

Chapter 6

Youth–Adult Relationships and Positive Youth Development

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Over the past several decades, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have designed, implemented, and evaluated countless studies, interventions, programs, and practices designed to promote the positive development of adolescents. These efforts are often derived from theories and philosophies of the positive youth development (PYD) perspective. PYD scholars posit that all young people have strengths and that the contexts around these young people can provide resources to them (called “developmental assets”; Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011). When the strengths of the youth are aligned with the resources in their contexts, youth thriving is promoted. Therefore, PYD-derived efforts often aim to identify and engage the strengths of young people and the resources in their contexts (families, schools, neighborhoods, and out-of-school time programs) that are thought to lead to their success and well-being. For example, the 4-H Study of PYD sought to identify which developmental assets might promote young people’s development of the Five Cs of PYD—competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Bowers, Geldhof, Johnson, Lerner, & Lerner, 2014; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015; see also Chaps. 1 and 9; Lerner et al., 2005).

Across contexts, relationships with committed, caring adults are one of the most important assets in adolescents’ lives for promoting thriving or high levels of PYD and low levels of risk behaviors (Bowers, Von Eye, et al., 2011; Li & Julian, 2012;

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Theokas & Lerner, 2006; see too Chap. 7). These relationships may be with parents, other adults who the youth encounter in their day-to-day lives (often called natural mentors), or formal mentors assigned to the youth through a mentoring program. Although these relationships differ in form and structure, they all have the potential to benefit adolescents in a multitude of ways. Realizing this potential, however, depends on the quality of the relationships themselves. Indeed, there are several characteristics of high-quality youth–adult relationships that are beneficial to adolescents, regardless of the type of relationship. Relationships that have these characteristics can be termed *developmental relationships* (Li & Julian, 2012).

In this chapter, we identify developmental relationships as the ultimate goal of youth–adult interactions, and we describe the characteristics that define these types of relationships. Next, we review research on young people’s relationships with parents, natural mentors, and formal mentors, as well as how these relationships are associated with adolescent thriving. In particular, we highlight research from the 4-H Study of PYD, a longitudinal study of adolescents’ strengths, resources, and thriving from fifth through twelfth grade (see Chap. 1). Then, we describe several exemplary programs in which youth–adult relationships are capitalized on as a way to promote adolescents’ positive development. Finally, we provide recommendations based on this evidence for practitioners and policy makers, and we identify priorities for future efforts with parents and mentors.

What Are Developmental Relationships?

The adults present in adolescents’ families, schools, and communities are most likely to serve as resources for PYD when they engage in *developmental relationships* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Li & Julian, 2012) with the youth. Developmental relationships are defined by four characteristics. First, these relationships are characterized by attachment, which means that the adult and young person are emotionally connected in a positive manner. Second, developmental relationships are reciprocal. That is, when the adult and youth take part in sustained and frequent joint activities, the adult provides guidance and support to the youth, and the adult adjusts this guidance and support to match the young person’s development. Thus, the young person’s characteristics influence the behavior of the adult who is influencing him or her. As such, the adolescent is a source of his or her own development (Lerner, 1982). Third, these relationships show progressive complexity. As the interactions and activities between the youth and adult continue, the youth engages in progressively more complex patterns of behavior, such as discussing personal problems and asking for advice. The final defining feature of developmental relationships is balance of power. As time progresses, the adult gradually drives less of the interactions and activities, and the power shifts to a balance of adult- and youth-driven interactions. Eventually, the young person takes the lead within the relationship. Again, this shift in influence reflects that the adolescent is a producer of his or her own development.

Although developmental relationships are the ultimate goal of youth–adult interactions, many relationships will not progress to this level. Nonetheless, the concept of developmental relationships is useful. That is, the four criteria that define a developmental relationship are important when considering the goals of program, practice, and policy decisions (Li & Julian, 2012). However, it is important to take into account how the characteristics of the youth, the characteristics of the adult, and the characteristics of the larger contexts in which the pair is embedded may affect the likelihood of developmental relationships forming. For example, young adults with insecure parental attachments have reported less security in subsequent mentoring relationships (Larose, Bernier, & Soucy, 2005). In addition, mentors who approach their relationships in a prescriptive fashion in which they exert a high degree of control over the activities are less likely to develop high-quality or long-lasting relationships (Morrow & Styles, 1995). Finally, mentor–mentor matches are affected by the different structures, missions, resources, and practices of the programs in which they occur. Therefore, the youth, the adult, and the context must always be considered when examining research and practice on youth–adult relationships (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008).

We now turn to findings from research and practice on the three primary types of youth–adult relationships: parents, natural mentors, and formal mentors. We highlight key findings from the 4-H Study as well as complementary work from other PYD scholars on each relationship type. We conclude the review by describing research that considers the joint contribution that these relationships make to youth development.

Youth Relationships with Parents

In this section, we review research findings regarding young people’s relationships with their parents. First, we describe the parental behaviors that matter most for young people’s positive development, and we then detail the positive youth outcomes that are associated with these parental behaviors. Finally, we describe how parents can play a role within youth development programs.

Which Parental Behaviors Matter?

