

**THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP:  
PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS MENTORING  
UNIVERSITY SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS  
BY  
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**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Masters of Social Work**

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**The Mentoring Relationship: Professional Social Workers Mentoring  
University Social Work Students**

**BY**

**Claudia Gavran**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
of  
Master of Social Work**

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship experience of mentors and mentees who participated in a formalised mentorship program and to propose recommendations for improvements to the program. A qualitative approach was undertaken with components of grounded theory used as a guiding framework. By using elements of grounded theory, recurring themes could be identified and built upon to achieve saturation.

The interviews showed that the experiences of the mentors and mentees involved in this study varied greatly and ranged from abject disappointment to a feeling of being part of a wonderful learning experience. Those who experienced disappointment cited the inability to connect with their counterpart as the primary reason for their negative experience while those whose experience was seen as positive indicated that exchanging ideas and learning about another's culture and ideas were the primary reasons for enjoying their participation in the mentoring relationship. How the development of the relationship was approached and prioritised by the participants and which party took responsibility for the initial development stage of the relationship had a direct effect on how the experience was perceived and experienced. Program recommendations include formal introductions arranged by the mentorship program co-ordinator at the onset; provision of detailed program information regarding the benefits for and expectations of program participants; mentee biographies to provide insight into the mentees needs and situation; provision of a neutral place to meet; and access to information from past mentors and mentees. This study attempts to extend the Canadian knowledge base.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Mentorship has a long history as part of learning. First found in the literature of ancient Greece, the word 'mentor' comes from the Greek language and means steadfast and enduring. In *The Odyssey*, the character, Mentor, is a disguise for the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena, who becomes the guide, adviser, role model, teacher, confidante, and inspiration for Prince Telemachus's rite of passage into manhood (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995).

A mentor is a person who possesses more skill or experience in a specific area than does a mentee (Effective mentoring: A self test, 1990). The word mentor is synonymous with "teacher, guide, and friend" (Library of Congress, 1992) and the concept of mentorship is an accepted career development tool in various business and professional sectors.

Mentoring is a process of communicating knowledge, accumulated wisdom of tradition, and a vehicle for using the experience of colleagues to gain access into higher professional ranks (Wunsch & Johnsrud, 1992). It is a documented fact that mentoring can have a powerful and positive effect on professional growth, career advancement and career mobility. Generally, an individual moving in managerial level employment must learn six new things: politics of the work place, norms, standards, values, ideology, and the history of the organization. This knowledge is necessary for progression to advancement. A mentoring relationship can address each of these areas and assist the mentee with career advancement (Williams, 2000). Architecture, Law and Medicine use a mentorship or apprenticeship system to assist the new student gain the confidence in the

application of skills and knowledge under the guidance of an experienced, practising professional (Krucker & Haensly, 1990).

### Rationale for this Study

Many American studies have focused on academic advisory/student, field supervisor/student, and mentor/mentee relationships (Collins, 1993; Gladstein & Mallick, 1986; Krucker & Haensley, 1990; McRoy, Freeman, Logan & Blackman, 1986) but there were very few Canadian studies found on the specific topic of mentee/mentor relationships in the university setting between students in a professional program and practising professionals in the field.

I have personally reaped the benefits of this type of professional development relationship, and was interested in understanding more about the benefits gained by others in a mentoring relationship. My interest in this topic stemmed from my own experience with an informal mentoring relationship that developed through a professional supervisory situation. Although I was not aware of it at the time, I was involved in a mentoring relationship with my former supervisor who helped me develop my professional skills in Vocational Rehabilitation. She also had a great impact on my personal growth and subsequently, the development of educational and alternative professional aspirations. It is interesting to note that this mentor and myself were of the same gender, similar age, and had the same level of education (university level graduates). However, we were not of the same ethnic or cultural background, did not come from the same type of family structure (she was raised as an only child in a single parent family while I had 3 siblings with two parents in the home), nor were we raised in

the same environment (she was raised in a large city while I was raised in a rural environment). Our personal life experiences were dissimilar due to these differences. Sharing a similarity in these factors, such as sharing similar culture, are discussed in the literature review as essential if the mentoring relationship is to develop and reach a successful conclusion. It is from this discrepancy between my own experience and the literature reviewed that questions emerged relating to the individual characteristics and the relationship necessary for effective mentoring.

More in depth interest in the topic of the mentorship relationship grew throughout the undertaking of this study and with the knowledge that I gained through researching the literature. I realized that the mentorship relationship could be utilized in a variety of settings and situations including the development of my own supervisory style and development of staff management strategies. As my professional interests began to lead me towards supervisory rather than clinical roles, the information gleaned from this study has been very helpful to my own professional development. As I am a member of the same professional school program as the individuals who are a part of this study, I felt that the results of the study would bring benefit not only to future students who might be involved in the mentorship program but also to myself who may have professional opportunities in the future to use the mentorship concept and relationship with clients.

The idea for this study was based on a presentation from the acting chairperson of the Affirmative Action/Educational Equity (AA/EE) Committee who made an appeal for graduate students to work on studies related to the mentorship program that was being administered through the AA/EE office in the Faculty of Social Work. I was attracted to this opportunity because I thought that since the program had been running for some

time, there would be a large study population from which to choose. I also thought there would be a large literature base from which to work. This belief came from the fact that I had been aware of the mentorship concept in professional, social service, secondary school, and rehabilitation sectors for many years and thought that there would have been research done on the topic in order for these programs to have been developed. Based on these two beliefs, I thought that information on the mentorship relationship would be easily accessed. As I reviewed the literature, I found that there was relatively little written in the literature on mentorship itself and even less on mentorship relationships between community-based professionals and university level students.

Supervisory and advisor roles and models were discussed throughout the literature with the mentorship relationship being discussed only briefly in relation to social service programs and secondary school programs. There was even less information found which related directly to mentorship relationships between university students and established community based professionals. What little information there was, was primarily written from an American perspective. This represents a large gap in the knowledge base for Canadian researchers.

### Purpose and Major Questions

This thesis examined the relationship between professional mentors and their student mentees through a qualitative study of the participants' personal experiences. The intention of the study was to identify themes that arose from interviewing participants in a mentorship program and to compare the results to themes presented in the literature review.

The questions that I was specifically interested in related to the concept of “likeness” or “sameness” and the importance of those concepts in the development and success of the relationship. I was also interested in looking at what mentee and mentor characteristics were important to how the overall relationship was developed and maintained and whose responsibility it was to ensure that a relationship is developed and maintained. Looking at the benefits to both mentors and mentees and future program recommendations were also important to the study outcome. From the results of this study, it was hoped that mentorship program co-ordinators would be able to anticipate and develop strategies to overcome difficulties that may have inhibited the program from being successful due to relationship issues between mentors and mentees. Also, a description of positive experiences might assist in the recruitment of future potential mentors and encourage students to become mentees.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Overview**

### Introduction

The following databases were searched: Socio File, Psych Lit, Social Work Abstracts and Eric databases which were accessible through the Net Doc System at the University of Manitoba. As this search provided limited information specific to mentorship relationships with university students, literature on student relationships with field supervisors, academic advisors, and professional role models were then reviewed. Literature on mentorship models and mentorship programs in a variety of settings including rehabilitation and secondary school systems, social services, and other professions were also reviewed.

The rehabilitation sector of society has utilized the mentorship concept through the development of job coaching, peer tutoring, and supportive work environments (Ylvisaker, Hartwick & Stevens, 1991). Through these mentoring programs, individuals with functional impairments are helped to become productive members of society. Mentoring has provided individuals with physical, cognitive and emotional challenges increased self-esteem, sense of self worth, efficacy and independence (West, Weheman, Kregel, Kreutzer, Sherron & Zasler, 1991).

Mentoring, in the field of education, is considered to be the “master key that can unlock the attention of at-risk students and make them receptive to learning” (Library of Congress, 1992, p.17). Educators have utilized the mentorship concept to enhance the learning experience and success of individuals with learning disabilities, providing one on one communication that is often required to assist the student make sense of the instruction received in a busy classroom. Mentorship has also been used with gifted

learners. Mentors have been found to provide creative programmes in the community for gifted and learning disabled students, which have stimulated renewed interest in learning (Lerner, 1993; Leroux, 1991).

Social service programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters have used the mentorship concept to enhance the lives of disadvantaged youth (Frank, 1996). This is discussed in literature specific to the role of mentoring youth in crime. The mentor works to help support the mentee and alter the cycle of failure to one of success. This has resulted in the development of socially acceptable behaviour and affects social change in the mentee.

In the Affirmative Action literature, mentorship has been used to equalize educational and career advancement opportunities in situations such as between white male students and their female and minority counterparts who are considered to be less advantaged (Wolfe-Devine, 1993). By becoming involved with a mentorship program, students and newly graduated professionals have an opportunity to develop a professional persona by modelling a colleague who is established in the field. Professional networks that might assist the new professional in their job search and professional development can often be accessed under the guidance of more professionally established or experienced mentors (Collins, 1993). The benefits of all of these mentorship programs have been measured in terms of financial, social and personal improvements including increased self-esteem, self worth, efficacy and independence for the individuals themselves. (West et al., 1991).

There are educational and economic indicators that mentorship is needed in both our school and business sectors. These have been identified in the literature (Carr, 1999).

Research suggested that many students who did not have a mentor, leave school before completing their high school diplomas. Research showed that without high school diplomas, individuals were twice as likely to receive social assistance or unemployment insurance. In 1992, the Conference Board of Canada indicated the Canadian economy lost approximately \$4 billion for each uncompleted school year due to lost income tax revenue.

In 1997, studies revealed that, in a survey of 365 Canadian businesses, there was a 20 percent increase in employee turnover from the year before (Carr, 1999). This was found to be due to young employees making a poor transition to the work place. Employers also reported that young employees often lacked the skills, competence, and attitudes to succeed in the work place. The cost to employers for training, recruiting, selecting, and hiring new employees to replace those that leave or do not work out was estimated at \$36,000.00 per employee. Evidence showed that these costs could be reduced or avoided through the use of mentoring programs in the work place and in the school system.

### Definitions

A mentor has been defined as an “experienced and trusted advisor.” (Oxford University Press, 1996, p.556). Yodder (1990) described a mentorship program as “an effective program grounded on a clear and conceptual foundation which provides positive benefits to the organization, the profession and the individual” (p. 9). Galbraith and Cohen (1995) considered mentorship as a “process that advocates, assists and guides us through the transitional phases of our adulthood” (p.1). They went on to say that



mentorship “influences our personal and professional growth and development” and “is linked to the formation of our identity” (p.1). They referred to mentors as individuals who “contribute their knowledge, proficiency, and experience to assist mentees who are working toward the achievement of their own objectives” (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995, p. 5). According to Galbraith and Cohen (1995), as the mentorship relationship developed, the participants would usually perceive mentoring as a mutual learning experience. The benefits became increasingly important over time.

Collins (1993) described mentoring as a:

close interpersonal helping relationship between two individuals who are at different stages in their professional development. Mentorship is not imposed or prescribed but often emerges spontaneously as a phenomenological experience between field supervisors and students as an expansion of their supervisory role relationship (p. 121).

Anderson and Shannon (1988) discussed mentoring as:

a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between mentor and protégé” (pg. 40).

These definitions referred to the mentorship relationship as a helping relationship

between a more experienced individual and someone who is in the process of developing personal and professional personas. An understanding of trust between the mentor and mentee is essential. These concepts gave the impression that this relationship is not controlling or directive but is one of supportive learning and development. The idea of assisting the mentee in developing and reaching their own goals supported this understanding. As these definitions reflected my own experience as a mentee, the concepts put forth in these various definitions were used as the working definition of mentorship for this study.

### Relationship Phases

Cohen and Galbraith (1995) believed that formalized mentorship programs were planned interventions. These interventions helped to focus on creating or developing a relationship that maximized the mentees learning experience. However, mentorship relationships are not instantaneous, not always planned and sometimes naturally occurring. Whether naturally occurring or contrived through participation in a formal mentorship program, the relationship takes time to build and with every human relationship, travel through various phases. Collins (1993) described these phases as the role modelling, the investment, the facilitation, and the adaptation phase (pp.126-127).

The initial phase was described as the interaction or role modelling where the students began to develop their own professional identity, philosophy and ethics and thus solidified their understanding of their role. The second phase, the investment phase was seen as a time when the mentor and student began to share ideas, values and feelings and began to develop a mutual admiration for one another. The mentor began to represent an

idealised professional model which the student admired and respected for his/her competence and ability to guide and support the mentee. In the third phase, the facilitation phase, the mentee was seen as beginning to internalise and assimilate the values of his/her profession into his/her own understanding and worldview. In the final phase, the adaptation phase, both the mentor and the student must have been able to adapt to the changing boundaries of the relationship and gain greater independence.

There were various pitfalls to each of these stages that may have jeopardized the relationship and caused it to fail (Collins, 1993). For example, in the role-modelling phase, negative role models made it difficult for the mentorship pair to establish a close personal bond which was usually the cause for the mentoring relationship to end. However, if the mentor and mentee were successful in negotiating these phases, the benefits to both could last a lifetime. The mentee may have developed professional independence and the mentor may have developed more self-awareness as a person and as a professional, developing a long lasting relationship with the mentee.

One way to ensure that these stages were brought to a successful conclusion was described by Bell (2000) as creating an environment of safety, advocacy and equality. He stated that developing a mentoring partnership was dependant upon travelling through four stages which he described as (1) levelling the learning field; (2) fostering acceptance and safety; (3) giving learning gifts; and (4) bolstering self direction and independence.

The first two stages were seen to prepare the mentor and mentee for the mentoring experience, or third stage where learning occurred and which was referred to by Bell as 'gifting'. Bell's final stage was aimed at encouraging mentee independence from the mentor.

According to Bell, in stage one, the mentor provided the mentee with an understanding of the partnership experience which was part of mentorship. This required the mentor to 'strip' the relationship of any power imbalances and develop an environment in which the mentee was comfortable to take risks in front of the mentor. This allowed for 'quality learning' to take place. Bell stated that a good beginning to the relationship set the tone for the entire experience and that the tone created in the first meeting determined whether the relationship failed or was 'fruitful'. Bell suggested that stage one could be done through such actions as offering the mentee coffee and sitting beside the mentee rather than 'peering' at them from over a desk. In other words, stage one relied more on the physical surroundings and actions of the mentor.

