The Effects of Mentorship with Speech-Language Pathologists of Color on the Professional Readiness and Emotional Support of Undergraduate Speech-Language Pathology Students

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Abstract

Background: A lack of emotional and professional support may be an obstacle to success for students in speech-language pathology. As students navigate the rigors of their academic programs, mentorship can provide opportunities for growth and development. This study investigated the ways in which undergraduate students were supported for further study and professional engagement in the profession after being provided with guidance from speech-language pathologists (SLPs) of color.

Purpose: Using mentoring theory (Ragins & Kram, 2007) as a lens for data analysis, this qualitative study explored the ways in which professional mentors of color and their undergraduate proteges developed bidirectional discourses to help make meaning out of academic and professional concerns.

Method: Eight undergraduate students, four self-identified White students (three women and one man) and four self-identified women of color were assigned to four female mentors of color. Participant interviews were employed to explore the ways in which students were prepared for future professional engagement following a short mentoring experience.

Findings: Data suggested that students had a better understanding of the importance of excelling within academic pursuits as a result of their mentors helping to make practical connections to academic knowledge. Participants reported greater appreciation for issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and how they affect the profession of speech-language pathology. They acknowledged that the mentoring program provided them with a safe space for related discourses related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Finally, participants shared obstacles to effective mentor/protegee interactions (e.g., scheduling concerns) and the creative ways in which they were able overcome such concerns (e.g., technological interactions and virtual spaces for meeting).

Keywords: mentorship, diversity, equity, inclusion, SLPs of color

Situating the Study

When we first began our research, we planned to investigate the ways in which students of color could be effectively mentored by SLPs of color. Following our participant recruitment, however, a number of White students expressed their interest in being mentored. Embracing inclusion in its most fundamental form, we decided to match interested students with mentors. Our participating speech-language pathologists were eager to accommodate.

Half of our students self-identified as individuals of color and the other half self-identified as White. We wish to be transparent with our readers and acknowledge that our theoretical lens, mentoring theory (Ragins & Kram, 2007) was founded in work primarily exploring academic and professional support systems existing outside of a critical, racialized framework. We understood a need to understand how mentoring could be used to best support the needs of students of color. Although we make mention of mentoring research in a general sense, our literature review centers on the limited research that explores the implementation of mentoring our students of color. We believe that this topic deserves attention so that as a field, we can better understand the importance of professional mentorship. We argue that this can lead to greater diversity within our professional community by assisting in minority student recruitment and retention.

Our results and ensuing discussion reveal the value of incorporating effective mentoring into academic programs. Although our findings indicate that such support was beneficial for all students irrespective of racial and/or ethnic identity, we have noted race-specific differences in perceptions when they occurred. Comprehensively comparing these notions was not the focus of this project, despite this being an evocative and valid concern. Future studies can and should explore more in-depth contrasts between students and mentors when racial differences are noted.

Introduction

In the field of speech-language pathology, there are numerous culturally and linguistically diverse clients, yet there also exists a lack of diversity among clinicians and current speech-language pathology students (Rodriguez, 2016). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the updated 2020 *Profile of ASHA Members & Affiliates* found that 91.6% of ASHA member and nonmember certificate-holders in speech-language pathology identified as White (ASHA, 2021). Of the remaining individuals, 0.3% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.9% identified as Asian, 3.6% identified as Black or African American, 0.2% identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and 1.4% identified as Multiracial (ASHA, 2021).

Scholars have noted that there is disparity among the support provided by clinicians and the needs of the clients of color (Alicea & Johnson 2021; Dwivedi, 2018). Additionally, they assert that there is a striking absence of students of color at the collegiate level in the field of communication sciences and disorders. Although a number of potential barriers impact the success of students of color in education, it also appears that many non-White students have an overall lack of exposure and knowledge about the field of speech-language pathology as well as audiology (Mahendra & Kashinath, 2022; Richburg, 2022). This lack of exposure may result in a lack of knowledge and apparent interest in the field, thus contributing to the lack of diversity in speech-language pathology as a whole. McCoy et al. (2015) suggest that this issue is further complicated by the fact that many academic programs appear to be race-neutral and employ colorblind ideology. They note this may contribute to problematic practices and perpetuate a lack of diversity in the field.

According to a recent survey about demographics in the field of communication sciences

and disorders (CSD), approximately 29.5% of undergraduate students and anywhere between 10.5% to 21.3% of graduate students identified as a racial or ethnic minority (Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders, 2019). It is important that upcoming and current SLP students receive the support needed to better serve diverse clients.

Growing Population of Culturally Linguistic & Diverse Clients

Demographic changes within the United States have led to an increased need for SLPs to work with culturally and linguistically diverse clients (Narayanan & Ramsdell, 2022). Individuals who identified as being multiracial increased by 276% between 2010 and 2020, while individuals identifying as White decreased by 8.6% (Jones et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is estimated that more than 43% of children in the United States speak a language other than English in the home (Santhanam & Parveen, 2018). As a result of these shifting demographics, many clinicians are likely to interact with clients who have a linguistic and/or cultural background that differs from their own. Unfortunately, clinicians have reportedly been underprepared for working with clients of varying linguistic backgrounds and they typically lack clinical experiences with diverse populations while in graduate school (Maldonado et al., 2019). Taliancich-Klinger (2022) suggests engaging graduate students in clinical experiences early on with CLD populations in order to engage in culturally appropriate practice with increasingly diverse caseloads.

Santhanam and Parveen (2018) have noted that there has been a positive trend in the availability of educational resources for clinicians working with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They suggest that there has also been an overall increase in clinicians' willingness and desire to work with this population. There is a continued need for more clinicians who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to better

connect with clients from diverse communities.

Need for Representation in the Field

From the perspective of a student of color, the need for emotional and professional support may feel like an obstacle when it comes to navigating the field of speech-language pathology. In an opinion piece featured in *The ASHA Leader*, one clinician stated that, "*It seemed that the very things that attracted me to CSD—the opportunity to understand and celebrate diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—were absent from the field itself*" (Rodriguez, 2016, p. 1). As students of color navigate the difficulties of undergraduate and graduate school, Rodriguez further suggested that mentorship can provide opportunities for additional support. By supporting these students in their journeys toward their professional careers, we can better facilitate the inclusion of more diversity and representation in the field of speech-language pathology. In one study where students of color were interviewed regarding their pursuit of higher education, one student stated this regarding representation, "*They [teachers of color] care for me because I look how I do and because they do want me to do well…sometimes it is nice to have someone that represents you. You think, 'I can do that,' because you see someone who looks like you*" (Dwivedi, 2018, p. 22).

Concerns for Students of Color

Undergraduate students of color may benefit from direct mentorship from clinicians of color to help prepare them professionally and provide emotional support that would likely not be provided due to traditional higher-education pedagogies (Mahendra & Kashinath, 2022). Students in CSD programs are required to demonstrate knowledge and clinical skills in a variety of areas. The academic rigor associated with this mastery may further contribute to high levels

of stress at the undergraduate level. It has also been suggested that graduate students often experience anxiety related to taking tests, a high academic workload, clinical hour requirements, and the financial burden of being in higher education (Hyun et al., 2006).

A recent study that surveyed 126 students pursuing graduate studies in CSD, found that the financial burden inherent to graduate studies was a common barrier for those with low-income backgrounds (Fuse, 2018). Specifically, students of color who succeeded in getting accepted into a speech-language pathology major had support, internal motivation, and were financially stable (Dwivedi, 2018). Given the high stress levels and risks impacting success in graduate school, mentorship is a viable way to support students seeking a degree in speech-language pathology (Fuse, 2018; Mahendra & Kashinath, 2022).

Literature Review

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a powerful tool that creates opportunities for individuals to collaborate, share ideas, and help each other gain academic and professional skills. It can further be defined as "a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else" (ASHA, 2023, para. 1). A mentor may be someone who provides academic guidance and encouragement. Additionally, they may also provide social support and general guidance beyond academic needs (Crisp, 2010). Mentoring is not a novel concept. In fact, one of the earliest documented mentoring constructs first appears in the years 2635–2595 BCE when a man named Imhotep, a master in numerous fields such as architecture, health, and education, provided tutelage and

support for a number of proteges (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008). Today, mentoring can be seen throughout academic and professional preparation programs.

Current Research Related to Mentoring in the Field

Overall, current research related to mentorship by speech-language pathologists of color (SLPOCs) in the field of speech-language pathology is limited. Previous studies highlighted the benefit of community building between students of color and student-led initiatives to provide emotional support and a "safe place" (Alicea & Johnson, 2021; Girolamo & Ghali, 2021). It was also found that the presence of a college-educated role model positively impacted students' success in graduate school, regardless of their varying backgrounds (Fuse, 2018). Research has indicated that providing structured mentoring for students of color was beneficial in supporting their advancement in the field of speech-language pathology (Mahendra & Kashinath, 2022; Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008).