Young people’s first, longest-lasting, and most prominent relationship with an adult is most often with their own parents. It is commonly thought that as the youth go through adolescence, the opinions of peers and the desire to fit in replace parents as the primary drivers of youth decisions and outcomes (see Chap. 7). However, findings of the 4-H Study of PYD, along with other research studies, show that parents remain an important influence in adolescents’ lives (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). In particular, three aspects of parenting are linked to positive outcomes for

adolescents: warmth, monitoring, and school involvement. These three aspects relate to youth–parent relationships across the contexts of family, peers, and school, respectively.

Parental warmth is gauged by behaviors reflecting the parent’s acceptance, nurturance, and support for his or her child. This aspect of parenting is related to adolescent behavior and psychosocial adjustment in many important ways (e.g., Baumrind, 1991; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993). For example, higher levels of parental warmth are associated with higher academic competence (Gray & Steinberg, 1999) and lower levels of externalizing and internalizing problems (Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, & Lerner, 2010).

Parental monitoring is measured by the ways and extent to which parents keep track of their child’s whereabouts and acquaintances. Lower parental monitoring is related to higher levels of delinquency (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991), substance use and alcohol misuse (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2006), and other externalizing behaviors (Brody, 2003). Conversely, very high levels of parental monitoring may impede adolescents’ personal control, sense of self-efficacy, and independence (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988; Rodin, 1990; Syme, 1990). Thus, parents must find the optimal amount of monitoring for their child by taking into consideration the particular developmental needs of the child, including age. It is normal for the youth and parents to progress through a back-and-forth process across adolescence; as the youth obtain more control over their activities, parents reduce their level of monitoring (McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009); this process illustrates the importance of developmental relationships.

Finally, parental school involvement is measured by the ways and the extent to which parents take an active role in their child’s education. Examples of such involvement include parents helping with their child’s homework, talking with their child about what is going on at his or her school, or attending events at school. High levels of parental school involvement are related to higher intentional self-regulation, future aspirations, academic competence, and student achievement (Bowers, Gestsdottir, et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2004; Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Although it is commonly thought that the influence of parental school involvement wanes as the youth mature, the positive influences of parental school involvement are consistent across adolescence (Bowers, Johnson, et al., 2014). As with monitoring, the type and extent of school involvement should be responsive to the desires and needs of the adolescent, as is the goal of developmental relationships.

Parenting Style and PYD

These three parenting behaviors—warmth, monitoring, and involvement—can be viewed jointly to define the type of *parenting style* that parents use to raise their children. In other words, the influence of one parenting behavior depends on whether the other behaviors are also present. For example, parents may have warm relationships with their children, monitor their children at a developmentally appropriate

level (i.e., not too much or too little), and be involved in their children’s schooling. Some parents, however, may show warmth toward their children but do not monitor them and are not really involved in what happens at school. Still another group of parents may be cold, controlling (i.e., over monitoring), and uninvolved in school. These parenting styles influence adolescent’s experiences and subsequent outcomes.

Parents in the 4-H Study of PYD showed several types of parenting styles, and these styles were related to their children’s scores on measures of PYD (Bowers, Johnson et al., 2014). Parents who were engaged in their teenagers’ lives by showing them warmth, monitoring their activities, and being involved in their schooling had children who reported the highest levels of the Five Cs, especially connection. In contrast, parents who were not involved in their children’s lives in terms of warmth, monitoring, and education were most likely to have children who reported the lowest levels of PYD. In between these two extremes of parenting styles, parental warmth was the key ingredient for positive outcomes. Parents who either monitored their children at a relatively high level or were highly involved in their child’s education, without also showing warmth, had children who reported relatively low levels of PYD, although these levels were not as low as those of the youth whose parents were not involved in any way.

Parenting styles are also related to young people’s intentional self-regulation or the processes the youth use to select and pursue their goals (see Chap. 2). For example, Lewin-Bizan et al. (2010) found that positive parenting (defined as having both warmth and monitoring) was a major contextual asset that set off a cascade of positive effects for young people in fifth through eighth grades (i.e., a domino effect). Positive parenting predicted youth intentional self-regulation; in turn, intentional self-regulation predicted young people’s scores on PYD. Finally, PYD scores were positively related to adolescent’s Contribution scores (see Chap. 11 for a more in-depth discussion of the “sixth C” of Contribution).

The 4-H Study has provided consistent evidence for a link between positive parenting characteristics, intentional self-regulation, and positive youth outcomes, such as higher PYD and Contribution (see Chap. 11) as well as lower frequencies of problem behaviors across adolescence (Bebiroglu, Geldhof, Pinderhughes, Phelps, & Lerner, 2013; Bowers, Gestsdóttir, et al., 2011; Bowers, von Eye, et al., 2011; Napolitano, Bowers, Gestsdóttir, & Chase, 2011). These results suggest that positive parenting—marked by high warmth, monitoring, and school involvement—is key to youth success and well-being. Positive parenting can be reflected in activities as simple as regularly eating dinner together as a family (Bowers, von Eye, et al., 2011). Shared meals are opportunities for parents to show support for their children and be involved in their children’s lives.