Stage two continued to build on developing the environment but was done through communication skills such as empathising and listening. Stage two allowed the mentee to feel valued and heard which allowed them to take risks. They began to grow and learn from their mentor

In stage three, Bell suggested the mentee began to broaden their perspective. This was done through asking permission to give advice and clear, specific feedback, provided in an atmosphere which said, "I am not perfect. I am like you. We all have much to learn."

Gaining independence was the final stage of the mentorship relationship and was, Bell stated, an inevitable end to a healthy relationship. He believed that this stage could be used as an effective growth tool. Through providing the mentee with sincere praise for their acquired knowledge while taking part in the mentorship partnership and discussing future plans and opportunities the mentoring experience could be bridged with the future.

The expected results of these stages were similar to those of the stages described by Collins (1993). However, the first phase described by Collins might have perpetuated the perception of a power imbalance because the mentee views the mentor as more experienced and knowledgeable than themselves. In contrast, the initial stage described by Bell, worked specifically to break down those barriers.

The stages described by both Bell and Collins could be applied to both of the models of supervision described in the next section by Carr. However these stages would more likely be seen in a formal mentorship program.

### Relevant Models of Supervision

Carr (1999) described two models of mentoring which he labeled as the Natural Mentoring Model and the Intentional Mentoring. He discussed Natural Mentoring in terms of traditional, unintentional, informal, real, or unplanned mentoring. The pairing was usually not planned but occurred naturally, usually when an older, more experienced person helped a younger individual explore alternatives and reach their life goals. This model had no defined beginning point, no specific direction, and no specified outcomes or expectations. It evolved over time and had no ending point.

The Intentional Model was developed when the benefits of the Natural Mentoring Model were recognised and their value acknowledged (Carr, 1999). However, in contrast with the Natural Mentoring model, the Intentional Model had planned pairings, a definite beginning and end, and a specified direction and expectation. It was planned, formal, deliberate and systematic. Like Natural Mentoring, Intentional Mentoring took place, usually, on a one to one basis and usually involved an older, more experienced person

mentoring a younger person. The mentors in this model were usually recruited through a third party such as a mentoring program coordinator. Matching the mentor and mentee was done by the co-ordinator and was dependant upon certain criteria such as mentee needs and mentor experience. Intentional Mentoring had specified time limits, which could range from one short meeting to regular meetings over a period of years. The content of the meetings, the length of the meetings etc. were usually negotiated between the mentor and the mentee which allowed for clearly defined roles and expectations for each participant. Typical examples of this type of mentoring program is the Boys and Girls Clubs and Junior Achievement.

The social work literature discussed models of supervision that could be applied to the mentorship concept and which would fall under Carr's Intentional mentoring model. There are three models identified in the supervision literature: the apprenticeship, the growth, and the role systems model (Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977).

The Apprenticeship Model was a model of learning by doing, while under the tutelage of a more experienced and knowledgeable professional. The primary characteristic of this model was that the student and the supervisor undertook long, private and regularly scheduled conferences, during which the supervisor instructed the student on how to manage their caseload and other professional duties. This model placed the student in a position of observing and passively learning from the supervisor (Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977).

The Growth Model was based upon the student becoming self-aware and experiencing first-hand, personal growth through introspection and interaction with the supervisor. The underlying philosophy of this model was that the professional needed to

be able to connect their own inner problems with how they performed professionally. It was thought that in order to practice or help others, students must first be aware of their own problems (Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977).

The Role Systems Model of supervision, in my view, appears to be most beneficial to both parties. This model is based on recognition that the supervisor is the expert; more knowledgeable and competent than the student. However this model also respects the student's special capabilities that may be superior to the supervisors in some areas of knowledge. The supervisor in this model is aware that the student enters into the relationship with his/her own views that may enhance the process. This awareness forms a more egalitarian relationship based on mutual admiration, respect and sharing of knowledge (Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977).

The stages of mentoring described by Bell and Collins to work most closely within the Role Systems Model. Specifically, this model allows the supervisor and student to develop an environment of equality or safety which is seen as essential by both Bell and Collins. The development of a professional persona described in this model is also important in Collins writing.

The Role Systems model reflects the underlying philosophy of the definitions of mentorship that were discussed earlier as these also refer to mentors as more knowledgeable and experienced individuals who are guiding influences in the mentee's life. The respect for the student's knowledge or expertise is also highlighted by this model.

### Characteristics of the Relationship

According to the literature, mentors ought to be dedicated and committed to their responsibilities towards their students in order for a successful relationship to build. They assist their mentees by acting as friends rather than authority figures. They are advocates, advisors, role models; agents to assist in social, cultural, athletic, occupational and personal growth; and for the development of positive personal self concepts. Mentors support the young professional in the development of personal ethics and standards. Through assisting the mentee with developing personal insight, they deepen the mentees interests and talents, enhance creativity, and broaden career aspirations (Baran, 1992). There should be a genuine appreciation and regard for each other as individuals and the gradual discovery of each other as whole persons should take place throughout the relationship (Collins, 1993). Cohen and Galbraith (1995) indicated that, as experienced, established professional and advocate, mentors have considerable influence in directing the mentees educational, training, and employment possibilities.

### Relationship Enhancing Behaviours

Cohen and Galbraith (1995) believed that a successful mentorship relationship was dependent upon five mentor behaviours that contribute to a positive relationship. These behaviours included:

1. Asking open-ended questions related to the mentee's immediate concerns and present situation.
2. Providing descriptive feedback on observations of the mentee rather than from inference of motives.



3. Clarifying what the mentee is verbalising to ensure a clear understanding of their feelings and perception of a situation.

4. Offering non-judgmental, sensitive responses to assist the mentee in clarifying their emotional state and reactions to various situations and concerns.

These behaviours were often associated with individuals in the helping professions such as counsellors, nursing, and the medical professions. Since mentors have been considered to be helpers, the authors have discussed these behaviours as being beneficial when applied to the mentoring relationship.

#### The importance of likeness in minority relationships.

The majority of the literature on the development of the relationship between the mentor and the student appeared to indicate that the characteristics that were most important for a successful outcome were similarity in culture, ethnicity and/or gender (Gladstein & Mallick, 1986; LaCounte, 1987; McRoy et al., 1986). However, there have been arguments against this opinion that point to other factors that could facilitate the development of a successful and long-lasting mentorship relationship (Wolfe-Devine, 1993). The following will highlight these issues.

The literature that specifically spoke to the needs of minority populations in higher education suggested that modelling after a mentor of the same minority background encouraged or inspired students to attain professional positions of power and authority that they might not have otherwise attempted. The concept of the importance of “like” mentors is underscored in the literature by studies done by Gladstein and Mailick (1986), and Griffiths (1977). In discussion of various issues related to learning and professional

development, Gladstein and Mailick (1986) suggested that the stress factor for minority students was significantly increased if they were not provided with mentors who share the same belief systems, cultural values, understanding of family relationships, relationships with authority and work ethics. Equally important was an understanding of historical relations with the dominant culture that could affect how minority students interrelated with faculty and peers. A mentor from the same cultural background as the student might more easily have identified the student's strengths and understood how to capitalise on them to enhance the learning experience and, ultimately, the student's academic success. The input and support of a mentor who understood these unique issues from personal experience may have made the difference between that student adapting to the academic arena and graduating or feeling isolated and possibly dropping out of the program (Gladstein & Mailick, 1986; Griffiths, 1977).

Another aspect, which supported the importance of providing minority students with mentors of similar cultural experience, was the need for an understanding of the effects that the issues of culture, ethnicity and gender have on power relationships between mentor and mentee. It was suggested in the literature that some of the race relation problems in the larger society did encroach on the mentor/student relationship (McRoy et al., 1986). These societal problems served to increase the complexity of the inherent power relationship that existed between students and mentors. Non-minority mentors might have concerns that they were being perceived as racist or patronising by their minority students if they could not form a good working relationship with them. Due to the differences in their life experiences, expectations and cultural values, non-minority mentors might not have been able to establish a rapport with their minority

students. On the other hand, minority mentors might have felt that their expertise was undermined and underestimated by their students due to stereotypes assigned to their culture. Non-minority mentors who did not acknowledge their minority colleague's expertise in areas other than minority issues could escalate this issue (McRoy et al., 1986). It is important to note that the McRoy et al.(1986) study is American and assumes a context which may be different from our own Canadian experience and context. For instance, the fact that Canada prescribes to a multicultural perspective rather than a melting pot philosophy of immigration may result in an increased tolerance of cultural differences. This may also provide individuals from minority populations with a different view of working with those from a dominant culture. Therefore, the results of similar Canadian studies may be very different from McRoy et al's (1986).

In the same study, it was found that in cross-cultural supervision cases, both the supervisor and the student identified more potential problems than benefits in working with someone of a dissimilar culture or ethnicity (McRoy et al., 1986). White field supervisors indicated that a failure to clarify values, lack of knowledge of cultural differences, language barriers; poor communication and problem-solving skills, lack of trust, personal conflicts, differing expectations, student defensiveness, failure to recognise the student's strengths, lack of experience with cross- cultural supervision, prejudice and bigotry were the major problems that arose with their minority students (McRoy et al., 1986). The minority students that were involved cited differences in communication styles and language differences, personality conflicts, differences of opinion, life experiences and backgrounds as possibly being problematic in the relationship. Feelings of inferiority to their white supervisor were also indicated.

Minority field supervisors reported that white students questioned their ability and expertise and were not willing to accept supervision from them. These language difficulties and misunderstandings based on a minority supervisors accent or mispronunciation of words were cited by white students as a potential issue, as was prejudice, differing values, and the inability of minority supervisors to be honest and direct (McRoy et al., 1986).

Although the McRoy et al study was specific to a supervisor/student relationship, the results appeared to support the opinion that “likeness” was very important to the development of a meaningful and mutually educational mentorship experience. However, the results of this study may have been influenced by the fact that student’s grades were likely affected by the quality of their relationship and any problems associated with it. This may have influenced the opinions expressed by the students and skewed the study results. For example, if a student received bad grades, he/she may have attributed the grades, rightly or wrongly, to the quality of the supervisor’s ability to speak the English language or to having a heavy accent.

It has been my experience as a participant in a professional mentorship relationship and as a student working under a field supervisor, that the structure and the long term goals of these relationships are very similar and may, therefore, be comparable. The above study’s results may be able to be applied to either experience, with a few minor exceptions. For example, in a mentorship relationship, such as is the focus of my study, the mentees grades and academic outcome would not be influenced in any way by their participation in a mentorship relationship. Therefore, the problems cited in the 1986 study which speak to the power imbalances and the findings related to mentees fear of

losing academic standing due to differences with their supervisors would not effect the perception of the experience and in fact, would not have influenced the outcome of a mentorship experience at all.

There is an opinion presented in a book edited by Wright (1987) that Native Americans have a high level of mistrust of non-native officials (La Counte, 1987). If this is indeed the case, it may be paramount to provide them with mentors from their own cultural heritage. Placing these students with non-native mentors might impede the rapport-building process while the relationship is being established. The benefits of working with a mentor would not be realized because of the lack of trust in the information being presented. It might also negatively affect the students comfort with requesting assistance. La Counte's views seem to support the argument for increasing the exposure of minority students to mentors who share their culture and ethnicity

As seen in the studies cited above, issues of race and power could affect the quality of the mentorship relationship and the nature of the students' professional and academic experience. The follow up questions are raised by the literature's suggestion that these issues of race and power are inherent in any relationship between minority and non-minority supervisors/students: 1) if difference is present in the mentor\mentee relationship, how can it be mediated in order to salvage the relationship and help make it a successful experience for both parties; 2) what specific concerns related to ethnic and cultural differences arise; and 3) what life experiences in both parties past history complicate the cross-cultural relationship? These questions were not followed up in my study results as the participants did not report these types of difficulties in their mentoring relationships.

The importance of likeness to physically challenged individuals.

Issues related to the importance of providing mentees with “like” mentors are again discussed in literature specific to physically challenged students. With advancements in medicine and the availability of increased technical support in the community, there has been an increase in the number of physically challenged individuals who are able to attend institutions of higher learning and pursue professional career development programs. Weinberg (1991) indicated that social work is an attractive career goal for many of these individuals because they have been exposed to the profession early on in their lives. As the profession of social work becomes more diverse and more physically challenged individuals enter the schools of social work, it becomes important to search out like mentors, and to recruit physically challenged faculty members. Providing these students with mentors who are experienced in working with physically challenged individuals is advantageous. These mentors will be familiar with and sensitive to the student’s special needs and will be more able to help these students access resources and services on campus. More importantly, a mentor who is aware of and is experienced in working with physically challenged students will encourage their continued use of skills and abilities in directing their own lives and career plans, thereby fostering continued independence. Armed with this knowledge of the unique issues of disability, the mentor will be in a position to help the student consider realistic career opportunities (Weinberg, 1991).

The integration of physically challenged individuals, particularly more severely disabled individuals, is relatively new to our society. This means that prejudice,

stereotypes, and public discomfort continues to pervade. In the case of disabled students, it would appear to be especially important to try to arrange for a community mentor who shares their disability or who has had to overcome physical limitations and environmental barriers in order to reach their own career goals. Learning that others have had to surmount similar obstacles to reach their goals can be inspiring and may be an important motivating factor for these students. Learning to deal with the discomfort of co-workers as well as able bodied clients is something that is most easily done through role-modelling or through discussions with an individual who has had to face that kind of prejudice themselves. Therefore, in this case as well, Weinberg suggested that “likeness” is an important factor for successful professional development of the student and the mentorship relationship itself.

This article did not address what would be the most appropriate substitute if a “like” mentor is not available. As there was no other literature found specific to the needs of physically challenged individuals in a mentorship program which supported or refuted this opinion, this brought up the question of whether not providing a mentor at all was preferable to providing a mentor who did not share the mentee’s culture, gender, disability etc. From the benefits of mentorship that were described throughout the literature and discussed earlier in this review, such as increased confidence, self esteem, personal and professional development, it appeared that a dedicated mentor who is unlike their mentee may be preferable to no mentor at all.

