The questions are based on a Likert scale (Faul & Hanekom, 2009). Previous studies reported internal consistency reliability indices of 0.6 to 0.89 for the CHI-High (Faul & Hanekom, 2009).

Interview. We used open- and close-ended questions and narratives to explore how teenagers experienced mentoring. These questions focused on the reasons why they are in a mentor relationship, their experience of the relationship, their feelings towards their mentors and characteristics they expect in a mentor relationship. In addition, we completed face-to-face member-check interviews with 10 teenagers. The aspects covered by the interviews were the same as those covered in the self-developed questionnaire. By repeating the same questions in both writing (some in a narrative) and verbally, increased the trustworthiness of the data (Schurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011).

Procedure

The North-West University and the Department of Education granted permission to conduct this study. Participants provided individually, written consent from their parents. Once the participants had returned the consent forms, only the participants with an agreed signed consent form were contacted and requested to complete the questionnaires. These teenagers were called via telephone, and the interviews were schedule during a convenient time in a neutral environment. No time limits were set for the interviews to give the participants ample time to express their views and opinions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were captured into PASWIN 2000 computer software (Faul & Hanekom, 2007). The report compiled by the software includes an in-depth analysis along with graphs of the sections listed above. The quantitative data were divided into two sections. One section indicates teenagers involved in a mentor relationship and the other, teenagers not involve in a mentor relationship. Each section had five sub-sections, namely positive functioning elements, self-perception, trauma dynamics, relationships and decision-making abilities. The sub-sections were used to compare the two groups of participants to establish whether a mentoring relationship has an influence on male adolescents. The dependent variable was the effect of the mentor relationship the teenager experienced and the independent variable was mentoring. Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schurink et al., 2011).

Findings and Discussion

The themes identified were the mentor relationship, expectations concerning a mentor relationship and involvement in an active mentor relationship. We commence with comparison between teenagers with and without mentors.

Comparison Between Male Teens With a Mentor and Without a Mentor

Table 1 is an in-depth outline of the results of the quantitative study where the male teenagers with a mentor are compared with those without a mentor.

Table 1 indicates that teenagers in an active mentor relationship experience and present higher positively functioning elements. They have a higher self-perception and seem to have a greater sense of responsibility towards other people. It further indicates that within the trauma dynamics section they perform better at school and have positive attitudes towards adults. Positive attitudes towards adults may improve relationships towards parents; teachers and other adults with authority roles. Kotze (2004) is of the opinion that 72% of teenagers experience communication difficulties towards their parents.

Participants with a mentor further indicate and confirm that they have better relationships with their peers, siblings and parents with the highest score with their peers. Louw (1998) and Pruitt (1999) were of the opinion that teenagers valued their relationship with peers higher than that with their parents. The decision-making abilities of teens with a mentor are also better than those of teens without a mentor. The quantitative data, as indicated in Table 1, indicate that male teenagers that have a mentor present more satisfied results.

The Mentor Relationship

The first theme is the mentor relationship between a male teenager and a male adult. From the data, the participants are of the opinion that their mentors are more than only friends; these adult men became part of their lives. Some of these participants have a bonding relationship with their biological father and still have a mentor outside the family. One of the participants described his mentor as *"He is* [like] *an older brother to me. He has already finished what you still need to go through, look up, you may ask him things that you do not know and he knows things about you that you don't know yourself" (participant #8).* Another participant describes his mentor as *"A good friend that will share his knowledge to uplift me. Someone who sees you grow and brings forward the best in you" (participant #3).* From the data, it becomes evident that the participants are exceptionally positive towards their mentor and that they have a positive influence on them. They experience them as role models and directors – someone who communicates at their level, builds them up to lead a life of a better quality. Hendricks and Hendricks (1995, p. 13) express it as *"Who are the people who have helped to make you who you are today? I'm referring to the people who have marked you, who have made a significant impact, a lasting impression on your life."*

One participant defines his mentor relationship by saying: *This* [mentoring] *is paramount in your character formation and is not just an example. A mentor brings the strongest features emerge and strengthen the weak. You strive not someone else's character, but you form your own" (participant #3).*

The Expectations Concerning a Mentor Relationship

The participants had certain expectations concerning a mentor relationship (see Table 2). These expectations include support, which include emotional and physical, protection, and directing. Other significant expectations include that the mentor must listen to them, be receptive to their opinion and that the mentor needs to be a humble person. One participant responded with *"He will uplift and help you" (participant #2).* Another participant expresses it by saying: *"He will hold your hand*