Parents as Resources in Youth Development Programs

Given the importance of parents in adolescents’ lives, it is essential for effective youth development programs to engage families (Deschenes & Malone, 2011). As such, innovative youth development programs are reconsidering the role that

parents play within programs. In the past, many programs worked with parents to increase youth participation; this approach is termed *program-centered*. Now, many programs are focusing on going beyond those strategies to empower parents to facilitate their children's learning and development both within and beyond program settings (Rosenberg, Wilkes, & Harris, 2014). This approach is termed *learning centered*. Several exemplary programs have adopted a learning-centered approach, such as the Techbridge program in Oakland, California. Techbridge has involved parents in many aspects of the program, which is designed to develop and broaden girls' interest and potential opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses and careers. In addition to STEM-focused programming, Techbridge works to engage families in supporting their child's STEM interests and activities by providing training to program teachers on parental engagement and providing guidebooks for parents on how to incorporate STEM-relevant projects in their daily family activities and support their daughters' interests.

As we have described, parent–adolescent relationship quality is strongly related to many youth outcomes (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). As such, it is not surprising that much of the work on youth–adult relationships from the 4-H Study specifically, and from research in general, focuses on youth–parent relationships. Youth development, however, takes place within a greater context that potentially involves many relationships with other adults. These relationships, in turn, may provide resources for young people (such as expertise) that are not as easily supplied by their parents. For example, the important influence these nonparental adult relationships have for STEM interest and efficacy is recognized in the Techbridge program. As the girls served by Techbridge often do not have any family members working in STEM careers, let alone female family members, female professionals from a variety of STEM fields are recruited to serve as role models to the youth participants. In a similar way, young people also often develop natural mentoring relationships with athletic coaches in order to learn the skills of a particular sport. Therefore, we now turn to research that supports the decisions of programs such as Techbridge to include nonparental adults into their programs as models and mentors.

Youth Relationships with Natural Mentors

Natural mentoring relationships refer to those relationships that happen between young people and adults they encounter within their daily lives through existing social networks; these relationships also are associated with positive development among the youth (Bowers et al., 2012; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a, 2005b; Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). These individuals may also be called important nonparental adults (e.g., Bowers et al., 2012), informal mentors (e.g., Kogan & Brody, 2010), or very important nonparental adults (VIPs; e.g., Greenberger et al., 1998). Regardless of the label given to them, natural mentoring relationships can occur in a variety of settings, from relationships with teachers, coaches, and community members to relationships with

older siblings, aunts, uncles, and other family members. Natural mentors are often instructors, advocates, and role models in contexts that are important to the youth, such as sports, hobbies, and other out-of-school time activities; therefore, youth relationships with such adults may serve as “developmental assets” that promote PYD outcomes (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Semsal, 2006; Bowers et al., 2012).

The influence of natural mentors may be especially important in adolescence, as the youth build identities outside their family life (Côté, 2009; Marcia, 1980; see too Chap. 10). The youth who have natural mentors in their lives report a range of better psychological, socioemotional, and behavioral outcomes across adolescence compared to the youth without these relationships (e.g., Bowers et al., 2012; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a, 2005b; Greenberger et al., 1998; Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Just as with youth–parent relationships, however, the quality of these relationships is important. When these natural mentoring relationships are marked by warmth, acceptance, and closeness, they are related to more positive outcomes for young people (Bowers et al., 2012; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b). For example, the youth who reported having natural mentors were more likely to complete high school and attend college, were more likely to report higher levels of self-esteem, and were more likely to be physically active compared to the youth who did not report having such relationships in their lives (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a). In addition, the youth with natural mentors were less likely to take part in negative behaviors such as gang involvement and risk taking (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a). This pattern of findings is found consistently across diverse groups of young people, including rural African-American youth (Kogan & Brody, 2010), urban African-American youth (Hurd, Zimmerman, & Reischl, 2011), and European-American youth (Bowers et al., 2012).

Because young people may encounter many potential natural mentors over the course of their lives, parents and others who work with the youth may wonder whether having more natural mentors confers additional benefits. Oftentimes, youth connections to nonparental adults are supported based on the maxim that “It takes a village to raise a child.” At the same time, it is often said that the “youth only need one adult who is crazy about them.” Data from the 4-H Study have been used to compare the evidence for these adages (i.e., whether the quantity or quality of natural mentoring relationships matters more and for what outcomes). Specific outcomes of interest included intentional self-regulation (the way adolescents set and work toward their goals; see Chap. 2), hopeful future expectations (adolescents’ hopes for the future; see Chap. 5), and the Five Cs of PYD (see Chap. 9).

The youth in the 4-H Study benefited from both the quantity and quality of mentoring relationships, but in different ways (Bowers et al., 2012). The quantity of natural mentoring relationships the youth reported was related to their hopeful future expectations, which in turn predicted the specific Cs of confidence, character, and caring. Young people’s emotional closeness with a particular natural mentor (i.e., quality) also was related to their hopeful future expectations and, in turn, the specific C of confidence. Although both aspects of natural mentoring were important, quantity had a more extensive relationship with the Cs of PYD. Therefore, programs and policies can be aimed at community-wide initiatives that engage adult

community members with whom the youth are likely to enjoy spending time and who provide youth encouragement. The youth also benefitted, however, when one of these relationships reached a deeper level of interaction or emotional closeness. The youth who reported that they talked to their natural mentor about private matters, emotions, and problems with friends and family also reported higher self-confidence. This degree of intimacy with an adult is a fundamental aspect of a developmental relationship and only comes with time and sensitivity on the part of the adult.

