The Adoption Mentoring Partnership

Manuscript written by
Quade Yoo Song French, Harold D. Grotevant, Jen H. Dolan
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Program developed by
Harold D. Grotevant*, Renee Moss**, Quade Yoo Song French*,
Jessica Robbins**, & Jen H. Dolan*

*University of Massachusetts Amherst
**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County, Massachusetts

January 2013

A collaboration between the Rudd Adoption Research Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County, Massachusetts.

This manuscript outlines the development of an adoption-specific mentoring program (the Adoption Mentoring Partnership: AMP) that matches adopted college students with adopted children in the local community. The theoretical and empirical foundations of youth mentoring that contributed to the conceptualization of AMP are discussed first. Following a presentation of current programming focusing on the population of adopted persons, we outline the development, maintenance, and evaluation of AMP. The manuscript concludes with lessons learned from the first three years of the program.
The Adoption Mentoring Partnership:
A University – Community Collaboration

PART 1: Background

Youth mentoring programs connect children and adolescents to supportive peers and adults who act as mentors for these children. In these relationships, mentors facilitate the development of children’s personal competencies in areas such as academics, pro-social behaviors, and self-esteem (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). A wide variety of mentoring programs have been developed to serve various populations, with equally varied goals. Many mentoring programs seek to “match,” or pair, children with mentors who share personal characteristics or lived experiences (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Syed, Goza, Chemers, & Zurbriggen, 2012). Such programming often focuses on children in underserved populations, including those whose parents are currently incarcerated, those who belong to specific ethnic groups, and children from military families (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2013).

In these more specified programs, mentoring is employed to provide children with not only a role model, meeting the traditional goals of mentoring, but with a friend who understands the unique challenges stemming from their particular circumstances that cause the child to feel different from others (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Liang & West, 2007). Mentors in these specialized programs are well positioned to normalize the experience of “difference,” and embody self-awareness, perseverance, and possibility. In harnessing the strengths of the mentoring model employed in the service of underserved populations, the remainder of this manuscript will outline the development of a mentoring program for adopted youth.
The Experience of Adoption

The unique, and at times isolating, experience of being adopted into one’s family, is being increasingly recognized as a defining characteristic of an emerging social group (French, in press). Despite existing as a social fixture in the United States for decades, adoption has been, and continues to be, shrouded in stigma and discrimination (Miall, 1996, Wegar, 2000) for members of the adoption triad, consisting of birth parents, adopted persons, and adoptive parents. From the 1850s through the 1950s, religious morality influenced attitudes held that adopted persons needed protection from the stigma of being fatherless and illegitimate, fueling a push for secrecy and closed records (Carp, 2002; Fisher, 2003; Freeark, 2006). Seeking to protect, many adopted persons were not told they were adopted, and American society obliged, “protecting” adopted persons by rejecting the notion that there was any difference between adopted children and biologically related offspring (Kirk, 1964).

Yet in the mid-1960s, in conjunction with increasing social awareness of civil rights, and equality, there was a growing sense that forming a family through adoption was inherently different, but that this method of family formation was not inherently inferior (Fisher, 2003). Since the emergence of these new views on adoption, the practice of rejecting the notion of difference of adoptive families is increasingly seen as disenfranchising members of the adoption triad of the opportunity to explore what it means to be a part of adoption. As efforts to peel back the shroud of secrecy and stigma build momentum, the challenges of adoption are being increasingly recognized and in many cases, rectified. Research and advocacy have influenced adoption policy in the push for openness in adoptions (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). For example, contact between birth and adoptive families is being more formally organized and
emphasized as contributing to the healthy identity development of the adopted person (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000).

The majority of adopted persons lead happy, successful, and enriched lives. Adoptive parents are becoming increasingly aware of the challenges they will face as a family, and the challenges their children will face alone. Many of these parents go to great lengths to educate themselves on how to best educate and support their children. Yet ultimately, it is understood by the adopted individuals themselves that no matter how hard their parents try, adoptive parents will never fully understand because they haven’t experienced being adopted themselves. Part of the experience of adoption that seems to occur outside the reach of adoptive parent support is seeking answers to the questions, “What does my adoption mean to me?” and “Who am I as an adopted person?” This experience has been captured by adopted persons across all forms of media, through documentary films (“Adopted” (Lee, 2008)), poetry (“The People They Brought Me” (Partridge, 2009)), and online blogs (“Harlow’s Monkey” (Kim, 2012)).

Many adopted persons note the powerful experience of connecting with other adopted people who have also sought these personal insights as helping them answer these questions for themselves. Programs designed to support adopted persons at various stages of life are also emerging, many in the form of groups and networks that connect adopted persons so they may find support among those who share in the trials and tribulations of the adoptive experience. Organizations such as Boston Korean Adoptees, Inc., and Adoptees Have Answers, have emerged as powerful resources for adopted persons looking to connect with others, find information about making contact with birth families, and current scholarship and policy.
Connecting Mentoring and Adoption

Mentoring programs provide powerful means to reach young people and cultivate their development of a strong sense of self (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Ensher & Murphy, 1997). Often, the implementation of mentoring is executed as an intervention before the emergence of challenges associated with adolescent development such as development of self-concept, academic performance, and cultural connectedness (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Mentoring programs are successful when they focus on particular social groups or personal characteristics, as mentoring provides the mentee with a personal connection to someone who shares in a unique lived experience (Freeark, 2006).

Adopted persons belong to a unique social group that positions them as individuals who experience unique challenges associated with this group membership (French, in press). As members of a unique social group, adopted persons may often feel different from their nonadopted peers, and perhaps racially and culturally different than the rest of their adoptive family (Fisher, 2003; Wegar, 2000). While acknowledging racial, cultural, and biological characteristics may strengthen individual identity and sense of self as an adopted person, doing so also makes salient the differences between the adopted person and his or her adoptive parents, siblings, and peers; this is particularly challenging in transracial adoptive placements (Baden & Wiley, 2007).

Considering the challenges experienced by members of the adoption triad, coupled with the strength of mentoring as a method of connecting and supporting members of unique social group, the development of adoption specific mentoring programs is a viable intervention in the lives of triad members. Social connectedness with other adopted persons is invaluable to the process of seeking an answer to “Who am I as an adopted person?” (French, in press). Open
discussion of personal experiences with other adopted persons can be helpful and grounding for members of the adopted community. Support groups and post-adoption resources are often cited by adopted persons as filling many needs.

The remainder of this paper will highlight core components of mentoring programs as a potential method of intervening in the lives of adopted children and adolescents. Mentoring programs are actually quite diverse and complex; therefore, nuances of program structure will be outlined and considered for their potential implementation with the adopted population. A variety of existing mentoring programs targeting adopted persons will be compared and contrasted with each other as well as with established best practices in mentoring. Finally, the Adoption Mentoring Partnership (AMP) will be presented as a new model of a cross-age peer mentoring program that seeks to support the positive development of adopted children and adolescents through the formation of friendship-based mentoring relationships with adopted college students.

Mentoring

Mentoring as a form of social support has been a feature of diverse social fabrics across time and culture; the concept of an older, more experienced individual taking a younger member of society under wing ensures the passing along of culture, knowledge, advice, and wisdom. While natural mentoring, those relationships formed organically (e.g., an uncle, grandparent, or parents’ friend) often enriches the lives of children, it is just as common for such influential individuals to be absent. In those cases in which a child does not have access to a mentor through his or her current social network, organized mentoring programs can be valuable. While the act of mentoring appears simple enough, there are nuances of program structure that may greatly affect the scope, reach, and ultimate impact of the program on the lives of both the
mentor and the mentee. To facilitate the present discussion on the structural elements of mentoring programs as they may relate to the development of an adoption specific mentoring program, we first introduce a few major concepts and programmatic elements.

For an excellent and detailed series of reviews on mentoring programs, readers are referred to the work by DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002), DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011), Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor (2006), and the special issue of the American Journal of Community Psychology on youth mentoring (2002).

**Program Goals**

The goals of the program are the most influential element of a mentoring program, and it is critical to establish the goals of the program from the outset. Desired goals will influence every aspect of the program, from recruiting participants, to shaping their training, to influencing mentor supervision, and informing targets for program evaluation. Consider first why the proposed program is important and necessary, who the program is designed to impact, and how the program is expected to impact participants both positively and negatively. There are two overarching goals that shape the mentoring landscape: impacting the lives of mentees by providing mentoring around specific aspects of life (e.g., delinquency, academic performance), or impacting the lives of mentees by providing them with a positive, empathic, and caring relationship with an older adult who can support the mentee’s sense of self.

**Instrumental mentoring.** While all mentoring programs are developed to positively impact the lives of the (typically) child mentee, mentoring programs vary greatly in the specific focus or goals that they address. Many mentoring programs are designed to target specific, identified problems such as truancy, academic success, or social skills building; these programs
are referred to as *instrumental programs* (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). This model may be more often found in site-based programs, or those in which the mentoring relationship takes place in a consistent, pre-determined location such as a school or community center. In these site-based programs, the mentor often directs the mentee in the achievement of academic milestones and provides necessary skills-based and emotional support.

**Developmental mentoring.** An alternative to instrumental mentoring is a developmental approach, reflecting a stance that mentees receive personal benefits not from direct support against truancy or poor grades, but rather, through a stable and supportive relationship (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). The focus on the interpersonal relationship sets *developmental mentoring* programs apart from more goal-oriented programs, as developmental mentoring programs target the strengthening of relational abilities within the youth mentee (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

Informed by a comprehensive meta-analysis identifying the impactful components of mentoring programs, DuBois and colleagues outlined a model of developmental mentoring (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). This model, influenced by additional research on the key aspects of mentoring relationships, emphasizes mutuality, trust, and empathy in the formation of a strong, empathic, and interpersonal connection (de Anda, 2001). The strength of this relationship built around shared interests and quality time spent together contributes to a variety of intrapsychic and overt behavioral outcomes such as self-esteem and academic performance (de Anda, 2001; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). In these developmental relationships, the mentee has a chance to practice positive social engagement strategies, planning and negotiating activities, and maintaining appropriate and positive communication, which are foundational elements for success in other
functional areas of life. Thus, the developmental approach may indirectly result in improvements in tangible goals such as academic performance or truancy that are otherwise directly targeted in instrumental programs.

Yet the positive impact of a developmental approach may ultimately not exceed that of an instrumental approach. No significant difference in effect size between these two forms of mentoring was found in an analysis of programming impact (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, Cooper, 2002). Moreover, some researchers suggest that the formation of a strong emotional connection with a mentee should not be the direct focus of the mentor, but rather, that the emotional connection will emerge as a result of consistency in time spent together focusing on increasing the child’s competence (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992). More recent research on the impact of mentoring suggests that programming does indeed positively impact the lives of child participants, but that programs are impactful through an integration of developmental and instrumental approaches (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Ultimately, equivocal evidence in the field of youth mentoring does not provide much of a foundation to make solid claims to the strength of one model over another. However, research does support the overall positive impact of youth mentoring as an intervention in the lives of children (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

**Different programs to meet different goals.** Ultimately, it is critical to identify the desired goals of the program (i.e., relational or performance) before proceeding with further program development. Different goals require idiosyncratic program elements to ensure their respective success; however, it is critical that programs rely on core best practices that have emerged through sound research. Key programmatic elements and considerations such as mentor training, mentor support, mentor and mentee recruitment, shared or different mentor and
mentee characteristics, and frequency of match meetings, are critical in both instrumental and developmentally informed programs. As seen in the meta-analysis by DuBois et al. (2011), developmental and instrumental goals may be included within the same program. What is important is that desired developmental and instrumental goals emerge from a larger theoretical orientation that guides comprehensive program development, and subsequently tracked through ongoing program evaluation.

**Program Context**

*Program context* refers to the distinction between site-based and community based mentoring programs. Site-based programming often takes place in a more structured style at the mentee’s school or community center, while community-based programs are more independent, and take place within the community. The context of the match defines the nature of the association between the mentor and the mentee (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Power dynamics may be altered if the mentee feels more like a subordinate student under the watchful eye of a teacher who is also in the classroom. Conversely the mentee may be able to access a wider range of community-based experiences and resources that would otherwise be unavailable to him or her. Consideration of the context of association is critical to the overall tone of the relationship that the program is trying to cultivate in the mentor / mentee match.

**Program Structure**

The term *program structure* refers to the type of mentor participating in the match (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). While the target mentee is almost always a child or adolescent, the type of mentor could range from a high school student who may be only a few years older than the mentee, to an older retired adult in the community who is seeking to give back as he or she seeks to enrich retirement. Each type of mentor brings unique
skills and limitations in his or her ability to connect with a child or adolescent mentee, and in this way, the type of mentor defines the structure of the program.