Table 1
Teen Self-Reported Functioning

	Countryside		Remote countryside		Combined averages	
	With mentor	Without mentor	With mentor	Without mentor	With mentor	Without mentor
Positive functioning elements						
Perseverance	78	**62**	74	72	76	67
Satisfaction	83	**61**	79	66	81	**64**
Future perspective	72	**47**	69	**57**	70	**52**
Self-perception						
Anxiety	32	35	28	**44**	30	**39**
Feelings of guilt	11	29	27	**39**	19	34
Defective self-worth	19	**39**	34	**38**	26	**38**
Isolation	**41**	**51**	**49**	**41**	45	**46**
Responsible for other people	**53**	**36**	35	**37**	44	**36**
Lack of self-assertion	32	31	35	**42**	33	**36**
Trauma-dynamics						
Memory loss	24	30	33	**41**	29	35
Frustration	24	29	23	35	24	32
Helplessness	20	32	23	33	21	32
Attitude towards adults	24	**41**	27	25	25	33
Mistrust	**37**	**37**	35	**41**	**36**	**39**
Stigma	35	32	30	32	32	32
Body image	19	28	16	24	17	26
Personal boundaries	9	15	9	16	9	15
School problems	30	**52**	**46**	**43**	**38**	**48**
Alcohol use	21	31	31	8	26	20
Drug use	5			5		
Relationships						
Relationship with friends	86	72	66	**53**	76	**62**
Relationship with mother	76	**43**	**52**	67	**64**	**54**
Relationship with father	**60**	**40**	**62**	**62**	61	**51**
Relationship with stepmother				**60**		**60**
Relationship with stepfather				**60**		**60**
Family relationship	**64**	**44**	67	**63**	65	**54**
Decision making ability						
Independence	78	**56**	77	**63**	77	**60**
Responsibility	76	**61**	71	**56**	73	**59**

Note. The numbers in the table is the indications of the score out of 100. Factors in boldface are the areas that need improvement. Indication for improvement areas: Positive functional elements and Relationships < 64 needs improvement, Self-perception and Trauma-dynamics > 36 needs improvement and Decision making ability < 67 needs improvement.

during difficult times" (participant #5). Odendaal and Gouws (2005) described supportiveness as being of assistance to somebody, to comfort someone and to stand by a person.

According to Table 2, the most prominent expectation was *support* followed by *giving direction*. One participant described giving direction as *"Shows you what and where to go to" (participant #9).* The data of this study highlights the fact that male teenagers had a need for somebody to assist them with their choices, but not to make the choices for them. Other qualities that came to the fore from the data but of which the frequency was low, were *role model*, *faithfulness*, *leadership* and *act lovably*. From the data, one should expect that the frequency of *role model* should be high, but it is not. This might be because they differentiate between a role model and a mentor. Role modelling is most likely experienced by the male teenagers as a character of a mentor. Eldredge (2006) confirm this, but mentoring is not necessarily a character of a role model because there is no need for a personal relationship in role modelling.

Involvement in an Active Mentor Relationship

The participants are very positive and grateful for the mentor relationship and they understand the supportive role of the mentor. Because this relationship is active and personal, one partici-

Table 2

Ranking of Importance Regarding the Expectations the Adolescent boy Have Concerning the Mentor Relationship

	Countryside	Remote countryside	Total
Active participation	6	10	16
Protection	8	0	8
Listen	16	15	31
Humble	5	8	13
Supporting	28	32	60
Director	20	23	43

Note. The numbers in the table indicate the frequency this aspect occurs. The participants could answer to more than one aspect and could mention this aspect several times.

pant explained it as "*This is more than a friendship, we learn from one another. There is complete trust from both sides" (participant #1).* Other participants experienced it as a "*Deeper relationship than just friendship*" *(participant #8).* A third participant described it in two manners "*Speaks freely, honest to each other, admire each other, complement each other" (participant #7)* and "*He will tell me straight if I am wrong*." *(participant #7)* Thus, participants experience the relationship with their mentor as extremely intense and personal, yet spontaneous and respectful. Taylor and Bressler (2000) state that the guidance to and nurturing of an adult to a younger person, is the key to helping the younger person into productive adulthood.

Limitations of the Study

Mentoring relationship and qualities may have been under-reported by the participants. This could be because communities in rural areas may not perceive mentoring as separate from their daily living. These are close-knit communities with strong social bonds. The study did not collect any observational data, further limiting the scope of evidence. Future studies could include observational data or intensive case study to determine the repeatability of findings from this study.

Conclusion

Male teenagers with an active mentor report higher resilience, satisfaction and future perspectives. They also have better self-perceptions and display better school adjustment. The male teenagers with mentors report superior decision-making abilities compared to those with no mentors.

Male teenagers in a mentoring relationship have certain needs within this relationship. These needs are experienced by the mentees as personal and include support and guidance. The mentees further experience their relationship with their mentor as being intense and personal, yet spontaneous and respectful. Male teenagers in a mentoring relationship experience a better quality of life.

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