Promising Programs That Incorporate Natural Mentoring

Natural mentoring relationships often emerge from youth connections to adults within their existing social network. Therefore, these relationships are more likely to be maintained as they are already in a context important to the youth, and they are likely linked to other youth relationships. Several youth development organizations have leveraged these aspects of natural mentoring relationships to design and implement programs to promote PYD. For example, the National Guard Youth ChalleNge Program (NGYCP) is an intensive residential program for youth ages 16–18 who are no longer in school due to expulsion or dropout and who are also unemployed (e.g., Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013). NGYCP uses an innovative model of mentoring termed youth-initiated mentoring.

In youth-initiated mentoring, young people nominate mentors from among the nonparental adults from their existing social contexts (e.g., a teacher, a neighbor, religious leader). If willing and approved, these adults are then trained and provided with ongoing support to be mentors to these young people. These mentors, in turn, support the youth as they progress through the program and transition back into the community. The program has been effective in enhancing young people's educational and vocational outcomes, including attainment of a GED or high school diploma, higher earnings, and longer length of employment (Millenky, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2014). The NGYCP draws on the strengths of natural mentoring relationships to promote positive outcomes; over the course of the program, however, these relationships change in structure to be more like formal mentoring relationships, which we next discuss.

Youth Relationships with Formal Mentors

As we have already described, youth–adult relationships—with parents as well as with other important nonparental adults—hold great potential for promoting youth thriving. Not all youth, however, have high-quality relationships with their parents or access to other adults who can serve as natural mentors for them. Even youth who already do have these types of relationships would most likely benefit from having

more of them (Bowers et al., 2012). For this reason, many youth policies and programs aim to connect youth with adults who can play this role in their lives. These connections take place through formal mentoring programs, in which an adult¹ (usually a volunteer from the community) is “assigned to” or paired with a young person (or a group of young people) for the explicit purpose of acting in a mentoring role or capacity.

Positive Effects of Formal Mentoring Programs

Consistent with the PYD perspective, research has demonstrated that formal mentoring programs—examples of which will be discussed below—are associated with a range of positive psychological, socioemotional, and behavioral outcomes for youth participants. The clearest evidence for these positive effects has come from a study by DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011). These researchers used a technique called meta-analysis to combine the results of 83 different studies of formal mentoring programs. DuBois and colleagues found that, overall, these programs had positive effects for young people in several outcome categories, including attitudes/motivations, social/interpersonal skills, psychological/emotional competencies, reduction of conduct problems, academics/school achievement, and physical health. The magnitude of these effects, however, was relatively small: the average youth in a mentoring program scored approximately nine percentile points higher than the average youth who was not mentored (DuBois et al., 2011).

Characteristics of Mentoring Relationships and Programs That Matter

Although formal mentoring programs have the potential to affect the lives of young people in a variety of ways, positive results are not guaranteed simply by the act of pairing a mentor and a mentee. Certain characteristics of the mentees, the mentors, and the mentoring relationship itself are more likely to be related to positive outcomes, and particular program practices (i.e., things programs do) are more likely to support these high-quality mentoring relationships (which can be developmental relationships). In their meta-analysis of mentoring programs, DuBois and colleagues (2011) found a trend for mentoring programs to be slightly more effective

¹Some mentoring programs use a strategy called “cross-age peer mentoring” (Karcher, 2007, 2014), wherein older youth are paired with their younger counterparts (such as high school seniors paired with freshmen or fifth graders paired with first graders). Because the focus of this chapter is youth–adult relationships, we will not discuss cross-age peer mentoring. Interested readers are encouraged to consult other excellent resources on the topic (e.g., Karcher, 2014).

when they included a higher proportion (more than 50 %) of male participants and when they were directed at the youth who showed moderate levels of either individual risk factors (such as a history of conduct problems) or environmental disadvantage or risk factors (such as poverty), but not both. In other words, DuBois et al. (2011) note that most mentoring programs are not designed to help the youth with severe difficulties. This finding is echoed by a study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring program, wherein the youth who showed moderate levels of difficulties when entering the program experienced more benefit when compared to the youth who were experiencing either severe difficulties or very few, if any, difficulties (Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, & Herrera, 2011).

In regard to mentor characteristics, DuBois et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis showed that mentor's backgrounds, the way in which mentors are matched with their mentees, and the roles that mentors are supported in playing within the mentoring relationship all are related to positive outcomes for young people. Programs are slightly more effective when mentors are recruited based on an alignment between their backgrounds and the objectives of the program (DuBois et al., 2011), such as if a mentoring program focused on educational outcomes recruited teachers as mentors. Furthermore, program outcomes are stronger when mentors and mentees are paired based on common interests. For example, a mentee with an interest in robotics might be matched with a mentor with an engineering background. Finally, greater effects of mentoring are seen when mentors are encouraged, trained, and supported in playing an advocacy and teaching/informative role within the mentoring relationship.

In addition, the length of the mentoring relationship is important (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012; Rhodes & Roffman, 2003). When mentoring relationships last at least a year, mentees are more likely to experience positive outcomes. On the other hand, when the youth are in relationships that last for only between six and 12 months, fewer positive outcomes of mentoring are evident. When young people are in mentoring relationships that end relatively quickly, it appears that mentoring may actually be detrimental. Decreases in positive functioning have been reported in such circumstances (Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & Roffman, 2003).

