

## **Gender in mentoring**

The effect of gender in mentoring relationships is a relatively unexplored area. Some boys respond very well to having a formal relationship with an adult role model outside of their family. Others don't. The same goes for girls. But from what little has been studied of the effects of gender between adult and mentee, there are a few patterns which enable us to make rough generalizations about this relationship.

In a study done of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS) it was found that girls were more likely than boys to terminate their matches. Most of the results from this study showed that mentoring relationships were overall less successful with girls than with boys. Just over 73% of boys named their mentors as a "significant adult" in their life while under 27% of girls did. Even with these findings being limited to a one-time study, a difference of over fifty percentage points in this category between girls and boys, calls for further study.

Sanchez suggests that part of the discrepancy in results between boys and girls is due to their personal lives and how they found themselves involved in a mentoring program. Boys most often are referred to be part of a program because of a lack of a father figure in their lives. Girls are often referred because of a rocky relationship with their mother. Mothers are more instrumental in maintaining the connection between their children and the mentor (setting appointments or providing transportation). If a mother and daughter have bad rapport it can lead to missed meetings and failed opportunities, decreasing the strength of the bond between the young girl and her mentor.

Boys have more frequently been found to have very strong ties to their mentor figures. Another study done of boys from diverse backgrounds lacking father figures and their primarily middle-class mentors found that the boys all felt very strongly about the relationship. They felt that they could trust their mentors and that they were in a safe place where they could receive emotional support when they met.

Whether we can make generalizations of these few studies or not, their existence shows us that gender does have effects on a mentoring relationship.

*Information for this article was taken from Gender, Ethnicity, Development and Risk: Mentoring and the Consideration of Individual Differences, Darling, et. al. and The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Mentoring Relationships, Dr. Bernadette Sanchez, University of Minnesota Extension, Nov. 14, 2007*