#### Arguments against the importance of likeness to the relationship.

The literature reviewed primarily supported providing students with supervisors

and mentors who are from similar backgrounds. However, there are arguments put forth in the literature supporting the view that providing like mentors or role models for minority students may encourage favouritism and what one author referred to as tribalization (Wolfe-Devine, 1993). “Tribalization” in this instance referred to the maintenance of rigid cultural or gender boundaries. This would provide the mentor and mentee with a very narrow, cultural or gender specific view of their professional experience and could limit their ability to develop an understanding of a working relationship with the larger community.

Wolfe-Devine’s (1993) opinion appeared to bring a one-sided view of human relations as they apply to professional relationships. It overlooked that tribalization also happened with white male advisors or mentors and their white male students, and thus begs the question if tribalization is not a natural consequence of developing a close advisory or mentorship relationship with a student, regardless of what cultural, ethnic, or gender issues are at play. If this concept of tribalization was indeed exclusively the result of a relationship in which the mentor and student were from the same cultural and ethnic group, did it enhance the learning experience or was it a hindrance and, therefore, how important was cultural or ethnic similarity in fostering a successful learning or mentorship experience?

Another perspective on the importance of “likeness” in the mentoring relationship comes from Segal (2000). Rather than discuss the importance of providing mentees with “like” mentors, he discussed some of the social and political reasons why working with a “like” mentor was not always possible. He presented a factual point of view rather than dealing with this issue from an emotionally charged perspective.



Segal (2000) presented other reasons for this natural inclination to be drawn towards a “mirror image” mentoring partner. He stated that because mentoring results in sharing of more than “objective information” including hopes, fears, dreams and other personal data, mentoring someone other than your “mirror image” could cause problems in the work place. For example, because males continue to hold the balance of power in most work places, mentoring a female employee can be misconstrued as sexual interest. This causes most men to avoid mentoring women. They discriminate against women employees to avoid harassment claims that these mentees may bring against them if the mentoring relationship does not achieve the desired results.

Fear of harassment charges is not the only factor impeding individuals from mentoring other than their “mirror image” (Segal, 2000). Fear of being charged with discrimination has stopped some white males from mentoring minorities or women. For example, because in an effective mentoring relationship one might discuss potential barriers to advancement and ways to deal with them, questions and discussions around colour, religion, culture, gender and other factors could come up. Segal acknowledged that these discussions could be productive and helpful for both the mentor and the mentee because they were learning from each other. However, if the relationship did not work out, the employee could turn the discussion against the mentor. For example, a mentoring pair may have discussed an issue such as assertiveness. They may have agreed that it is more socially acceptable for a male to show assertiveness than a woman. If the relationship ends badly, the female mentee may claim that her male mentor discouraged her from being assertive in the work place, reducing her chances of promotion. The easiest way to avoid these situations is to avoid mentoring those other than mirror

images.

Other issues that may come up between mentoring pairs and could be as equally damaging were asking questions such as plans to have children, the impact of religious beliefs on career choices etc. (Segal, 2000) All of these situations are risky for mentors who were mentoring those other than their mirror image. Honest conversations about human differences or family plans could have legal risks because of provincial and federal workplace laws. Conversations on gender or race would less likely be an issue when mentoring a white male. Segal offered the opinion that in order to encourage mentoring across racial, ethnic and gender lines, companies and institutions should establish formal mentoring programs. This is because formal programs could set rules and regulations regarding meeting places, mentoring contracts outlining expectations and parameters for intervention. These programs may be closely monitored by a third party or co-ordinator and consent forms might need to be signed if necessary. Thus, there may be a greater measure of protection for both parties involved than in informal, natural occurring mentoring relationships. These formal programs could also protect the participants from harassment or discrimination claims and encourage more global mentoring relationships.

#### Other characteristics important to building the relationship.

Some of the literature reviewed suggested that there were other characteristics and issues besides those raised by cultural, ethnic and physical ability differences which were brought to the relationship by both the mentor and mentee and which had an impact both positively and negatively on the development of the relationship. In a study done by

Kucker and Haensly (1990), it was found that students and novice teachers acting as mentors cited possessing similar professional philosophies as critical to the success of their relationship. Students found that a warm and caring personality in their mentor, and the ability to trust the mentor were among qualities that were of primary importance. The study also found that having a mentor who shared easily, was a good listener, and provided moral and emotional support along with resourcefulness and one who had a real interest in being a mentor and was able to take the time to meet were also important to the student when evaluating their mentor (Krucker & Haensley, 1990).

A study from the social service sector discussed the mentorship relationship between professionals in the community and teen mothers (Zippay, 1995). The mentees who participated in the study indicated that their contact with their mentors centred on the discussion of personal issues such as families, boyfriends, or parenting, issues related to continuing their education and future career opportunities. The characteristics that were cited as being important to the success of the mentorship relationship were friendliness, warmth, supportiveness, and lack of criticism when offering advice.

The results of the Zippay (1995) study showed that the mentorship program was successful, in that 17 of the 20 participants completed their high school education and went on to post-secondary vocational development education. It also reported an increase in the participants' abilities to expand their social network beyond that which they had when they first entered the program. This suggested that mentorship relationships had a positive impact on the students' sense of accomplishment and their ability to overcome obstacles in order to reach their goals. This example of the mentorship relationship appeared to have shown how the pairing of inexperienced individuals with those who

have more professional (and life) experience can broaden the personal expectations of the student. In this case, the mentorship relationship was a life-altering experience and was not dependent upon “likeness”.

Qualities of mentors in failed relationships in the study cited above were those of criticism, control, envy or rejection of the student (Zippay, 1995). Characteristics of students involved in a failed relationship included being demanding of their mentors time and resources, being arrogant or clinging.

### Benefits of the Mentorship Relationship

The benefits of participating in a mentorship program have been well documented in the literature. The benefits for the mentees included: increased self-esteem, sense of self worth, confidence in their chosen professions, job satisfaction upon graduation, research productivity and a greater chance of initiating leadership roles in their professions. Researchers in this area found that individuals who lack mentors in their professional development did not realise high academic or professional achievement (Zippay, 1995).

Some authors believed that professionals who have benefited from participation in a mentorship program would have more to offer their profession and their client base (Collins, 1993). From these opinions expressed in the literature on the benefits of participation in a mentorship program, it appears evident that ensuring that all individuals in professional development programs have access to mentors should be an important responsibility, not only for the educational institution itself, but for each professional in the community as well.

Research suggested that there have been high financial benefits to implementing mentoring programs in our schools and business sectors. The cost of keeping a student in the school system would be approximately \$3,400 to the Canadian tax payer as opposed to \$61,000 per year to maintain an individual in the prison system (Carr, 1999). This would not imply that all individuals who did not complete their high school diploma become involved in crime. However, research indicated that they may be twice as likely to become unemployed which could result in becoming involved in criminal activities to meet the needs of daily living. (Frank, 1996). Based on the benefits suggested in the literature, these costs could be reduced through the use of mentoring programs. For example, research showed that more employees successfully completed their probationary periods, have increased job satisfaction, and stayed in the job longer if they were involved in a mentoring program immediately upon hiring. In addition, there may be greater enthusiasm, camaraderie and professionalism which positively affected the entire culture of the organisation (Williams, 2000). In support of mentorship programs in the work place, Segal (2000) stated that effective mentoring often makes the difference between a “good employee and a great one” (p. 1).

### Social Exchange Theory

The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of those who participate in a mentoring relationship can be explained in part by social exchange theory. The basic principle of this theory is that “ individuals have goals which can be met only by affiliating with others” (Wrightman & Deau, 1981, p. 158). Through interacting with others, individuals constantly evaluate the advantages and disadvantages or costs and benefits of

participating in a relationship. This evaluation is ongoing and is affected or influenced by the individual's personality characteristics and other factors in his/her life that are important to him/her (Smith, et al., 1986). This comparison of benefits and costs might be influenced by past experiences. If the relationship is evaluated to be of more benefit than cost to the individual, then he/she will continue on with it. Conversely, if the costs outweigh the benefits, the level of dissatisfaction with the relationship is greater (Wrightsman & Deaux, 1981). Therefore, the individual who is experiencing a significant level of satisfaction in a relationship is likely having their goals, expectations and needs met. In this case, it would be logical to expect that the relationship would continue to a positive conclusion.

### The Paradox of Mentoring

There were many reasons why people volunteered to become mentors including their own life experiences, wanting to give back to their community, or altruism. (Carr, 1999) Most mentorship programs required the mentor to commit to orientation meetings, training seminars, reporting and supporting other mentors. The reality was that these activities were time consuming. The individuals who were most often considered to be the best choices for participation in a mentorship program did not volunteer because of lack of time to allocate to volunteer activities. This dilemma was considered by Carr to be the mentoring paradox.

The other side to this paradox was the recruitment and selection of youth who were thought to benefit most from a mentoring relationship. Carr (1999) suggested that the individuals most likely in need of connection with an adult mentor was unlikely to

volunteer. In order for intentional mentoring to be successful, it would have to be attractive to the targeted mentee group. This could be done through partnerships with community service groups who had already made connections in the targeted community. By reflecting the culture in which the targeted individuals were functioning, an environment of trust and respect was more easily established. For example, if the individual was functioning in an organization where team-work was valued, mentoring would reflect a reciprocal or partnership relationship.

### Summary

The literature that is available on mentorship in a university setting is limited, and thus indicates that further research is necessary to understand the complexities of this unique relationship within the university setting. Longitudinal studies in this area are still required in order to provide evidence of mentorship's long-term benefits to the social work profession. However, the literature presented on the value of mentorship in a variety of settings and with diverse population groups indicates that these programs are not only valuable to the mentor and student but to the rest of society as well. This study will review the concepts put forth in the literature about which individual and relationship characteristics are important to ensuring its success. It will also compare the social exchange theory with the study findings in an attempt to explain the results.

Canadian studies on mentorship are extremely rare. Yet there are Canadian mentorship programs at the university level in a variety of professional faculties. In order to ensure that these programs are developed in ways to ensure success to the participants, research needs to be undertaken. It is important in understanding the various aspects of

the relationship between mentors and mentees, as well as in developing a program model and training framework. Providing potential program participants who are unfamiliar with the mentoring concept with some guidelines as to what the relationship might look like and a concrete model on which to base the development of their own relationship has the potential to enhance the mentorship experience. Providing some insight into the development of a mentorship relationship and suggestions for future mentorship training programs in this regard are the primary goals of this research.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### Introduction

Marshall and Rossman (1999) indicated that “qualitative methods have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for the social sciences” (p. 9). Qualitative research methodology is gaining acceptance as a valid tool with which to undertake research in all sectors of social science.

Franklin (1996) stated that:

Qualitative research methodologies are gaining acceptance within practice based disciplines such as family studies, marriage and family therapy, social work, counselling, psychology and education. Recent transformation in the philosophy of science, including increasing awareness of the limitation of empiricist/positivist research methodologies for the human sciences, have increased enthusiasm for qualitative approaches to research (p.242).

Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996) indicated that qualitative research studies people as they go about their daily lives in their natural environments. Understanding how people live, talk, behave and what interests them and causes them distress is also captured by the qualitative research method. They indicated that the most important aspect of qualitative research methods was that it brings meaning to people’s words and behaviours.

Qualitative research methods attempt to understand each mentor’s and mentee’s personal experience within the study objective. As the goals of this study were to

understand each participant's personal experience, the individual and unique qualities and characteristics that each brought to the relationship and what participation in the mentorship relationship meant to them on a personal level, the qualitative research methodology was an appropriate approach. This chapter discusses the methodological theories, methods and research strategies used in this research study.

### Qualitative Research Approach and Rationale

The aim of this study was to obtain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of the mentoring relationship. This included probing the personal experiences of those who had been involved in a relationship of this nature to understand how they benefited from being a part of the relationship and to tap opinions on how the development of the relationship could be expedited or enhanced. In order to obtain this in depth information, the qualitative methods of interviewing and observing were seen as appropriate research tools to ensure that the experiences of these individuals were understood from their perspective, and through their own words.

The foundation of qualitative research is the study of people in their natural environments, in the context of their daily lives. It aims to "understand how people live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them" (Tutty et al., 1996, p4).

Qualitative researchers work primarily from an inductive perspective; from the facts up rather than from theory down (Tutty et al., 1996). Qualitative researchers indicate that they do not work in ignorance of the knowledge base that has already been established on a study topic but are careful not to allow pre-existing theory or knowledge

to interfere with hearing the uniqueness of each participant's account or experience within the study. Therefore, qualitative researchers do not set rigorously defined questions and hypotheses before they begin a study but do undertake to research and be aware of the relevant literature base.

Setting a general goal, such as understanding the study participants' experience in the context of their own circumstances or natural state, is sufficient for a qualitative study approach (Patton, 1990). As I was interested in examining the themes that emerge from the individual mentors/mentees experiences and was not looking at specific pre-determined themes, the qualitative research method was appropriate.

Qualitative studies do not "limit or restrict themselves to the measurement of variables that can be measured in the same way for all participants rendering standardised information" (Tutty et al., 1996, p. 10). Therefore, this study had each participant share their own experience in the context in which it occurs. This information was used to understand and report on the unique experience of the mentor and mentee experience.

Qualitative research lends itself to the identification of the strengths, challenges, expectations, roles and personal gains of each participant in the mentee and mentor relationship. The anecdotal quality of qualitative research allowed for reporting each mentee's and mentors specific comments on their experiences. As the goal of this study was to examine the relationship between the mentors and mentees involved in the program, gaining a full understanding of the individual experience was paramount to the success of the study. Compared to quantitative research methods, the qualitative approach was more suitable for capturing and communicating human experiences. Aspects of the mentorship relationship may be too personal or complicated to be easily captured by

quantitative methods such as structured questionnaires or standardised measures. Qualitative methods, such as in depth personal interviews and field observations, provided “glimpses of the inside” (Franklin, 1996, p. 242). Therefore, by adopting these data gathering techniques for this study, it was hoped that the full understanding of the individual experience would be captured in the study findings.

Public acceptability of this research depended upon the credibility of the researcher and belief in the qualitative research methodology. Duplication of the study results was not a primary goal of qualitative research because each researcher had a unique relationship with the subjects, a different mind set regarding the study, employed a different study approach and interview skills, all of which would result in slightly different study results (Tutty et al., 1996). Therefore, it was not expected that the study findings would necessarily reflect all those found in the literature review.