Professional Readiness and Emotional Support

Academic support can typically be defined as the support a student receives that helps to increase their potential for academic achievement. One study defined academic support as the environmental resources available to a student throughout the school day at a university (Robayo-Tamayo et al., 2020). Measures of this type of support included the students' perception of a professor's perceived ability to encourage class participation during a lesson and the level of concern the professor had for the students' academic performance. The study also found that when a student's perceived level of academic support was high, they were more engaged in the classroom and learning process overall. For the purposes of this current study, academic support will be defined as, "the mentee's perception of the mentor's ability to provide them with

information about the field of speech-language pathology, as well as answer questions related to academics and the career as a whole.

Some scholars have used the term "emotional support" to mean demonstrating active listening skills as well as having an empathetic demeanor (Klyver et al., 2018). In more academic settings, teacher given emotional support has previously been measured by looking at the teacher's level of sensitivity, regard for the students' perspectives, and the ability to create a positive environment while promoting students' autonomy (Romano et al., 2020; Ruzek et al., 2016). Of note, Ruzek et al. found that when teachers provided emotional support as defined above, students showed improved autonomy in the classroom. For the purposes of the current study, emotional support will be defined as the mentees' perception of their mentor's ability to provide empathy, foster positive interactions, share personal experiences and build a relationship with the mentee.

Importance of Advisement and Mentorship for Undergraduate Students of Color

Recent studies have started to highlight the experiences of undergraduate students of color and the barriers that impact their educational journeys (Allen, 1992; Boatman & Long, 2016; Dulabaum, 2016; Museus, 2009; Unverth et al., 2012). These common barriers include financial stress, reliance on financial aid with limited knowledge about resources available, lack of social support and various forms of racism faced in a higher education environment.

Dwivedi (2018) reported that having a solid foundation of emotional support can have a positive influence on a student and their decision to further their education. Students in this study noted that their cultural and linguistic background caused them to struggle with their identity and they were more reluctant to pursue a degree in speech-language pathology because of these

differences. One participant reported that connection to a mentor through a student organization provided the opportunity to learn more about the field of speech-language pathology through mentorship. Given the current absence of diversity in the field of speech-language pathology, there is much more that needs to occur in terms of recruiting and retaining students of color at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, such as increasing diversity among clinicians by engaging students in culturally diverse clinical experiences and classroom-based activities (Taliancich-Klinger et al., 2022).

It has been found that the type of mentorship provided to students of color may also be a barrier to their academic success. McCoy et al. (2015) noted differences that may exist between advising for students of color and their White counterparts as a result of "colorblind mentorship." They posit that this phenomenon occurs when White faculty advisors insufficiently mentor students of color by ignoring topics related to race, thus creating distrust between the students and advisors. They further noted that better mentorship is needed for students of color in higher education. However, there is a lack of research related to how these students are impacted by the differences that they experience.

One study described an effective model for creating an affinity group and mentorship for underrepresented undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in speech-language pathology programs at predominately white institutions (PWIs) (Alicea & Johnson, 2021). This study emphasized the lack of diversity in communication sciences and disorder (CSD) programs, as only 29.5% of undergraduate CSD students identified as a racial or ethnic minority. The percentage falls between 10.5% and 21.3% at the master's and doctoral level. By creating a group specifically geared towards supporting students of color in the field, students reported an improvement in levels of academic and clinical success and stress management. Furthermore,

students who participated in the program reported feelings of belonging to the CSD department and the institution as a whole. Students felt as though the affinity group provided a "safe space" where they could discuss their experiences as minorities. Similarly, student-led initiatives have been identified as a way to potentially support minority students in CSD programs (Girolamo & Ghali, 2021). Creating similar programs across other CSD departments could encourage diversity in the field and might help to support students of color pursuing a degree in speech-language pathology (Alicea & Johnson, 2021).

Due to the overall lack of diverse students and clinicians paired with the growing needs of representation of minority communities, providing appropriate mentorship is especially relevant. Mahendra and Kashinath (2022), designed a program providing structured mentorship to underrepresented students in the field. Participants consisted of undergraduate and graduate students who considered themselves to be underrepresented in the field of speech-language pathology. These students were then placed in one-on-one and small-group mentoring pairs with peer mentors, faculty, and SLPs in the community. It was found that participants found value in participating in a program that provided early exposure to prepare them for their career in health care. Specifically, it was found that students of color were able to better imagine a successful career trajectory for themselves.

Methods

Research Design

This project is a qualitative study of the effects of one-on-one mentorship with a speech-language pathologist of color on undergraduate students' emotional support and professional readiness. The data for this study were collected through structured interviews that were

conducted virtually with various speech-language pathologists of color (SLPOCs) across the country and undergraduate students in the Speech-Language Department at SUNY Buffalo State University. Each one-on-one interview was conducted independently. Students and mentors were interviewed separately in an effort to eliminate their responses from informing others' reports. Participants were obtained following a criterion-based voluntary process. Due to the nature of this study, randomized subject selection was not utilized.

Participants

Participants included four ASHA-certified SLPOCs and eight undergraduate students majoring in speech-language pathology. Four of the mentees identified as students of color and four students identified as White. The mentee inclusion criteria included participants who were undergraduate students majoring in speech-language pathology. Mentee participants were all at least 18 years of age. The aim of this inclusion criteria was to identify participants who had an interest in the field and intended to pursue speech-language pathology as a career. Inclusion criteria for mentors included being an ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist and identifying as a person of color (POC). All SLPOC participants were licensed in their state of practice. All mentor participants had completed their graduate studies and Clinical Fellowships. The aim of this inclusion criteria was to identify SLPOCs who could provide appropriate mentorship to students desiring to become speech-language pathologists (SLPs). No consideration was given to age or sex for this study.

Potential mentee candidates were recruited by graduate student researchers through email communication and announcements during meetings for the affiliate chapter of the National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing at SUNY Buffalo State University. Potential mentor candidates were recruited by the senior researcher through email

communication and announcements on a social media group for alumni of the Speech-Language

Department at SUNY Buffalo State University. Several individuals who initially expressed

interest in the mentorship program never completed an initial interview.

Participants were provided with an informed consent form which was approved by the

university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the initiation of the mentorship program.

Verbal informed consent for recording purposes was established during the beginning of each

interview. Participants were primarily matched based on their shared interest area(s) within the

field of speech-language pathology. Availability was utilized as a secondary criterion for

matching mentees to mentors. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to uphold privacy

and anonymity during data analysis. All of the participants' names used throughout the study

have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

Participants' Background

Mentee participants for this study consisted of eight undergraduate students enrolled in

the speech-language pathology major at SUNY Buffalo State University. Of the eight total

mentee participants, seven identified as female and one identified as male. The racial and ethnic

backgrounds of the students are as follows: two African-American or Black mentees, one Asian

mentee, four Caucasian mentees, and one Latinx or Hispanic mentee. The ages of the mentee

participants ranged from nineteen to twenty-eight. The majority of mentees were between the

ages of nineteen and twenty-one.

Mentor participants for this study consisted of four ASHA certified speech-language

pathologists. All four mentor participants identified as female and as African-American or Black,

with one also identifying as Latinx or Hispanic. The age of the mentors ranged from twenty-five

to thirty-seven. Specific demographic information for the participants in this study is displayed in the tables below.

Table 1

Mentee Demographic Information

Mentee Pseudonym	Age	Self-Reported Gender	Self-Reported Ethnic and/or Racial Identity
Blake	19	Female	Caucasian
Brianna	20	Female	African-American or Black
CeCe	21	Female	Caucasian
Courtney	21	Female	Asian
Logan	28	Male	Caucasian
Nayely	19	Female	Caucasian
Riley	19	Female	Latinx or Hispanic
Skylar	20	Female	African-American or Black

Table 2

Mentor Demographic Information

Mentor Pseudonym	Age	Years of Clinical Experience	Self-Reported Gender	Self-Reported Ethnic and/or Racial Identity

Ivy	37	1 year, 5 months	Female	African-American or Black
Lisa	25	3 years	Female	African-American or Black
Opal	27	3.5 years	Female	African-American or Black; Latinx or Hispanic
Tori	29	4 years	Female	African-American or Black

Data Collection

Mentees who expressed interest in the mentorship program were provided with an Informational Intake Form. Specific questions for the participants in this study are displayed for the mentees in Appendix A and for the mentors in Appendix B. This form requested information about the availability of the mentee and potential areas of interest within the field. A similar form was provided to mentors, inquiring about their current field(s) of practice and area(s) of expertise. After analyzing the acquired information from each participant, potential mentees were paired with their potential mentors based on shared interest(s). In the event that shared interests were not identified between individuals, participant availability was prioritized when creating mentorship pairs.