Exemplary Formal Mentoring Programs

According to one estimate (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2006), more than 5,000 mentoring programs currently operate in the United States, and these programs serve about three million youth. These programs vary widely in terms of the number and population of the youth they serve, the aims and activities of the programs, the types of individuals who serve as mentors, and the extent to which they follow recommended program practices (e.g., DuBois et al., 2011), as described above. In this section, we highlight several programs—large and small—that illustrate not only this variety of mentoring programs but also the potential for positive outcomes for youth participants.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) is the oldest and most established mentoring organization in the United States (BBBS, 2014). BBBS operates both community-based and school-based mentoring programs and also offers programming specifically targeted for African-American, Latino, and Native American youth, military-connected young people, and children and adolescents whose parents are incarcerated. The BBBS evaluation study conducted in the 1990s (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) was one of the first large-scale and rigorous evaluations of a formal mentoring program. This landmark study showed that BBBS youth—between ages 10 and 16—were significantly more likely to experience several positive outcomes (such as feeling more confident about their school performance), and less likely to experience negative outcomes (such as skipping school), compared to similar youth who had not participated in BBBS. An evaluation of the BBBS school-based mentoring program showed that mentees experienced positive outcomes in some (but not all) of the areas that had been targeted by the program (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011), and BBBS has used such evaluation results to improve their programming (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007).

The 4-H Youth Development organization—one of the most well-known youth development programs in the U.S.—also sponsors formal mentoring activities through their 4-H National Mentoring program (4-H, 2014). Three 4-H mentoring programs were designated as Programs of Distinction by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and were selected for implementation across the country. These programs are being delivered to underserved youth populations with a goal of improving family relationships, increasing social competencies, increasing school attendance, and reducing juvenile delinquency and youth unemployment. The three programs are (a) 4-H Mentoring: Youth and Families with Promise, developed and originally implemented by Utah State University (<http://extension.usu.edu/yfp/>; Higginbotham, Harris, Marshall, & Lee, 2006; Riggs, Lee, Marshall, Serfustini, & Bunnell, 2006); (b) 4-H Tech Wizards, originally developed and implemented by Oregon State University (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/metro4h/techwizards>; Hobbs & Sawyer, 2009); and (c) 4-H Living Interactive Family Education, from the University of Missouri (<http://extension.missouri.edu/4hlife/home.aspx>; Dunn & Arbuckle, 2002).

Though results from these programs have not yet been published in peer-reviewed research journals, initial results circulated through program reports (e.g., 4-H National Mentoring Program, 2011) are encouraging. For the Youth and Families with Promise program, for example, the youth and parents reported statistically significant gains in young people's school experiences, family experiences, and personal characteristics. This program also includes a component for parents, and parents reported statistically significant gains in self-perceived parenting abilities.

In addition to these two large providers of formal mentoring programs that serve many youth across the United States, countless other, smaller, programs exist. Many of these programs target specific groups of the youth and use innovative implementation methods. An example of one such program is the University of Virginia's Young Women Leaders Program (YWLP), which pairs college women with primarily ethnic minority middle school girls from lower socioeconomic status

backgrounds; the YWLP program uses a combination of one-on-one meetings and group sessions. Considerable evaluation research has been conducted to examine many aspects of this program, and initial results are promising. For example, research done by Henneberger, Deutsch, Lawrence, and Sovik-Johnston (2013) showed that YWLP participants had stable levels of overall self-esteem across the program period, whereas girls in a comparison group experienced declines. This finding suggests that mentoring may protect against declines in self-esteem that girls often experience across adolescence.

Integrating Youth–Adult Relationships: How Do Parents and Mentors Coalesce to Promote PYD?

Development occurs within a system of cross-context relationships; in other words, the youth interact with parents *and* teachers *and* mentors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Most research, however, has focused on just one of these relationships (e.g., parents *or* teachers *or* mentors) and their impact on adolescents' development. The integrative influence of parents and mentors is important, however, and a few researchers have examined the joint impact of parents and important nonparental adults, such as natural and formal mentors (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009; Hurd, Varner, & Rowley, 2013; Kogan & Brody, 2010). Several youth development programs also harness the resources that both parents and nonparental adults can provide to promote adolescents' PYD.

There are several possible ways in which parental and nonparental adult relationships can interact to influence youth development. The effects may be complementary, such that the combined positive influences both contribute to positive development. Perhaps the youth in positive relationships with their parents are able to learn the skills and knowledge needed to develop relationships with, and recruit resources from, other adults around them. The relationships may also be compensatory, in which a positive relationship in one area can buffer or lessen the effect of a poor relationship in another area. The potential of compensatory relationships for promoting PYD is the foundation for many formal mentoring programs. Finally, the joint influence may even be detrimental, if there is a combined negative influence of both relationships. This detrimental effect might be seen if the youth with poor family relationships also experience short-lived or negative experiences with mentors rather than positive ones.