Choosing an advisor and committee whose background and credentials are such that their colleagues acknowledge their expertise in the area will assist in acceptance of the study results by other professionals in the field . Working under the guidance of such professionals should increase the credibility of the study results (Kirby, 1981). Therefore, I chose Professor Esther Blum as my advisor for her experience in developing and working with the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Social Work mentorship program. Professors Atlanta Sloane-Seale and Laura Taylor were chosen as my committee members as they have both worked with and written on the topic of mentorship.

### Theoretical Base

Grounded Theory (Creswell, 1998) was a qualitative tradition that allows

researchers to develop theory based on data gathered in the field. It involved data gathering through interviews or field observations with as many people as necessary to ensure that categories were saturated. However, the grounded theory “logic of ongoing inclusion of groups” implied that the number of research interviews for the completion of this study could not be pre planned (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). This principle dictated that a new participant would be brought into the study based on the need for more data that was pertinent to the concepts or themes that evolved through prior interviews. This allowed me to build an understanding of the experience through the development of themes and subthemes that were based on ongoing analysis of data as it was collected. In this study, saturation referred to the appearance of similar concepts on a repetitive basis throughout the interviews, generating confidence that a theme was present.

### Research Design

The participants in this study were individuals who had taken part in the mentorship program during previous academic years. The mentees in the program were social work students who believed they would benefit from being involved in a mentorship relationship. The mentorship program would be open to all Social Work students. As at least 1/3 of social work students self identified as being from priority groups. The program’s mentors were social work professionals from the community who had agreed to support developing professionals from the social work program. The study participants were not dyadic pairs since there was a concern regarding confidentiality. It would be more likely that a confidence would be exposed if dyadic pairs had been studied. There was also an issue regarding availability of study participants as dyadic pairs. Finding

dyadic pairs to participate in the study was difficult as many of the mentees from previous program years would have moved from the Winnipeg area for employment or other reasons once they had completed the social work program. Therefore, it was likely that only the mentor component of the dyadic pair would have been available for participation in the study.

The number of participants interviewed was not pre planned, using the “logic of ongoing inclusion of groups” (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). Bringing a new participant into the study was based on the need for the inclusion of more data to support the evolving concepts and themes found in previous interviews. The interview process stopped when it was determined that a saturation of the themes was occurring; that is to say that similar concepts were repeated throughout the content of the interviews, indicating that a theme had been generated.

Data analysis was ongoing process throughout the research process. Preliminary concepts were labelled as they appeared in the data. Each transcript was analysed prior to embarking on the next interview. This allowed confirmation or denial that the categories found in the previous interview were possibly part of an emerging theme. By returning to previous interviewees to probe for more information around new emerging concepts, the importance of themes and subthemes was determined. Once the data was arranged in this way, the report writing process began.

Study validity was addressed through using a number of techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The range of data sources included interviewing participants from various age groups, cultures, levels of professional preparedness and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The key concepts found in the literature review were used for

comparison with the findings in order to confirm and disconfirm the study analysis and findings. Research participants were asked to confirm or refute my interpretations of their information as well as the interpretations found in the transcripts from previous interviews. Because I had been involved in a successful mentoring relationship in the past, it was important that my own opinions and biases on the topic did not interfere with my interpretation of the data. In order to avoid this, it was important that I was very aware of how I felt about my own experience, including how the relationship formed and was maintained, the benefits to myself and my mentor and the aspects of the relationship that could have enhanced the experience for both myself and my mentor. By doing this, I was able to monitor how my personal feelings and opinions influenced my interpretation of the data. Discussions around the interpretations of the findings was undertaken with my advisor during feedback meetings. Her insights were helpful in understanding the data collected during interviews.

### The Study Population

The mentee participants in this study were voluntarily selected from students who were involved in a mentorship program at one School of Social Work. As this mentorship program was open to any individual student who felt that they would benefit from involvement with a mentor, the mentees were students who were accepted into the Bachelor, Accelerated, Pre-Masters or Masters of Social Work programs at the university level. It was possible that students from minority or special needs populations could have been involved in the study as the mentorship program was administered through the Affirmative Action/Educational Equity office. The mentors were also selected voluntarily

from those who responded to a call for volunteers. Mentors were social workers from the community, either practising or retired. The participants were not dyadic pairs as was mentioned earlier. Therefore, this study was based on the experience of individual mentors and mentees who had participated in the mentorship program.

#### Study population selection process.

Approximately 120 letters were sent out to the mentees and mentors who were listed as participants in the mentorship program in the 1997 and 1998 academic years. As anonymity of the participants is a concern in studies dealing with human subjects, I did not have access to the list of names. Therefore, a volunteer who was not involved in the study sent out the letters. Twenty-nine letters did not reach their destinations and were returned. Posters outlining the study and asking for volunteer participants were posted in the student lounges and the Faculty of Social Work hallways. A call for volunteers was made at the mentorship orientation meeting at the beginning of the 1998/1999 academic year and at the Affirmative Action/Educational Equity meetings throughout the year. As a result of these actions, I received nine positive responses; 4 from mentees and 5 mentors. These nine individuals were interviewed during the course of this study. These were not chosen purposefully to be matched dyads and therefore, interview questions and probes were not meant to reflect the quality of specific dyadic relationships. However, some of the study participants may have been paired while taking part in the mentorship program.



## Research Process

### Preparation phase.

In preparation for the study, I reviewed my own experience in a mentorship relationship and did an extensive literature review as reflected in chapter 2. I was looking for information that confirmed my own experience as well as provided me with information on such topics as: the personal characteristics important for both the mentor and mentee to possess in order to ensure that a relationship could develop; the existence of a mentorship model to assist in developing the mentorship relationship; the importance for individuals in the relationship to share commonalities such as sex, ethnicity, physical abilities, or life experiences in order for the relationship to develop and come to a successful conclusion. This review helped develop the initial questions that I intended to use as a guideline for my interview probes. (See Appendix II for sample of Interview Probes).

### Data collection phase.

In this study, research focused on the experiences of individuals who participated in a university mentorship program in a professional faculty. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with participants. The introduction to the interview session outlined for the participant who I was, what my intention was for undertaking this particular research, and what I expected from them. Specifically, the expectation was to talk as openly as they felt comfortable with about their experience in the mentorship program. Demographic information was collected regarding gender, culture, and ethnicity, number of years involved in the mentorship program, university program year

for the mentee respondents, and number of meetings held with their mentee or mentor.

Each participant read and signed a consent that outlined the intention of the study, the roles and responsibilities of the researcher and the rights of the participant. Each participant was asked for permission to tape the interviews, or if they preferred, to have a verbatim transcript produced from interview notes. However, all agreed to taping the interview. Although I was prepared to present this consent form in alternative media, the standard, English version was sufficient for my study populations' complete understanding (See Appendix I for consent form).

The major data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with voluntary study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These interviews allowed for probing, redirecting, and summarising information provided by the interviewee, which resulted in the collection of rich, in-depth information. (See Appendix II a for sample of interview probe questions). The open-ended interview allowed the study participant to talk about his/her own experience. Probes were used to encourage the interviewees to expand on themes or information that they had already provided. This style allowed the interviewer to build rapport with the interviewee and reduced the perception of power imbalance. A more casual tone was set during the interview that resulted in richer information and opinions being gathered.

In this study, the open-ended questioning prompted the interviewee to expand on experiences and allowed the interviewer to identify themes that were presented throughout contact with the study population. These prompts were only possible as themes emerged from the data being collected. Sharing emerging themes from earlier interviews in subsequent interviews are a strategy used to check for the strength of the

themes (Rogers & Bouey, 1996).

The interviews were completed either at the participants' homes, in their work place or at the AA/EE office on the university campus. The location was determined by the convenience to the participants. As their time was voluntary and they all had busy work and school schedules, it seemed appropriate to accommodate their schedules as much as possible. Each interview took between one half and one hour to complete, depending upon the level of English that the participant had and how prepared he/she was for the interview. Many were able to speak their mind very quickly, while others, two individuals, who did not have English as a first language, took longer to express their thoughts.

The data collected during these interviews helped me refine the research questions, develop preliminary categories and concepts, and to gather information that would be compared to the content of the other interviews during the analysis phase, until saturation of themes could be reached. Nine follow-up telephone interviews of approximately ten minutes in length, one with each participant, were conducted to clarify some of the information gleaned their own personal interviews or to compare their comments with information gathered from others.

Reflection on information gleaned from the interviews was kept in an interview log (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The field diary contained information such as where the meeting was held, the date of the interview, the comfort level of the interviewee, the body language that indicated emotion or excitement during the interview. For example, when one interviewee was discussing her disappointment with her experience, her eyes filled with tears and she averted her eyes from mine, indicating strong emotion during that

particular part of the interview which could not be captured on tape. Another interviewee became quite animated, smiling and speaking with his hands, sitting forward in his chair, all of that indicated enthusiasm and excitement for what he was telling me. These were important notations for analysis as they added richness and personality to the statements. A better understanding of the study participant as an individual was gained.

#### Data analysis phase.

All the interviews were transcribed. After reading the entire interview transcription first stage coding took place. During this process, preliminary labels identified words or sentences that were meaningful on their own. These units were isolated from the remainder of the transcript by highlighting them with a coloured circle. This open coding system was done throughout the transcript, line by line. Preliminary interpretations were made in the margins of the transcript. From these provisional categories, new interview probes were developed for the next interview. This allowed me to confirm or deny that the categories found in the previous interview were possibly part of an emerging theme.

This process was repeated after each interview. Eventually, the common categories repeated themselves throughout the content of each interview transcription and a theme emerged. For example, one common category that presented itself in the initial interview was “busy schedules”. This concept was generated from the experience of the first interviewee and was enriched, expanded upon and verified during each successive interview. However, by probing each interviewee for more information around this concept, it became apparent that this category was a subtheme of a larger,

more all-inclusive theme, “making contact”. By combining the subtheme “busy schedules” with other categories and concepts related to the overall development of the mentorship relationship, the larger theme of “making contact” emerged. Due to the saturation of this theme throughout the interview process it was substantiated as significant to the phenomenon of the mentorship relationship. As these categories and the overall themes were repeated throughout the interviews, confidence in their significance was gained, and “making contact” was identified as a significant theme of the study with supporting sub themes such as “busy schedules”. Sub themes elaborated on subject of the main themes. Similarly, other themes and sub themes emerged.

This form of data analysis was based on the grounded theory method where the process set apparently related pieces of information, observations, events or activities under a common conceptual label. Concepts that were common to a similar phenomena were combined into categories or themes. If the concept was repeated, its relevance to the categories or themes was confirmed (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

### Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical concerns when dealing with human population groups, and especially groups which may have included special needs populations such as in this study (Kazdin, 1992). Invasion of privacy was defined by Kazdin (1992) as “seeking information of a personal nature that intrudes upon what individuals view as private” (p.390). To protect the individuals in this study from having their privacy invaded, anonymity and confidentiality was offered. It was not important for the researcher in this study to be able to identify the individual or to correlate the results of

the study with the name of the respondent. The information that was important to the study was the individual experience of being involved in mentorship.

One of the issues the literature discussed was the importance of having access to “like” mentors\mentees. Therefore, it was pertinent to know whether the participants shared characteristics of culture, ethnicity, and sex. However, it was not necessary to the study that the specific cultural affiliation or ethnic group, or specific disability group of the participant be identified. Therefore, these personal details were not identified in the study findings.

Confidentiality was respected by agreeing not to disclose specific information to a third party without the explicit written consent of the study participant (Kazdin, 1992). When the thesis research was written up, numbers were used when presenting individual information. For example, participants were identified as mentee no. 1, mentor no. 1 etc. There were some unique details or information relating to some of the participants that could identify them even under file number. As this information could not be further disguised to protect the participant’s identity, it was deleted from the thesis write up.

Informed consent was a pivotal issue when considering ethics in research design. Informed consent for this study consisted of three considerations: (1) competence; (2) knowledge; and (3) volition (Kazdin, 1992). Competence referred to the participants’ ability to make cognitive decisions and to give consent based on the knowledge that they have been presented with. Knowledge referred to the understanding of the nature of the study, the alternatives available, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. Volition referred to how the consent was given.

Competence was not likely an issue with a population of university students and

practising professionals as they would have to be adept at understanding the written word in order to succeed. However, ensuring that the participants had a full understanding of the nature of the study was an issue that needed to be looked at closely. Individuals were provided consent forms in a media or format that allowed complete and accurate access to the information. In the case of this study, consent forms were provided in written form in the English language. However, I was prepared to offer consent forms in alternative media. For example, if individuals did not have English as their first language, they would have been provided a consent form in their own language. Alternatively, an interpreter could have been provided to ensure that the nuances of the English language were not a barrier to their complete understanding of the consent and the study itself. Individuals with special learning needs, such as those with reading disabilities, would have been provided consent in auditory as well as written format. Blind individuals would have been provided either Braille or auditory consent forms. This would ensure that the participants were able to access the consent form independently, reducing the risk of having a reader or interpreter misinterpreting or misrepresenting the essence of the study and/or the consent form. None of these actions were necessary, as all of the participants fully understood the standard consent format. However, when planning a study that potentially involves special needs populations, these alternatives are important considerations.

Volition represented a consideration with a group of participants such as students. There may have been a sense of difference in power and status between researcher and the student (Kazdin, 1992). Students may have felt that if they did not participate, their success or progression through their studies could be affected. To ensure that they did not

feel obligated to participate they were made aware that the study was not funded by the university and was part of a fellow student's practicum or thesis. It was a peer study, not a faculty or university funded study. Insurance of confidentiality or anonymity also reduced fears for the students. Participants provided consent of their own free will, without coercion or duress. The participants took part voluntarily and they were able to revoke their consent at any time (See Appendix I for consent).



## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings**

### **Study Population Description**

All of the study participants were involved in the social work profession, either as practicing or retired social workers or as social work students. In total, there were four mentees interviewed and five mentors. Of the four mentees, two were in the MSW program (one in the first year of the MSW degree and the other in the pre master's year) and two were in an accelerated Bachelor of Social Work program (one in the first year while the other was in the second year). The accelerated program consists of students who have earned a university degree in a discipline other than social work. It is a more intensive social work program of studies requiring two years to complete rather than three years required for the regular BSW program.

All mentees in this study had earned previous degrees from a post secondary institution. Only one reported a previous experience as a mentee while another had participated as a mentor in another university mentorship program.