Three one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant, held separately from other participants, throughout the course of the study. This included an initial, midterm and final interview. The initial interviews were conducted prior to the initiation of the mentorship program. The midterm interviews occurred following the third meeting between each individual

mentor and mentee group. The final interviews were conducted at the end of the study. Each of these interviews were transcribed and coded for common categories. All interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom and were audio transcribed and recorded using Grain, an online audio transcription service. Specific questionnaires for the participants in this study can be found in the appendices of this article.

Following each one-on-one meeting between mentees and mentors, participants were instructed to complete a questionnaire on Google Forms. There were separate Google Forms provided to both mentees and mentors. Participants used their assigned pseudonyms when completing these questionnaires to maintain confidentiality and anonymity throughout this process. Each of these questionnaires were reviewed and coded for common categories. Specific questionnaire questions for the participants in this study are displayed for mentees in Appendix E.

The study was conducted over 6 weeks in the Spring 2022 semester. Each mentorship pair was required to meet one-on-one virtually for a total of seven times. Initial, midterm, and final interviews took place to record data throughout the progression of the study. Initial interviews took place in the month of January, prior to the beginning of the mentorship program. Midterm interviews took place in the month of March, following three one-on-one meetings between mentorship pairs. Final interviews took place at the conclusion of the study in the month of April.

Theoretical Considerations

The current study is grounded in mentor theory, which was proposed by Ragins & Kram (2007) as an expansion of Kram's work in 1983 regarding mentoring. Ragins and Kram (2007)

used mentoring theory to analyze data in their qualitative mentorship study. Mentoring theory is centered around various aspects of the relationship between mentors and mentees that lead to successful mentorship experiences. Mentorship can be structured in a variety of ways, including peer, formal, e-mentoring, group, leader and cross-organizational. E-mentoring stands for electronic mentoring primarily using email. It does not include video-calling platforms as noted in the context of this article.

When considering cross-race mentor relationships, several authors suggest that initiating interactions electronically may be helpful to avoid triggering stereotypes during the establishment of a relationship (Blake-Beard, 1999; Hall & Chandler, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). However, face-to-face interactions are considered optimal when continuing and developing a relationship. Factors like personality, race, ethnicity, gender developmental needs, career stages and relationship skills all influence the process and outcome of mentorship. The mentorship process usually occurs in mentorship episodes and may be based on developmental networks. These mentorship episodes can be defined as, "short-term developmental interactions that occur at a specific point in time" (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007, p. 662). Establishing a mutual and reciprocal relationship is also an essential component of mentorship. This occurs when both parties engage in bidirectional discourses that are perceived as equally beneficial (Russell & McManus, 2007). Challenges to mentorship may include minor problems such as poor communication, ranging to significant problems such as sabotage that damages the mentorship relationship. Other authors reported that mentorship pairs with complimentary personality traits were predictors of a successful outcome (Turban & Lee, 2007). It has been suggested that mentors entering a new stage in their career may be less able to help a mentee enter a new cycle in their career simultaneously (Hall & Chandler, 2007).

Several authors have posited that in cross-racial mentoring relationships, individuals of color may be expected to exhibit and assimilate to the behaviors of the dominant culture (e.g., Cherniss, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Behaviors that are expressed based on a non-majority culture are prone to be viewed as incorrect or indicate a deficit. The authors indicate that mentored interactions should be viewed as opportunities to facilitate emotional and social competencies required to successfully negotiate a diverse workforce.

Cherniss (2007) noted that mentors can serve as emotional role models. A mentor's ability to show compassion, empathy and care may allow for a deepened mentor-mentee relationship (Boyatzis, 2007). The process of mentorship is also likely to focus on work-life balance. Ragins and Kram (2007) noted that, "there may be a cyclical process in which the achievement of work-life balance in one partner changes norms and facilitates a spiraling process of reassessment that leads to more balance in the life of the other member of the relationship" (p. 666).

Although past literature has been focused on more measurable outcomes such as increased job performance and job advancement, several authors have expanded the outcome measures of mentorship to include aspects such as personal skill development, personal identity growth, relationship job learning, and personal adaptability (Allen et al., 2004; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Lankau & Scandura, 2007; Noe et al., 2002; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Mentorship outcomes involve high levels of personal development that may be expressed as growth in self-esteem, self-confidence, self-identity, psychological success, adaptability and self-awareness (Hall & Chandler, 2007).

There are many personal factors that contribute to mentorship outcomes such as mutuality, reciprocity, personality, and stage of development and stage of career of both parties.

Cross-race mentorship can be beneficial if stereotypes are examined and managed appropriately throughout the mentorship process. Challenges that arise from mentorship may be a result of poor communication or a personality mismatch. Mentors are likely to serve as emotional role models and may encourage growth in nonwork areas such as work-life balance, self-esteem, and identity growth. These antecedents to mentorship are critical to consider since each of these factors and topics greatly influence each mentoring relationship.

Data Analysis

Transcription

The interviews were transcribed and recorded using the online audio transcription service, Grain. Each transcript was reviewed to consensus among both researchers to ensure accuracy before coding for notable categories. Some utterances were debated before reaching unanimity while others were marked as being unintelligible with the symbol "XX" when the utterance could not be determined.

Coding

The data in this study were generated using principles of grounded theory outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research which allows researchers to make connections based on common categories that emerge from collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Neuman, 2006). After data were collected and transcribed from mentee and mentor interviews, codes were created and organized into emerging categories. The process of coding is defined in the following quote from Maldonado et al. (2019):

> "… as researchers explain, interpret, and provide meaning to the data, new theoretical
>
> ideas are formed and explored. In the current research study, the transcripts and field

notes generated by the participant interviews constituted a mass of data, which were then analyzed for organization into categories via a process known as coding" (p. 6).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a process that helps to verify findings from qualitative research. Previous research noted that analyzing the data from the varied perspectives of multiple researchers allows categories to appropriately emerge during the coding process (Denzin, 1978).   We engaged in triangulation by including four mentors and eight mentees of differing backgrounds and perspectives in our study. Each participant completed an initial, midterm, and final interview, resulting in three different interviews for each participant. Each of the interview responses was reviewed and coded, resulting in several central categories that emerged based on the range of responses. Each participant was required to fill out a questionnaire on Google Forms after each mentorship meeting, equating to six questionnaires for each participant. The data from the questionnaires investigated the research questions and added another level of crystallization. Saturation occurred when a common theme emerged across a multitude of participants. Following the analysis of data points into categories, the different viewpoints were organized based on their significance to the current study. The collaboration of several authors from varied racial, cultural, and gender-based backgrounds helped to enhance trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Results

The use of open-ended interview questions allowed participants to craft unique and unguided responses focusing on their experiences throughout the mentorship program. As previously discussed, data were transcribed and then analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

The following table provides an overview of the categories, themes, and sub-themes developed

from the data.   A more comprehensive presentation of the data follows.

Table 3

Thematic Analysis

MENTORING'S IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL READINESS

• Bridging the gap between theoretical construct and clinical application
  ○ Supporting academic knowledge and professionalism
  ○ Providing resources and materials to aid in growth/understanding
• Cultivating culturally and linguistically diverse perspectives
  ○ Engaging in DEI-related conversations
  ○ Serving culturally and linguistically diverse clients
• Supporting knowledge about a variety of clinical settings and practices
  ○ Engaging in discussion regarding ASHA's Code of Ethics and HIPAA laws
• Providing advisement related to the timeline of educational pursuits (e.g., graduate school application and Clinical Fellowship Year)

MENTORING'S IMPACT ON EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

• Fostering a personal connection with a professional in the field
  ○ Sharing mentors' personal experiences and challenges
• Developing a sense of belonging in SLP programs
  ○ Challenging imposter syndrome
  ○ Cultivating the presence of a safe space for challenging conversations
• Making connections related to personal struggles and support
  ○ Emphasizing the ongoing importance of mental health
• Relieving stress by providing reassurance

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP

• Acknowledging limited representation of SLPOCs in the field
  ○ Discussing mismatch between client population and clinicians providing services
• Recognizing goodness of fit within mentor and mentee relationships
  ○ Identifying difficulties related to personality and varying levels of understanding
  ○ Overcoming limited engagement by the mentees
  ○ Scheduling and time management
• Brokering meaningful conversation related to difficult topics

- ○ Approaching conversations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)
- ○ Creating a safe space for mentees and mentors
- ○ Demonstrating understanding of a variety of topics
- ○ Overcoming a lack of face-to-face interaction (virtual interactions only) with mentorship pairs

