

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, WILLFUL ADOLESCENTS, AND MENTORING

Reed Larson
University of Illinois

This article describes positive youth development as a process in which young people's capacity for being motivated by challenge energizes their active engagement in development. The first part of the article discusses the conditions under which this motivation is activated and considers obstacles to its activation in daily life. The second part discusses ways in which caring adults, including mentors, can support this process of positive development. Several frameworks that provide models of how adults can provide needed structure and guidance while supporting youth's development as agents of their own growth are discussed. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

I remember becoming indignant as a youth on several occasions at the dinner table because my parents did not act immediately to make my younger sister behave. This confidence that my parents had the power to mold and shape my sister partly reflected my early adolescent concrete thinking. But it also reflected the beliefs of an era—it was about 1960—when it was generally thought that development was something that adults did to the young. Although Dr. Spock was starting to influence many American parents like mine, authoritarian parenting was still common. Behaviorism was the dominant model in psychology, educators “taught” youth, and adults in many roles expected young people to listen, obey, and learn from their elders.

Since that time, there has been a growing recognition that children and adolescents are more than soft clay to be molded (or the willful miscreants to be tamed of the 19th century). Rather, young people are motivated and able to be constructive agents of their own development. The new label *positive youth development*—with its redundant adding of *positive* to *development*—is used to emphasize and champion this new way of thinking: Youth are producers of their own growth; development involves more than preventing problems; adults are most effective when they support the positive potentials within young people.

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In daily usage, the label often is shortened to *youth development*, but the *positive* remains implicit, although not yet well formulated and certainly not accepted in all quarters.

In this article, I draw on this new thinking about positive youth development, with a particular focus on the concept of youth as producers of their own growth and what it means for mentoring. As parents, teachers, policy makers, and mentors, we still (as did my early adolescent self) want to control and mold youth. Yet the new and harder challenge of this emerging paradigm is to support and enable youth to control and motivate themselves—to help them mobilize their often-dormant potentials for growth. In this article, I first address the conceptual question of how we think about youth as agents of their development. In the second part, I discuss the more practical question of how mentors can support this agency.

My concern is with the *processes* that occur in successful mentoring relationships. How can mentors help awaken, support, and guide youth's capacity for growth? Much of the theory and research on mentoring focus on identifying static traits of mentors or mentoring relationships that are associated with positive change in youth. However, theory and research provide only limited assistance with knowing what mentors should do in specific day-to-day interactions. My goal is to explore ways of thinking that—with further refinement and research—might provide tools for mentors' use in these interactions. Let me be clear, though, that in focusing on youth's agency, I will of necessity give little attention to other important dimensions of development that can be supported by mentors, particularly in the social and emotional domains (see Rhodes, 2002; Spencer & Rhodes, 2005).

THINKING ABOUT YOUTH AS PRODUCERS OF DEVELOPMENT

From Determinism to Agency

The changing views of young people have occurred within a larger paradigm shift in psychology. The dominant social science models of the modernist era, from Marx to Freud to Skinner, viewed human behavior as determined either by external societal forces or internal mechanistic processes. The idea of personal agency was dismissed as an illusory "ghost in the machine." Psychologists believed that they could find scientific laws that would allow the prediction and control of human behavior. Although there were certainly exceptions (such as the ideas of John Dewey), the dominant models in practice were those of control, subjugation of nature, and top-down human engineering. Watson (1924) famously claimed that he could shape any child into a doctor, lawyer, beggar, or thief.

In the postmodern world matters are less tidy and controllable. Most psychologists have given up on the goal of reducing human behavior to fundamental laws. With the exception of a few people in neurobiology and artificial intelligence, we have stopped trying to explain the ghost in the machine and accepted that humans are intentional and purposive beings. They exercise agency; they are willful (Polkinghorne, 1983).

But this view has left us with a pre-20th-century question of whether children's and especially adolescents' agency is necessarily directed toward positive ends. Yes, teens are agentic, but many adults—including professionals and scholars—think they are often agentic or "willful" in the negative sense of the latter term. Youth are perceived by many adults to be "rude," "irresponsible," and "wild" (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). Much of the field of adolescent development remains focused on youth's problem behavior. The current zeitgeist, then, includes a range of views of youth's agency and willfulness, with a positive view by no means dominant.