Younger mentors often participate in cross-age peer mentoring matches, in which the mentor and mentee may be closer in age. For example, a high school senior would mentor a middle school student at the mentor’s high school. Cross-age peer mentoring programs are often site-based and often emphasize benefits to the mentors in addition to the mentee (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). This emphasis on the personal development of the mentors stems from the gains thought to be obtained through positive peer interaction within the cadre of mentors. Cross-age peer mentors occupy an interesting social position for the mentee in that the mentor is old enough to require respect as an elder, but young enough to avoid being viewed as too old or out of touch. While cross-age mentoring affords benefits, as a corollary of their age, younger mentors may not be as experienced in working with children, and may have less access to both social and material resources that could otherwise strengthen the impact of the program on the well-being of the child.

Similarly, inter-generational mentoring, in which mentors are age 55 or older, has benefits and challenges to consider as well (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). An older adult mentor would likely have access to those resources (e.g., transportation, funds to facilitate activities) missing from a cross-age mentor match, but the older adult may be less connected to cultural elements which the younger mentee might wish to converse about or engage in. While the younger adult mentor may be more focused on establishing a more egalitarian friendship with the child based on shared interests, the older adult mentor may be motivated to share their experiences and wisdom with the mentee in what might resemble a
master / apprentice relationship; each style having strengths and limitations (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

In group mentoring, one mentor is matched with a group of mentees, often meeting at the same time. Group mentoring models may be either site-based or community-based. What is unique to the group mentoring experience is that the mentor forms relationships with each individual mentee, but within the context of a larger social system (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). In this format, individual mentors and mentees may form less direct and personal relationships, as the primary benefit to group mentor models is seen as the opportunity for facilitated peer-to-peer interaction and socialization (Yalom, 1995). However, it may also be the case that the group format provides mentees with an opportunity to interact with peers and mentors in a more controlled setting, in which appropriate ways of interaction are modeled (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

**Infrastructure and Dosage**

*Infrastructure* and *dosage* are two other program elements that have been identified separately from goals, context, and structure, though may ultimately be most influential in determining the unique impact of individual mentoring programs (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Infrastructure is composed of the core supportive elements of the program itself, reflecting all aspects of the program executed to facilitate match success, including: mentor recruitment processes; training; supervision; and mentor support.

Program infrastructure should be designed in accordance with program goals and available resources, with each element enhancing the positive impact of the program. For example, a cross-age, site-based program might implement mentor training that focuses on mentor acquisition of techniques for managing challenging behavior, and boundary setting, areas
in which younger mentors may need instruction. Conversely, a training program for community-based, inter-generational mentors may focus on effectively relating to younger adolescents, and trends and topics the mentee may be interested in talking about. Successful mentoring programs tend to have quantitatively more, and qualitatively better elements of infrastructure (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). However, it is critical that elements of program infrastructure are conceptualized early on, as they will have cascading effects on later aspects of program development and maintenance.

Dosage refers to the frequency of mentor / mentee meetings, the depth and intensity of interaction, and the total length of the match relationship (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). The frequency of contact between the mentor and mentee may variably impact the quality, or intensity, of the relationship formed, as the mentee may come to equate the commitment and dedication of the mentor with their frequency of contact. A mentor who meets with his or her mentee every week may likely establish a different relationship than a mentor who is only scheduled to meet with his or her mentee once per month (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992). In addition to the frequency of meeting, the total length of the mentor / mentee match may also impact perceived program efficacy, though determining the total duration of a match will vary according to program goals (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). An instrumental mentoring program focusing on the development of academic proficiency may last nine months, or one academic year, whereas a developmental mentoring program focusing on establishing lasting friendships may not have set limits on the total length of the formal match.
Program Modeling (e.g., staff, support structure, management, and supervision)

Program modeling shows connections between the many aspects that make up a mentoring program, and each of their subsequent impacts on outcomes of participation (Borich & Jemelka, 1980; Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Elements of program modeling (inputs, outputs, constraints) are discussed, and then presented visually in an example in Figure 1.

Program Inputs. Any elements of a program that were conceptualized and developed to produce results, including aspects of infrastructure, personnel, planning, and maintenance, are referred to as program inputs (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Inputs represent the core content of the mentoring program and the bulk of impactful program elements that may influence outcomes. Inputs informed by theory and shaped by program goals are more likely to result in a successful program.

Program Outputs. Program outputs are any outcomes that emerge as a result of participating in the mentoring program (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). In an instrumental mentoring program focused on direct intervention across a range of aptitudes, an output might be improved grades or increased school attendance. In a developmental model, outputs may be measured in the strength of the relationship between mentor and mentee, and the mentee’s perceived self-worth. Outputs are further divided into proximal, distal, and, enabling subtypes (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

Proximal, distal, and enabling outcomes. Proximal outcomes are those that emerge as a direct result of program participation (e.g., mentee participation results in increased school attendance due to the mentor’s encouragement). Distal outcomes are those in which the ultimate gains from participation may not be immediately realized, but which may emerge later in life.
(e.g., greater career success). Enabling outcomes, while technically outcomes from participation, are viewed as products of participation that mediate the relationships between more tangible proximal outcomes and more abstract distal outcomes (see Figure 1) (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

**Constraints.** In addition to charting hypothesized connections between inputs and outputs, program modeling also takes into account other factors that mediate or moderate the relationship between inputs and outputs in different ways. These factors may be previously anticipated or may emerge through the process of mentoring, and are referred to as constraints (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). These relationships between inputs, outputs, and constraints are modeled in Figure 1.

**Mentoring Program Components in Sum**

Outlined here, there are many components that comprise a mentoring program. A far greater endeavor than simply finding willing participants and allowing them to interact, program developers must take into consideration all of these elements as they work to build a successful, and ethically sound, mentoring program. Program goals must be carefully considered
Figure 1. Example of the effect of a constraint on the relationship between an input and outputs. Shared interests between the mentor and mentee may moderate the impact of mentor training on positive outcomes. This figure also diagrams the relationships between proximal, enabling, and distal outcomes, where increased self-esteem mediates the effect of improved attendance on later career success. Adapted from Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006.

and established from the outset, as they will shape decisions regarding every program element to follow. Goals shape the types of mentors and mentees sought for participation, locations, content of mentoring relationships, supervision, and outcomes. Consideration of the relationships between program goals, inputs, outputs, and constraining factors should be considered, and contingencies planned for in the event that hypothesized connections do not come to fruition. Greater attention to detail and the inclusion of well-planned program elements and infrastructure can lead to a more successful program overall (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Yet one aspect of mentor programming that is critically important, yet chronically underdeveloped, is program evaluation (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).
Research on Mentoring Programs

On the whole, mentoring has been found to benefit youth participants across a range of socio-emotional, relational, behavioral, and academic goals (de Anda, 2001; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992; Sipe, 2002; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). In a comprehensive meta-analysis on the efficacy of mentoring programs, DuBois and colleagues found that mentoring programs positively contribute to the development of mentees across social, behavioral, emotional, and academic areas of functioning (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). In their efforts, researchers found a series of program criteria that likely contributed to greater efficacy, including, among other things, mentee participants who were experiencing greater psychosocial risk, finding appropriate mentors who fit with program goals, and sound matching procedures (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Yet across all formats, increased program infrastructure and support for all participants was associated with greater program impact on mentee participants (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006).

Despite consistent evidence supporting an overall positive impact of mentoring programs on the lives of child participants, results do not reflect the magnitude of impact that many presume mentoring programs to have. Effect sizes of .21 from a recent meta-analysis suggest a positive, yet modest impact (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Researchers suggest that these modest results are due in part to a number of factors, including: a) limited emphasis on program evaluation, b) a policy focus on rapid expansion – quantity of programming – over improvements in the quality of programming already offered, and c) the
failure to implement many empirically supported best practices for mentoring (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

**Does race matter? The impact of perceived similarity between mentor and mentee.**

The issue of similarity between the mentor and mentee is a challenging one. Research on whether it is important for the mentor and mentee to share personal characteristics such as shared racial or ethnic group membership, or shared life experiences is very ambiguous (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Sipe, 2002) and does not provide direction toward a best practice in program development.

Proponents of matching mentors with mentees across points of similarity suggest that better relationships may be formed when the mentee believes that the mentor is similar to themselves (Sipe, 2002). This similarity may be racial, cultural, or shared life experiences (e.g., homelessness, parental incarceration, illness). The majority of mentees are from an ethnic minority group, while the majority of mentors in America are White (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011, Sipe, 2002). As a result, one of the common areas of discussion in terms of matching across points of similarity is race. Knowing that his or her mentor has similar experiences yet has succeeded in life may motivate the mentee to open up more in conversation, and truly view the mentor as a role model. Studies have found mentees preferring mentors of the same race, reporting greater satisfaction with the program overall, and greater connections formed as a result (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Liang, Tracy, Kauh, Taylor, & Williams, 2006; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). This movement also draws strength from dominant social and cultural views that similarity between children and individuals in parental or role model positions is critical to the health and longevity of cultural identity (NABSW, 1972). By continuing to pair mentees with mentors from the same race or cultural group, there is a strong
sense that lessons of life and culture, managing discrimination, and developing a strong ethnic identity will be maintained.

However, research supporting the idea that mentors and mentees benefit to greater degrees when sharing personal characteristics, is equivocal (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Sipe, 2002). Several studies have found no significant difference in the reported benefits between groups of mentor / mentee pairs that were in-racial (the mentor and mentee are of the same race) versus cross-racial (mentor and mentee are different races) (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Rhodes, Reddy, Grossman, & Lee, 2002).

What may matter more than actual shared group membership between the mentor and mentee across racial or cultural lines, is the ability of the mentor to be open, communicative, and accepting of the mentee’s lived experiences (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Liang & West, 2009). Further research is necessary to explicate the role of shared group membership in mentoring outcomes.

**Adoption and Mentoring**

Many adopted persons report being the only adopted individuals in their communities and growing up without an older adopted person to serve as a role model in navigating challenges associated with adoption (Samuels, 2009). This feeling of isolation is not easily remedied by nonadopted individuals, be they clinicians or even adoptive parents; many adopted individuals believe that while others genuinely care for them and are concerned, nonadopted persons will never fully understand the challenges of being adopted (Lee, 2003).

Mentoring programs, particularly developmental mentoring programs that focus on rapport and relationships, connect youth with older adults in the hopes that they will form a
meaningful relationship. This intervention provides youth participants with access to resources and opportunities, and also provides mentees with a role model in their mentor. To the degree that the mentor and mentee share personal characteristics, the mentee may be able to internalize positive messages about his or her own attributes, seeing that someone else like them in very unique ways has found ways to be successful. Mentoring can often normalize the experience of characteristics for children who may not otherwise have the opportunity to interact with members from a unique social group, and therefore, would have little opportunity to engage socially with other individuals in casual, everyday settings. Matching an adopted child with an older adopted mentor may provide the child with a role model who has also experienced the challenges of adoption. In sharing lived experiences and an empathic ear, these mentors may serve to de-stigmatize adoption and provide the adopted child with the support of a person who knows first-hand the challenges of adoption and the feeling of difference.

Adoption in Brief

Adoption as a form of family building is a practice long woven into the fabric of society. Yet despite its more formal presence in the United States since the mid-1800s (Grotevant, Grant-Marsney, French, Musante, & Dolan, 2012), a longstanding and pervasive social belief that adopted persons will always be different, endures (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). While large-scale U.S. surveys suggest social acceptance of the general practice, there remain societal beliefs of deficit and deficiency inherent to all adopted persons (Evan B. Donaldson, 2002; Fisher, 2003; Wegar, 2000). Adoption research methodology itself has contributed to the sense of difference between adopted individuals and nonadopted peers through continued use of between-groups methodology, in which a group of adopted individuals is compared to a “standard” of nonadopted individuals (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). Decades of between-
Groups research designs reinforce the misguided idea that nonadopted peers provide an appropriate contrast to the lived experience of adoption.

Yet many adopted persons are open in acknowledging the, at times, profound challenges associated with being adopted (Lee, 2003; Samuels, 2009). Identity development as an adopted person (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011), developing a racial and cultural identity different from one’s adoptive parents (Baden & Steward, 2000), feeling a sense of connection to one’s adoptive family, and negotiating challenging birth family dynamics (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998), are all identified as areas of increased difficulty for adopted persons. In sum, the feeling of difference is real, and impactful.

Ultimately, adopted persons are indeed members of a unique social group, with the adoptive experience positioning adopted persons as different from peers who are biologically connected to their parents. This idea of difference in adoption is not new (Kirk, 1964), and continues to be developed. The concept of “birth privilege” (French, in press) reflects the challenges faced by adopted persons as they seek to develop a sense of self as an adopted person while living in a social environment that continues to promote blood ties as a primary indicator of familial connectedness and legitimacy. Yet the negative aspects of difference (e.g., stigma, discrimination) may be moderated by the degree of control adopted persons have in determining the impact social attitudes have on their sense of self as an adopted person (French, in press).