Existing Support

Academic Support & Professional Readiness

Results from our study revealed that students felt varying degrees of support from their academic faculty members. Although most students reported their appreciation for the concerns and efforts of academic faculty members, one participant expressed feeling more supported by their family than academic mentors. Several participants expressed that they felt supported in the CSD program, especially following the changes in instruction in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Logan stated that, "*I feel like if I need support…it's there for me. If I have any questions, people are willing to, like, hear me out and listen, and to answer the questions that I have.*" The return to in-person instruction was found to be beneficial in supporting academics of undergraduate students. However, several participants noted the desire to be more supported by academic instructors in the program. Participants noted feeling separation between students and professors and the absence of supportive relationships. Brianna stated, "*I just think that I'm not that close with any of my professors, like, that in a way…we could be supported more by the teachers.*" Participants discussed uncertainty in their knowledge of course material, resulting in anxiety related to furthering their academic pursuits. Courtney stated that, *"I'm really nervous and anxious that I'm not prepared enough."*

Emotional Support

Interview data from the mentees offered insight into the participants' level of emotional

support currently experienced before the mentorship program began. Students appeared to feel

the most supported by their family, social events on campus, as well as some sense of community

with peers. Brianna noted that familial encouragement was her most significant source of

support, stating:

> *I would definitely say my family. Um, they support me in, you know, helping me get through*
>
> *college and always, you know, saying little things like, "Oh, I'm proud of you and keep*
>
> *going," and things like that. I think I just feel very supported within my family and that*
>
> *also gives me the drive to actually, you know, go forward with college and make something*
>
> *of myself, you know?*

Another student shared her perspective on viewing her classmates as a form of community by

discussing how encouraging it is to learn alongside others in her class. In contrast, some students

also expressed that they did not feel emotionally supported by their advisors and professors.

After becoming frustrated with her academic advisor's lack of emotional support and belief in

her ability to succeed as a speech-language pathology major, one mentee said she used her

academic roadmap (i.e., a departmental publication that provided step-by-step instructions

related to graduate requirements and course order within the undergraduate curriculum at SUNY

Buffalo State University) independently and was hesitant to visit her advisor again. Brianna

expressed her desire for a deeper connection and level of emotional support with her professors,

stating that there's "*never been that much of a time to bond with them.*"

Motivation for Mentorship

Many mentees expressed the desire for hearing about their mentors' experiences in the field and learning from them. This is what Courtney had to say about her hopes for the program:

Gaining knowledge, gaining wisdom from the SLP and, um, just getting this opportunity to ask them any questions that I have or any concerns, um, you know, going forward and just kind of get[ting] a feel of how things have been for them in the field and their experiences, their ups and downs, and really just getting to know them as a person and an SLP and everything they've gone through.

Many mentees also stated that they wanted to learn more about the profession and viewed the mentorship program as a way to become connected to the field by connecting with their mentor. Mentees shared their desire to learn about specific sites such as a medical setting, since the classroom material at the undergraduate level is typically more focused on the educational side of speech-language pathology. CeCe stated her motivation for participation in this way: "*I decided to participate…because I love the field of speech therapy and I'm always excited when there's an opportunity to learn and become more immersed in the field.*" CeCe also cited the opportunity to learn from an SLPOC in particular by saying, "*I also chose to participate in this program to broaden my views on different backgrounds and diversities [sic] that will help me treat patients better in the future.*" Riley, who self-identified as a POC, also stated her excitement regarding being mentored by an SLPOC by stating, "*I think diversity is great, like having diversity and, you know, also working with women and I think…that'd be a good thing to have too.*" Mentees expressed participation in this mentorship program for a variety of reasons such as gaining academic knowledge and resources, making a connection to someone in the field, and having an opportunity to learn about a POC's experience in the field and diversity in client populations.

Expectations of Professional Knowledge

Academic Support & Professional Readiness

Among mentee participants, several categories related to topic-specific interests were identified as expectations of academic knowledge to gain through participation in this mentorship program. Several participants expressed a desire to learn about the medical field. They were particularly interested in treating clients with aphasia and traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). Other participants looked to the mentorship program as an opportunity to fulfill unanswered questions related to the field, exemplified by Courtney's comment:

> *Just getting this opportunity to ask them any questions that I have or any concerns, you know, going forward and just kind of get a feel of how things have been for them in the field and their experiences, their ups and downs, and really just getting to know them as a person and an SLP and everything they've gone through.*

Overall, mentee participants desired to make a connection with someone who was already in the field and to learn from their experiences as practicing clinicians. Nayely spoke about gaining a better understanding of the daily responsibilities of the profession, by stating the importance of building a relationship "*with somebody who's already working in the field, like present day, to be able to go to them and ask like, 'Okay, in this specific situation, what are you doing?'*"

Several participants expressed interest in learning from the perspective of an SLPOC, specifically as an avenue to diversify perspectives as future clinicians. Logan, a White man, discussed the importance of working with an SLPOC to help him better support his future clients by stating the following:

I think their experiences are really valuable, especially with the populations that we would

be working with and begin to have their point of view and maybe what they experienced,

like what they've seen in their work or growing up and all of that.

One mentee expressed her desire to see an actual therapy session with a client in order to learn more about what would be expected from her in the future. Furthermore, all mentee participants discussed that having a connection with an SLPOC mentor in the field would provide them with the opportunity to learn from the mentors' first-hand experiences in the profession.

Emotional Support

Mentees desired guidance and support from their relationship with their mentor in hopes of growing their connection over time in the program. On this topic, Courtney said: "*The knowledge and wisdom from the mentor, and just building those strong connections and foundations where you can grow with each other both personally and professionally and just learning all there is about the field.*" Skylar hoped that this mentorship program could serve to connect them to a mentor who could help them become more comfortable with being an SLP major and "*give me the inside scoop as to what goes on, like, so I'm more comfortable.*" Lastly, mentees commented on the desire for things to get easier as they progress to becoming speech-language pathologists, and the desire to learn how to advocate for themselves and for their clients in the future.

Role of Mentor

Mentees mentioned many characteristics about mentors that they greatly appreciated. In particular, several mentees viewed their mentor as being someone who could serve as a connection to the field, being someone who has already successfully navigated an academic

program in speech-language pathology. Blake said she wanted, "*… advice from a person who has been, you know, who has gone through what I'm going to have to go through.*" Blake also stated the following regarding conversations with her mentor:

> *She'll explain her day-to-day life and explain it in great detail… I think when I see it being explained to me day by day, step-by-step what she does throughout the day, it makes it really easier to visualize that this is what I want to do. So, I think that's been the most influential part of it for me, and she explains it in such great detail that it's like, "Oh, I can, like, see." Like, envision it in my mind quite well.*

Many mentees reported their mentor being willing to answer their questions and listen to their concerns. In fact, being able to answer questions about the field was one of the most common roles that the mentors fulfilled, according to the mentees. A few mentees also mentioned their mentor helped them reach their academic and career goals while growing in professionalism. Lastly, many mentees stated that they viewed their mentor as someone who would provide encouragement and resources for them at the undergraduate level. One of the mentors incorporated more visual resources, such as graphics and short posts on Instagram, since her mentee had voiced her preference for visual materials as a visual learner.

Professional Readiness

Professional Aspects of the Field

Several of the mentees wanted to learn about different clinical settings in the field of speech-language pathology. Many mentees mentioned learning more about the medical setting in particular, since most of the classes at the undergraduate level are more focused on the educational side of the field. Nayely noted that the "*most influential [part] would just be how*

much we've talked about, like the medical setting… she's really piqued my interest in it a lot more than I was already interested in it." Several mentees commented on receiving information about unfamiliar clinical settings throughout conversations with their mentors. Similarly, Blake shared this about her mentor:

> *She's just been really insightful about the medical aspect of this, which I want to work in. So, and I've been learning a lot of great things that I think it's better to know from a person who's actually working in the medical side of this rather than just reading it in our textbook or something.*

Mentees also learned more about clinically based information from their mentor's experience, usually in a variety of clinical settings. Along with that, a few mentors shared their "real-world" challenges that they have faced as SLPOCs in the field clinically. Skylar said, *"It's always nice to like know what we will go through. Like, you know, it's not always going to be like peaches and cream, rainbows and sunshine."* Some mentors also shared about how they interact with their clients by building rapport and emphasizing the importance of family/caregiver training into their therapy. Mentees were also informed about various aspects of professional development and professionalism. An example of a professional issue that was covered by one of the mentors includes going over ASHA's Code of Ethics (2015) and talking with the mentee about the importance of using a client's initials instead of a client's full name in order to stay in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA, 1996). A mentor also mentioned the importance of building rapport with professors, and also building rapport with clients in the future as well and comporting oneself in a professional way with professors. One mentor specifically addressed how to write professional emails to professors and how to conduct oneself in class appropriately. Additionally, mentors provided specific

educational materials about ASHA and information about professional conferences, such as the NBASLH National Conference. One mentor even shared information about student scholarships for the conference and encouraged her to apply while also sharing information about the conference itself.