Natural mentors most often serve as a complementary or compensatory resource for young people from diverse backgrounds. To illustrate a complementary effect, the youth with more contextual resources, including positive relationships with their parents, may also be more likely to report having a natural mentor (Erickson et al., 2009). The youth with natural mentors also reported higher levels of parental involvement than the youth without natural mentors (Hurd et al., 2013). In addition,

when natural mentors are strongly connected to the youth, they share socializing responsibilities with parents (Hurd et al., 2013).

For the youth with fewer contextual resources, however, the effect of having a natural mentor can be compensatory. For example, among the youth with natural mentors, those youth from low-resource backgrounds experienced a bigger increase in their educational success than the youth from high-resource backgrounds (Erickson et al., 2009). Similarly, among young black men from rural communities, support from natural mentors buffered the effect of conflicted and unsupportive youth–parent relationships (Kogan and Brody, 2010). Finally, mentoring may have the largest benefits for the youth who are neither very high nor very low in social resources (Schwartz et al., 2011). The youth with lots of social resources may experience no benefit from additional adult support in their lives, whereas those in extreme need may need more than what a mentoring relationship can provide. Young people who had satisfactory relationships with their parents, teachers, and peers benefited more from mentoring relationships in terms of academic performance and prosocial behavior than the youth who had either very positive or negative relationships (Schwartz et al., 2011).

The integrative role that parents and natural mentors play in promoting the Five Cs of PYD was also examined in a sample of high school students from the 4-H Study (Bowers, Johnson, et al., 2014). The youth with parents who were supportive and appropriately engaged in their lives were more likely to report having someone other than their parents to talk to about some or all of their problems. In addition, there was generally a positive effect of a natural mentor on the Five Cs, particularly for youth connection and character, regardless of the type of parenting style. This work illustrated that natural mentors can serve as both complimentary and compensatory resources for youth, depending on whether the youth reported positive or problematic relationships with parents. This general finding is consistent with Rhodes' (2005) contention that positive relationships with mentors may help the youth learn how to have more positive interactions with others.

Comprehensive Youth Development Programs

Several youth development programs have adopted a comprehensive approach to promoting PYD in which they incorporated the assets provided by both families and mentors. One such program is the aforementioned 4-H Mentoring: Youth and Families with Promise program (4-H YFP; Higginbotham, MacArthur, & Dart, 2010). 4-H YFP engages the adults in young people's lives in three different settings: the youth participate in a 4-H club, are matched with a formal mentor in a one-to-one relationship, and participate in a monthly Family Night Out activity with their parents. Parents of participants have reported significant improvement in young people's self-control, confidence, and positive outlook (Higginbotham et al., 2010).

Some programs have focused specifically on improving these cross-contextual relations to enhance the effects of mentoring programs. The parent engagement model (PEM) is a multicomponent mentoring intervention that includes orientation, guidebooks, and biannual events for families as well as additional training and support for mentors (Kaye, 2014). The aim of the PEM is to enhance the effect of mentoring by engaging parents more fully into the program and improving mentors' cultural competence. An evaluation of the program identified no improvements in youth outcomes but did identify several issues with the implementation of the program that are helpful to both academics and practitioners engaged in university–community collaborations. For example, some components were very successful, such as the parent orientation, but other components, such as the enhanced training for mentors, were not. Therefore, greater efforts to involve all stakeholders in the design and implementation of the comprehensive multicomponent interventions are needed to affect the youth in a holistic way.

Conclusions from Research on Youth–Adult Relations and PYD

The research we have discussed above, which links parenting relationships and mentoring relationships to PYD outcomes, provides several key points for youth-serving professionals:

- The presence and quantity of caring adults in adolescents' lives are the most important assets for PYD; therefore, it would benefit programs to engage adults from multiple youth contexts through coordinated program components or joint activities.
- Adults are most likely to be resources for PYD when they engage in developmental relationships (attached, reciprocal, progressively complex, and shared power) with the youth. Programs should be structured in order to maximize the likelihood of these relationships being formed through thoughtful matching as well as providing mentors with extensive training and ongoing support.
- The 4-H Study points to three parenting behaviors that are predictive of high PYD among adolescents: warmth, monitoring, and school involvement. In a developmental relationship, parents adopt a parenting style adapted to each individual youth.
- For natural mentoring relationships, emotional closeness is a key attribute of developmental youth-mentoring relationships. This type of relationship takes time and sensitivity.
- Mentoring programs are more effective when mentors' backgrounds align with the program, mentors and mentees are paired based on common interests, and mentors are encouraged, trained, and supported to be advocates for and teachers of the youth.

Recommendations and Priorities for Youth Policy and Practice

We have several recommendations for practitioners and policy makers who want to capitalize on the potential of youth–adult relationships to promote young people’s positive development. Each of these recommendations is provided with the aim of increasing the likelihood that young people will have access to and participate in developmental relationships with adults from the many contexts in which young people participate.

Our *first recommendation* is that youth-serving programs should focus on promoting parenting practices that reflect warmth, acceptance, and support of their children. At the same time, parents should also be encouraged to be involved in their children’s academic and social lives. That is, parents should engage with their children’s teachers and schools and know where their children go and with whom they associate. Parental involvement in their children’s academic life is only detrimental to young people when that involvement is the parents’ *only* concern. Parental engagement in the multiple contexts of a young person’s life is essential for comprehensive youth well-being as reflected by the Five Cs of PYD (see Chap. 9).