It is this idea that adopted persons can take control of their story, their narrative, and find a source of positive self-esteem and self-concept in their status as an adopted person that makes possible the idea of a positive intervention in the lives of young adopted persons. Should these young people find role models in older adopted individuals who themselves, have experienced the challenges of adoption, younger adopted persons may gain access to coping strategies,
insight to the experience, and most importantly, an empathic friend who relates to them based on their shared experiences of adoption.

As such, adopted persons are seen as prime candidates for mentoring programs that match older adopted adults with adopted children in the hopes that forming a friendship will provide the mentee with a role model, point of support, and a friend who knows first-hand the challenges of being adopted.

**Current Mentoring Programs Focused on Adoption**

A number of mentoring programs have emerged specifically targeting adopted persons as mentees. As with mentoring programs for nonadopted children, these programs vary greatly across stated goals and program designs. (See Appendix A for a sampling of adoption specific mentoring programs). Information on these programs was obtained from websites run by the programs themselves, in addition to email and telephone communication with members of program staff. These programs provided models for current resources for adopted persons and information here were used, along with theory, literature, and research, to shape the formation of the Adoption Mentoring Partnership (AMP) that is detailed later in this manuscript.

As was noted previously, research support for mentoring programs that match along shared demographic characteristics or social group membership is equivocal (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Liang & West, 2007). What is more substantiated is the notion that effective programs have clear goals that inform stronger infrastructures, with clear mechanisms for mentor and mentee support and supervision (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Therefore, the core features of mentoring programs discussed previously (i.e., program goals, context, structure, infrastructure, dosage, and modeling) will be used to present a sample of current mentor programming for adopted persons.
Program goals (instrumental v. developmental: style to meet the needs). Nearly all adoption-specific mentoring programs cite their main goals to support adopted children or those children in foster care in the management of challenges associated with the lived experience of adoption. The connection between adoption and foster care is enduring in the United States (Grotevant, Grant-Marsney, French, Musante, & Dolan, 2012). As a result, many mentoring programs that provide services to adopted individuals also include those children and teens that had previously been in the foster care system. This aspect of programming reflects knowledge that maintaining a sense of continuity of key figures in children’s lives is critical, especially for those children in the foster care system who may have experienced a number of different foster homes and caregivers over time.

The majority of programs for adopted and foster care youth surveyed in this manuscript are informed by developmental goals. Central to these programs’ missions are the fostering of a relationship between the mentor and mentee. Common to these mentoring programs for adopted and foster youth is the goal to ensure mentees have an individual in their lives who shares in the lived experience of adoption and/or foster care. These goals likely stem from findings and personal accounts from adopted persons and those in foster care that despite genuine and unending love and care provided by adoptive and foster care parents, these adults would never truly understand what it was like to be adopted or to be a foster child (Lee, 2003; Samuels, 2009). In providing these young people with a mentor who had been adopted or who had been in the foster care system, this invaluable connection and support may be obtained.

Many programs’ goals are future oriented, such that through mentoring and viewing mentors as role models, adopted or foster care youth may develop a more positive sense of their place in the future. These programs share a view that in developing a positive sense of their
place in the world ahead, mentees would achieve other valued functional outcomes and grow as successful adults in their communities. In this way, some of the programs take on hybrid developmental – instrumental goals; for example, hybrid long-term goals may be that the mentee succeeds in college. However, this goal may be attained through the formation of a close personal relationship with a mentor to motivate the child, as opposed to more instrumental programming in which the mentor may work with the mentee on specific academic assignments and attendance.

**Program contexts (site or community).** The adoption-specific mentoring programs surveyed here represent a blend of site-based and community-based approaches. A number of programs that offer site-based programming provide more organized and structured activities that the mentor and mentee engage around, often cultural in nature (e.g., China Care programs). These programs are often supervised by program directors or other personnel at the site. Other community-based programs (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters) allow the mentor and mentee greater autonomy over activities that they engage in as a pair, and provide supervision on a case-by-case basis to the mentor.

**Program Structure (type of mentor).** Adoption-specific mentoring programs reflect both cross-age and older adult mentoring formats. Mentors must generally pass a background check and complete an interview process to ensure mentee safety. A number of programs have been developed through university sites, relying on cross-age peer mentoring structures. Programs developed outside of a university partnership typically state that the mentor must be over the age of 18.
Infrastructure & Dosage

*Infrastructure (mentor recruitment, training, supervision, mentor support).* Aspects of program infrastructure vary greatly; however, there are commonalities suggesting a widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of both preparing and supporting mentors, and match relationships. While mentor recruitment strategies range from targeted, on-campus recruitment in instances of university-linked programming, to word-of-mouth practices, all mentors are screened through some form of interview and background check procedures.

Mentors are generally required to attend training which prepares them to enter into a relationship with a child. Training topics vary by organization, but largely focus on educating the prospective mentor about the theoretical positioning and goals of that particular program, effective communication, forming bonds, having fun, and managing challenging behaviors that may arise.

Mentoring programs also vary in the provision of ongoing mentor support. While nearly all programs provide mentors with supervision around their mentoring activities and challenges that may arise when interacting with mentees, very few programs offer the mentors a chance to meet as a cohort to support each other.

*Dosage (frequency of meetings, depth and intensity of interaction, duration).* Aspects of program dosage also vary, with some programs requiring one to two meetings between the mentor and mentee per month, to some requiring up to 3 – 5 hours per week. Adoption-specific programs vary in the intensity of mentor and mentee interactions across a host of dimensions.

First, adoption specific mentoring programs vary greatly in terms of the degree to which mentors are asked to engage with mentees around the topic of adoption. Some programs expect
mentors to actively engage mentees on the subject of adoption, sharing their own stories, and asking mentees to consider the challenges they face. Mentoring programs may actively teach mentors about aspects of the adoptive experience such as the intricacies of the child welfare system, adoptive and birth family dynamics, and identity development to prepare mentors for these discussions. However, other programs take a less directive approach to the topic of adoption, encouraging mentors to allow mentees to broach the subject of adoption.

Adoption-specific mentoring programs also vary in the intensity of focus on culture and race; an issue more prominent in those programs focusing on transracial adoption. Some programs emphasize cultural exposure and education about the mentee’s culture of origin. Many of these programs are cross-age peer mentoring programs based in colleges or universities, utilizing ethnic student groups as mentors.

Regardless of an explicit focus on adoption as a part of the mentoring relationship, nearly all programs that function in a one-to-one mentoring format require a minimum of a one year commitment from the mentors. Many programs cite the need to protect the best interests of the child as motivation for this requirement, reflecting the spirit of many stated goals, to provide a consistent and positive adult presence in the lives of adopted and foster care youth.

**Program Modeling.** Program modeling includes inputs, those aspects put in place that are seen to contribute to the overall success of the program, and outputs, which are outcomes that can be traced longitudinally over the course of participants’ lives.

**Inputs.** In many ways, these elements are difficult to identify from a position outside the particular program without a clear or intimate sense of the personnel, or understanding of the nuances of programming itself. Every program has a core leadership group, mentors who volunteer their time, mentees who participate, and a cadre of supporters and other team members.
to make mentoring possible. However, there are key elements of programming that may contribute to the overall strength of a particular mentoring program.

*Mentors are adopted themselves.* The requirement for mentors to have been adopted themselves is one aspect of adoption-specific mentoring programs in which the true impact is unknown, but suspected to be profound. Many of the adoption-specific mentoring programs stated that mentors *could* be adopted, but that it was generally not a requirement of mentor participation. Only one (Mixed Roots Adoptee Mentor Program) of the existing programs reviewed here (in addition to our program, described later) stated that it was required for mentors to have been adopted.

In contacting a number of programs, many program staff stated that it had initially been a desire to have the mentors be adopted themselves. Program coordinators saw an inherent and valuable benefit in having mentors for children who shared the experience of adoption. Many coordinators believed that the shared experience of adoption might facilitate stronger bonds between the mentor and the mentee, as the child may feel closer to the mentor. However, nearly all of the programs contacted stated that requiring mentors to have been adopted themselves placed too severe a restriction on the pool of available mentors who met that criterion. In opening mentoring roles up to nonadopted persons, these programs accepted any positive relationship as better than none; meeting the needs of many children was prioritized over any anticipated benefits of recruiting mentors who had been adopted themselves.

However, two programs, Adoptment, and the M&M program through the Children’s Home Society and Family Services, require mentors to have been adopted or emancipated from foster care. Both of these programs were initially created by adopted people, who strongly believed that the mentors’ personal connection to adoption or foster care was a critical part of the
overall success of any adoption specific mentoring program. Despite equivocal research outcomes to support matching mentors and mentees across criteria such as race, ethnicity, or in this case, status as an adopted person (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Sipe, 2002), these programs believe strongly in the benefits of having mentor and mentee share in this very unique characteristic.

**Mentor support.** Nearly all of the adoption specific programs offered organized mentor support in the form of supervision, group or individual, around issues that arise in the mentor / mentee relationship. In many of the site-based mentoring formats that organized around structured activities, supervision and guidance was provided at the time of the mentoring. In other models such as community-based mentoring programs, mentor supervision occurred independently from the mentoring outings between mentor and mentee. Supervision sought to provide mentors with ongoing guidance and direction for the duration of the mentoring relationship. In addition to providing ideas and insights to strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship, supervision may also provide the mentor with a chance to express frustrations and concerns that may arise through his or her role as a mentor.

An additional aspect of programming is the organization of regular group meetings for the mentors. These meetings often serve similar functions as individual supervision, but with the added components of camaraderie and social support. As a group, mentors may come to understand that challenges they may experience are more common. Meetings also provide the mentors with a cohort of other individuals who they may connect with in their shared characteristics. However, few of the adoption-specific mentoring programs included in Appendix A offered mentors this form of support.
**Outputs.** Of the adoption-specific mentoring programs reviewed above, many did not indicate a formal evaluation program or explicit “outputs.” Many programs were developmental in nature, and therefore did not seek to measure traditional mentoring outcomes such as attendance in school or academic performance. Many of these programs did not indicate a research or program evaluation component to determine ultimate program efficacy on their respective websites. Of those programs contacted directly, many acknowledged the importance, but relative absence of organized programs of evaluation.

**Adoption and Mentoring in Sum**

A range of mentoring programs match adopted persons with youth who have also experienced foster care and adoption. The majority of adoption focused mentoring programs highlight developmental mentoring models, working toward goals of bettering the lives of adopted children by providing them with a role model and a friend. Programs vary in the type of mentors recruited; a majority of them do not require mentors to be adopted themselves. In many cases, programs recognize the unique benefits likely provided by a mentor who shares in the experience of adoption or foster care; however, many programs felt that instituting this requirement significantly limited the number of available mentors. Further, many programs do not seek to specifically match mentor – mentee pairs across other characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or country of origin in the case of international adoptions. The adoption-specific mentoring programs outlined here all seek to provide mentors with both initial and ongoing training and support, both hallmarks of effective mentoring programs (DuBois. Holloway, Valentine, Cooper, 2002). While adoption-specific mentoring programs are indeed forming around the country, there remains limited research on the impact of these programs over the long term.
Current Effort: The Adoption Mentoring Partnership

The remaining sections of this paper present various aspects of the Adoption Mentoring Partnership. The Adoption Mentoring Partnership (AMP) is a collaborative, university-community partnership in Amherst, Massachusetts, that seeks to match adopted college students with adopted children from the local community. In understanding that adopted individuals are faced with carving out an identity in a social environment that may not understand or appreciate the challenges associated with adoption, mentoring is seen as a viable intervention in the lives of all participants. Through an active infrastructure build to support both the mentor and mentee, AMP facilitates friendships that will provide these adopted children with a friend, a role model, and a resource as they face common challenges of adolescence, and the unique challenges of adoption. AMP also supports the personal development of the mentors as well through Mentor Group Meetings that focus on education, connection, and camaraderie with adopted peers.

The remainder of this paper presents a detailed outline and program manual for the Adoption Mentoring Partnership for practitioners and organizations interested in developing a similar program in their community. Part 1 (above) presented background information about adoption, mentoring, and other adoption mentoring programs. Part 2 discusses the development of AMP from its inception to its implementation, to its maintenance. Aspects of program development including the refinement of program goals, the formation of program infrastructure to meet those goals, and the personnel required to execute this program will be presented in detail.

Part 3 discusses the program of research developed in concert with the development of the mentoring program itself. Program evaluation is an undeveloped area of critical importance in mentoring programs in general (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011);
the adoption-specific mentoring programs were no exception. As such, program evaluation was a cornerstone of this program from the outset. AMP program evaluation consists of three parts, focusing on the mentors themselves, the child mentee, and the mentees’ adoptive parents.