All mentee participants were female students and all but one reported that their mentors had been of the same gender. Two of the four reported that, to the best of their knowledge, they and their mentor were of the same culture and ethnicity. One indicated that although she and her mentor were of the same gender, she was unsure as to the ethnic or cultural origin of her mentor. The fourth reported that her mentor was of different gender, culture, and ethnicity.

The mentors were a slightly more diverse group; four were females while the fifth was male. Two of the mentors were professional social workers who were employed in the field of social services. A third was a professional social worker in a private

counseling practice. The fourth mentor was retired from the profession but maintained close contact with the social work faculty. The fifth mentor was new to the profession and was taking advanced social work courses.

The average length of time in the social work profession for the mentors was 17.6 years with the actual years in the profession ranging from 2 to 50. Four of the five mentors had been involved with the mentorship program for only one year with the fifth participating in the program for a third consecutive year. All of the mentors except one reported that their mentees were of the same gender but of a different culture and ethnicity to themselves. One reported a difference in gender, culture, and ethnicity.

The average number of meetings for mentees with their mentors was one. Most of the mentees in the study reported never meeting with their mentor face to face and only having contact with them through the telephone. As some mentors were working with more than one mentee, they reported meeting on an average of three times with each mentee. The actual number of meetings ranged between 0 to 6. It is important to understand that the study participants were not dyadic pairs and therefore, the difference in the reported number of meetings can be explained.

## Demographics Chart

**Table 1**

**Description of Demographic Characteristics**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Same Sex</b>	<b>Same Culture, ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Years in Mentorship Program</b>	<b>Number of Years in Social Work Profession</b>	<b>Social Work Program or Sector of Profession</b>	<b>Number of Meetings with Mentor or Mentee</b>
<b>Mentee 1</b>	No	No	1		MSW	1
<b>Mentee 2</b>	Yes	Unknown	1		Pre MSW	0 (multiple phone messages left for each other back and forth)
<b>Mentee 3</b>	Yes	Unknown	1		Accelerated BSW YR 1	0 (1 phone call consult)
<b>Mentee 4</b>	Yes	Unknown	2		Accelerated BSW YR 2	0 (multiple phone messages left back and forth and 1 attempted meeting – mentor did not show up)
<b>Mentor 1</b>	Yes	No	1	7	Private Practice	6 with 1 mentee and 5 with the other
<b>Mentor 2</b>	No	No	3	15	Mental Health	1 with 1 mentee, 5 with another, and 4 with the third
<b>Mentor 3</b>	Yes	Unknown	1	14	Independent Living	1 initial group meeting with 3 mentees and 0 with the 4 <sup>th</sup> . (1 telephone consult with 4 <sup>th</sup> mentee)
<b>Mentor 4</b>	Yes	No	1	2	Graduate Student	5 meetings
<b>Mentor 5</b>	Yes	No	1	50	Retired from Social Service	Approximate 6 meetings and attended practicum oral report – numerous phone consultations

### Thematic Summary of Findings

“One widely used approach to final analysis is the search for themes” (Ely, 1991, p.150). Throughout the analysis of the interview material, major themes and sub themes began to emerge as significant to the overall mentorship relationship. These themes and sub themes will be explored in this section of the thesis report.

### Main Themes and SubThemes

<b>MAIN THEME (MT)</b>	<b>SUBTHEME (ST)</b>
MT 1) EXPECTATIONS	ST 1) “I needed some direction.” ST 2) Clarification of Expectations
MT 2) MAKING CONTACT	ST 1) “We both had crazy schedules.” ST 2) Good Intentions but Low Priority ST 3) Taking Initiative
MT 3) THE EXPERIENCE	ST 1) A whole learning experience. ST 2) Someone from a different background
MT 4) ENHANCING FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS	ST 1) Helping define the program

### Main Theme 1: Expectations

Mentors and mentees came into the program with established expectations of the relationship. They all expected to benefit in some way from being part of a mentorship relationship. Most of the mentees cited wanting assistance with networking in the larger professional community, increasing their professional development, being provided with some help with decision making regarding areas of professional specialization, brainstorming with a more experienced social worker regarding ideas for a thesis or practicum, needing emotional support, and assistance navigating the university system itself as their primary concerns and expectations.

Most of the mentors reported that they expected to help the mentees clarify their needs and gain insight into their expectations of how the mentorship relationship could benefit them. They also expected to benefit themselves from the relationship by keeping in touch with the new ideas in training, and community resources that the mentees would be learning about through their university courses.

#### Sub theme 1: "I needed some direction".

Mentee 1: "I am new to the province. I don't know what agencies are here, not really sure what sort of things they have and probably a good idea to get connected with some people because I probably would be looking for jobs or whatever if I decide to stay here. So I thought a mentor would be a good place to start. I just

thought I needed some direction. What I was hoping for was if I was having times where I was struggling that I could have this person to meet with and hash things out with. I was interested in finding out the experiences of people that were employed in different areas than I had worked in.”

Mentee 2: “Looking for just more of a guidance, kinda guiding me through the steps cause I had been out of school for some time. I wasn’t familiar with the MSW program or what happens within the faculty, that sort of thing.”

Many of the mentees indicated that because they were very new to both the profession and the city itself, they were looking for guidance in gaining an understanding as to what their future employment opportunities might be and what might be expected of them as a professional social worker. Many had had some exposure to social service agencies but were unsure if they had an accurate picture of what working in these agencies as a professional would be like.

Mentee 4: “I needed someone around for like the career type advice.....I would like to know where social workers work, what the jobs are like, that kind of thing. Who hires.”

Mentee 1: “...students (peers) that you’re going through the program with, will often have a lot of the same doubts, the same questions, the same concerns, so you really can’t resolve anything with them for the most part. It’s almost better to talk to

someone who has had ten to fifteen years experience working for an agency. just to see where they're at and how they feel. If they can say 'you know what you are in school and it looks like this way but when you actually get into the working world, it's completely different or you know the agency you worked at was just not a typical agency that you come across,' and that sort of thing."

The mentors interviewed also held expectations of their role and the kinds of things they might be called upon to do in order to help their mentees with as part of their relationship.

Mentor 2: "I find too, that I could use my experience in terms of helping those who do not have the sort of contacts within the community. Networking."

Mentor 4: "I expected that my responsibilities would be to show the student kind of like how to use the bus system, how to use the computers, which I did."

### Subtheme 2: Clarification of expectations.

Many of the mentees indicated that, although they came into the relationship with expectations, they were not sure what assistance the mentors could provide to them, what their own roles were or what to expect from their mentor.

Mentee 2: "It really wasn't clear what a mentor could do for me....It wasn't even

clear in my own mind what a mentor could do for me.”

This was supported by the mentors who indicated that a large part of their role initially was to assist the mentee in understanding exactly what they needed or expected from the relationship. Most of the mentors and mentees cited this as the initial task at the beginning of the relationship. Working with the mentee from a perspective of understanding what their needs were was seen as part of the mentor’s initial task in building the relationship.

Mentor 2: “cause some students have the tendency when they sign up and they don’t know exactly what they want me to do for them. You as the mentor, you got to make sure you touch base with them, let them know who you are and what you can do for them. And sometimes they don’t know what they want and you walk along their path.”

Mentor 1: “The students didn’t even know what was expected from them or what they can expect from something like this...But basically if you want to try to help someone I think that probably more clarification of expectations is needed....if they can point out, you know, expectations and needs, as specific as possible...In the sense I think that you know, in this particular situation, I was really able to understand and know more about where she’s coming from and what she’s looking for...”



Although they required some clarification, the expectations that the mentees held regarding what involvement in a mentorship relationship could do for them appear to be similar to what the mentors expected their roles to be. From the participants interviewed, clarification of roles or expectations was an essential step in building a relationship. As evident below, agreement on roles and expectations is required or the development of the relationship is jeopardized and will likely not occur.

Mentor 3: "I didn't get the sense that the other lady (mentee) who was looking for information about the university program, I didn't think she was satisfied. She wanted me to give her the magic answers about what she should do now about this problem at the school of social work. And I didn't have the answers...She expected me to have the answers...I got the impression she saw me as the fixer. I offered her assistance in terms of helping her find the resources...it seemed that she wasn't satisfied with that...she didn't seem happy with the idea that I was just willing to refer her."

In this example of the mentorship relationship, there was confusion about role expectations for both the mentor and the mentee. The mentee appeared to expect the mentor to be available to answer her questions regarding all aspects of her academic program and assist in making career development choices. Yet her mentor did not agree with this expectation. Role and expectation confusion resulted in a breakdown of the relationship before it had a chance to develop and there was a perception of failure and frustration for the mentor.

Throughout this theme, it appears to be very important to both mentors and mentees that the roles and expectations of the relationship be defined or clarified at the beginning and that both agree on them before the relationship can progress to the next level. Without this clarification and agreement on expectations and roles the further development of the relationship is placed in jeopardy of failing.

### Main Theme 2: Making Contact

How the relationship was initially established was a major theme that emerged consistently throughout the interviews. How the expectations were developed or met appeared to depend upon how the relationship was established and maintained. All of the participants indicated that family, professional, volunteer and academic responsibilities combined to present a barrier to making contact and jeopardized the development of a meaningful relationship. Taking the initiative to ensure contact was established appeared to be the mentor's primary task in building the relationship.

#### Subtheme 1: "We both had crazy schedules".

The quote, "We both had crazy schedules" summarizes the difficulty that both the mentors and mentees encountered when attempting to initiate contact and establish a relationship. The overall difficulty appears to be based in the fact that most of the study participants had extremely busy schedules. Most of the mentees were attending school full time as well as working on a part time basis. Some were working full time and

attending school on a part time basis. The mentors were carrying heavy workloads, attending workshops, or sitting on committees. Some were taking courses at the university or writing a thesis as well as acting as a mentor. These schedules left very small windows of time to be put aside for the purpose of making telephone calls or meeting with mentee/mentor counterparts. This is illustrated by the following quotations from mentees:

Mentee 1: “We actually had a difficult time getting together because he was out of country and the day I was flying home for Christmas is actually the day he was back and got a hold of me .... we ended up meeting after I came back, I think it was around January, February when we finally managed to get together... We both had crazy schedules.”

Mentee 4: “I got a message from that mentor once. And I had called three different numbers trying to get a hold of her like numerous times and it never happened. It took us a while to connect - when I did hear from her, our schedules were both really not good... Things were just getting crazy for me... I think she had just too busy a schedule.”

Many of the mentors indicated that although they had flexible schedules and tried to arrange meetings around times that were suitable for the mentee, meeting face to face was very difficult. One mentor indicated that problems making initial contact with his

mentee due to busy schedules were compounded by time management problems exhibited by the mentees.

Mentor 1: "...It is quite difficult to arrange meeting with people...she was really very busy with her courses - my intervention with her was very limited...I am quite flexible but she was extremely busy, extremely busy...sometimes you can't meet."

Mentor 2: "I find that it is hard to work within the sort of schedule cause of the exams and part time jobs and so on....some have major problems trying to keep up with their school work, kids at home....you play telephone tag sometimes a whole week, two weeks, three weeks before you can touch base...they have part time jobs, studies, one lived out of town and worked out of town...time management is a major issue and have great difficulty managing everything in 24 hours."

In conjunction with making initial contact a priority in a busy schedule, easy physical accessibility to one another appeared to be a factor in the ease with which an initial relationship was established. It seemed to over ride the issue of busy schedules and made it easier to place developing a relationship high on the priority list in a busy daily schedule. Two of the mentors who were very accessible to their mentees due to either a more relaxed life style or circulating in the same environment as their mentee, indicated that they found it very easy to connect and develop a relationship.

One of the mentors who reported no difficulty arranging time with her mentee was retired from the workforce. She indicated that she had a flexible personal and volunteer schedule that allowed her to arrange her time to suit her mentee's schedule.

Mentor 5: "I have been out of the field for many years. I keep in touch with the University and still volunteer in the community. I was able to reach her by phone right away and she just came over...we talked on the phone quite a bit."

The second mentor who also found that she did not have difficulty meeting with her mentee was a graduate student and was on campus during the day. This meant that both the mentee and mentor were readily accessible to one another. The mentor indicated that she found it very convenient to meet her mentee between classes or at the end of the day because she and her mentee were both involved in classes in the same building of the University. They often saw each other in the hallway or cafeteria throughout the day. This was helpful in making it easier to connect with one another on a personal level and subsequently developing a comfortable relationship.

Mentor 4: "We got to know each other - like I would go up to the (International) center on campus and have lunch a couple of times. We would see each other in the library and she would ask me to help her or we would decide to meet after class. It was easy to meet up when we just ran into each other all day long."

### Subtheme 2: Good Intentions but Low Priority.

Another difficulty encountered by the study participants when making initial contact and establishing a relationship was the fact that as the school year progressed, mentees became more involved in classes, work, volunteer projects and their own personal issues. This compounded the difficulty of meeting or connecting with their mentors and supported the need for making initial contact early in the school year if meaningful assistance was going to be offered and a satisfying relationship was going to be developed.

Mentee 2: “The mentor herself called me, she tried to contact me a few times and then I tried to connect with her and then I just kind of gave up and I didn’t have the time to connect with her because I work full time and I was attending two courses that kept me pretty busy and just never got an opportunity to talk to her.... I just got busier as time went by.”

Another reason why the mentors and mentees encountered difficulty developing an initial relationship and one which is directly related to busy schedules was placing the importance of making the initial contact low on the priority list of things to do. The mentees expressed a concern that building the mentorship relationship had not been a priority for their mentors. One mentee expressed the opinion that pursuing the relationship was not a priority because participation in the mentorship program was voluntary.

This same mentee acknowledged that although mentorship is a voluntary program and scheduling a meeting with the mentee may not take priority in a busy work schedule, the mentors must come into the program with good intentions to familiarize a novice social worker with the profession.

Mentee 4: “I think it’s hard because it’s volunteer, and these people go ‘oh, I’d like to be a mentor and I think that they have really good intentions but they get busy and that’s okay but then like I said it becomes very low priority.”

This was confirmed by a mentor who indicated that it is difficult to volunteer when she already had many other professional obligations:

Mentor 1: “I had other things going on so it is very difficult to volunteer for you know I am writing reports and, you know, I am the editor of one of our newsletters.”

The same mentor voiced the sentiment that the mentorship concept is a good one and that she had a genuine interest in working with social work students and helping them to develop both professionally and personally.