Motivation as a Mediator of Development

Psychology, however, has provided a powerful construct to help us think about the potential of youth's agency to be directed toward positive growth. Theory and research suggest that humans have a built-in motivational system that drives development. The existence of inherent motivation to develop was implicit in Piaget's theory, which became influential in the 1960s and 1970s. He posited an active child who is eager to understand the world. Indeed, he saw children's learning as propelled by a biological imperative to adapt successfully to their environment (Piaget, 1967). In a similar vein, Csikszentmihalyi (1993) theorizes that humans have a built-in system to experience enjoyment in taking on complexity and challenge. He argues that this motivational system was selected by evolution specifically to support learning and development. After all, the distinctive adaptive advantage of our species is its huge capacity for learning. It makes sense, then, that the species would have acquired a motivational system to use this capacity—just as we have motivational systems to fulfill other biological imperatives, such as reproduction and avoidance of danger.

Psychological researchers have obtained abundant evidence that humans have such a motivational system that energizes development. Numerous studies have found that, under the right conditions, people become intrinsically motivated by challenging tasks; they become personally engaged. Evidence also shows that they learn more effectively when they are intrinsically motivated, or when they have internalized a learning goal—one does not have to enjoy every moment to remain engaged (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2003). Research on related psychological constructs, such as internal locus of control, self-efficacy beliefs, interest, and the need for competence and autonomy, provide confirmation of a human motivational system that encourages engagement in challenging, task-oriented behavior, including learning (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). Although agency is, almost by definition, impossible to capture fully, these different motivational constructs provide more tangible means to conceptualize the conditions under which agency is, or can be, mobilized toward learning and growth.

What is striking is that most of these motivational constructs contain a prefix that is reflexive (*intrinsic, internal, self*). I am glossing over a great deal of variation among them, but a basic finding of this research is that people are most motivated to take on challenges when they experience ownership of what they are doing: when they perceive themselves as agents of their actions (Eccles et al., 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000).¹ This perception does not require that a person have monomaniacal control; indeed a person can experience ownership as part of a collaborative group (or in a mentoring relationship, as I discuss later). What is important is that for internal motivation to be sustained, people need to perceive their actions as their own.

Obstacles to Positive Development

The new agency of contemporary psychological thinking, then, is not the total free will contemplated by 17th-century philosophers. The exercise of agency for positive development is mediated by this motivational system. Moreover, the activation of this motivation

¹ I prefer *ownership* to the more commonly used term *autonomy* because the latter has individualistic connotations that do not carry well across cultures.

is subject to constraints, threats, and competition that create obstacles to young people in sustaining engagement in growth. Let me try to articulate some of these:

- First, research on intrinsic motivation and similar constructs indicates that by no means does this motivational system exert a constant press on human action. The strength of this motivation fluctuates over time, varies across situations, and differs between people. Motivation to learn can be disrupted, for example, in circumstances when people do not perceive they have ownership.
- Second, besides the motivation that propels growth, people have other competing motivational systems, such as those for pleasure and avoidance of pain. Stress, threats to safety, and even attractive extrinsic rewards can diminish or trump intrinsic motivation. Growth is a less urgent priority in Maslow's hierarchy of motives. These other motivational systems support a person's acting willfully in other directions.
- Third, the environments that young people live in are full of situations that interfere with sustained growth motivation and that activate the competing motivations described. In addition to all the usual youthful distractions (e.g., peers, media), the young people enlisted in formal mentoring programs are typically subject to one or more major risk factors—poverty, disrupted parenting, low-quality schools, dangerous neighborhoods—that are related to the presence of more daily experiences that interfere with intrinsic motivation for development.
- Fourth, even when young people are motivated to learn, they often do not have the self-regulatory skills to sustain their effort. They can become overwhelmed or bored; they may not know what to attend to or how to organize their efforts (Corno & Kanfer, 1993). Even adults have a poor record of achieving goals, including learning goals, that they set for themselves (Gollwitzer, 1999). Human agency is limited by the skills people have to sustain motivation and action.

So, yes, young people have a built-in motivational system that has enormous potential to engage youth in positive development. But daily life presents an obstacle course of situations and conditions that can keep that system turned off, or only partly engaged. Of course, a youth's daily life may also include encounters with people and situations that turn on and sustain developmental motivation. But in research in which we signaled youth with pagers at random times during the day, youth did not often report strong internal motivation at the same time they were engaged by challenge; experiences of boredom were frequent (Larson, 2000). A focus for advocates of positive development is to determine how to provide more opportunities for this motivational system to be activated.