Part 4 addresses issues that arose in development, implementation, and execution of this adoption specific mentoring program, as well as important considerations that prospective program developers should review.

**PART 2: AMP Program Implementation and Maintenance**

**Impetus**

Truly a community-driven enterprise, the Adoption Mentoring Partnership (AMP) arose from concerns expressed by a group of adoptive parents. These adoptive parents believed that local schools lacked an understanding of the challenges of adoption and failed to adequately support their children, whom they believed struggled in school as a result of their status as adopted individuals. This group of adoptive parents sought to raise community awareness so that younger adopted children and their families might avoid the challenges they had experienced. Leaders of the local Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) chapter believed that their program could help meet this need through provision of a mentoring program. In reaching out to the Rudd Adoption Research Program (Rudd) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, leaders at BBBS sought to complement their already robust mentoring program with adoption specific knowledge and understanding. In this way, the development of the Adoption Mentoring Partnership was truly a blending of community and academic strengths and resources.

**Formation of the AMP Team**

In the development of this community – university collaboration, a number of key contributors were identified. Interest from various community partners was initially strong, and
many of these entities contributed to the initial conceptualization of main program goals. Some continued to play supporting roles by identifying children and families who might benefit from the program. However, over time, it was clear that the two major partners engaged in the development, implementation, and maintenance of the program would be BBBS and the Rudd. To streamline the execution of emerging programmatic needs quickly, a few key positions were developed to meet those needs (See Table 1).

Table 1: Program Personnel and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals (affiliation)</th>
<th>Description of Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chair, Rudd Adoption Research Program (Rudd) and Executive Director, BBBS (BBBS) | • Spearheaded the initial effort and maintained momentum during all stages of the program.  
• Managed working relationship between the Adoption Mentoring Partnership and the larger participating organizations (Rudd Adoption Program and BBBS)  
• Provided funding and applied for additional grants  
• Presented the program to public, research, and professional communities.  
• Provided academic credit for Mentor Group Meetings (Rudd Chair) |
| Program Coordinator (Rudd) | • In consultation with other program personnel, provided oversight for program development and maintenance, including:  
- Initial program conceptualization and development  
- Recruitment of mentors and facilitation of mentor / mentee match  
- Developed and moderated Mentor Group Meetings  
- Community engagement and presentation of program to public, research, and professional communities  
- Develop, coordinate, and execute research and program evaluation  
- Ongoing program maintenance |
| Case Manager (BBBS) | • Contributed to initial program development  
• Focused on mentee recruitment  
• Provided coordination and support for mentor / mentee relationships  
• Directed mentor supervision  
• Participated in Mentor Group Meetings  
• Provided liaison to adoptive parents of mentees |
| Program Officer  | • Recruited mentors on UMass campus  
| Rudd            | • Assisted with funding applications  
|                 | • Administered program evaluation and research components with parents and mentees  
| Supporting     | • Consulted on initial program development  
| Contributors    | • Provided ongoing support in the form of educative materials and psychoeducational opportunities for mentors (e.g., guest presenters at mentor group meetings)  
|                 | • Provided referrals of potential participants  

In providing context for the interaction of these various positions, an executive committee was formed from the Chair of the Rudd program, the Executive Director of BBBS, the Program Coordinator, and the Case Manager (see Table 1). All members of the executive committee participated in planning meetings throughout the entirety of the program, though these meetings became less frequent following a shift to program maintenance as opposed to initial development. Once the program was operational, this executive committee focused on seeking funding and increasing the community, research, and professional exposure of the program.

Following the initial conceptualization and planning by the executive committee, primary responsibility for the management of ongoing program operations shifted to the Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator was directly involved with or consulted in regards to: mentor and mentee recruitment and matching; development of mentor group meetings; ongoing mentor support; program evaluation and research. Specifically, the working relationship between the Program Coordinator and the Case Manager was critical to the success of initial efforts, as these two individuals collaborated around recruitment and making initial matches between mentors and mentees, in the supervision of mentors, and the development of mentor group meetings. In this case, the Program Coordinator was a graduate student in clinical psychology, with a vested interest in adoption research, program development, and advocacy.
Program Goals: Selecting a Mentoring Model

It was clear from the outset that the program would utilize some variant of the time-tested BBBS model for mentoring which reflects a developmental approach toward preventive intervention. This model emphasizes the formation of friendships, in contrast to the focus on attainment of skills in more achievement-based instrumental models. Developmental models provide mentees with a stable interpersonal relationship that they can rely on for support should challenges arise in life. Importantly, the mentor may act as a role model for the mentee, serving as a foil to negative social stereotypes and beliefs about adopted persons. Mentors are seen as a profound resource for younger mentees, having first-hand experience navigating the challenges of adoption, and developing a strong sense of self despite stigmatizing experiences. In these ways, mentors may normalize the experience of adoption for the mentee, showing him or her that adopted persons are fully capable, intelligent, funny, personable, and approachable.

The selection of the developmental model of mentoring was also informed through a consideration of the adopted mentees that would likely be participating in the program. Typical families served by general BBBS programming in the surrounding community were largely from lower socioeconomic status groups, lacking both social and material resources to support their children. Many families were headed by single parents, and some experienced contact with child protective services and the justice system. In contrast, many of the prospective adopted mentees who might participate in AMP came from adoptive families headed by two parents with material resources, high levels of education, and strong social support. These adoptive families and adopted children were, at the time of recruitment in AMP, not in need of tutoring, educational supports, or assistance with truancy. These families largely shared high expectations of their children’s academic and social success, and were positioned to provide access to enriching
activities without the help of a community-based mentoring program. Yet despite these resources, many of the adoptive parents understood that what they could never provide was a personal understanding of the adoptive experience and in many cases, what it was like to navigate the predominantly White community as a person of color. In this way, the developmental mentoring model fit extremely well in providing these prospective adopted mentees with the one thing that their adoptive families could not. In selecting a developmental model emphasizing the formation of a positive relationship, the match would also serve to normalize the mentee’s understanding of adoption as a way of building families rather than as a deviation in family structure from the “norm.”

Interestingly, the initial group of adoptive parents who spoke to raise awareness of a perceived lack of support from local schools around adoption, focused at first on their children’s truancy, academic, and sociocultural challenges; goals that might initially speak to an instrumental mentoring approach. However, in participating in initial discussions and program development, members of this core group of adoptive parents understood that a developmental approach that connected younger adopted persons with an older adopted mentor may preempt the development of later behavioral and academic challenges. Through open communication, discussion, and collaboration, the decision was made to institute a developmental mentoring program to intervene in the lives of children before the later development of academic or behavioral challenges. Thus, the program was conceived as a preventive intervention.

**Program Context**

Consideration of available resources and the goals of normalizing the adoption experience informed decisions on program context. While BBBS had experience in facilitating both community-based and site-based mentoring matches, it was understood that strengths and
limitations of each variant would differentially impact the overall scope and success of AMP. As potential mentees did not require intensive support in the school setting due to the adoptive families’ access to resources such as tutors and educational services, a community-based program was developed. The mentoring relationships of AMP had already been envisioned to focus on the relationship that could be built through engaging in shared activities, outings, and spending quality time together so that the adopted mentee may come to view their older, adopted mentor as a socially successful role model. In these ways, the community-based model best met the needs and developmental mentoring goals of the program. Mentor-mentee pairs would engage in the community around shared interests, and would be encouraged to utilize private or public transportation to facilitate match activities such as visiting local farms, parks, pools, and shopping areas as they connected with their mentee in fun, enriching activities.

**Program Structure**

In determining whether matches would take place in one-to-one or group settings, a number of issues were considered. Informed by the developmental mentoring goals of AMP, in which benefits are seen from the formation of a close personal relationship between the mentor and mentee, a one-to-one format was selected. Additionally, the BBBS model that was to be employed strongly emphasizes the formation of one-to-one matches.

A second consideration in terms of program structure involved determining the type of mentor desired to fill the role defined by AMP. The mentor in AMP was conceptualized to be adopted, to be a role model, to be able to connect with the school-age mentees on many social and personal issues. Considerations ranged from older adult mentors who may be working professionals or retirees, to the use of younger mentors ranging from high school age to emerging adults. Due to the participation of the Rudd Adoption Research Program situated on
the campus of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the large undergraduate student body appeared to be an ideal source of potential mentors. BBBS also had a long history of success in using UMass college students as mentors, further supporting this decision.

**Program Infrastructure: Screening and Recruitment**

A range of characteristics was considered in the recruitment process for potential mentors and mentees: age and developmental level; gender; adoption story.

**Mentees: Age and Developmental Level.** In working to operationalize our desired preventive intervention program, pre-adolescents were viewed as ideal mentee candidates. As a result of their developmental level, pre-adolescents or early adolescents may not have yet begun facing many of the challenges associated with later teen years. Moreover, research suggests that while younger adolescents have a cognitively based understanding of adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011), it is likely that they have not yet begun thinking about what their adoption means to them, or incorporating nuances into a larger sense of self (Brodzinsky, 2011). As a result, the involvement of a mentor at this early age would add a protective element against future challenges associated with adoption, race, and ethnicity; this was precisely the goal of AMP.

It is clear that adolescent populations experiencing difficulty are indeed in need of well-developed, considerate service. However, it was determined that the scope of services AMP could, and should, ethically provide, would not be sufficient to warrant recruitment of an adopted population already in significant distress. The decision to focus AMP on pre-adolescents was influenced by the non-clinical nature of developmental mentoring relationships, in addition to the range of competencies that college student mentors could safely provide. It would be unsafe and irresponsible to match a mentee (regardless of age) with a mentor who was simply not developmentally or experientially equipped to manage such challenges on his or her own.
Therefore, to ensure the relative safety and comfort of both the mentee and mentor, it was believed that school-age mentees around the ages of 8 through 12 be targeted. It was believed that mentees of this age may not yet be experiencing significant challenges associated with adoption. Further, screening processes inquired as to the adjustment and current level of social and intrapsychic functioning of prospective mentees, from the perspective of adoptive parents, the Case Manager, and the Program Coordinator.

**Mentee Recruitment.** Mentees were recruited through the existing BBBS recruitment network in local schools and community centers. BBBS also had a large waitlist for their standard mentoring program that was culled for any persons identified as being adopted. In partnering with the local school district, fliers were produced and disseminated to students in the local district to inform parents of this new opportunity. A local post-adoption services program that had been involved in the initial conceptualization provided AMP with a concentrated population of adoptive families to recruit from. Finally, mentees were recruited through word of mouth. Adoptive parent communities in many areas are often connected, and upon hearing of the effort to develop this program, many parents contacted AMP expressing interest.

**Mentors: Age and Developmental Level.** It was clear from the outset that in maximizing on the resource at hand, mentors would be sought from the general student body at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. BBBS staff indicated that they had had great success with college-age mentors from the local student population, and that many of their matches made with college-age students were quite successful due to the flexibility of the students’ schedules as compared to an older adult professional working full time. However, in order to provide the mentors and mentees with a safe, successful, and relatively autonomous community-based mentoring experience, a thorough screening program was critical. One of the benefits of having
BBBS as a contributing partner is that the program’s extensive experience provided AMP with a tested mentoring model, replete with mechanisms for background checks, personal references, and supervision.

**Mentors: Academic Year.** The use of college-age mentors requires consideration of the mentor’s own academic timeline; for many, graduation signals a move away from the surrounding community. Stability in a mentoring relationship is critical to its success; many mentoring programs, including BBBS, use match longevity as a marker for overall program success. While the stability may allow mentor pairs to develop a trusting and positive relationship, a shortened or inconsistent relationship may do more harm to a young child than good. Moreover, adopted individuals have been traditionally believed to be more sensitive to loss and abandonment (Brodzinsky, 2011). As such, minimizing inconsistencies in mentor contact with mentees in this program in particular was a primary concern.

It was understood that students entering their senior year would not be able to commit beyond their senior year, and thus, the potential costs of a terminated relationship were seen as too great. However, should the potential mentor have had plans to stay in the local area beyond the senior year (e.g., their permanent residence was local), some exceptions were made, and a few students in the senior class were accepted. Students entering their freshman year were not allowed to participate as a mentor in their freshmen year. In addition to being potentially less mature as a function of their age and developmental circumstances, AMP program developers though it critical that freshmen students be allowed to experience an unencumbered year of adjustment to college life and experiences. For many of these students, the first year in college would represent the first extended period of time away from parents and the stability of a familiar environment. Moreover, this period has been noted to be rife with personal
development, introspection and identity exploration. As mentors are required to be as stable of a resource as possible for mentees, it was critical that potential mentors have the time, space, and freedom to begin to work through their own identity processes.