Mentor 1: “I was very interested in it (mentorship) and I said ‘Yes I would do it.’ And I thought it would be a good idea to share information and knowledge with students as they were going through the program. I was interested in helping them

with some academic development if that's what they wanted, I was also interested in helping them with some personal development or dealing with the stress if that's what they wanted."

A fellow mentor supported her in these good intentions.

Mentor 3: "I was very interested in it and thought it was a good idea to share information and knowledge with students as they are going through their program."

Both the mentors and the mentees acknowledged that the individuals who sign up to take part in this volunteer program do so with the intention of following through.. However, the both also talked about the fact that the mentors, in particular, are involved in other community and professional activities that sometimes take priority over their mentorship responsibilities. Mentees' schoolwork becomes a primary focus and priority as the course work load increases towards the end of term. Good intentions do not appear to be enough to ensure that the mentorship relationship moves through the initial development phases.

### Subtheme 3: Taking Initiative.

The opinion that a successful mentorship relationship was developed by making initial contact a high priority in a busy schedule appeared to be shared by the mentors



who were interviewed in this study. There was a consensus that the onus for making the initial connection was on the mentors. This involved initiating contact and arranging a meeting during the first semester when the mentee is new to the system and had many unanswered questions, concerns and needs. The mentors took their role very seriously.

Mentor 1: "I ... have the initiative to phone her, but you know...I don't expect her to phone me. .. you phone four, five, six times and leave a message and they never get back And so again this is very precisely why I understand that she will not take the initiative."

Mentor 2: "You see in order to be effective as a mentor, you can not sit and wait for the students to come to you. Once you have been given the list that you will be working with, it is your responsibility as the mentor to reach out to them. It takes a lot of time and a lot of energy, you play telephone tag sometime a whole week, two weeks, three weeks before you can touch base with the student, but once you are able to meet you find that you are able to work things out."

The mentors talked about the need to be flexible enough to fit into the mentees schedule.

Mentor 2: "As a mentor you have to have that flexibility, you have to be able to give that time, there is nothing if you sit back and wait for those to come to you."

One mentor discussed how he used a strategic method in order to ensure that he made contacting his mentee a priority. He approached contacting his mentee as part of his workday, using his day timer as a tool to remind himself every day to attempt to reach out to his mentee and arrange time with him/her.

Mentor 2: "I used to calendar every morning...you know if I didn't get a hold of them today, I phone the next day. So the first thing next morning and I'll continue to call everyday until you touch base.... You as a mentor, you got to make sure you touch base with them, let them know who you are, and what you can do for them."

One mentor did not take the initiative or assume responsibility for developing the relationship or maintaining contact with the mentees nor did she have easy accessibility to them. There was no contact after the first group meeting and she expressed a sense of personal failure and discouragement through her body language when discussing her experience. She talked about finding it difficult to meet the mentees when they lived in different parts of the city and she herself did not live near the University or have access to a car. She questioned whether her approach to mentorship in some way deterred the mentees from contacting her. She thought she had made it clear to the mentees that she was there for them but did not follow up with them after the initial introductory group meeting. She indicated that in her opinion, the onus for developing and maintaining the relationship was on the mentee; it was the mentee's responsibility to contact the mentor as required.

Mentor 3: "I told them it was their responsibility to call me....Now I don't know if that was an influence on them not calling me back or not setting up another meeting or appointment...Certainly I made it very clear that I was willing to provide them with support and I never hear from them again."

This opinion and mentorship strategy stemmed from her professional experience of working in an environment that supported client independence and self-reliance. She indicated that in her opinion, the mentor's responsibility was to foster independence and help the mentee find resources for themselves. Therefore, she left the responsibility for ongoing contact to the mentee. However, she also acknowledged that this tact appeared to deter the development of a relationship with her mentees as only one of four contacted her for assistance when making a decision on taking a specialty course.

Mentor 3: "I wasn't willing to be everything for everybody...I wasn't prepared to do the kinds of thing initially at first where I was running all over the city."

Although her words did not fully express it, during the interview, the extent of her disappointment with the experience was exhibited by the way she was sitting with her arms crossed and facing slightly away from me during the interview. This body language became more closed as she drew her arms more tightly around herself when talking about not having all of the answers for the one mentee who had contacted her after the initial group meeting.

Busy schedules appear to have resulted in some mentees feeling as though their mentors were placing the development of the mentorship relationship low on the priority list. The mentors appeared to believe that as the school year progressed, the mentees placed continuation of the relationship low on their priority list. Not taking the initiative to ensure that the mentorship relationship was a priority, resulted in not developing or taking part in the mentorship relationship by either party.

### Main Theme 3: The Experience

The overall mentorship experience and relationship was perceived quite differently by the mentors and mentees who participated in the study. This can be explained in part by the difference in the number of times that the mentors reported meeting with their counterparts. The mentors, in general, met with their mentees on average 3 times while generally, the mentees reported not meeting with their mentors or meeting only 1 time. It is important to re-emphasize that these individuals were not dyadic pairs and the mentors interviewed reported working with more than one mentee which explains the different number of reported meetings. Another reason for the difference in the number of average meetings is that many of the mentors reported working with more than one mentee, meeting one time with one but three or four with another.

The mentors who took responsibility for initiating and maintaining contact throughout the relationship, regardless of how busy their own schedules were, all expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the end result which was a mutually satisfying relationship with their mentee. Words such as “collegial”, “exciting”, “interesting”,

“enjoyed” were words that the mentors used to describe their relationships with their mentees. The mentees, however, did not express satisfaction with their relationship even though they all indicated that they had taken responsibility for attempting to contact their mentors numerous times.

Subtheme 1: A whole learning experience.

Mentor 5: “Yes. It was great, it really went well, actually I really enjoyed it...she was such a bright and interesting person. This was a whole learning experience for me.....I found that it was very exciting.”

Mentor 1: “I was the teacher...but afterward, when we got to know each other, we were able to share.... We interchanged ideas.”

These mentors were quite animated when discussing the quality of their experience in the mentorship program. Their voices took on an excited tone and they leaned forward when talking about the benefits that they experienced through their relationship with the mentees. These benefits ranged from keeping in touch with the University program to assistance with brainstorming around solutions for their own professional case load to getting a new perspective on the profession and learning more about another culture.

Mentor 2: “I learn from the student and the student learns from me...It goes both ways... you had to not only give and take in terms of you getting something from them and them getting something from me. It also gives me an opportunity to be in touch with the University.”

Mentor 2: “ ...it was beneficial to me, very, very, beneficial to me and to them because I always ask them what’s new, you know, or sometimes - in terms of cases where I say ‘look I have so and so how shall we deal with this? What are you doing with this?’...one (mentee) was another resource and got me involved in a (community based) committee.”

The mentors in these examples are reporting mutual learning and benefits from their participation in a mentorship relationship. They reported that they would participate again in the program.

On the other hand, the mentees who participated in this study reported a very different perception of the experience. Unlike the mentors who reported meeting their counterparts many times throughout the year, the mentees reported meeting with their mentors either one time or not at all. This was due to either being too busy themselves to take responsibility for making the connection or having a mentor who did not take responsibility for maintaining the relationship or making the connection a priority in their own busy schedule. The result was the perception of an unfulfilling experience for the mentees as they were never given the opportunity to experience mutual learning or growth within a mentorship relationship.

Mentee 3: ...”(it) discouraged me that I didn’t get much out of it.”

Mentee 4: “No, I just thought as much as I am getting out of this, I can probably get on my own. .... I didn’t get much out of it.”

The mentees expressed a great deal of disappointment in their experience and indicated that they managed to work out their own difficulties and found answers to their questions on their own without the help of a mentor. None of them indicated that they would try to work within a mentorship relationship again.

Mentee 1: “I got that from my own peers (emotional and academic support) No. I didn’t feel I needed it. I was also a mentor last year and decided not to be a mentor this year feeling that I could do more volunteering....”

As the mentees were talking about their experiences in forming a mentoring relationship, their disappointment was evident. One mentee’s voice trembled as she described going to meet a mentor for a tour of the work place only to find that the mentor was ill and had not called the mentee to cancel or reschedule. This mentee appeared to be quite hurt by this; it indicated to her that having a mentee was not very important to this mentor at all.

Although the words do not adequately express the hurt, as she was speaking, her eyes became slightly teary and her face slightly reddened. There was emotion in her tone

and the disappointment was obvious as she spoke. This expression of hurt and disappointment is in direct contrast to the experience expressed by the mentors who were successful in forming relationships with their mentees. The other mentees seemed to express disillusionment with the process rather than hurt.

### Subtheme 2: Someone who came from a different background

All of the study participants indicated that they were of different ages than their counterpart and most indicated that they were of different cultural backgrounds than their mentor or mentee. With the exception of one mentor, who did not express an opinion, all study participants reported that the difference in age and cultural backgrounds enhanced the relationship and overall learning experience.

Mentee 1: "In fact, I think it was beneficial to have an experience with someone who came from a different background. He explained that social work in Canada now is really dealing with many different people. If you look at it that way, it was a learning experience all on its own. You know, seeing some of the issues that you hear about in class from another perspective. It was really good that way."

Mentor 2: "To be honest with you, and I am saying that too because I am from a different culture, I find that it was very exciting to me and to the people I worked



with...I was able to share a lot of experiences with them, you know, probably a mentor of the same age as in their twenties, may not have that kind of experience, may not be able to relate to some of the things that they were going through. And I find that was a plus in that respect.”

Mentor 5: “I had never met anyone from her country...I found it very interesting in terms of her personality and how sharp she was...That was a whole learning experience for me.”

The experiences varied greatly between those reported by the mentors and mentees. Although the mentees reported making many attempts to connect with their mentors and took the initiative to do so, their lack of contact led to the perception of the mentorship experience as unfulfilling and of little benefit. The mentors, on the other hand, felt that mutual benefit was reaped. Their sharing led to a perception of mutual learning and understanding.

#### Main Theme 4: Enhancing Future Relationships

Most of the research study participants provided their opinion on what steps could be taken to enhance the development of the mentorship relationship. Many of these suggestions revolved around the need to put mechanisms in place to improve the ability of the mentor and mentee to connect and establish a relationship. Other suggestions focused on expediting the initial phases of establishing the relationship by providing

both parties with a brief autobiography of the other, outlining interests, academic history, needs, and program/role expectations. Providing mentors/mentees with a detailed outline of what is expected of them, including time frames for initial meeting, minimal number of meetings etc was another suggestion.

#### Subtheme 1: Helping define the program.

All of the study participants provided ideas to enhance the mentorship relationship and to help make participation in the mentorship relationship a successful and beneficial experience for everyone involved. These ideas included such things as orientation meetings early in the school year where formal mentor/mentee introductions could be facilitated, more clearly defined program goals and role expectations for both the mentor and the mentee, providing the mentor with more background information on the mentee to assist them in understanding the mentee's needs. As well, adding more formality to the program was suggested, including mentorship contracts outlining time commitments. More dedication to the relationship from both parties was needed.

Mentee 4: "I don't know, Maybe assistance with meeting the mentor. As I said I called one of my mentors numerous times before she returned my calls and the other one never did. Maybe they need to be told up front that they are expected to call us within a certain time frame. Like right at the beginning of the year."

Mentee 3: “Well, it would make it easier to connect for the first time. You wouldn’t waste time phoning around. Maybe we could all be told what to expect like how many times we should meet or what types of things we could expect help with. You know, things like that.”

One mentor recommended that program evaluations be completed by both parties as a way of ironing out any problems in future relationships or building on successful relationships. The same mentor suggested that a specific meeting place be provided on campus for the mentors and mentees to use for their meetings. This suggestion stemmed from a previous successful mentorship experience where she met with her mentee at the International Student’s Center on campus. This easy accessibility to the mentee in an environment in which the mentee was comfortable, reportedly enhanced the development of the relationship in its’ early stages.

Mentor 4: “Maybe a formal introduction, yeah. What was helpful when I was a mentor at the International Center was ‘the center’. I could always go there to meet, so that was good, but as a social work mentor there was kinda no place to go. Like you know, the only chance you have is calling and maybe getting to see them.”

Another mentor suggested that rather than have a mentor assigned to a specific mentee, a mentor might be assigned to a class. She indicated that perhaps a mentor could come into the class and answer questions about the profession and, specifically, her/his area of practice.

Mentor 3: “I thought another way of doing this might be to ask professionals who are working in the field to attend classes, go to one class and talk about what I do as a social worker, how it works in the real world, answer some of the questions about my area of work and how does that operate and what are some of the dilemmas you run into in the whole area rather than me just working with three or four students who might need my particular support or help. If a number of people could do a presentation to a large group of people and it might be more helpful.”

Throughout the interviews, it appeared that the timing of the initial contact greatly affected the perception of satisfaction in the relationship for the mentee. Difficulty connecting with the mentor early on in the term resulted in the mentee having to work out most of their issues on their own or with their classmates who were struggling with the same problems and concerns. Most of them agreed that the first semester of school would have been much easier if they had been able to connect with their mentor early on when most of them had many questions and concerns that they needed help with. By the time the students spoke to or met with their mentor, they had managed to find answers to their questions from other sources.

Mentee 1: “I think if I would have met up with him in September/October it would have been really helpful. Especially being new to this city, being new to the province.....But really by that time (second semester) I was settled (and) I knew what was what.”

One of the mentors reflected this opinion when he told me that one of his previous mentees had indicated that meeting in the first semester when he had most of his questions and difficulties would have been most helpful.

Mentor 2: "...one (student) pointed out to me that if he had this sort of thing before it would have been much easier for him...like right at the beginning of his degree...because he had been through all his troubles already in terms of this and that..."