Academic Support

Mentors also provided mentees with various forms of academic support throughout the mentorship program. Some of the mentors provided additional information and resources beyond class material, tutored studies in specific subject areas, answered questions about class material and helped mentees with building their resume. Logan even appeared to primarily view his mentor as a source of academic knowledge and support by saying, "*If I had trouble finding resources, she guided me in that direction to find the correct resources so I can get some homework done.*" Many mentees reported that their mentor supported them academically by helping with projects as well. The mentees also asked their mentors many questions related to academic topics. When reflecting on the fact that the mentees have many questions, Ivy connected it to the profession by saying: *"Asking questions is something that has to be done in the field as well. So, you need to be comfortable now asking questions because later on you're going to have to do parent interviews. You're going to have to feel comfortable being face-to-face and getting that case history."* This mentor provided insight for the mentees into the importance of professional engagement with clients and their families.

A few mentors also offered to review their mentees' resumes and offer changes in order to appear more professional and prepared. The mentors also emphasized the need for excellence in academic performance at the undergraduate level. Tori in particular stated:

I also really reiterated to them to like, while they're in undergrad and then…into grad school, like, treat this as a job. Like, this is your job…this is your main focus. Kill it. We are getting A's and A-minuses and that's it. I was telling them, I'm like, you need to, number one, you need to shoot for the stars with A's and A-minuses because you need to know your stuff…Number two, I was saying to them once you guys get into grad school, the lowest you could get is a B. If you get anything lower than a B, you're going to have to keep doing stuff over and over again and remediating quiz [sic], tests, homework, et cetera. Who's trying to do all that all over again? So, just know your stuff. Get it right.

This mentor in particular outlined the expectations that students would be held to in graduate school, and she encouraged them to obtain the highest level of success possible in their current classes to prepare for the future. Mentors also provided academic support by challenging the mentees to actively participate in class with both their professors and their peers. Specifically, a few mentors talked with their mentees about how to interact with their professors and peers in a professional manner. Ivy even suggested code switching when she said, "*I hope I helped them with understanding that the language that you use when you're with your colleagues and, you know, um, your professors is very different from the language used, you know, code switching and stuff when you're with your family or friends. So, just being mindful of being professional overall and trying to stay within those [sic] Code of Ethics.*" Mentors helped guide the conversations with their mentees towards topics related to professionalism and provided academic support in several areas.

Mentors Bridging the Academic Gap

Mentors often embodied the role of a teacher when interacting with their mentees. By providing clinical information and sharing their own experiences in the field, mentors were able

to give academic material a clinical application. The mentees often commented about the benefits of hearing their mentors' real-life experiences. Logan noted that:

> *I find myself, like, every week, that I learn something new in my classes. So, um, whenever I learned something but kind of, like, have a question about it, but forget to ask the professor or something, um, or thinking about it later. Uh, I just ask her during the week. I make a list. It's been good. She's been answering those questions for me.*

Blake even expressed her hesitancy to ask professors questions, and how her mentor was able to take on that role in some capacity during their mentorship meetings. She stated:

> *So, it's like either you have to do the research on your own or talk to the professor. But like, it's like, you don't even know where to go with that, even know how to start doing the research. So, it's like I'll just ask her a question and then she'll be like, "Oh, I do that all the time. I do that every day." Um, you know, yesterday. I asked her, "So how do you do the oral mech exam?" because like there's different ways of doing it. She was like- she did it step-by-step and, like, she actually showed me how she does an oral mech exam, which was, like, amazing.*

Courtney mentioned her lack of experience talking with a professional in the field by reporting:

> *I would say, just the most influential portion of this program is being able to talk to like a professional in the field. I haven't really had the chance to do that one-on-one yet, I haven't had that opportunity to get to know what it's really like to be in the field. So, it's just really nice to get that, that other side of that perspective. I haven't gotten that, so it's just cool to know what I'm working towards basically.*

Courtney also commented that having a connection between her current academics and being a future clinician has been beneficial for her by saying she now has:

> *Insight about, like, the writing that I'm doing in language acquisition right now…and like communication as far as, like, how that's going to relate when we get into the field. Like, what I'm gonna have to use those skills that I'm learning in both of those classes.*

Brianna also mentioned that her mentor reviewed the ASHA website with her and explained things that, "*she learned outside of the class that she didn't get taught in class and that, like, actually in the field that she learned.*" These experiences have been invaluable for her when it comes to making the connection between class material and being a speech-language pathologist. Blake stated a similar sentiment when she responded to what the most influential part of the mentorship program was by saying,

> *I would say, just the enthusiasm that my mentor had for her job and, like, with her clients and, like, you could tell, like, she really, really likes being an SLP. You know, she isn't there just for the paycheck. She is, like, she was telling me, like, you know, different trick[s] she does for certain things, you know, things that she does with her job, um, you know, explaining how…little things that you wouldn't learn from a textbook, from, like, an actual person with experience. So, I think that, and her telling me her experience makes me not so afraid, I guess of the field. So, yeah, that was pretty influential.*

The mentors also noted that they felt sharing their personal experiences in the field would be beneficial to their mentees since, "*It's not always going to be as black and white as a textbook.*" Overall, the mentors greatly saw the value in connecting their mentee's studies with their own experience. Ivy shared this by saying, "*I think the fact that in our field, we do need to come*

together maybe a little more and just help those starting out and not just think that the book work and the lectures are enough."

Graduate School and Beyond

Mentees were also curious about many aspects of graduate school including graduate school applications, coursework, and the expectations overall in graduate school. When reflecting on her mentee's desire to know more about graduate school, Tori said that her mentee:

> *"...really appreciates, like, me giving her a heads up on things that she wouldn't know, whether, you know, she wouldn't know, unless it came from somebody who went through it kind of thing. Because she was even asking about, like, how things go. Like, 'When do we do our internships? When do we do classes? Uh, do you have to do classes and internships at the same time?' et cetera, et cetera. I told her about the comps, research and master's project, the difference between those and you know, how one of those is required to graduate and things like that. So, she definitely did express gratitude, like, 'Oh, thank you so much because I wouldn't have known, you know, any of this.'"*

Moreover, many mentees also asked their mentors about the trajectory to becoming a speech-language pathologist including getting into graduate school, completing graduate school, completing the clinical fellowship year and beyond. Courtney said this about her conversations with her mentor, "*I think with her just being able to tell me like her experiences throughout it and like what grad school looked for her and her CF and where she's worked thus far and her experiences, I guess that's helped me kind of get an idea a little bit of like the field in general from somebody else's perspective.*" Several mentors also shared their own personal experiences about graduate school being competitive and stressful at times. One mentor reviewed the

requirements of the specific graduate program the mentee was applying to, and she guided her through the general application process as part of their meeting. In general, mentees asked many questions related to what graduate school would look like, and they asked their mentors about their specific experiences.

Emotional Support

A consensus among several participants was the role of rapport when establishing relationships within their mentees. Courtney stated, "*The first time we met, it was kind of just a "introducing each other" kind of getting to know each other…just so we were more comfortable*." Similarly, a mentor participant stated that they emphasized *"...trying to build that rapport and get an understanding of what, you know, kind of emotional support you can give to them*." Mentee participants reported that they appreciated having someone who endured similar academic experiences to listen to their concerns. Notably, Courtney also stated:

> *I was just telling her how it's really nice to have somebody to talk to about these things and someone to be like [listening] with you about everything. Just being able to talk about some of the struggles I've had so far going through my education. It's been really nice. She offered a bunch of advice and things that could help me…*

Similarly, mentees reported enjoying having somewhere to talk about mental health exemplified by CeCe stating, "*She wants to make sure that I'm still keeping my mental health in check too which is, I feel, really important. So, it's really nice to have that when I haven't always received that from professors or teachers and stuff."*

When discussing emotional support related to graduate school, mentors discussed providing counseling throughout meetings. Specifically, mentees reported that conversations

with mentors were beneficial in humanizing the field and providing support, especially

throughout the initial application process. Opal discussed the role she took on when addressing

her mentee's anxiety related to graduate school and progressing into their professional careers:

> *[I] like easing their concerns about, like, grad school and, like, real life…like, these girls*
>
> *or guys, whoever, are just, like, stressing out over things that are, they're trying to do, like,*
>
> *two, three years from now. Um, so I was just, like, telling them, like, how, like, the real*
>
> *world works and if, like, someone like me, who's, like, a Type B can navigate in this world,*
>
> *like, it's going to be okay. Like, everything's going to be fine. Um, so I think I liked that*
>
> *part and I feel like it. You know, the feedback that I got it. It's nice for them to talk to*
>
> *someone who is, like, in the field.*

Meetings were used to facilitate such discussions centered on easing concerns related to clinical

experience and gaining a better understanding of practicing within the field, according to several

participants.