Therefore, in order to provide mentors and mentees in this program with the best chance to develop a stable relationship, and with the opportunity to continue their match beyond one year, students entering their sophomore or junior year (with at least 2 years of college remaining) represented ideal candidates. In these instances, first year students were recruited in the second semester of their first year, for participation in their sophomore year; second year students were recruited in the second semester of their second year for participation in their third year.

**Mentor Recruitment.** Mentors were recruited through various forms of media, ranging from campus-wide emails, posts to university class Facebook pages, and more traditional methods such as the posting of flyers and short presentations in undergraduate lectures. Recruitment materials indicated that mentors would be required to participate in a one-to-one mentoring relationship for approximately 3 to 5 hours per week. Paired with a younger adopted child, mentors would be responsible for the safety of the mentee, but would also be charged with forging a strong, personal connection; their mentee was to become a friend. Mentors were informed that they would be able to receive two college credits per semester for participation in the program. These academic credits would meet university elective credit requirements. It was decided that mentors would be offered the opportunity to receive college credit for participation due to the incredible investment in time and effort being asked of them as mentors in AMP. In addition to the 3 to 5 hours with their mentees, mentors would be required to participate in Mentor Group Meetings (MGMs) every other week. These hour-and-a-half long meetings provided psychoeducation for the mentors on both adoption and mentoring. In addition, MGMs
allowed mentors to connect on a personal level with each other; this cohort formation emerged as a profoundly important part of the overall AMP experience for the mentors, and will be discussed in detail later in the manuscript.

Interestingly, despite recruiting materials that emphasized the requirement that mentors themselves be adopted, many nonadopted students also expressed strong interest. It is likely that this interest from nonadopted students reflects a genuine desire to volunteer in the community and a lack of understanding of the central role that being adopted plays in the mentor-mentee relationship. Nonadopted students who expressed a desire to participate were referred to BBBS for potential participation in the general community program.

Following initial interest, applicants who met program criteria participated in an interview conducted by the Program Coordinator and the BBBS Case Manager who would both be working with the mentors. The joint interview drew upon the strengths of the two collaborating parties (Rudd and BBBS) by focusing on issues related to both mentoring and adoption. Questions pertaining to mentoring aspects allowed interviewers to get a sense of the applicant’s prior experience in working with children of this age group, previous mentoring experience, motivation, and responsibility. Questions pertaining to adoption focused on the mentors’ own adoption story, personal experiences, and comfort in talking about adoption. This was a critical aspect to the recruitment process, as it was essential that mentors be responsible in two ways. First, that mentors would be responsible by remaining fun yet vigilant when walking with a mentee across the street. Second, that mentors would remain responsible by not burdening the mentee with the mentor’s own unresolved issues around adoption. While it was not required for applicants to have their adoption “all figured out,” it was imperative that they be able to engage in a comfortable, age appropriate discussion around adoption and manage any
expressed emotions that the mentee might wish to divulge in an empathic and supportive manner.

**Gender.** While both males and females were accepted for participation in this program, the decision to match mentor / mentee pairs across or within gender lines was the first consideration when forming appropriate matches in this program. The BBBS mentoring model recognizes that same-gender relationships allow the participants to automatically clear one major hurdle in their efforts to kindle a friendship. In working with a person of the same gender as themselves, both the mentees and mentors may feel more comfortable in their own abilities to relate based on familiarity of experience; in this way, the mentor may recall what they were like at that age, and mentees may find comfort in the ability to assume that their mentor had similar experiences. However, in practice, BBBS also facilitated cross-gender matches in which a female mentor would be matched with a younger male mentee, to great success. Ultimately, a determining factor in these matches was the comfort level of the mentee in being paired with a female mentor. As a result of positive results from both same and cross-gender matches, mentors and mentees were asked early on in the recruitment if they had a strong gender preference, with the child mentee’s preference as the deciding factor in determining the nature of the match. In practice, decisions about gender matching often came down to discussion of shared interests (e.g., preference for indoor vs. outdoor activities, etc.)

**Adoption Story and Background.** The experience of adoption is idiosyncratic. While there are common paths to adoption (e.g., foster care, international adoption, domestic private adoption), these processes are experienced differently by each adopted person, adoptive parent, and birth parent. No two people’s experiences will be exactly the same. However, it is also understood that there may be aspects of the adoptive experience that are felt by adopted persons,
adoptive parents, and birth parents regardless of the path to adoption. Further, there may be aspects of the adoptive experience unique to the different paths themselves (e.g., transracially adopted persons may share aspects of their experiences that differ from those of in-racially adopted persons). Drawing on the developmental goals of this program that placed great value on mentor and mentee forming a relationship around shared experiences of adoption, pairs were matched based on aspects of their individual adoption stories. They were also matched on the basis of similar personality and interests, to further facilitate their building a successful relationship.

Every effort was undertaken to match mentors and mentees with a primary focus on gender, followed by a number of other variables listed here in order of priority: shared ethnic group / country of origin; transracial / in-racial adoption; international / domestic foster care adoption types. In addition to these background characteristics, matching on personality and shared interests was also considered important. For example, a mentee was adopted transracially from Guatemala, into a same-sex parent family, and after mentor recruiting efforts, this mentee was matched with a female mentor who had also been adopted from Guatemala into a same-sex parent family. While not all matches reflected such a close fit as this example, matching across similar adoption stories was of paramount importance for AMP.

**Mentor Training**

This program’s unique focus on adopted persons required a revision to the traditional training program for mentors initially developed by BBBS. In keeping with the commitment to building friendships as opposed to clinical or therapeutic relationships, mentors were trained to understand their unique role as both a friend, and a responsible figure in the lives of these young children.
Developing interpersonal relationships. Training placed great emphasis on the relationship between the mentor and the child. While it was very important for the parents to trust and respect the mentor, extensive BBBS experience had found that parents generally supported their children’s relationships with the mentors provided that the children were happy with the arrangement. As a result, mentors were instructed to call the mentee’s home and ask to speak with the mentee first, often just to chat, but also to discuss the activities for their next outing. Having the mentor engage first with the mentee to discuss activities was implemented to elevate the mentor’s connection with the child as most important, and to make the child feel special in knowing that the mentor was their friend, and not some informant or spy hired by their parents to find out how they were doing. After speaking with the mentee, the mentors would often speak with the mentee’s parents for ultimate approval over the activities that had been discussed, and to make logistical arrangements.

Mentee safety. As the mentors were ultimately responsible for the physical and psychological safety of the mentees when they were on their outings, training focused on issues related to mentee safety that the mentors might face (i.e.: accidents such as tripping or falling; difficult conversations around drugs, alcohol, or sexual intimacy).

Related to the issue of mentee safety is the issue of confidentiality in the mentor-mentee relationship. It was critical to define boundaries around confidentiality early in the relationships among all three parties (mentor, mentee, mentee’s parents), to set the tone for the formation of trust between the mentor and mentee. Mentors (and parents) were instructed that in general, conversations between the mentee and their mentor would be private. This would allow the mentee to feel comfortable talking with their mentor about “small secrets” (i.e.: a friend at school they may have had a crush on; what they got a parent for their upcoming birthday). However, all
parties were also informed that “big secrets” in which the physical or psychological safety of the mentee was in question would be open for discussion. The mentor and parents were informed that the mentor may first contact the Case Manager or Program Coordinator should either party become concerned as a result of conversations with their mentee. In the event of a concerning situation, all parties would meet to talk about the issue in a meeting mediated by the Case Manager and Program Coordinator.

Outside of discussions around “big secrets,” mentors were instructed to politely resist advances from the mentee’s parents on specific details of their conversations with mentees. In this way, mentors worked to manage boundaries between mentor, mentee, and the mentee’s parents while remaining respectful to their relationship with the mentee. Mentors were instructed to politely inform the parents that they would be happy to speak with the mentee about whether the child wished their adoptive parents to know certain information. These arrangements may at first seem secretive, and may be concerning to some parents; parents had different expectations about the information they would be privy to that emerged from their children’s conversations with mentors. For example, some of the mentees’ parents wished to know what their children were thinking and feeling about adoption. However, following a discussion of the rationale of the program and the potentially beneficial and powerful connection between the mentor and mentee, mentees’ parents ultimately understood the benefits to the budding relationship of being able to communicate privately about certain topics. Parents were ultimately satisfied with the mentors’ training and programmatic protocols and supports of the program designed to ensure their child’s safety.

Discussion of adoption. Despite the fact that mentors and mentees were accepted into this program as a result of their shared experiences with adoption, mentor / mentee matches were
not intended to be clinically-based interactions around adoption. Rather, emphasis was placed on the formation of a friendship based on shared interests, open lines of communication, and mutual respect. It was hoped that in forming this foundation first, any questions or challenges that the mentee may have related to their adoption would emerge in conversation with a trusted friend.

Mentors were instructed to allow the child to be the one to initiate any discussion regarding adoption or adoptive status, ensuring that the mentees did not feel pressured into having a discussion around adoption. Additionally, this framework around the discussion of adoption served to protect the mentors as well, by alleviating any pressure they might have felt to press the mentees into discussions around feelings and challenges related to adoption. By allowing the mentee to initiate and lead a discussion of adoption using their own age-appropriate language and understanding of adoption, the mentor would be better positioned to craft their responses in a developmentally appropriate manner, and to avoid overwhelming the child with much more advanced concepts, language, and perspectives. This was viewed as the most organic and healthy way for the topic of adoption to be introduced as a component of the mentor / mentee relationship.

**Dosage.** A final element, though parallel in importance to the success of the match is the amount and frequency of contact, or dosage, within the mentoring relationship (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, & Taylor, 2006). Ultimately, a mentee who perceives his or her mentor as inconsistent, distant, and infrequent, would be less able to view the mentor as a person to trust, confide in, ask for support, or seek a strong relationship with. Standard policy for BBBS Hampshire County frames dosage within the mentoring relationship as meeting three to five
hours per week, each week, for a minimum of one year. With no research available to suggest an alternative dosing strategy, this framework was implemented in the AMP model.

**Mentoring Activities.** Within the aspect of dosage, mentors were directed to plan outings and activities in a collaborative manner with their mentees. Planning activities together was recommended by BBBS, in that it better reflected a true peer friendship as opposed to a prescribed, adult-child interaction. That being said, the mentors were advised to always have a few activities thought out in the event that the mentee could not think of an appropriate activity.

**Match Day**

Upon finalization of the mentor-mentee match, the Program Coordinator and Case Manager accompanied the mentor to the mentee’s house for the first meeting. At the first meeting, the prospective mentee was not present; the meeting was between the mentor and the mentee’s parents, along with the Case Manager. This meeting was primarily an opportunity for the mentee’s parents to get to know the mentor and establish a relationship with him or her. While mentee’s parents knew that these mentors had been vetted and background checked, reference checked and interviewed, they were placing great trust in these college student mentors. As such, this first meeting was very important to establishing trust between the mentor and mentee. In these initial meetings, mentors and the mentees’ parents were able to discuss boundaries for a range of contexts such as what the mentee may be allowed to watch on television and whether the mentee had any food allergies that needed to be considered. Mentees’ parents were also able to inform the mentor of family values (e.g., religion, rules) that they may wish the mentor to respect when spending time with the mentee.

The mentor and parents exchanged contact information; however, it was made clear that the mentor’s relationship was with the child first and the parents second. In this way, the mentor
would call the home and ask to speak with their mentee, and would often speak with the parents only to confirm plans and logistics, and to make them aware of any major concerns should they arise. The nature of the relationship was made explicit, such that parents were informed they would not be receiving a detailed report from the mentor regarding their conversations and that parents should respect the mentor-mentee relationship as largely independent. However, it was also made clear that the Program Coordinator and Case Manager would provide support for the mentor, in addition to acting as a line of communication and security for the parents.

Following this initial parent–mentor meeting, a second meeting was held with the mentee present. Much of the pressure of this meeting in which the mentor was to meet the mentee was alleviated by having the Program Coordinator and Case Manager present to facilitate introductions and engage both the mentor and mentee in light conversation. In BBBS tradition, the mentor and mentee would retreat to get acquainted with one another while the Case Manager and Program Coordinator answered any questions the parents may have and complete requisite paperwork. Following the initial match meeting, the mentor was responsible for maintaining communication with his or her mentee and coordinating logistics with the mentee’s parents.

**Program Maintenance**

Program maintenance following the initial match meeting centered on mentor/mentee relational support, logistical challenges around scheduling mentor/mentee meetings, and individual development within the mentor population.

**Mentor/Mentee Relational Support**

Following the initial match meeting, the mentors and mentees worked hard to cultivate a warm, caring, safe, and trusting relationship. Mentors were supported in their efforts through
individual case supervision, with the BBBS case manager, once a month (as per standard BBBS Hampshire County policy), as well as through the Mentor Group Meetings (MGM).