A key consideration for this effort is to improve practitioners’ understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of the youth and families with whom they work (Outley & Witt, 2006). Specific parenting styles and behaviors are understood differently by families from various cultural backgrounds (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997). Therefore, practitioners must take care to understand these important differences and how they might affect their plans and efforts. However, practitioners and programs must be clear about their own discipline protocol as well as expectations for family behavior at program activities and on program grounds.

In turn, our *second recommendation for practice* is that programs should engage families more fully. This effort is essential for programs to promote PYD most effectively. Earlier, we highlighted Techbridge as an out-of-school time program that worked to engage parents in several ways. There are many activities that can encourage parental engagement, including (1) hosting a parent night to share information about the program, youth progress, or a family activity; (2) building a social media presence through posts by program staff and the youth; (3) extending personal invitations to family members to visit the program, if possible; and/or (4) hosting a community-wide event. In planning these types of events, practitioners should consider parents’ schedules, to maximize participation and also empower parents to contribute to the planning and execution of these activities.

Our *third recommendation* is that youth development programs should include training and support for youth-serving professionals to learn the best ways to build developmental relationships with young people (Gettings & Wilson, 2014). In particular, mentors need the skills to develop an emotionally close relationship with young people in which mentors are seen as resources for a young person’s private and difficult issues. Because developmental relationships take considerable time to grow, programs should also work with mentors to build commitment to the program

and to ensure that mentors feel invested in their relationships (Gettings & Wilson, 2014). In turn, programs should train and support young people in developing these same relationship-building skills, as well as help-recruiting skills, in order to optimize the resources provided by adults in their communities. The youth can then contribute to building supportive social networks composed of caring adults to enhance their well-being and success in life.

Our *fourth recommendation* is for practitioners in formal mentoring programs to consider the characteristics of the youth before assigning them to mentors. A thoughtful approach is essential when there are many more youth who want mentors than there are mentors available. Programs need to consider what interests and needs youth have before match decisions are made. Whereas high-quality mentors would probably benefit all youth regardless of background, some youth may already have enough social support and would thus benefit little from having a mentor. At the other end of the spectrum, some youth may have pervasive difficulties that require more intense intervention than a mentor can provide. In addition, findings from the 4-H Study showed that mentors were most beneficial for youth connection and character. Therefore, programs aiming to improve youth prosocial behavior or promote healthy youth relationships with families, peers, and adults in their communities should look to recruit mentors as a resource for youth in their program.

In regard to policy, research on youth–adult relationships compels us to make the following recommendations. Our *first policy recommendation* is for stakeholders in youth development to collaborate to create support systems for young people (Zaff, 2011). This recommendation is driven by research on the importance of both parental and nonparental adult relationships. One possibility is for school systems to implement family support programs (FSPs) within schools (Pullman, Weathers, Hensley, & Bruns, 2013). FSPs are a multicomponent and holistic approach to address the multidimensional needs of the youth and families. The aim of FSPs is to build partnerships with families, to increase family engagement in the school, and to address the nonacademic needs of the youth and families such as access to food, clothing, housing, and community resources such as mentors and parenting and career-building classes. For example, in the Seattle Public Schools, the key component of the FSP is the Family Support Workers stationed in the district’s elementary schools. These individuals primarily work as a liaison between identified “at-risk” students, their families, and the schools to enhance family–school relations. In this role, they take on a broad range of tasks, as family needs arise, that include mentoring students, home visits, and organizing events. They also develop service plans and measure progress for these students. The FSP is promising initiative for youth–adult relationships to be supported through policies.

Our *second policy recommendation* is for researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and foundations to go beyond cross-contextual relations between two or three youth contexts. Rather, comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs; Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010) may provide the best approach to capitalizing on youth–adult relationships to promote PYD. A CCI is a community-based coalition of institutions and individuals that is designed to pursue a common agenda and achieve a shared set of goals based on the unique strengths and needs of that

community. CCIs represent a sustained coordination of organizations based on an infrastructure that supports systemic, community-wide change. With a strong infrastructure in place, resources to develop positive youth–adult relationships can be sustained, or in instances when these relationships end, additional resources such as other mentors from the CCI can be identified and provided to the youth.

Within these comprehensive initiatives, our *third policy recommendation* is that young people should be able to work with adults in the overall initiative infrastructure as well as the individual youth-serving programs and organizations that are involved. Youth–adult partnerships provided an appropriate model for including youth voice in enterprises focused on their well-being (Liang, Spencer, West, & Rappaport, 2013; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O’Connor, 2005). In youth–adult partnerships, young people and adults work collaboratively, learn from each other, and jointly contribute to the decision-making processes of the program. The ultimate aim of youth–adult partnerships is to contribute to positive change at the individual, community, and policy levels (Liang et al., 2013). Having young people included in the operations of institutions and organizations allows youth perspectives on how researchers, practitioners, and policy makers might best promote PYD.