Even when this system is engaged, however, there is a fifth obstacle or concern. Intrinsic motivation alone can not be counted on to propel development across all domains of growth. When adherents of positive psychology have asked what positive qualities society would like to see youth develop, they come up with long lists of different domains, dealing with the individual's personal well-being and constructive participation in the community. Summarizing these lists, a panel of the National Research Council identified 28 domains, ranging from health habits to moral character to multicultural competence (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). It would be naive to think that, left to their own

devices, young people will spontaneously develop in all of these 28 domains, especially given the many obstacles and competing forces I have mentioned.

Let me use the domain of moral development to illustrate this point. Intrinsic motivation alone will not compel someone to become an ethical being: Youth can be intrinsically motivated by the challenge of learning to be a good drug dealer, scam artist, or Internet hacker (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1978). Now, in addition to the built-in intrinsic motivational system, contemporary psychology suggests that people have a built-in system that—with the right encouragement—supports development of altruism and prosocial motives (Schulman, 2002). (Interestingly, evidence suggests that this disposition is also activated not when youth are commanded to be moral, but when they experience *agency* over their own moral choices; Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995). But this disposition is also not constant or absolute. Evidence suggests that humans have competing dispositions toward greed and aggression (Pinker, 2002). So development in the moral domain also occurs in an obstacle course and thus—as with the other domains of development—is by no means assured.

Again, I am glossing over a great deal of complex literature. I certainly do not want to suggest that there are separate motivational systems for 28 domains of growth! Rather, the basic point I want to make is that positive development requires the *combination* of intrinsic motivation—a general engine of growth—with support for its being activated in diverse domains of development, and support for its remaining activated as youth experience the obstacle course of everyday life. Parents and other adults, including mentors, have an important role to play in this area.

Adolescence

Before addressing the role of adults, it is important to situate what I have discussed in the age period of adolescence. First, this age period adds new obstacles to the obstacle course. Adolescents experience new or strengthened motives, such as sexual desire and desire to fit into a peer group, that compete with and distract them from the project of development. Their lives include more stress (Larson & Ham, 1993), which can interfere with allocation of their attention to growth and development. For these and other reasons, many young people experience decreasing motivation toward schoolwork as they enter adolescence (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993), as well as greater risk of delinquent behavior and psychological problems, such as depression that indicate that youth are off-track.

On the other hand, adolescence is also an important period for the development of new levels of cognitive competence that can strengthen youths' capacity for agency and help them navigate this obstacle course (Keating, 2004; Moshman, 1998). Adolescents develop greater capacity to understand systems, including messy real-world systems; to think about hypotheticals and future contingencies; and to use new metacognitive tools that permit greater executive control of thought. These capabilities allow youth to be more conscious of complexities in the environment around them, including the types of obstacles I have discussed, and more conscious of their own psychological processes, including motivational processes. Furthermore, teenagers achieve greater integration of their knowledge, which potentially improves their strategic capacities for self-regulation and steering of their interactions with their environment. They may be more able to guide their behavior over time—beyond the present hour or day—by foreseeing outcomes of their actions, avoiding or overcoming situations that interfere with growth,

and organizing their effort to work toward goals (what I have called *initiative*; Larson, 2000). In sum, as adolescence creates new obstacles to positive development, it also creates the potential for youth to develop a more advanced level of self-regulation, initiative, and agency.

Conceptualizing Positive Development

So young people are agents who have tremendous built-in potential for growth. But there are a lot of asterisks and qualifications in the road to this growth. For youth to be producers of their own development, first, their internal motivation needs to be activated and sustained: Youth need to experience ownership and gradually develop greater ability to regulate this agency. Second, this agency needs to be directed in ways that are consistent with development of well-being and constructive participation in society.

SUPPORTING YOUTH AS PRODUCERS OF DEVELOPMENT

The Contradictions of Helping Youth

The role for mentors in this process of positive development is more difficult than their old role of shaping youth. It is easier to think about molding clay than about helping the clay mold itself. The new paradigm requires us to replace a linear process, in which action moves from adult to youth, with a process that is interactive. A central issue in applying this new paradigm is what I have come to think of as the *Intentionality Paradox*.

On the one hand, adults want to be intentional in guiding youth. We want to keep youth out of trouble and help them develop. With our greater experience, we often have a better view of the obstacles they are facing and the mistakes they are about to make. Our concrete-thinking inner child wants to help them, to direct them through the obstacle course. Furthermore, those of us in practitioner or policy roles have a professional obligation to do so (Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Bordon, 2005). In an era of accountability, social service programs are subject to mounting pressures from funders to show measurable impact on the youth they serve.