Challenges to Successful Mentorship

Throughout the mentorship program, challenges related to meaningful conversations,

connection between mentor and mentee pairs, and personal differences were identified by both

mentee and mentor participants. Several participants expressed a desire for more structure and

guidance in topics of conversation. Brianna stated, *"[Sometimes] I don't even have any*

questions, or how can I keep this going? That's kind of like the little 'struggle.'" Mentors

expressed a similar concern related to mentee engagement and its impact on their own

participation in the program. Opal expressed, "*I think the engagement really affects, like, how*

much, like, I gave as well." This mentor went on to detail the inconsistencies between her

relationships with her two mentees as she felt more involved with the mentee who reciprocated her engagements.

Mentors identified goodness of fit and personality as factors that also impacted their relationships with their mentees. Notably, one mentee participant reported difficulty initiating conversations related to race due to their racial mismatch. Some mentors reported that their mentees' willingness to initiate conversation and prepare questions would impact the flow of meetings. Ivy explained that while differences may exist in one's level of extroversion, there is still the potential that not everyone is *"open to [mentorship] or has a full understanding of what mentorship is."*

The mentors' own knowledge and experience in the field was identified as a challenge when mentees desired to know about aspects of the field outside of mentors' area(s) of expertise. Similarly, the mentors' past experience in their educational and professional careers may differ from what was presently experienced by their mentee(s), creating a disconnect in shared experiences. Mentors specifically noted a difference in their own graduate school admission experiences compared to that of their mentees. Many mentor participants reported a need to be competent in several areas (e.g., academics, social engagement, emotional support, etc.) to appropriately support the needs of their mentees.

In terms of structure of the mentorship program, some participants expressed a desire to meet in person, citing that some methods of communication (e.g., texting, FaceTime) were more effective than others (e.g., trying to meet in person). Scheduling was an area of concern for some mentorship pairs, resulting in missed meetings and a prolongation of the program beyond the initial 6-week requirement. One mentor spoke of an instance of rescheduling a meeting due to distraction and a lack of enthusiasm from the mentee.

Use of Technology

The use of the technology was paramount to the success of this study, given that virtual platforms were used to broker the mentorship conversations throughout the program. Opal recommended many resources in a virtual form with one of her mentees who had specifically voiced concerns with learning from other materials since she was a visual learner. These virtual resources included informative Instagram posts/videos, podcasts, and YouTube videos. At least one mentee and one mentor met virtually using the iPhone platform FaceTime, as this was most convenient for her mentees. Most mentees noted that their mentors were available at any time for questions, and most mentors provided their personal phone numbers so that the mentees could text them. One mentor preferred contact through email as opposed to texting. Mentees tended to ask questions, confirm meeting times, or reschedule meeting times over text. In comparison, one mentor in particular used the texting platform to confirm logistics while also supporting them emotionally. This is what Blake had to say about her mentor's communication:

> *I think I feel supported because…she'll be texting me, like, throughout the week like, "How's the week going?" She'll want to know how my classes are. Not just like my speech classes, like my other classes and, you know, she wants to know like, "Oh, is there anything interesting that you learned in your speech classes?"*

Both mentees and mentors cited the frequent use of technology to continue communicating with each other throughout the week, and not just merely during their one hour a week mentorship session. When the mentees were asked if there was anything they would like to see changed in the mentorship program, there was a mix of responses in terms of technology. Many noted the benefits of technology such as convenience and being able to communicate with someone who is

in a different location. However, mentees also voiced the desire to meet their mentor in person. Riley noted the following:

> The only thing I would change is maybe in person, if we could do it in person. I mean, online is good…at first I did think it was in person and I was like, "Oh, that's cool I get to meet someone in the same time zone" and then I found out it was on Zoom and I was like, "Okay," but it's not that bad 'cause I think the past two years of COVID I got used to, like, stuff being on Zoom."

Other resources included PowerPoints created by the mentors and other professionals, articles, informational handouts, and Instagram posts/videos. The mentors used a variety of technological platforms and resources to support their mentees both academically and emotionally, along with using a virtual space to conduct weekly mentorship sessions. Overall, the use of technology appeared beneficial to this program.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Representation of diversity in the field of speech-language pathology is critically important, and mentees of color reported a significant lack of diversity in their educational careers. These students were eager to share their own experiences within their academic programs. They positioned themselves within these narratives as being "othered" and as outsiders. Courtney reported:

> I have grown up most of my life in America. You know, I do look different than my peers and people growing up, and so that diversity factor always kind of played a role in my life and it was kind of hard to sometimes be supported in that sense, just because I didn't have people around me that understood. You know, looking different can be enough…to make

> *you feel like you're different than other people around you. So, yeah, just the diversity*
>
> *aspect, having representation in the field itself.*

Statements such as this were frequently made by all participants of color. They seemed comfortable having these discussions and understood that their racial backgrounds were an integral part of who they were. Reports of isolation within academic and clinical programs were commonplace. They were easily initiated and openly discussed. When such discourses were noted within the recorded interviews, participants of color generally focused on their own lived experiences as people who had been marginalized within their professional community and society, more globally.

Although less frequently occurring, several White students were interested in diversity, equity and inclusion in the field. It should be noted that these discussions generally centered on these topics as professional issues or abstractions. They were not situated within their own lived experiences, nor did they share any of their personal encounters with racism, prejudice, or subjugation.

Nayely reported that she had conversations regarding allyship and diversity in the field and referenced an Instagram Reel where a White SLP invited an African American SLP and an Afro-Latina SLP to talk about racial discrepancies between colleagues and patients. Nayely stated:

> *We…took a few days and just talked about that and like allyship and…I learned a lot of*
>
> *things that I hadn't seen before, and I think that'll really help in my career so I could be a*
>
> *better co-worker and better SLP in general.*

Logan expressed the desire to know more about "difference versus disorder," especially when evaluating clients who speak African American English. Logan's mentor sent him a resource about how to recognize the features of that specific language. Logan also asked how to converse with family members about the languages and/or dialects they speak to better inform therapeutic practice. A meaningful exchange detailing the importance of honest and open communication between clinicians and their clients ensued.

White students in this study also articulated the benefit of developing their own cultural humility through a brokered relationship with an SLPOC. Nayely stated the benefit of having a mentor of color by saying, "*I honestly liked the whole thing how it was. I especially liked how, um, it was specifically from- with someone who is a person of color. I thought that was really good, especially so you can, like, see different perspectives."* Courtney expressed her desire to know more about, "*why there's a lack of diversity in the field and what could be done about it."* She also expressed her desire to explore issues related to diversity in the future by saying:

> *I would say this is kind of more like, focused on the promoting diversity aspect…this is my personal interest, but what like ASHA and what the profession of SLP can do kind of to promote diversity and support those who are, um, financially disadvantaged and like how they can help them. So, that, like, finances aren't really, like a make or break when deciding whether or not you want to pursue SLP. So, I think that's kind of interesting to think of and like what can be done to kinda go forward with that.*

Mentorship As a Success

Overall, numerous factors were identified as contributions to identified success within mentorship pairs. SLPOC mentors reported using meetings with mentors as an opportunity to

provide information related to professional information in the field. Several participants noted that successful mentoring was contingent on bridging the gap between academic and practical knowledge. When asked about the most influential portion of this program Courtney stated speaking to a professional who is already in the field gave her "*the opportunity to get to know what it's really like to be in the field*."

Consistent meeting times were identified as an important aspect of maintaining strong relationships, even beyond the requirements of this mentorship program. Several participants reported exchanging personal contact information with the expectations of maintaining the connection established through this process. In order to continue such conversations informally, the use of email and texting were identified as beneficial means of communication. One mentor expressed their pride in seeing their mentee accepted into graduate school and supporting them in their future endeavors. Opal, in reference to what they hope to see as their mentees progresses as a professional, stated, "*To me, like, if the mentees don't want to keep pursuing speech, that's totally fine because, you know, I just want them to be happy, like, with their decision as a person. Um, and I think this will help them decide*."