To ensure the success of these initiatives, our *fourth policy recommendation* is that funding sources must also be allocated in ways that recognize and support the processes and aims of developmental relationships and CCIs. Funding sources must acknowledge the time and effort that are required to develop quality youth–adult relationships as well as the larger partnerships essential for promoting PYD. CCIs require the commitment and integration of many constituencies over several years to design and implement an initiative that is evidence-based, rigorous, and sustainable. Therefore, funding sources should prioritize integrated and comprehensive approaches among several contexts of youth development.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Youth–adult relationships provide key resources for PYD in the lives of many youth. More research needs to consider the diversity of young people and the diversity of the relationships that they can form with adults. What characteristics of these relationships might influence youth outcomes and which youth might be most affected? In addition, both researchers and practitioners need to acknowledge and address the joint influence that the adults in a young person’s life have on his or her thriving. The findings we have reviewed point to the shared responsibility of adults for the positive development of youth in their community, and we have outlined recommendations for potential policies, programs, and practices that can enable communities and adults to uphold that shared responsibility.

Most of the research findings we presented addressed only how adults influenced youth development. Additional work should examine whether the characteristics of youth elicit different behaviors in their parents and mentors. By affecting those who aim to affect them, children are producers of their own development (Lerner, 1982).

Parent or adult rearing, as well as child rearing, exists (Lerner, 2004). Future work should examine the network of relations among the youth and adults and what the quality and number of these interrelationships mean for youth thriving.

Practice and research that address youth–adult relationships must also consider the rapidly changing definition of “family” and growing diversity of family structures. For example, with same-sex partnerships and marriages being recognized in the majority of states, it is important to examine what this means for relations among parents, mentors, and youth-serving programs. This substantial change in policy is added on to existing challenges that programs may face as they look to engage families from marginalized or minority populations.

Finally, more commitment to evaluate comprehensive program models is needed. The evaluation of the PEM (Kaye, 2014) did not identify any significant changes in the young people who participated; however, this evaluation did provide a model for identifying areas of strengths and areas of need for the program. The willingness of both practitioners and researchers to be open to recognizing their successes and areas where they might not be successful is a key component to developing programs that will ultimately benefit diverse young people across the United States.

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Recommended Additional Resources

DuBois, D. L., & Karcher, M. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of youth mentoring* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Research on youth mentoring has grown rapidly in the past decade. The *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* turns a critical eye to the research that has been done during this time. The handbook is a valuable resource for academics and professionals. The writing is very accessible and many practical applications are discussed. The handbook includes a historical look at mentoring, the current fashions of mentoring, how these have impacted and continue to impact development, different types of formal mentoring programs and their effectiveness, the different contexts in which mentoring occurs and how different youth populations can be uniquely understood, and an examination of policy issues related to youth mentoring.

Lerner, R. M. (2008). *The good teen: Rescuing adolescence from the myths of the storm and stress years*. New York: Random House.

The Good Teen aimed to dispel the overwhelming public opinion that teenagers are nothing but trouble. Using evidence from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, an 8-year study of 4,000 teens from 25 states, Lerner lays out a case for the reframing of adolescence. The book explores the origins of “the

troubled teen,” dealing with old myths and redefining normal adolescence. It then presents five attributes of teen behavior that foster positive development—competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Envisioning adolescents as resources to be developed, not problems to be fixed, Lerner provides suggestions for parents and encourages new thinking, new public policies, and new programs that focus on the strengths instead of the deficits of teens.

Manza, G., & Patrick, S. K. (2012). *The mentor’s field guide: Answers you need to help kids succeed*. Minneapolis: Search Institute Press.

Mentors come to mentoring with a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and assumptions. Whether you’re new or seasoned, formal or informal, or volunteer or professional, *The Mentor’s Field Guide* will provide both practical advice and needed inspiration. This thoughtfully assembled and easily used guide to mentoring information and resources provides answers to and understanding of the challenges of mentors using the latest research, evidence-based practices, and case examples.

The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring (<http://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/>)

Youth-mentoring program evaluations have shown that high-quality, enduring relationships can lead to a host of positive outcomes for young people. Formed in 2012 through collaboration between MENTOR and the Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring at University of Massachusetts, Boston, the Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring seeks to advance youth-mentoring research and bring findings to the field in order to enhance practitioner skill and knowledge through evidence-based practice. This online resource is designed to provide a forum for conversation, sharing, and the presentation of findings concerning the advancement of youth-mentoring practices and policies.

Equipping Quality Youth Professionals (E-QYP) (<http://www.e-qyp.net/>)

E-QYP provides real-time information for youth-serving professionals and volunteers through a variety of technologies. They have an iPad and iPhone app, a website, and a book (in print and electronic forms) which present practitioner-developed and academically credible resources for those people working with the youth of all ages. E-QYP has assembled high-quality youth development information so that it can be readily accessed and practiced in broad range of settings.

Harvard Family Research Project (<http://www.hfrp.org/>)

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) aims “to shape twenty-first-century learning opportunities so that all children and youth thrive.” This online resource addresses issues around equity and accessibility of education as well as family and community engagement practices. Across a variety of settings, HFRP explores progressive perspectives on educational, programmatic, family, and community engagement research, practices, policies, and strategies.

MENTOR (<http://www.mentoring.org/>)

The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) develops quality resources to advance mentoring program effectiveness and innovation by sharing knowledge among mentoring programs. On a national scale, MENTOR advocates for public funding for quality mentoring programs, establishes evidence-based national standards for quality mentoring programs, and maintains the only national online Volunteer Referral System, which helps both adult mentors and the youth who are seeking mentoring programs to find appropriate resources.

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