Themes that emerged in both forms of supervision concerned the appropriate setting and maintaining of boundaries between the mentor and the mentee. As was explained to the mentors, their role was unique in that they were expected to be both a friend, and an adult figure who was ultimately responsible for setting the framework in which the relationship could safely develop. Issues such as the mentee ignoring the mentor when it was time to pick up toys before leaving, the mentee rooting through the personal belongings and desks of the mentors when they would spend time in their dorm rooms or apartments, were among the most common. Supervision around these issues was largely to remind the mentors of their role as the adult figure as well, and to offer suggestions about how to speak to the mentee to remind him or her that while the mentor was a young adult, it was important for the mentee to listen to the mentor for guidance, instruction, and safety.

**Mentors’ Personal Development**

A large aspect of program maintenance involved supporting the mentors’ personal development and growth in response to participation. Mentors were given full access to psychological services at the university; however, none of the mentors to date has sought referrals to counseling services through AMP. Nearly all of the mentors did, however, rely heavily on the Mentor Group Meetings (MGMs) as a place to discuss their experiences as a mentor, share their thoughts about the readings and studies, and find support in each other as they began to think more and more about the role of their own adoption in shaping who they were as a person.
**Mentor Group Meetings.** While the primary role of the mentor was established as a friend to the mentee, it was critical that mentors receive training to handle questions related to adoption should they arise. While many of the mentors had experience interacting with school-age cousins, nieces, and nephews, few had experience working with children in a role that required them to be simultaneously an authority figure and a friend. The mentor group meetings (MGMs) were established to meet three critical needs for college-age mentors participating in this adoption mentoring program: a) support for the mentors in their mentoring roles; b) education around the issues of adoption to prepare mentors to handle questions that may arise; c) support for potential personal reaction and response around mentors’ own understanding of the role of adoption in his or her lives.

A) The MGMs, co-led by the Program Coordinator and the Case Manager, provided the mentors with advice on how to develop rapport, develop these dual roles, maintain boundaries, ensure mentee safety, and ultimately, have fun. Mentors were able to use the Program Manager, Case Manager, and the other mentors as sounding boards for any questions, concerns, or ideas for outings and activities.

B) In meeting the second identified need - education around the issues of adoption - MGMs included a didactic portion that covered a review of past and current issues related to adoption, identity, race / ethnicity, and family dynamics. Guest speakers addressed topics such as adolescent / emerging adult development, post-adoption services, and the intersection of race / ethnicity and adoption. In addition, by reviewing and critically responding to research and theoretical papers, mentors were positioned to appropriately respond to potential questions raised by their mentees. (Course content for the MGMs was developed by the Program Coordinator in consultation with the Chair of the Rudd Program and other members of the executive committee.
Additional information on the specific content of the mentor group meetings, readings, assignments, and guest speakers can be obtained by contacting the first author directly.

C) By exposing the adopted mentors to new perspectives on adoption, current issues, theory, and research, it was hypothesized that the mentors may engage in some level of introspection regarding their own personal feelings and understanding of adoption. Facilitated by a transracially adopted, clinical psychology graduate student, (who also held the role of Program Coordinator), MGMs were developed as a safe and open space for mentors to engage in discussion about adoption.

Research and theory into the formation of an adopted person’s understanding of the influence of his or her adoption suggests that it is much more involved and complex of a process than simply obtaining pieces of information (i.e., information about one’s birth family) (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). Rather, “understanding adoption” is conceptualized as the manner in which an adopted person views their adoption as a powerful influence on many other dimensions of one’s life, from friends they choose, social experiences one has, to how the schemas they use to navigate the world around them are formed (Brodzinsky, 2011). Current work further suggests that the social environment in which adopted individuals are raised is critical to an ultimate acceptance and understanding of the influence of adoption (French, in press). An unsupportive environment (characterized by a lack of appropriate communication around adoption) may prevent the adopted person from incorporating adoptive status as a source of positive self-esteem. In providing a new social context in which adoption was the center of discussion and framed in positive ways, it was anticipated that the mentor group meetings would act as an impetus and catalyst for the development of a new understanding of adoption for these emerging adults.
As the mentors began thinking about their adoption more, the group began to evolve into a more cohesive support system that the mentors could rely on. It was critical that the Program Coordinator and the Case Manager who facilitated the mentor group meetings be sensitive, open, and understanding to the comments, issues, and challenges that were brought up over the course of the year. The Program Coordinator who ran the meetings was himself a transracially adopted person, while the Case Manager was not. However, the mentors expressed that they felt comfortable disclosing their perspectives on adoption with the nonadopted Case Manager present, as she was viewed as a trusted and respected individual. Far from resembling a group therapy session, the Program Coordinator and Case Manager ensured that the mentor group meetings consistently presented new, but appropriate information to the mentors, and provided ample time for discussion.

In meeting these three critical needs, the mentor group meetings were developed to play an integral role in AMP to support mentors, and as a corollary, strengthen the program as a whole.

**Logistical Support**

One of the initial concerns was the dependability of the mentors; while the screening process targeted those potential mentors who were thought to be both responsible and dedicated, it was understood that in working with young adults of this age, it is often the case that “things come up.” In reality, difficulties in consistency typically resulted from the busy schedules of the mentees and their parents, rather than from any mentor unavailability or irresponsibility. The children selected to participate as mentees in this program were generally very busy with other activities during the school year, such as afterschool tutoring and sports activities; something that had not been anticipated during the development of the program. BBBS noted that the majority
of its mentee populations for its general mentoring program come from low-income backgrounds; as a result of the lower level of financial resources, many of the children in the regular program do not have daily schedules filled with extracurricular activities. This, we quickly learned, was in stark contrast to the mentee population that was a part of this unique adoption mentoring program, in that the mentees and their adoptive parents were involved in many activities. Efforts were then made by the Case Manager to ensure regular contact with the mentees’ adoptive parents to ensure that they were prioritizing their child’s time with their mentor.

**Funding**

The Adoption Mentoring Partnership was initially developed through the Rudd Adoption Research Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County, MA. The Rudd program contributed funds for the salary, benefits, and tuition of the graduate student Program Coordinator to develop the program, as well as a portion of the salary of the Rudd Chair and the Rudd Program officer. BBBS allocated at least 50% of an existing Case Manager’s salary line to work on AMP as well as a portion of the Executive Director’s salary and some additional staff support. Both programs contributed to supplies and incidentals needed for the program. Later, the Rudd Adoption Research Program also contributed funds in the form of challenge grants which matched dollar for dollar, any additional seed monies obtained through traditional grant application processes. Initial efforts were undertaken to apply to local foundations and organizations that supported programs focusing on bettering the lives of community members. Despite the challenging economic situation in which this program was developed, AMP received one grant from the Community Foundation of Western
Massachusetts and two grants from the Frank Beveridge Family Foundation, which were matched by the challenge grant put in place by the Rudd Adoption Research Program.

The Rudd Program continued to pay for the salary and benefits of the graduate student Program Coordinator, and later offset costs associated with the salary of the Case Manager assigned to the AMP program by Big Brothers Big Sisters. External funding is being sought continuously; a number of grants were applied for but not awarded. Funding is an ongoing challenge, and members of the AMP executive committee continue to seek funding through various channels, tapping into the collaborative, cross-disciplinary nature of this community-based, but also highly academic endeavor.

**Program Summary**

Efforts to develop the Adoption Mentoring Partnership as a preventive post-adoption intervention that provided adopted children with a protective factor in the form of an adopted college student mentor, has been a resounding success in many areas. As with the development of all service provider programs, a number of challenges arose, both common and unique to this specific endeavor. The strengths and limitations that emerged in the development of this program will be discussed following the presentation of the program of research established as a part of the overall Adoption Mentoring Partnership. This program of research was designed to capture the impact of program participation on all participants in the program, as well as to shed light on the processes underlying the influence of adoption on the formation of concepts of self and identity in adopted college-age individuals.

**PART 3: Program of Research**

AMP program leaders believed unequivocally in the importance of program evaluation. The implementation of a research program was critical to the ultimate success of the program.
As a result, the research program outlined here is extensive. This chapter reflects the development of the research methodology over the first two years of the program; an evaluation methodology that is still evolving. Some elements of program evaluation are stronger than others (e.g., research on mentors), while other elements still have yet to be implemented in full (e.g., child and mentee parent research). As data collection is still in progress, only methodology and procedures will be reported in this chapter. All aspects of this research, regardless of the stage of data collected, have been approved by the University of Massachusetts Amherst Institutional Review Board (IRB). This institutional body is responsible for ensuring that university-sponsored research adheres to sound ethical principles.

This chapter should be viewed as a strong response to reviews of mentoring literature that note a dearth of research and program evaluation across the board (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Moreover, AMP is positioned as a potential vanguard in the study of mentoring as a post-adoption service intervention. The motives for this particular program of research are quite clear. Primary goals for AMP program evaluation were to a) determine what impact was participation having on the mentors, mentees, and mentees’ parents; b) inform the continued development of the best possible program; c) provide evidence to funding sources to ensure continued financial support over time; and d) strengthen the mentoring program to ultimately make it viable for dissemination as a model for adoption-specific mentoring nationwide. There was also a desire to contribute to the literature base on the impact of mentoring programs on adopted persons. In these ways, program evaluation is seen as a critical component to the overall success of AMP. It is strongly recommended that some form of evaluation be implemented in future programming to ensure participant safety, program efficacy, and funding legitimacy.
The aims and subsequent methodology are guided by the theoretical positions of the researchers and program developers involved in this program. In keeping with the initial goal of establishing a developmental mentoring program, targeted areas of evaluation reflect the intrapsychic and relational aspects that may be impacted by participation. Others seeking to develop a similar mentoring program may have differing program goals or views that should guide their own program evaluation component. Therein lays the strength of this model. The framework outlined here should be seen as a starting point for other program developers and researchers who may wish to incorporate other measures or other aims into their particular version of the Adoption Mentoring Partnership. That is entirely acceptable, though given the connections between existing adoption theory and the developmental mentoring model, future developers will need to reconcile the theories embedded within the infrastructure of the mentoring program with any desired evaluation outcomes.

Aims of Research

The research arm of AMP was developed in conjunction with the mentoring program itself, and sought to evaluate the impact of program participation on a range of dimensions of self and identity among mentors and mentees. Informed in conjunction with the developmental goals established early, domains of functioning and program impact assessed were primarily socio-emotional functioning, relational strength, and the impact on mentor and mentee self-concept.

The goals of this program of research were divided into two specific aims:

Aim 1) Assessment of child/family to determine program impact on the child mentee in areas of: a) child’s perception of self-concept; b) child’s perception of the strength of his
or her relationship with the mentor; and also, to assess c) adoptive parents’ perception of their child’s socio-emotional functioning and behavior.

Aim 2) Assessment of the impact of participation on a range of mentor characteristics including: a) mentors’ identity development in relation to their status as an adopted person (adoptive status); b) self-esteem; c) mentors’ concept of race and ethnicity; d) adoptive family dynamics; e) communication around adoption within the adoptive family; f) mentors’ perceptions of the strength of their relationship with the mentee.

Change in the mentor group population was to be assessed through the assessment of similar variables in a non-mentoring Comparison Group sample of adoptees, recruited from the university’s student body population at large.

Aim 1: Program Evaluation of Mentees and their Parents

The program of research for the mentees and their parents was designed to capture the impact of program participation on a range of characteristics in line with the larger developmental theory that shaped the development of the AMP program. To date, limited data have been collected from the mentees and parents. The presentation that follows outlines the methods that will guide future data collection.

The stated aims for child and family research in AMP were the assessment of program impact on: a) child’s perception of self-concept; b) child’s perception of the strength of his or her relationship with the mentor; and also, to assess c) adoptive parents’ perceptions of their child’s socio-emotional functioning and behavior. To address the main program goals and specific child / family research aims, data will be captured in a longitudinal design over a series of four waves of data collection.
Participants

Mentees and parents. Mentee participants in this research were those adopted children who had been accepted and matched in the Adoption Mentoring Partnership. Mentees were approached about participating in this research following their match; this timeframe meant that the mentees had met the Program Coordinator and Case Manager a number of times, and had become familiar with them. Parents were approached first to give consent for both themselves and their children to participate. Parents were informed that their participation in AMP was not contingent on their participation in the research component. However, as the AMP program was still a part of the larger BBBS program, parents were required to complete a series of BBBS specific program evaluation measures, many of which part of the more formal program of research outlined here. Should a parent refuse to participate in research, their responses and data would be excluded from any analysis or publication. After obtaining parental consent, mentees were asked, as autonomous individuals, if they would like to participate in research, and given a chance to provide their own assent for participation. Both parental consent and mentee assent were required for participation.