But under the paradigm of positive psychology, development depends on the youths' experience of intentionality. The goal is for youths' own internal motivation (and other built-in positive dispositions) to be activated. Theory and research from psychology suggest that adults who are overcontrolling undermine motivation and learning; adults are most effective when they support youths' experience of ownership and agency (Ryan & Deci, 2003). In the field of youth development, this idea is expressed with the current rallying cry "youth empowerment." As I have just argued, however, if one leaves youth to their own devices, they may often be waylaid in the obstacle course; plus, they cannot be expected to show growth across all the many domains of development. At best, learning by trial and error can be a very inefficient way for them to learn (Bandura, cited by Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004).

So the paradox is that we want to be intentional, but our intentionality involves helping youth experience intentionality. My research team observed this paradox in our research on organized programs for high school-aged youth. We found that in situations when the adult advisers of these programs took over control of the activities, youth were more likely to lose a sense of ownership. As a result, motivation fell and youth disen-

gaged. However, when the advisers turned the activities over completely to youth, the work was often off track or stalled, a situation that also could lead to declining motivation and investment (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005; Larson, Walker, & Pierce, 2005). The dilemma faced by the adults was trying to keep ownership for the activities in the hands of the youth *at the same time* they were trying to keep the activities (and the accompanying developmental experiences) on track.

This same paradox can be observed in one-on-one mentoring. Recognizing the difficult challenges faced by poor Chicano youth in a Utah city, Diversi and Mecham (2005) created a mentoring program to facilitate these youths' adaptation. Some of the mentors, however, despite their training, believed they knew what the youth needed and tried to engage their mentees in service activities, such as mowing the lawn of an elderly woman. The unsurprising result was that these mentees became alienated and stopped participating (Diversi, personal communication). But the opposite scenario was more common. Anxious to win over their mentees, many of the mentors bent over to be supportive and obliging. They acceded to the youth's wishes, for example, to be picked up in a location where their friends could see the mentor's nice car or to be taken to places that they could brag about to their friends. For many mentors, their tutoring of homework became doing homework for the youth. These mentors kept youth motivated during the time they spent together and generally had warm relationships with the youth, but they did little to challenge them or provide direction (Diversi & Mecham, 2005).

The dilemma, then, is that creating too much structure or direction by adults can lead to loss of youth ownership, whereas supporting youth ownership as the top priority can mean that youth are not being challenged to grow and develop. They do not gain the benefit of adults' help with the obstacle course. Within the day-to-day practice of working with youth, adults can experience this tension in many forms:

- When to set firm boundaries and when to be flexible
- When to support a youth's goals and when to challenge them
- How to grant youth choice and autonomy without putting them at risk
- When to listen and be empathic and when to give one's own point of view
- When to let youth learn from mistakes

But, as with many paradoxes, this one is not insurmountable. Seeing it clearly is the first step toward its solution. The tension is *not* between two opposites: youth control versus adult control. Rather, it is between youths' experiencing a *sense* of ownership (remember that internal motivation rests on *perception* of agency) and their being challenged and staying on track—as well as possible and in whatever way that might be defined in a given situation. Theory and research suggest that if a relationship of trust has been built, there is not an inevitable clash of adult and youth intentionality. It is possible for adults to support youths' experience of agency at the same time they are providing input that challenges them and helps keep them on track.

Mentoring relationships provide a special opportunity for adults to balance this two-part role. A characteristic feature of mentoring relationships is that they involve mutual trust. After a period of relationship building, mentees typically begin to see their mentor as someone who cares about them and on whom they can rely (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2002). Once this relationship is established, the adult has enhanced latitude to balance the roles of supporting

youths' agency—their internal motivation—but also providing input that helps direct it toward growth. But how are these goals achieved in day-to-day interactions with youth?

The Practice of Positive Youth Development

Current thinking provides a variety of working models for youth–adult interactions that can achieve this balancing of youth agency with adult input. By *working models* I am not referring to the “internal working models” of attachment theory. I mean conceptual frameworks or tools that help us think about these interactions in ways that generate ideas for how an adult might act in given situations within the relationship. These are process models that suggest how to “help the clay mold itself,” that support youths' powerful capacity to be motivated by growth. All are consistent with research findings suggesting that effective mentors allow for joint decision making, challenge youth, provide moderate levels of structure, and balance having fun with working toward practical goals (Rhodes, 2002).