### Summary

The participants in this research study reported varied perceptions of their participation in the mentorship relationship. Primarily, those mentors who had numerous contacts with their respective mentees, found the experience positive and fulfilling, leaving them with the perception of having been part of a mutual learning experience. The mentees reported a much different picture. Their experience was one of disappointment and frustration because, for the most part, they did not meet with their mentors for a variety of reasons outside of the mentees' control. Both the mentors and the mentees reported the same difficulties making initial contact with their counterpart and subsequently, establishing a relationship. These included problems with time management, prioritizing mentorship involvement in busy schedules, and not being provided with clear guidelines regarding expectations and roles. Those mentors who did make initial contact with their mentees, agreed that they would participate again while the

mentees whose mentors were not as persistent or committed indicated that they would not participate again, feeling that they could get the support that they needed from their friends and peers. Making the relationship work meant taking the initiative to overcome the obstacles and connecting with one another. Recommendations to the program included provision of a neutral meeting place, providing more detailed backgrounds of the mentors and mentees to their counterparts, and more involvement by the program coordinator in setting up initial meetings.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of the Study Findings**

### Preliminary Remarks

The study has highlighted some factors and circumstances that may contribute to the success or failure of the development of a relationship between mentor and mentee. There are certain actions that can be undertaken by both the mentor and the mentee to help ensure a positive outcome to the experience. The research findings demonstrate that:

- 1) The busy schedules of both the mentors and the mentees can preclude the participants from making the development of the relationship and full participation in the program a priority. When there is a conflict in schedules between developing the mentorship relationship and the participants' work, school and family responsibilities, the latter take priority. This factor is compounded as the school year progresses and the mentees academic work load increases.
- 2) If mentors take responsibility for the development of the relationship with their mentees and maintain this responsibility as a priority in their schedule, there is a potential for a successful relationship. A component of "taking responsibility" is assisting the mentees to develop insight into what they need or expect from participation in the program. The mentees also must understand how the mentors can assist them in having those needs and expectations met.
- 3) The participants interviewed for this study were not of the same age, ethnicity

or culture as their program counterpart. According to the information gathered from the interviewees, this was not a concern to them nor did they feel that these differences in any way detracted from their experience. In some cases, these differences enhanced the positive aspects of the relationship and overall experience.

A fourth finding is directly reflective of the participants' thoughts on how the relationship could have been enhanced through changes to the program itself.

- 4) Both mentors and mentees indicated that more defined program guidelines and role expectations would have been helpful in providing them with a structure in which to build the relationship. This recommendation is reflected in the literature. Bell (2000) and Williams (2000) both discuss the importance of providing structured mentorship programs. Williams' perspective comes from protecting the parties involved from situations that might result in charges of harassment or discrimination, while Bell's perspective is that increased structure helps to ensure that the stages of the relationship are monitored and therefore there is an increased chance of success.

The findings above will be discussed in the following three sections: (1) social exchange theory and the mentorship experience; (2) characteristics required for developing a successful relationship; and (3) recommendations for future mentorship programs.



### Social Exchange Theory and the Mentorship Experience

The results of this study are consistent with some of the tenets of the social exchange theory. The mentees in this study were neither satisfied with the relationships that they attempted to develop with their mentors nor with the outcome of their participation in the mentorship program in general. They reported that their needs, expectations and goals for participation in the program were not being met. The primary reason cited for this dissatisfaction was that many of the respondents had not, in fact, been able to arrange personal meetings with their mentors until the latter part of the school year and in some cases, not at all. The cause was seen to be conflicting schedules between the mentor and the mentee, busy work schedules for them both, lack of mentor dedication to the program and lack of support or direction from the mentorship program.

Some of this concurs with the literature. It is indicated that mentors should be dedicated and committed to their responsibilities towards the mentee in order for the relationship to build. (Baran, 1992). The mentees in this study were accurate in their assessment as to why their relationships with their assigned mentors did not develop and therefore, were not successful. Many indicated that they were aware that they were not high on their mentors' priority list and that, in their opinion, the mentorship program was looked upon as a volunteer obligation that did not take precedence over paid employment or career obligations. The dedication or commitment to the mentorship relationship was not there and therefore, the experience was a negative one for most.

Many of the mentees were not able to articulate their goals or expectations, nor had they a clear understanding of what a mentor could offer to them. However, through the analysis of the interview transcripts it appeared that most required assistance with

“navigating” the university system, development of a professional persona, networking with social service agencies and prospective employers, academic assistance and emotional support. Developing a sense of their own needs and how to have these needs met was seen by the mentees to be a function of the mentorship relationship. As a relationship was not developed with their mentors, their needs were not met. Therefore, the benefits of continuing participation in the mentorship program were seen to be less valuable than the costs of disappointment at being a low priority, frustration, time wasted leaving unreturned telephone messages. In short, they were not satisfied or content with their affiliation with their assigned mentors and developed other means and support systems that met their needs and were more beneficial to them.

The mentees’ alternate affiliations included discussing their problems with peers who were experiencing the same doubts about their chosen profession, had the same questions regarding potential employment options, and who were attempting to “navigate” the unfamiliar university system. Although some of the mentees reported that this was not the optimum solution to their problems and it would have been more beneficial to connect with someone experienced in the profession, peer support was seen as their only option.

This result is consistent with the mentorship literature. Collins’ (1993) research indicates that the mentor is needed as a source of knowledge about career issues as well as to provide emotional support, assist with personal development issues, foster growth, and counter fears evoked by new situations and change. Similarly, the mentorship handbook that has been developed by the Department of Employment and Immigration Canada suggests that mentors support young professionals to develop personal ethics and

standards and assist in broadening career aspirations as well as personal interests and talents. From the writings of these authors, the expectations that the mentees had of the benefits that participation in a mentorship relationship could bring were realistic.

The mentees in this study found that they could meet their own needs without the assistance of a mentor assigned to them. However, they all indicated that meeting these needs would have been easier with the help of an experienced professional or mentor. One mentee indicated that she used community volunteer positions to familiarise herself and network with social service agencies in the city. This assisted her in gaining an understanding of potential job opportunities and to network with other professionals who might be important future contacts for employment. Net working was one of her identified expectations of being involved in a mentorship relationship. Although this mentee did not identify one specific individual in the volunteer placement with whom she connected, it may be that she was participating in a mentorship relationship that was not of a contrived nature. The literature does speak to the benefits of a naturally occurring mentorship relationship (Colins, 1993; Bell, 2000). However, whether naturally occurring or contrived, these relationships take time to build. As the mentees in this study indicated, they were not afforded the opportunity to meet with their assigned mentors, so they did not experience the benefits of a mentorship relationship.

The mentors in this study reported a much different experience than the mentees. Their experience is also consistent with social exchange theory. Because the benefits of participation were many for the mentors and the sense of satisfaction was great, they continued to participate in the program and perceive the experience as successful; the benefits outweighed the costs.

Contrary to the experiences reported by the mentees, the mentors in this study indicated that they felt it was their responsibility to remain committed to the development of the relationship and to continue to contact the mentee until a face to face meeting could be arranged. They indicated that it was their responsibility to remain as flexible as possible in their scheduling in order to respect the time commitments of the mentees. Looking at the development of the relationship as a priority and taking concrete measures to ensure that making contact was a priority in a busy schedule was considered the mentor's responsibility. Assisting the mentees in developing insight into what their expectations and areas of need were was also cited as a mentor responsibility if a successful experience was going to be realised by both parties. Drawing on their own experiences in the profession and in some cases, as graduate students themselves, provided mentors with added knowledge to guide the mentee.

The mentors in this study reported numerous benefits, both professionally and personally from their participation in the mentorship relationship. Amongst those cited were maintaining contact with the university social work program and updating their knowledge, having someone to discuss cases with, gaining a new perspective on their cases, and learning about other cultures. Learning about new or different resources in the city from their mentees was also reported as a benefit of the relationship.

These findings support the Role Systems Model of Supervision (Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977) more than the other models discussed in the literature. The Role Systems Model recognizes the mentor as having more experience and knowledge than the mentee. However, the mentor also recognizes the student's knowledge is superior in some regards and the relationship is enhanced through mutual sharing of knowledge

(Wijnberg & Schwartz, 1977). This mutuality results in a richer experience and greater realization of benefits, both through professional and personal growth.

One mentor reported an unsuccessful experience. This mentor did not take responsibility for the development of the relationship and, contrary to the recommendations in the literature, placed the onus on the mentee to maintain contact and ask for assistance when he/she needed it. She did not assist her mentees to develop insight into what their needs might be, nor did she offer alternative resources to them. Although this style of mentoring was based on her own professional experience, it sabotaged the development of the relationship. Her approach might have been perceived by her mentees as disinterest or lack of support or commitment to the relationship. It may also have undermined the mentees ability to develop insight into what they needed or expected from the relationship and therefore, their ability to ask for assistance. Many mentees may not yet have developed the confidence, self esteem or communication skills to initiate or maintain a relationship with an older, more experienced professional with whom they had not had any past professional or personal experience. Therefore, risk of rejection might have been greater than the possible benefits to the mentees in this situation. This example again supports the study results that highlight the need for the mentor to take responsibility for the development of the relationship.

For the most part, the findings in this study demonstrate that the mentors perceived the relationship as beneficial, exciting, interesting and enjoyable. Mutual learning took place. Therefore, according to Social Exchange Theory, these mentors would continue to be involved because the benefits outweighed the costs of spending time in another volunteer activity. Guiding a young professional and sharing their knowledge and

experience was valuable to them. The Role Systems Model with its emphasis on mutuality reinforced these benefits.

### Characteristics Required for Developing a Successful Relationship

Authors such as Zippay (1995), and Krucker and Haensley (1990) have discussed a number of characteristics that are important in the mentorship pair and the individuals involved in the relationship to ensure success. The results of this study both support and refute the opinions reported in the literature by these authors and others such as Wolfe-Devine (1993) who referred to “likeness” as paramount for success.

Throughout the literature on mentorship, the importance of “likeness” is discussed as an important characteristic required to match mentors and mentees for a successful relationship (Wolfe-Devine, 1993). The writings not only discuss cultural and ethnic “likeness” but also the importance of providing physically challenged individuals with “like” mentors or supervisors (Weinberg, 1978). Generally, the opinion is that a mentor who shares similar life experiences to the mentee will have a greater understanding of their “like” mentees belief systems, values, and relationships to authority figures and to the dominant culture. These may affect the mentees’ interaction with faculty, peer group or clients. Similar backgrounds assists the mentor to identify the student’s strengths and capitalise on these for enhancing the mentees learning experiences and their academic achievements (Gladstein & Mailick, 1986; Griffiths, 1977).

In addition, providing physically challenged mentees with “like” mentors would provide them a role model who has successfully dealt with prejudice, stereotypes, and public discomfort. Krinsky and Weinberg (1978) suggested that mentor role models

could assist the mentee in choosing or considering realistic career opportunities and examining strategies to overcome obstacles related to disability.

In contrast Zippay (1995) argued that “likeness” is not a necessary characteristic for developing a successful mentorship relationship. Other characteristics such as being supportive, warm, friendly, providing advice without criticism, and sharing a professional philosophy were stated as important. Being a good listener, providing moral support and resourcefulness were also reported as essential to the development of rapport and the overall relationship. Characteristics such as arrogance, being demanding or clinging were mentee characteristics that contributed to failed relationships. Krucker and Haensley (1990) added that being rejecting and critical were mentor characteristics that signified failure in the mentorship relationship.

The results of this study appear not appear to support the literature that refers to “likeness” as an an important characteristic in developing a successful mentorship relationship. All of the mentors with the exception of one were of a different ethnic and cultural background than their mentees. In fact, one mentee reported differences in all of these areas, gender, culture and ethnic background. All of the mentors and the mentees who actually met with their mentors indicated that these differences had not affected the relationship in any way. In fact, they insisted that the differences served to enhance the relationship. One mentor stated that learning to work with individuals of different cultures and backgrounds was necessary for social worker professionals who were expected to practise in a community that was becoming more multicultural. Working with a mentee or mentor of a different culture or ethnic background provided another learning opportunity which many of the mentor study participants indicated was exciting

and a benefit to the overall experience.

One mentee who was from a minority cultural group, stated that, while she was not sure whether her mentor was of a different culture or ethnic group, “likeness” was unimportant to her. Having someone who shared experiences with her and who assisted her with professional development issues were more important to her. This mentee’s attitude appeared to support the literature indicating that the personality of the mentor and the benefits experienced by the participants were more important to a successful relationship than similarity to their mentee (Krucker & Haensley, 1990). It is important to remember that the mentees in this study, because their relationships did not actualize, discussed their ideas about potential mentoring relationships

Most of the literature reviewed originates from the United States. The content differs from the results found in this study on the issue of cultural, ethnic and gender “likeness”. Although the number of participants in this research is small, I wonder whether the difference in Canadian and American political and cultural orientations may play a part in the different responses to individuals who do not share similar cultures, ethnicities or life experiences. This study’s participants viewed a relationship with someone who was different than themselves as an opportunity for learning and personal growth rather than as a hindrance to the relationship. Further research might explore whether this view of working with people different from ourselves is true for most Canadians. If so, there are implications for those of us who work in the field of social work, mentorship programs and in the area of disability to name a few. Helping peers and clients view associations with individuals different than themselves as learning opportunities could help diminish the effects of power imbalances, prejudices, and



stereotypes.

This study has put forward a few new insights into the interaction between the mentor and mentee, which may assist in developing relationships of mutual gain. Primarily, the need to give the mentoring relationship priority status in a busy schedule appears to be essential to a successful experience. Differences in cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, sex and age appeared to enhance the learning experience, or at the very least did not impact on the relationship in any reported negative ways. More defined mentorship program expectations and involvement at the outset of the relationship by the program coordinator was also a significant finding which was supported in the literature.

## **Chapter 6: Recommendations**

All of the findings in the present study lead to more questions, which should be considered when either developing mentorship programs or designing new research studies.

### Future Program Recommendations

The following are several recommendations to practitioners who are involved in the development of mentorship programs.

1. The initial meeting between mentor and mentee should be arranged by the program co-ordinator in order to ensure that it a) takes place and b) takes place early in the year. Most of the participants in this study express difficulty making contact with their counter part, thereby, jeopardizing the development of a successful relationship. Most indicate that meeting early on in the first semester of the academic year is important to the success of the relationship as it is in this early stage of professional development that most of the mentee's questions and concerns arise. It is also important due to the fact that a student's schedule becomes increasingly busy as the school year progresses and academic demands increase. This results in a decrease in the amount of time that the mentees have available to allot to making contact with their mentor.
2. Program co-ordinators need to define the program in terms of expectations and benefits for the parties involved. Most participants in this study express a need for

an outline of the responsibilities of each party, mentor and mentee. Specific guidelines around such things as the number of meetings that are expected to take place over the year and an expectation of the time frame for the initial meeting (first month of the first semester, etc.) would be helpful. This provides some guarantee to the participants that contact is likely to be made in a timely manner and that the expected time frames are to be respected.