Measures

Youth Outcomes Survey (YOS). The YOS is employed in this study to address part (a) of Aim 1: youth self-concept. The YOS is a measure developed and implemented by BBBS (BBBS, 2012). Focusing on three core areas of: 1) socio-emotional competence and self-concept as related to social relationships; 2) attitudes toward risk; 3) attitudes toward education and self-concept as related to educational ability, the YOS is a comprehensive measure of mentee
response to intervention across a range of attributes. The YOS is designed to capture change over time, making it quite suitable for the goals and aims outlined in this research program. One advantage of using the YOS and other national BBBS measures is that they are well-validated and normed.

**Strength of Relationship – Youth (SOR-Y).** The SOR-Y is employed in this study to address part (b) of Aim 1: mentee perceptions of the strength of the relationship with his or her mentor. A complementary measure to the SOR-M, the SOR-Y provides a comprehensive view of the relational connectedness from the perspectives of the mentee. Results from this measure can be used to target specific areas for improvement within individual matches and provide targeted supervision. Additionally, results speak directly to the main developmental mentoring program goals, as an increase in SOR-Y and SOR-M scores reflect the strengthening of bonds between the participants.

**Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessments – Child Behavior Checklist - School Age (ASEBA-CBCL).** The ASEBA-CBCL is employed in this study to assess perceptions of mentee socio-emotional and behavioral functioning from the perspective of the mentee’s adoptive parents. The ASEBA-CBCL (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) is a well-validated assessment of youth externalizing and internalizing behaviors observed by parents. The measure is completed by the mentee’s adoptive parents and can be used to track change over time (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001).

**Program Outcomes Evaluation (POE).** The POE is a measure employed in this study to assess parent perceptions of program impact on their children. The POE is designed to assess three key areas: a) confidence; b) competence; and c) caring (BBBS, 2006). The confidence dimension assesses the extent to which the mentor is able to instill self-confidence in the mentee.
This dimension reflected in parent assessments of his or her child’s confidence in his or her abilities, the child’s engagement in extracurricular activities, and the degree to which the child has a positive view of the future (BBBS, 2006). Competence reflects traditionally instrumental program goals, including the degree to which the mentee improves in class participation, classroom behavior, and minimizes truancy. While these outcomes are not typically central to developmental mentoring programs, this measure as a whole was an important part of BBBS standard assessment protocol. In this way, valuable data could be collected to meet the needs of both AMP and BBBS. The third dimension assessed by the POE is caring, which assessed the parents’ perception of the strength of connection between the mentor and mentee and the manner in which the mentor positively engages with parents and family of the mentee (BBBS, 2006).

**Parent Interview.** The parent interview was developed specifically for use with parents in AMP. The measure is designed to gain insight into parent attitudes and views of the mentee’s participation in the program, as well as aspects of the parent-child relationship and communication. Interviews were designed to be conducted in person, and asked adoptive parents to common on: a) how and why they became interested in participating in AMP; b) their assessment of the program’s impact; c) their assessment of the program’s overall functioning; d) parents’ suggestions about the program as a whole. Interview questions are available upon request.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

In coordinating mentee / parent research with mentor data collection, the research timeline adhered predominantly to the academic school year. Data are to be collected in a series of six rounds designed to capture change over time, mentee and parent data will be collected in a longitudinal format (see Table 2).
Table 2: Data collection procedures for parents and children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1: before match</td>
<td>YOS</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2: beginning of the academic year</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>ASEBA CBCL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3: December</td>
<td>SOR-Y</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 4: February</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>POE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 5: end of the academic year</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>ASEBA CBCL Parent Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 6: 12 month mark of match</td>
<td>YOS</td>
<td>POE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOR-Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first wave for the mentee participants is to occur prior to the initial match. The YOS will provide a baseline measure of mentee functioning prior to intervention. In Wave 2, the ASEBA-CBCL is to be administered to the mentees’ adoptive parents. This serves to provide another baseline against which change observed over the following year can be measured.

The third round of data collection (Wave 3) will be administered at the end of the first semester, in November and December, and involves the administration of the SOR-Y. Wave 3 was designed to capture change after the first semester of participation. Additionally, Wave 3 provides a point of data prior to the mentee experiencing a significant temporal break in the relationship due to the mentor’s leaving for the winter academic break. By collecting data before and immediately following the winter break, data may capture changes in the mentee’s perception of the strength of their relationship following a disruption.
Wave 4 reflects data captured at the beginning of the second academic semester, immediately following the participants’ return to the match following the extended winter break. In Wave 5, parents are administered the POE; wave 5 is to be executed at the end of the academic year, during which mentees’ adoptive parents will complete the ASEBA – CBCL as well as the Parent Interview. Finally, in the last round, completed at the 12-month mark of the match as per BBBS policy, the mentee will complete the YOS and SOR-Y, and his or her parents will complete the POE.

**Aim 2: Program Evaluation of Mentors**

Much of the research on the effects of mentoring programs focuses on the mentees and seeks to highlight the tangible and covert benefits of their participation. Mentors are often not in focus in program evaluations except as additional sources of information on the development of the mentees, assessors of the strength of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, and the assessment of overall program impact on the mentees.

**Theoretical Approach to Research on Mentors**

As the mentors for the current effort were recruited from the student body of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, it was understood that these mentors would likely be immersed in their own experiences of self-change, autonomy-seeking, limit-testing, and identity development as a function of their newfound freedom on campus (Arnett, 2000). In addition to the developmentally appropriate growth processes that college students experience, adopted persons experience additional processes of change related to their adoptive status. Though viewed as unfolding over a lifetime, developmentally appropriate trajectories of conceptualization and critical thinking position emerging adulthood as a critical time in which adopted persons may be more likely to the impact of one’s adoptive status on his or her self
(Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). Thus, in addition to processing changes related to typical psychosocial development and integration of self associated with this phase of life, adopted emerging adults may also contend with the challenge of integrating, to varying degrees, their adoptive status as an aspect of self (French, in press).

While intrapsychic developmental processes of identity are becoming more capable and more complex, the individual remains in an interactive and transactional relationship with his or her built environment (Burawoy, 1998). The built environment may reflect both the physical structures built up to construct the campus, lecture halls, and the neighboring towns. The built environment also reflects the constructed social environment, replete with norms, attitudes, expectations, and ways of life that define a region and its people. The stated processes of identity development unfold within the context of this built environment, ensuring that any emerging processes of self-development are either a reflection of, or a rejection of the transaction between the individual and his or her built world.

In seeking to integrate multiple influences of the built environment along with developmentally informed intrapsychic attitudes and beliefs, adopted persons are thought to engage in a process of narrative identity development (French, in press; Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000; Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). This narrative connects an adopted person’s past, current, and future, allowing him or her to conceptualize the role of adoption as an influence on identity development. Mentors were thought to be engaging in processes of crafting their narratives, and were positioned to contribute to the current knowledge base on processes of identity development in adopted persons, in real time. The program of research around mentors was designed to understand how a change to the built environment (participation in AMP) influenced processes of self-exploration and development.
The theoretical positions outlined above provide a foundation for the study of program effects on the mentor population. A range of related intrapsychic and interpersonal domains that research suggests are core components of the adoptive experience were targeted: a) mentors’ identity development in relation their status as an adopted person (adoptive status); b) self-esteem; c) mentors’ concept of race and ethnicity; d) adoptive family dynamics; e) communication around adoption within the adoptive family.

As mentors are exposed to a changing social environment and discourse on adoption, their understanding of adoption and its impact on their lives will be contrasted with data provided by a comparison group of adopted college students who did not experience the impact of the Adoption Mentoring Program. In this way, the experiences of these participants will be used to gain insight to the accuracy of current theory and shed light on the interaction of dimensions of self as related to adoption and changing social contexts.

**Participants**

**Mentors.** AMP Mentors already accepted for or involved in the AMP program (UMass college students) were invited to participate in the research / evaluation project; however, their participation in this research was not compulsory, and mentors’ ability to participate in the mentoring program was not contingent upon their consent to research. However, all mentors to date have agreed to participate in the research program.

**Comparison group participants.** To assess change in the mentor population as a function of participation in the mentoring program, comparison group participants were recruited within the first few weeks of the academic year. The university’s online research participation program, SONA, was used. SONA is managed by the university’s department of psychology, and is commonly used by faculty and graduate researchers to recruit undergraduates for research.
The only requirement for participation as a comparison group participant was that the student be enrolled in the university and be an adopted individual. Interested students were invited to an introductory meeting where the nature of the study was reviewed. Those who consented to participate completed necessary consent forms and received copies of the purpose of the study and their consent form for their records.

**Measures**

**Identity development: Adoption Interview.** The Adoption Interview (AI) used in this study was adapted from the Adoption Interview originally developed for use in the third wave of the Minnesota - Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP). MTARP is a longitudinal study focused on concepts related to identity development and openness in adoption (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Grotevant, Perry, &McRoy, 2005). The original interview was developed from a previous adoption interview created for the same MTARP study, and was based on a coding system regarding identity exploration and commitment (Grotevant & Cooper, 1981), and the Family Narrative Consortium coding system (Fiese, Sameroff, Grotevant, Wamboldt, Dickstein, & Fravel, 1999).

The Adoption Interview is a theory driven measure that combines systems and developmental perspectives within the context of narrative identity development theory. The interview facilitates an open discussion with the participant about his or her experiences, emotions, cognitions, and feelings related to adoption, adoptive identity, adoptive family, and birth parents. An adapted version was employed in this mentoring research to focus on three major dimensions of adoptive identity: (a) internal consistency (completeness of a narrative and strength of rationale), (b) flexibility (ability to consider different viewpoints about the narrative),
and (c) depth of identity exploration (degree to which the adopted person seeks information, relationships, or connections between elements of the narrative) (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011).

The Adoption Interview was administered in an online, chat-room format, as per its original administration in the third wave of MTARP data collection, and consists of the presentation of a question or a prompt to the participant, who then types in his or her response. The email program developed by Google.com, Gmail, has chat capabilities that allow for real-time, private, person-to-person text chatting. Mentor and Comparison group participants were asked to set up their own Gmail.com account using an assigned participant number as their username, and were instructed not to include any of their personal information in setting up the account. The researcher conducting the interview also created a unique, study-specific account for the purposes of data collection.

This digital data collection format offers a number of major benefits, with no tangible cost. In completing the interview online, the participant is able to express him or herself in a level of detail which may not have been possible through other methods. Research suggests participants may reveal more information when disclosing in an online situation as compared to a face-to-face interview, and that they may be more honest when discussing sensitive material (Bailey, Foote, & Throckmorton, 2000; Birnbaum, 2004; Joinson, 1999). When considering validity and reliability, studies have found that web-based methods produce similar results as compared to data collection that takes place in a laboratory setting (Birnbaum, 2004).

**Self-esteem: Self-Liking / Self-Competency Scale - Revised (SLCS-R).** The revised version of the SLCS developed by Tafarodi and Swann (2001) was administered in an online format. This measure is driven by a two-factor theory of self-esteem, distilling the construct into a) Self-Liking, which reflects one’s perception of how others perceive oneself, thereby capturing
the influence of social, familial, and environmental factors that affect self-esteem, and b) Self-Competency, which accounts for self-esteem attributable to perceived competencies (i.e.: success in tasks). This measure was chosen specifically for this two-factor approach, as past mentoring research suggests that being a mentor may impact both the manner in which the mentor believes others see them (self-liking; e.g., being a role model in the eyes of the mentee) as well as an internal sense of accomplishment and contribution to society (self-competency; e.g., feeling good about one’s efforts to contribute to the well-being of others).

The developers of this scale have found that the two factors are correlated (alpha = .69); however, they argue that two factors of self-esteem should be seen as related due to the nature of their definition. As they believe that both factors are believed to measure different components of one larger construct (self-esteem), it is logical that a relationship exists between them. To further explain this relationship, the authors provide the example that an individual may successfully complete a task, and therefore, bolster their self-competency. However, if there is social recognition of their successes, then that same event would also contribute to the individual’s self-liking, or perception of how others see them. In this way, the constructs remain independent to a degree, but are also related. Initial as well as follow-up research studies support this two-factor perspective (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995, 2001).

**Concepts of race and ethnicity: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM).** The evaluation study utilized a revised version of the MEIM (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999), which assessed the degree of exploration in, and commitment to one’s racial or ethnic group identity. The measure consists of twelve items that the participants rate from “1 - Strongly Disagree”, to “4 - Strongly Agree”, and provides both a composite score of global ethnic identity as well as separate scores for two independent factors, “Ethnic Identity”
(α = .89), and “Other Group Orientation” (α = .76) (Worrell, 2000). The MEIM represents a unique assessment of racial/ethnic identity that is not race or ethnicity specific; meaning that it can be reliably employed across groups. Further, previous studies have found that the MEIM was positively correlated with factors of psychological well-being (i.e.: self-esteem), as well as the salience of ethnicity across all ethnic groups that were screened (Ponteotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, Saya, 2003). This measure was also administered in an on-line format.