Throughout the program, the importance of established mentorship pairs was highlighted as a critical factor in outcomes. Tori expressed that despite differences between herself and her mentees, she believes that established a connection with one another and valued "*the flexibility that we have in how we can kind of make it our own as a mentor.*" In addition, mentors spoke to the self-reflection that occurred based on the connection that they established with their mentees. Opal stated this in relation to her relationship with their mentees, "*Um, so it's helping me see, like, how, like, what my own strengths and weaknesses are. Um, and, like, figure out my own feelings around, around like the SLPs and my job and clinical practice and all this stuff.*" Lisa

described this experience as being "*enlightening*," stating that, "*There definitely was a lot of, like, self-reflection, um, kind of stepping out of my comfort zone, talking about different things. So, I feel like overall, it has helped me grow as a person.*"

Goodness of fit between mentorship pairs was expressed to be a significant aspect of a successful experience with Ivy stating:

I mean, I just feel like, um, you guys did a good job as far as like, you know, I know that probably was hard with matching and I also feel like, I mean, I don't know if that was intentional, but giving me two different mentees on two different levels, maybe to see, you know, um, I just feel like that was good because it allowed me to see the needs of someone at different levels and kind of their thought process too, during that. So, I think that was pretty, um, good that I was able to see two different sides of a coin in a sense.

The informational intake forms (Appendix A and Appendix B), which were provided to participants at the beginning of the mentorship program, were referenced as an integral part of supporting the relationship between mentees and mentors. Brianna, a mentee participant, stated, "*I think that [the informational intake form] was a good idea because y'all gave me a good person to work with, because our- I guess, like, our answers probably kind of aligned. So, I think that like, definitely should still be the initial step…that is taken in this process*." Building relationships was expressed by participants as a contribution to success with Courtney stating:

So, overall, I'd definitely say that I had a really great experience with my mentor. Um, so myself and my fellow mentee and mentor, we were all able to ask questions and, you know, kind of express our feelings and concerns about a lot of things, which was really great. Um, because it allowed us to kind of, you know, work through the topics that we were talking

about and issues that we brought up together, which was really great. Um, because it

allowed me to like, hear their perspectives as well and then consider on- later on.

Riley expressed, "*It was nice getting to meet a new person and now, I have, like, somebody else I*

could connect to, you know, and could relate to someone who already went through, like, what

I'm going through. So, I think overall the experience was, like, it was nice."

Discussion

Professional Readiness

Mentees benefitted from many aspects of the mentorship program relating to professional

readiness and academic support. Mentors addressed information relating to topic specific

interests. These interests stemmed from class material for most of the mentees, while some had

questions about information not yet covered in their class material depending on their specific

stage in the undergraduate program. Mentees overwhelmingly cited their interest and perceived

benefit in hearing their mentor's everyday clinical experiences in the workplace. Specifically,

these interactions were beneficial in bridging the gap between their current academic knowledge

and how they will use that knowledge in the field. Undergraduate programs should consider

more ways to incorporate a mentorship program or access to speech-language pathologists as

mentors. Although some professors are still practicing in the field, there also appeared to be a

trend that students felt more comfortable asking their mentor questions than their professors.

This may be due to the one-on-one nature of the program, and the unique accessibility and

approachably exhibited by the mentors.

Many mentees were unfamiliar with the timeline to becoming an SLP, and some were

unfamiliar with the requirements for graduate school. Those who were familiar with graduate

school requirements were often intimidated and anxious about the process of applying and feared

rejection from graduate school. It is recommended that undergraduate programs continue or start

to educate their students about the timeline and requirements for graduate school by providing

information about it early on in their studies so that they can prepare appropriately.

The Code of Ethics appeared to be a helpful framework for the guiding topics provided to

all participants and this information was new to many of the mentees. Applying concepts from

the Code of Ethics in class material and a mentorship program should be considered for future

use. Many mentors also commented on the lack of professional skills some of the mentees

exhibited such as writing emails, interacting with professors, and engaging during class. Early

training regarding professionalism and professional development should be considered,

especially for students first entering their studies at the undergraduate level.

Emotional Support

Many important conversations relating to emotional support were noted by both the

mentees and the mentors. Mental health was of particular interest and was talked about by every

mentorship pair at some point during the six-week program. Mentees cited their appreciation for

their mentors listening to any concerns and checking in with them on a regular basis. Many

mentees also noted the various benefits of having their mentor ask them how they are doing

overall, and even having short conversations about topics unrelated to speech-language

pathology. This holistic approach taken naturally by mentors was well received by all mentees.

Self-care strategies were also covered by many of the mentors, and some of the mentors

encouraged the mentees to develop their own plan on self-care. This included activities such as

taking a break, taking a walk outside, organizing events using a planner, going shopping or

spending time with friends and family. This encouragement to, "allow you to feel like you're one with the world for a second, and you're not just consumed with all work" was noted highly among the mentees as a form of emotional support. It is recommended that undergraduate programs and mentorship programs should place a greater emphasis on acknowledging mental health concerns while also implementing mental health strategies and counseling for their students. Similar personalities between the mentee and the mentor pairs were also cited as contributing to the success of mentorship overall. Ragins and Kram (2007) also wrote about the benefits of complementary personality styles that may contribute to successful mentorship. Continued consideration for pairing mentees and mentors based on similar clinical and personal interests is considered.

Implications for the Field

Students' level of emotional and financial support from family and their school system as a whole, as explored by Dwivedi (2018), is an area of concern. The students of color in that particular study all discussed their previous experiences with microaggressions and blatantly racist comments made throughout their educational pursuits. These various experiences negatively impacted the participants' sense of self and their belief in their ability to succeed. However, all three participants were able to continue their pursuit of education through family support and belief in themselves.

Similar to the previously mentioned study, students in this mentorship program voiced their varying levels of support in their undergraduate educational experiences. Throughout the mentorship programs, participants expressed feeling supported in their relationships with their mentors. Specifically for the mentee participants of color, interacting with a successful SLPOC encouraged them in their own educational and personal pursuits. As students of color in CSD

programs have historically had difficulty with being provided with safe spaces within their

academic programs, mentorship with SLPOCs may provide necessary support (Abdelaziz et al.,

2021; Alicea & Johnson, 2021). The inclusion of SLPOCs in mentorship roles could potentially

affirm the experiences of students of color and lead to more conversations related to diversity,

equity, and inclusion (DEI). Notably, conversations related to diversity involving White students

were infrequent. These discourses primarily focused upon a lack of racial diversity within the

field rather than addressing issues of violence or (micro)aggression perpetrated against people of

color. Additionally, these brief conversations were clinically-oriented in nature (e.g., discussing

the observable dialectal variations associated with different speakers), rather than focused on

sociological or philosophical considerations of injustice experienced by members of

marginalized communities. White students appeared to lack the personal experiences associated

with acts of racial discrimination to actively engage these conversations like their fellow students

of color. Although a more comprehensive analysis of these data using a critical and racialized

lens is of significant interest, it falls outside the scope of this current paper. We freely

acknowledge the importance of this topic and we hope that future research endeavors will

explore this issue in greater depth.

Brokering conversations related to DEI may be difficult for a number of reasons.

Particularly, when a racial mismatch occurs between a mentee and a mentor, as discussed in

McCoy et al. (2015), it may lead to difficulties in establishing and maintaining an effective

relationship. CSD students may be hesitant to engage in conversations when they feel

uninformed about DEI topics, especially at an undergraduate level. As seen in this study, students

often waited until their mentor prompted these conversations. However, this phenomenon leaves

the responsibility of starting "uncomfortable" conversations entirely to the POC. Among students

of color and SLPOC mentors, the initiations of conversations related to diversity seemed to occur more organically, leading us to consider how this can impact the future of cultural responsivity in our field. Encouraging SLPOCs to share their experience and provide guidance may prompt an initial movement towards connectivity, although the responsibility of being a culturally responsive clinician must fall on the individual clinician. Training can be provided to support engagement and growth in such conversations among all individuals, not just people of color. The inclusion of DEI-related conversations directly into undergraduate CSD programs may assist in encouraging allyship in the field of speech-language pathology.

Limitations of the Study

During the recruitment process, 11 potential mentees were initially recruited for the program. However, three of the potential mentees expressed their inability to commit to the program prior to the start date, resulting in eight remaining mentees in total. Additionally, seven potential mentors initially expressed interest to the senior researcher via email. Ultimately, four mentors responded to the initial recruitment email and confirmed their participation in the mentorship program.

Throughout the interview process, both mentee and mentor participants requested the addition of a structured curriculum to the mentorship program. A list of guiding topics, structured based on ASHA's Code of Ethics (2015), was provided at the onset of the mentorship program. This resource was provided as a point of reference however, weekly conversation topics were determined by each individual mentorship pair. The structure of this program was intentionally designed to provide mentorship pairs with autonomy over their mentorship experience. Mentee participants expressed a desire to have a more active role in what content was discussed during their meetings. While mentor participants expressed a desire to have more guidance regarding

what topics they should discuss, as they felt as though the responsibility to facilitate meetings and conversation was based solely on them.