Some study participants suggest a description of the benefits that other mentees and mentors experienced during past participation in the program be included in introductory guidelines. The mentees indicate that this would help them to define their own expectations and to develop a sense of the kind of assistance they could ask for from their mentor. This may help the development of the relationship by reducing the time that is spent on understanding what each expects of the other. The pair could then discuss the important issues, questions and concerns and develop strategies to meet the mentees needs more quickly. This could result in a more fully developed sense of accomplishment on the part of both the mentee and mentor.

3. An orientation seminar at the beginning of the year that outlines the mentorship process, program expectations and perhaps provides an opportunity for an initial meeting between the mentees and mentors would be beneficial. To accomplish this there must be increased administrative support to arrange meetings and to problem solve around issues such as difficulties making connections. This support, provided through telephone contact or follow up meetings, would ascertain whether the

mentorship relationship was progressing. Any difficulties could be mediated as soon as possible in order not to derail its development.

4. Another recommendation is to have a short biography of the mentee provided to the mentor prior to the initial meeting. The mentor would then have background information and insight into the mentee's specific situation and other responsibilities. It would also give the mentor an idea of what the mentee might expect or need from the relationship. It could also expedite the development of the relationship and allow the mentees needs to be met more quickly.

All of these recommendations are consistent with the literature. Cohen (1995) suggested that in order for a mentorship program to be successful, and therefore promote an environment for the growth of a meaningful mentoring relationship, program co-ordinators should develop an overall strategic program plan which includes: a) conduct recruitment campaigns that attract experienced professionals who have already achieved success in their own professional and personal lives. This will help ensure that the mentee will benefit from the richness of the mentor's experience; b) orientation seminars which are designed to promote, enhance and sustain the mentoring model of learning and to provide detailed information on the frequency and length of mentoring sessions, information on mentoring goals, mentee expectations and provide assistance to those mentors who are not fully aware of what the mentorship model of learning entails. All of this will assist mentors to transfer their good intentions into mentoring behaviours which will provide both the parties with a rich and fulfilling experience. Cohen further suggested hands on mentor training using techniques such as role simulation, observation

and feedback would assist mentors in developing their mentoring role. Mentors could practice their mentoring techniques under the supervision of someone more experienced and thus become more proficient at transferring their knowledge and experience to their mentee.

The recommendations for future program considerations that have resulted from this research appear to be consistent with findings in other studies cited in the literature review. Implementation of these recommendations may not be possible in some settings due to lack of funding for training new mentors and hiring program coordinators for instance. However, if funding were found, these recommendations could be tested out in a pilot project to further determine their usefulness. If the pilot project results indicated that mentorship programs were enhanced with the inclusion of the suggestions above, funding might be more easily accessed.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

Several suggestions for further research can be made based on the results of this study.

1. In this research the perceptions of mentees and mentors differed significantly. However, the participants were not dyadic pairs. Due to the difficulties encountered by the mentees interviewed, information about ongoing relationship is unavailable. Had I been privy to both parties experiences and perceptions a more indepth understanding of the mentees perspective might have been captured. It would be useful, then, to conduct further research that looked at the relationship of dyadic mentorship pair.

2. This study concentrates on individual experiences in one mentorship program. Many of the experiences with mentorship are very short. It would be useful to develop a longitudinal study of dyadic mentorship pairs who participate in a long-term mentorship relationship. This would provide a more complete understanding of the stages of the relationship and long term benefits of participating in a mentorship relationship. This information could be used to develop mentorship programs which foster long term, successful mentoring relationships. The findings might also offer concrete examples of the long-term personal and professional benefits of which could be used in recruitment efforts.
3. Participants of this study re-inforce the need for more structured mentorship program. A program evaluation design would be of benefit in this regard as outcome may provide more specific guidelines around the expectations and responsibilities of all involved. More information is required about the content of first time meetings between the mentor and mentee, the benefits of a pre-determined, central, meeting place, techniques for scheduling meetings and prioritising the relationship with ever increasingly busy schedules and the best ways of providing the program feed back on the mentorship experience.
4. The literature points to a number of characteristics important for a successful mentoring relationship such as similar ethnic and cultural experiences and

professional philosophies, having warm, understanding personalities, and respect for the knowledge and expertise that each brings to the relationship. However, most of this literature is based on studies from the United States. It is important to understand this issue from a Canadian perspective as we have different cultural and political backgrounds upon which our experience with and tolerance of other people is based. That these may be important differences has already been tentatively demonstrated in this study. Further research might yield results somewhat quite different from that found in the American literature which would be relevant to developing uniquely Canadian mentorship programs.

5. Following from some of the previous comments, a qualitative study exploring how Americans view working with individuals of different cultures, ethnicities, and genders as opposed to how Canadians view such situations might lead to interesting outcomes. It would appear from comparing this limited study with the available literature that there may be significant differences. If the results indicate that multiculturalism increases intercultural interaction and tolerance a case could then be made for increased funding to community based programs that provide education to the general public on minority issues.
  
6. A study that examined the mentorship relationships that occur naturally within a professional academic program might provide further insight into the

characteristics that are important to the successful matching of dyadic pairs in a structured mentorship program.

7. It has been proven throughout the years that mentoring in the professional arena does produce more confident, competent, and satisfied professionals. Therefore, it seems to be a logical step to provide students with mentors while they are in the initial developmental stages of their profession. By increasing their confidence and competence while in the training phase of their professional development, it would stand to reason that they would be better prepared to enter the job force and require less mentoring and training while on the job. This should reduce the costs of hiring young, inexperienced professionals, thereby increasing their employability and productivity. A longitudinal/comparative study which tracks the progress of students who have mentors throughout their academic development is needed. This study could look at areas of performance on the job when first hired and their sense of confidence in their professional abilities and compare them with young professionals who did not have access to a mentor during their academic training.

Several suggestions for future studies have arisen from the findings of my study on the mentorship relationship. Implementing some of the studies suggested should contribute to the limited body of knowledge on this topic and fill some of the gaps in the literature. Research specific to Canadian mentorship programs is particularly important,



not only since there is a dearth of Canadian Studies but also since there may well be differences in the attitudes and experiences of Canadians and Americans when issues of culture, ethnicity and gender are factored in.

## Chapter 7: Personal Learning

I wasn't sure what I had learned from this experience. At times, the only thing that I seemed to be learning was how to use the computer functions of cut, paste and delete. At others, I thought I was learning the art of patience and tenacity. As it turns out, these were part of the experience and contributed to the end result of three years of work.

### The Thesis Experience

The experience of developing, researching and writing a graduate level thesis was unlike any that I had participated in before. I found that I was not entirely prepared for the amount of time, work or frustration that was involved in the process. The first challenge was trying to find a model or sample from which to work when developing the thesis proposal. It did not appear that past students nor their advisors kept copies of these documents. Having never participated in any academic or professional program that required me to engage in this process, I felt very lost and without direction. No one seemed to be able to provide a concrete description of the proposal outline or exactly what information was required. There was a thumb sketch outline in the graduate thesis handbook, but it was of little help when it provided only headings without substance or description of content. There seemed to be many different opinions, depending upon whom you asked or worked with. After many, many drafts, I was finally able to understand what was expected of me. The next challenge was to implement the study proposal.

I was very surprised and disappointed to find that fellow students who were also participating in this process or who would be participating in it in the near future, were not willing to volunteer for my study. This made finding volunteer participants very difficult and

significantly delayed the data-gathering phase of the thesis. As participation in the study had to be completely voluntary, I was not able to approach classmates or make a direct request that they take part in the study. This was quite frustrating and resulted in a small study sample, which included only one volunteer from my class the previous year. I was disappointed as I felt that the graduate studies process demanded ongoing peer support if we were all going to complete our degree requirements in a timely manner. Perhaps if I had of started my volunteer selection earlier in the year when people were more enthusiastic about participating in academia, I might have had a better response and more support from my peers.

Once the data gathering and interview phase was complete, I found that I could not continue to work on my thesis. I felt as though I could not listen to one more tape or read one more transcript without feeling as if I was drowning in paper and process. I chose to put it away on a shelf for a while, even though I would miss my self imposed, and somewhat unrealistic, deadline for completion. Eventually, I knew that if I did not try to connect with the project again, I would not complete it at all. In my heart, I knew that I had given up too much both financially and personally, to let that happen. I had to develop a plan to reconnect with the process.

I began to carry my notes, tapes, computer disc and other thesis related paraphernalia around with me wherever I went. It came to work with me, rode around in my truck, came to the barn, went out for dinner and even went to a few movies. I was hoping to make it a physical part of myself; an appendage without which I would not feel whole. Eventually, this tact worked. Because it was with me all the time, people would ask me what I was lugging around and ask detailed questions about the process and my project specifically. That helped

me to begin the intellectual connection that was required if I was to continue on. Eventually, I was able to begin writing again and although there have been other minor periods of time when I have put it aside, I have always been able to pick it up again quite quickly.

I certainly experienced a great sense of relief when I realised I had only 50, then 30 then 20 pages left and finally the last period was put in place and I was finished. In a somewhat perverse and masochistic way, I miss it. I look up at the empty shelf or at the now flat brief case that was it's home for the past 1½ years and there is nothing there. I almost felt guilty when I placed all of the material in a suitcase, closed the lid, snapped it shut and pushed it under the bed. Almost, I say, but not quite. It was a unique and exhausting experience and one that I will choose not to repeat. I can breathe again after 3 + years of "higher learning" and finally, get on with my life. Or, should I say, rebuild my life outside of the restrictions and parameters set by an academic adventure (?) such as this.

### Serendipitous Insights

Throughout this experience, I continually surprised myself by my reactions to the various phases of this experience. I had never been aware of my ability to commit to a project and attack it in such an organised and methodical droid like manner. My dedication to completing this process before the millennium bordered on obsessive. However, having lived through the past three years with my classmates who were also going through the same process, I have come to understand that obsessiveness in this context is a normal personality trait.

I have experienced every emotion known to man from euphoria to abject depression. I have cried, cursed, and felt no emotion at all, depending upon how many times I had

rewritten that particular section of the thesis report. The one consistency has been my wonderment as to how I got here at all.

Twenty four years ago I started my academic career at the University of Winnipeg, heading for a degree in sociology and then social work at the University of Manitoba. During the first year, I was seduced by cultural anthropology where my dreams of becoming the next Diane Fossey or Jane Goodall were born. But as life would have it, I did not complete my degree, choosing to marry, have a child, divorce, become a single parent and change careers three times before I found my way back to social work. What happened to those dreams of the mountain gorilla and far away cultures?

They aren't that far away. When I look at my experience over the past three years in the Department of Graduate Studies, the similarities to my cultural anthropological roots is alarmingly clear. I have immersed myself in the foreign culture of higher academia. I have learned the new language of quantitative and qualitative research and political correctness. I have conducted a field study in the tradition of Margaret Mead and those who went before her. And dare I say, there have been a few chimps and gorillas along the way.

So rather than say I have abandoned my dreams of watching gorillas in the mist, I prefer to think of it as substituting the vines and trees of the jungle for the hallways and tunnels of the university, the great apes for the lesser apes (humans) and the study of culture to the study of self. I am satisfied with that; at least until the Leaky Foundation calls.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of being involved in a mentorship program in a university setting. The practical goal is to offer material that may be useful in developing program guides and for recruitment of future mentors and mentees.

Claudia Gavran, a social work student is conducting the study, with the primary assistance of Professor Esther Blum. Professors Laura Henley Taylor and Atlanta Sloane Seele are involved as part of the graduate studies committee and will be offering their advice and expertise.

You will be requested to participate in one interview. A second interview may be requested if clarification of issues arise throughout the study or if time constraints do not allow us to gather all of the information in one interview. During the interview, you will be asked to relate your personal experiences during your participation in the mentorship program. I will be taping the interview and typing it up as a written record of what was said rather than taking notes. However, if you do not wish me to use a tape recorder, I will take notes during the interview. The tape will be used exclusively for the study and will not be shared with other persons.

In my report, I will summarise common themes that come up during the interviews. I may use direct quotations from the interviews to illustrate various themes. However, the

comments will be altered to prevent your identity from being revealed or the essence of the information from being changed. Your comments will never be reported or quoted if there is a chance of your identity being revealed. Your name will not be used in the report.

You are free not to answer any questions or discuss any experiences that you are not comfortable with. No identifying information will be reported in the final report. All information gathered will remain confidential. These obligations will continue following the completion of the study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be penalised in any way for not participating.

Limitations to confidentiality involve any information that might arise where risk or harm to yourself or others is obtained. In this case, the intended victim and the police will be informed. Research will be terminated with you if it becomes apparent that participation in the study is causing physical or emotional risk or harm to you. Community resources to deal with any of these issues will be provided to you in this case.

You will be able to obtain a summary of the results of the study by contacting Claudia Gavran.

I agree to participate in the interview and have it used in the study report.

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NAME

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DATE

I agree to have my interview taped.

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NAME

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DATE

## Appendix II

### INTERVIEW GUIDE\PROBES (POSSIBLE)

As this is a qualitative research study with the purpose of exploring the individual experiences of the participants while involved in the mentorship program, standard questions will not be used. However, as specific themes have emerged in the literature, I may be using some probes in order to clarify some of the issues or concerns that arise throughout the interviews.

Some examples of the various probes I may be using are:

- 1) Some of the other participants talked about feeling uncomfortable contacting their (mentor or mentee) at the beginning of the relationship. I was wondering what your experience was.
- 2) What made it difficult (or easy) for you to contact your mentor (or mentee)?
- 3) Do you have any ideas about how this might have been made easier for you?
- 4) Some of the other participants in the study felt that it was important to have a mentor (or mentee) that was from the same culture as themselves. What was your experience?
- 5) What do think made it more difficult (or easy) to work with someone from your own cultural background? What were some of the advantages (or disadvantages)?
- 6) What are some of the main advantages of being involved in the mentorship program?
- 7) Are there professional advantages to being involved in mentorship?
- 8) I am wondering if there are long term benefits to being involved in mentorship. What is your opinion on this?
- 9) Some of the other participants felt it was important to work with a (mentor or mentee) that was of the same gender. What was your experience?

Appendix III

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION THAT WILL BE SOUGHT

1. GENDER
2. NUMBER OF YEARS INVOLVED IN MENTORSHIP
3. ETHNICITY, CULTURE
4. NUMBER OF YEARS IN UNIVERSITY
5. AGE