I describe each working model in a general form, with suggestions on how it might be applied to mentoring relationships. Much mentoring occurs around shared activities (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004), and several of these models focus particularly on youth–adult interactions around such activities. But these models may also have implications for what an adult says in discussions with youth about their lives.

Authoritative Parenting. Let me start with the familiar “parenting style” of authoritative parenting. Much research shows that parents, at least in the Western world, are most effective when they maintain parental control but provide explanations for their actions and give children opportunities for input. Parents use their authority to keep children safe and guide children's choices. At the same time, children are respected and their opportunities for input can give them a sense of ownership. Applying this, an authoritative mentor would clearly articulate his or her own values and set clear limits on activities the two do together. But the mentor would also listen to mentees' points of view and encourage their input on activity choices within specified bounds. Current research suggests that as youth move into midadolescence, authoritative parents continue to place maturity demands on youth but, as the teen is ready, encourage more autonomy and give him or her more of a joint role in decision making (Collins & Laursen, 2004); this transition may also apply to mentoring relationships. There are limits to transferring concepts from parenting, however, in that mentors are not parents. They do not have the responsibility and authority of parents; nor do they have to deal with the baggage that accompanies them.

Instrumental Scaffolding. The metaphor of scaffolding provides a working model for an adult to support development that does not start from a premise of adult authority and control (Rogoff, 1998). In this model, someone with expertise furnishes a novice with suggestions, cues, modeling, or clarifications that help the novice direct his or her attention to key elements in a learning problem. The expert does not directly teach or impose structure, but rather provides these aids, as needed, adjusting them to the ability level of the novice and supporting the novice in going the next step. Agency is with the novice; the expert provides coaching. I am particularly intrigued by the power of scaffolding for development of “initiative” or agency over time, which I referred to earlier. In research in which 9- to 11-year-olds worked on a planning problem, Radziszewska and Rogoff

(1988, 1991) found that when working alone or with a peer, the youth mostly focused on single short-term tasks without thinking about how to organize these tasks into a larger plan. When they worked with an adult, however, the adult often made comments or asked questions that prompted youth to think about longer-term components of the problem and connections among the different tasks. With this scaffolding, the youth not only did better on the problem, but also internalized the cues they had obtained from the adult and did better than controls when asked to do a similar problem again. They were learning skills to organize their effort over time to reach a goal. Research shows how adults in youth programs scaffold these agency skills (Heath, 1999; Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005), and adults may use the same techniques in mentoring relationships, particularly in contexts when mentor and mentee are interacting around a shared activity (Halpern, 2005).

Motivational Scaffolding. Adults can also scaffold youths' motivation. Adults achieve this goal partly through modeling enthusiasm and communicating confidence that a youth's efforts will lead to a desired end. They also do it by helping youth experience conditions in which motivation is sustained. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) and others have found that intrinsic motivation is strongest when people are engaged with a challenge that is just matched to their abilities; it falls when people try to achieve goals that are either too easy or too hard for them. Adults can help youth sustain engagement in learning by helping them set achievable challenges and goals. Research shows that coaches can help young athletes stay engaged in learning, for example, by having them focus on building specific rebounding skills—an achievable goal—rather than on winning games, a goal that can lead to demoralization when, inevitably, it is not always achieved (Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997). In a mentoring relationship, youth can benefit from input of a caring adult that helps them set realistic expectations and goals, get through stuck points, and choose situations in which they can experience success.

Supporting Cycles of Real-World Learning. Especially as youth become older, we hope that they will gradually take over more control of the learning process themselves. Models of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2001) show how youth learn through cycles of carrying out actions and then learning from successes and mistakes. Models of experiential learning indicate that this process can be particularly powerful when it involves actions in real-life contexts over time (Priest & Gass, 1997). The helpful role of adults in this model is to support the learning cycle. In some cases, they may provide structure and scaffolding to allow the actions to occur. In adventure programs, they may supply provisions for a trip into the wilderness and accompany the youth to ensure their safety. In a one-on-one mentoring relationship, the equivalent might be helping a youth connect with a new opportunity and think through expectations in advance. A main role of adults in this model is that of encouraging and assisting with the final element in the cycle: reflection. Caring adults, including mentors, can help see that reflection occurs, and they may help youth interpret the experience in ways that draw out the salient lessons. They can assist youth in formulating metacognitive skills and strategies to help them better navigate similar situations in the future. Mentees, then, are learning through their own experiences of agency but gaining the benefit of a mentor's support for the process.