Communication barriers also existed with both the mentors and mentees throughout the mentorship program. Varying levels of inconsistent responses and response times led to a change in timeline of the program at the mid-way point by delaying the end of the program by a week. Additional follow-up was needed for several of the mentees by the researchers which was a limitation. Mentees were contacted primarily through email. However, in some cases, mentees were contacted through texting or a private message through the online application GroupMe when needed due to lack of response through email. Mentors were contacted through email only and did not have as much of a variety of response times.

Directions for Future Research

Throughout the mentorship program, a few ideas were suggested as ways to continue the mentorship program in the future. Although all participants were provided with a guiding topics sheet (see Appendix F) at the beginning of mentorship, a few participants also noted that having a more extensive list of topics would be helpful to guide the conversation. More structure related to the topics of conversation was a common theme. A list of topics related specifically to speech-language pathologists in educational settings that differ from questions related to a medical setting may also be helpful. One mentee Brianna noted specifically that during some mentorship meetings she would have a difficult time coming up with relevant questions to ask her mentor. Opal suggested a training for all participants relating to roles and responsibilities before starting the mentorship program to build more of a "foundation" for starting the process of mentorship. Some participants also proposed having a virtual orientation with all of the program participants and hearing about the variety of work settings and clinical experiences of the mentors.

Participants then may reach out to several mentors based on their setting of interest so each individual mentor's experience does not limit the type of information the mentee is seeking. Exploring the effects of group mentorship with more participants in the program overall may also be beneficial. Requiring participants to sign a weekly commitment to meeting may also help reduce scheduling and rescheduling concerns regarding the mentorship meetings. Some mentees expressed the desire to meet their mentor in person and shadow their mentor at their place of employment for a day as part of the program. Given the current study, this was not possible since most of the mentors were out of state. However, having the mentees shadow one or two local SLPs during the course of the program may be considered. Further analysis of differences in conversations related to DEI amongst White mentees and mentors of color should also be explored. Lastly, implementing a similar mentorship program for an entire academic year or longer is also a suggested area for future research.

Conclusion

The participants in this study expressed that participation in this mentorship program resulted in a positive growth in feelings towards professional readiness and emotional support. Mentee participants expressed the benefit of connecting with someone who could provide them with real-world experience related to the field. Intentional discourses related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and its impact on SLPOCs happened variably across mentorship pairs.

Relating to previous studies, researchers found that when undergraduate students were mentored by professional mentors of color, bidirectional discourses developed, which supported the mentees both academically and professionally. The mentors intentionally initiated conversations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion during the mentorship process and related these topics specifically to the field of speech-language pathology. The data showed that mentors

employed many strategies to facilitate these conversations such as role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling and fostering a relationship with the mentees, which was first suggested by Kram (1983). Future advancements in the field should seek to include the experiences of SLPOCs to support ongoing cultural responsivity and education for all individuals in the field of speech-language pathology.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Mentee Informational Intake Form

1. What year are you in the speech-language pathology undergraduate program?

2. Are you interested in working in a particular setting in the future (Education, Medical, Pediatrics, Geriatrics, etc.)? If you are unsure, what would you be interested in learning more about at this time?

3. Do you have any specific areas in the field of speech-language pathology that you would be interested in learning more about?

4. What do you like to do in your free time?

5. Please list your availability to meet with your mentor, including the days and/or times that work best.

Appendix B

Mentor Informational Intake Form

1. How many years of clinical experience do you have?

2. What settings have you worked in (Educational, Medical, Pediatrics, Geriatrics...etc.)? What setting do you currently work in?

3. I would like to be paired with a student(s) who _____. (Fill in the blank with what interests you hope the mentee has)

4. Do you have any specific clinical experiences that would be of particular interest to a student?

5. What do you like to do in your free time?

6. Please list your availability to meet with your mentee, including the days and/or times that work best.

Appendix C

Mentee Interview Questions

Initial Mentee Questions	Midterm Mentee Questions	Final Mentee Questions
Why did you decide to participate in this mentorship program?	What are your experiences with the mentorship program thus far?	What have your experiences been with the mentorship program overall?
What are your expectations for this mentorship program?	How would you describe your mentor's engagement in the program this week?	How would you describe your mentor's engagement in the program overall?
How prepared do you feel to become an SLP in the future and why?	What has been the most influential portion of this experience thus far and why?	What has been the most influential portion of participating in this mentorship program and why?

What would you still like to learn about the field of speech-language pathology and why?

Are you satisfied with your mentorship experience? If not, what would you change?

How has this mentorship program helped you learn more about the field of speech-language pathology?

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not at All," 10 being "Always Supported"), how supported do you feel in this program? Why or why not?

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not At All", 10 being "Always Supported"), how supported do you feel by your mentor? Why or why not?

Is there anything else you want to know that was not covered by your mentor?

What has contributed to your feelings of support thus far?

What ways can they support you more effectively?

How has this program helped you feel supported as an undergraduate student?

In what ways do you feel you want to be supported?

How has your mentor contributed to your knowledge about the field of speech-language pathology?

What other ways do you wish that you could be supported in the program?

What do you anticipate gaining from this mentorship program?

What else would you like to know about the field of speech-language pathology?

Overall, has this program impacted your thoughts towards professional readiness or emotional support? If so, please explain.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not At All", 10 being "Always Support") how supported did you feel by your mentor? Why or why not?

Is there anything you felt went particularly well and you would like to keep in the mentorship program and why?

Are you satisfied with your mentorship experience?

Is there anything that you would like to see changed in the mentorship program in the future?

Appendix D

Mentor Interview Questions

Initial Mentor Questions

Why did you decide to participate in this mentorship program?

What are your expectations for this mentorship program?

What would you like to educate students about related to the field of speech-language pathology and why?

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not at All," 10 being "Always Supported"), how supported do you feel in this field? Why or why not?

What has contributed to your feelings of support thus far? (Further Explaining Previous Rating Scale Question)

In what ways do you want to support your mentee(s)?

What do you anticipate gaining from this mentorship program?

Midterm Mentor Questions

What are your experiences with the mentorship program thus far?

How would you describe your mentee's engagement in the program this week?

What has been the most influential portion of this experience thus far and why?

Are you satisfied with your mentorship experience? If not, what would you change?

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not At All", 10 being "Always Supported"), what is your perceived level of support for your mentee based on your interactions so far? Why or why not?

What ways can you support them more effectively?

Final Mentor Questions

What have your experiences been with the mentorship program overall?

How would you describe your mentee's engagement in the program overall?

What has been the most influential portion of participating in this mentorship program and why?

How has this mentorship program helped you learn more about the field of speech-language pathology?

How has this mentorship program helped your mentee learn more about the field of speech-language pathology?

How has this program helped your mentee feel supported emotionally as an undergraduate student?

How has this program helped your mentee feel supported professionally as an undergraduate student?

Overall, has this program impacted your thoughts towards professional readiness

How have you supported your mentee(s) in their professional readiness related to the field of speech-language pathology thus far?

How have you supported your mentee(s) in their emotional support related to the field of speech-language pathology thus far?

or emotional support? If so, please explain.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not At All", 10 being "Always Support") what is your final level of perceived support for your mentee and why?

Is there anything you felt went particularly well and you would like to keep in the mentorship program and why?

Are you satisfied with your mentorship experience?

Is there anything that you would like to see changed in the mentorship program in the future?

Appendix E

Mentee Questionnaire Questions

Mentor Questionnaire Questions

Please indicate what you have experienced from your mentorship meeting this week.

Please indicate what you have experienced from your mentorship meeting this week.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not at All," 10 being "Greatly Impacted"), how has this mentorship meeting impacted your emotional support? Why or why not?

How have you facilitated emotional support through your mentorship meeting?

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "Not at All," 10 being "Greatly Impacted"), how has this mentorship meeting impacted your professional readiness? Why or why not?

How have you facilitated professional readiness through your mentorship meeting?

Note. All questionnaires were conducted using Google forms.

Appendix F

Mentorship Guiding Topics

- American Speech- Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Code of Ethics
- Evidence Based Practice (EBP) Triangle
- ASHA Big 9 Areas of Treatment
- Evaluation & Treatment Procedures
- Appropriate & Fair Treatment of Clients
- Interprofessional Collaboration
- Difference vs. Disorder in Patient Diagnosis
- Professionalism in the Workplace
- Work & Life Balance
- Mental Health

- Experiences of Mentor in the Field
- Academics & School Work
- Timeline of Becoming an SLP
- Links
    - https://www.asha.org/code-of-ethics/#:~:text=The%20four%20Principles%20of%20Ethics,competence%3B%20(III)%20responsibility%20to
    - https://www.asha.org/research/ebp/

An Investigation of the Differences in Phonological Awareness Performance Based on Cognitive Style

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