Asset Building. Development occurs within the full set of environments, relationships, and interactions that make up a youth's daily life (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, &

Anderson, 2002). Another model of adult intervention is focused on altering these daily contexts in ways that increase youths' opportunities to engage in positive development. This model may involve reducing the risk factors in their lives or increasing their experience of external supports, developmental resources, or what Benson (1997) has called "external assets." In my terms, what these interventions aim for is altering the obstacle course of daily life: reducing hour-to-hour encounters with distractions and disruptions and increasing daily experiences in which youth are motivated and directed toward development. Benson has been working at the community level to help cities and towns increase the availability of assets for youth, a daunting task. Mentors can serve as "advocates" or "sponsors" and use their influence to help change the daily lives of individual youth (Rhodes, 2002). For example, they may help connect their mentees to youth programs, faith-based organizations, jobs, or other contexts that opens up daily opportunities for engagement in processes of positive development.

In all of these working models adults provide input and guidance in ways that support youths' experience of agency. They recognize and respect the healthy vigorous disposition of the individual to be motivated by challenge, and they support the sustained activation of this disposition in ways that are consistent with development. They help youth navigate the obstacle course of internal and external threats. In so doing, these models also help youth internalize the capacity to navigate for themselves in the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Applying these working models in real life is by no means easy. A \$64,000 question for adults who work with youth is when to push and when to hold back and support. When might a mentor's attempt to provide scaffolding or arrange a job for a youth be experienced as intrusive? When might a failure to do so be a missed opportunity that leaves a youth floundering? This article has been speculative; much future research is needed to help us understand the processes whereby adults can support youth's engagement in positive development. Although the issues bridge all types of youth-adult interactions, I focus on suggestions for research on mentoring relationships:

1) *Collect Process-Oriented Data on Mentoring*

First, mentoring research needs more process-oriented data. What happens in interactions between mentors and youth? What are mentees' day-to-day experiences in these relationships? What are the types of situations and dilemmas that mentors face in these interactions? What is the repertoire of techniques that successful mentors use for these situations? We would benefit from in-depth case studies of mentoring relationships, as well as collection of ongoing time sampling and diary logs from mentors and mentees on these process dimensions.

2) *Analyze the Ongoing Dynamics of Mentoring Relationships*

The corollary is a need for analyses that focus on the day-to-day dynamics in these relationships. How do the experiences and actions of mentors and mentees influence each other? How do stressors and other events in mentees' lives impact interactions with mentors? In my view, our field is too exclusively focused on the longer-term time frame of months and years; the result is a lack of information

on the time frame of people's ongoing experiences—the type of information that would be most useful to helping mentors understand their role.

3) *Investigate Diverse, Process-Oriented Models of Mentoring*

Third, diverse process-oriented models need to be evaluated. My priority would be on assessing youth's encounters with the obstacles of daily life and how their fluctuating experiences of agency and direction are influenced by what mentors say and do. But there are many other worthy dimensions and dynamics in mentoring relationships that would benefit from process-oriented analyses.

4) *Examine Individual, Situational, and Cultural Differences*

A final point I want to make is that there is a need to attend to individual, situational, and cultural differences. The way an adult provides a balance of guidance and supports for youth agency may vary dramatically: Younger adolescents may need and accept more guidance and structuring from adults, yet the same approach might be rejected as oppressive or patronizing by older teens. Youth differ in the level of motivation they take into a relationship, and disengaged youth who have little initial motivation can be the most difficult. Youth from different cultural backgrounds may be accustomed to different levels of freedom and adult structuring (Serpell & Hatano, 1997). It is important to try to understand the fit between the youth and the type of relationship he or she has with an adult.

In ending, I want to be clear that there is much I have left out and left unresolved. Among many important neglected topics, I have said little about social emotional aspects of the relationship between youth and mentor. In addition, I have said nothing about the motivation of the mentors, although I would venture that many of the same issues apply. The important point I have tried to make is that—although it seems to be a well-kept secret at times—youth have the motivation to grow up to be healthy adults. When adults support this motivation and provide structure and input that are suited to the individual youth, they can unlock a great deal of natural energy that allows youth to develop, willfully, into positive, contributing members of society.

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