Adoptive family dynamics: Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ). The Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire (ADQ, Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994) is series of survey items designed to assess participants’ thoughts about their own adoption and their perception of the influence adoption has on their daily life, and was administered in an online survey format. ADQ items comprise three subscales which provide another layer of information about the individual’s perceptions of their adoptive status. The Positive Affect subscale (POSAFF) captures the degree to which the individual maintains a positive attitude toward their adoption by endorsing items such as “I think my parents are happy they adopted me”, “I think my parents would love me more if I were their birth child” (reverse-scored), and “Being adopted makes me feel loved”, according to the degree of congruence with held beliefs. The Preoccupation subscale captures the degree to which the respondent experiences ambiguity on certain areas of their adoption (e.g., “It bothers me that I may have brothers and sisters I don’t know”, “My parents tell me I should be thankful that they adopted me”), while the Negative Experience subscale captures the participant’s ability to recall both negative social interactions around their adoption, (e.g., “I get tired of having to explain adoption to people”), as well as negative personal views of their adoptive status (e.g., “Being adopted makes me feel angry”). This comprehensive measure has demonstrated alpha reliabilities of .86 - .90.
Communication about adoption within the adoptive family: Adoption

Communication Scale (ACS). The Adoption Communication Scale (ACS) is a self-report instrument designed to reflect an adoptee’s perceptions of how open and receptive their adoptive parents are to discussing issues related to adoption. The ACS, used in the third wave of the Minnesota / Texas Adoption Research Project, was adapted from the Adoption Communication Openness Scale (ACOS: Brodzinsky, 2005). The ACOS has demonstrated high test-retest reliability ($r = .70$) and a Cronbach’s alpha value of .79 (Brodzinsky, 2006).

Strength of relationship with mentee: Strength of Relationship – Mentor (SOR-M).

The SOR-M is a measure designed and implemented by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. This measure is designed to capture the mentor’s perceptions of the strength of their connection with their mentee. The measure is administered in tandem with the Strength of Relationship – Youth, which assesses the perceived strength of the relationship from the perspective of the mentee. When interpreted together, these two measures provide a unique, comprehensive assessment of the connection formed. This assessment is vital to a program that utilizes the developmental mentoring philosophy, which itself emphasizes the strength of personal relationships as a catalyst for individual growth.

Procedures for Data Collection

The data collection protocol for the mentors and comparison group participants was designed to capture change over time, and therefore followed a longitudinal format. Data were collected in a series of four waves per academic year, with the first occurring in the fall at the beginning of the academic year. This time point (Wave 1) provides a baseline measure against which change that occurred over the following year could be measured. The second round of data collection (Wave 2) occurred at the end of the first semester, in November and December.
Wave 2 was designed to capture change after the first semester of participation. Additionally, Wave 2 provided a point of data prior to the student mentor or comparison group participant returning home for the extended winter break. As many of the measures focus on communication and relational dynamics between the adopted emerging adult and the adoptive parents, it was important to collect data on the participants’ perceptions prior to a major winter break in which many participants returned to their adoptive homes for an extended period of time. By collecting data before and immediately following the visit home, data may capture change that occurred as a result of adoptive parent – adopted person interaction. Wave 3 reflects data captured at the beginning of the second semester, immediately following the participants’ return to school from the extended winter break. In the final round of data collection, Wave 4 was executed at the end of the academic year. The process of data collection and measures administered at each wave is depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Data collection procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adoption Interview</td>
<td>Adoption Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ADQ</td>
<td>ADQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>ACS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>ADQ</td>
<td>ADQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>ACS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adoption Interview</td>
<td>Adoption Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ADQ</td>
<td>ADQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>ACS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
<td>MEIM-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
<td>SLCS-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
<td>SOR-M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 4: Implementation Considerations and Recommendations

Match Longevity

Through tireless efforts in both development and maintenance, AMP was able to form and sustain a total of six mentor-mentee matches in its first year of operation. Matches were made according to the criteria established above, and have developed into close and valued relationships from the perspectives of the mentors, mentees, and the mentees’ adoptive parents. Overall, matches were strong enough to endure both the mentors’ challenging academic schedules as well as the busy lives of the mentees and their adoptive families. While mentors were on scheduled breaks (i.e., winter recess, spring break), matched pairs maintained contact via email, phone, and Skype. It was learned through discussions with the parents of the mentees that their children greatly looked forward to phone calls or emails from their mentors during these breaks.

Mentor-mentee bonds were solidified enough to withstand an extended separation, as one of the mentors participated in a two-and-a-half month study abroad program. During this time, the mentor communicated with his mentee via phone, traditional mail, or email, and was able to share an important and exciting experience with his mentee. Upon returning, the mentor reported that it seemed as though the separation strengthened their relationship, as it gave the mentee a chance to assess and truly come to value their time together; reports from the mentee’s parents supported these views. As an ultimate testament to the strength of the matches made in the first year of this program, all six mentor-mentee pairs desired to continue their relationship beyond the required one-year mark; longevity beyond requirements is seen by BBBS and many
other mentoring programs as the ultimate measure of success in these relationships as it speaks to the mutual perception of personal value and gain as a function of their participation.

Matches in the second and third years of this program continue to reflect the formation of close bonds, a testament to the strength of program development, and to the commitment of the mentors, staff, and adoptive families.

Challenges

**Mentee Recruitment.** Given the noted access to social and financial resources of this population of adoptive families, it is possible to question the appropriateness of provision of a no-cost, preventive intervention program to these families. Despite offering this programming, many of the adoptive parents initially expressed reservations as to the utility of their child participating. These parents commonly stated that they believed that their child was not currently struggling with challenges associated with his or her adoption. This was seen as an additional challenge to the task of recruitment of the mentee population. However, given the positioning of this program as a preventive intervention, it was expected that participants would not be exhibiting many traditional markers of distress (e.g., academic, behavioral, or socio-emotional challenges). This program was developed specifically for adopted children at this age, to put in place protective resources prior to the development of any later issues.

It is fully understood that not all adopted children will experience difficulties related to their adoptive status. However, it is strongly believed that simply having the opportunity to establish a friendship with an older adopted person, who they may come to view as a role model, will have a positive impact on the child’s early experience as an adopted person. The mentor’s own statements would emerge as later support for adoptive parents considering this program for their adopted children (the potential mentees). Nearly all of the college student mentors stated
that they wished there had been a similar program for them to participate in as a child; the mentors, privy to the details and nature of the relationship that they had established, continue to see value in the time they spend with their mentees. This message was very powerful to the adoptive parents of potential mentees, and it resonated with parents’ own sense of meeting the unspoken needs of their children.

**Mentor recruitment.** Mentor recruitment has been a challenge, especially in the early years of the program before it was well-known on campus and before we had made the contacts that maximized identification of mentors. Several constraints discussed above contributed to the challenge: the need to locate adopted students, who are not a visible group on campus; the decision not to admit freshmen or seniors as new mentors (freshmen could begin preparing, and seniors could continue if they had started earlier); and the desire to recruit more male mentors. On a university campus with 25,000 students, it was difficult, but surmountable with significant effort. On a small campus, it might not be feasible unless mentors were sought from several campuses in a geographical region. Our offering course credit to students at different institutions was facilitated by the Five College Consortium, which allows students at five local colleges and universities (Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Hampshire, and Amherst Colleges and the University of Massachusetts Amherst) to take courses and receive credit at all consortium-member schools.

**Scheduling.** Scheduling regular mentor–mentee outings emerged as a primary challenge. As can be expected, the college student mentors were exceedingly busy due to their rigorous academic schedules. In discussing their experiences in the first year of mentoring, all of the mentors stated that they were thankful that they were not asked to participate in their first year of college. Mentors believed that in their first year, they would not have been stable enough in their coursework or general adjustment to college life to commit the required time and energy
to supporting a successful match. These views supported the initial consideration in early program development about the need for college first years to have time to adjust to the new phase of life.

In addition to the mentors’ challenging schedules, the adoptive families and mentees also led incredibly busy lives; in fact, it was often the case that scheduling regular match meetings was limited by the child’s availability and not the mentor’s. It became clear that this limited child availability was a new problem unique to AMP that was not observed in the general BBBS population. Internal discussions ultimately identified the higher socioeconomic status of this population of adoptive families as a main contributing factor to the difficulty in scheduling. Families’ greater access to resources translated into a mentee population that was very connected to a wide range of community activities (e.g., organized sports, dance classes) that they participated in at a high rate. In addition to community activities, these families with greater resources than the traditional BBBS population served in this area meant that these families were often unavailable due to family travel and vacation. Therefore, the case manager worked with parents early on to stress the importance of regularity and consistency in meetings, and supported the mentors in their efforts to establish a standing meeting time each week.

The arrangements for mentor-mentee meetings ultimately varied based on the specifics of the mentor / mentee pair, but great success was achieved when match pairs were able to meet at the same time each week (e.g., after school on Thursdays). The benefits from scheduling standing meetings were twofold, as the mentors and parents were able to rely on that time as a regular appointment, making scheduling around match meetings easier, and the mentee themselves were able to look forward to meeting with their mentor at the same time each week;
It was often the case that parents would report their children waiting by the windows in the few minutes before their mentor was due to arrive.

**Contributions and Future Directions**

Adopted individuals, adoptive parents, birth parents, adoption professionals, and researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the lack of adequate post-adoption services at either the community or national level (Smith, 2010). Perhaps driven by still potent vestiges of past secrecy in adoption, both society and policy turn a blind eye to the real and profound differences of the system of adoption. Programs in support of the adoption triad (adopted persons, adoptive parents, birth parents) following the finalization of adoption have been grossly underdeveloped. The Adoption Mentoring Partnership was developed to address this unacceptable situation. The voices of adoptive families presented a unique opportunity for a collaborative, community - university initiative that would bridge the common divide between research and applied practice. In a testament to the strength and promise of this post-adoption services effort, AMP was developed out of past and current research and literature in both the areas of mentoring and adoption. Seeking to apply the best practices as they were currently defined provides the Adoption Mentoring Partnership with a solid foundation from which to grow and develop in a number of key areas.

**Match Success**

First and foremost, efforts in initial literature review and research have allowed for sixteen safe and successful mentor / mentee relationships to be established over the first three years of the program. Reports from the mentors, mentees, and parents on the relationships and rapport cultivated within this program are overwhelmedly positive. Perhaps the greatest testament to the overall success of the mentoring program is the fact that the vast majority of
matches choose to stay in the program following the first year. All six of the first matches made continued into the second year, with three of the six continuing for a third; the three matches that are no longer together terminated only due to the mentors’ graduation from college. Yet despite formally terminating the match, these three graduates have maintained communication through phone and email with their mentees. Five of the six mentor – mentee pairs in the second year chose to continue into a second year, with the one mentor citing unrelated personal challenges and not dissatisfaction as her reason for not continuing. The program is making great strides toward cementing its place as a community resource for years to come through the successful recruitment of a third mentor class which has begun new mentor / mentee matches this fall (2012). This success reflects the efforts of over four years of research and planning into the formation of a stable, and more importantly, supportive program that diligently sought to meet the needs of not only the children and their parents, but those of the mentors as well.

The program is founded in a desire to support and enrich the lives of child mentees and their parents. Yet the commitment of AMP’s executive committee to support the mentors from the outset is viewed as one of the strongest and most unique contributions of this particular mentoring effort. As this program targets a specific and unique population, it was deemed critical to develop a plan of support for emerging adult mentors, who may themselves be going through challenging periods in identity development and the role of their adoptive status.

The Mentor Group Meetings quickly emerged as a strength of this program. The MGMs allowed many of the adopted mentors to meet other adopted college students on campus for the very first time. Meetings provided them with an opportunity to experience a new social environment around adoption, replete with access to knowledge, discussion, and empathy. For
many mentors, they noted that the MGMs were really the first time in their adult lives that they had the opportunity to talk about adoption at all, and with other adopted individuals no less.

The motives for the development of such a strong support system for mentor personal growth were two-fold. First, it was clear that the mentors themselves would benefit from their participation in this program. It was hoped that in providing college students with additional gains besides altruistic or material (course credit) benefits, their commitment to and enjoyment of the program would be stronger. Second, a strong, healthy, confident mentor was seen as the key to overall program success. Such a mentor would instill confidence in the mentee and the mentee’s parents, and provide the mentor with a sense of confidence in their own abilities as well. College is often seen as a period of great development and instability as emerging adults mature; therefore, investment in the mentors’ development at this time was viewed as essential.

As such, a key recommendation for future adoption mentoring programs is that a strong component of their program is a supportive and encouraging environment for mentor growth and personal development around the issues of adoption.

**Contributions in Practice and Research**

As AMP was founded and guided by existing research, theory, and literature culled from the worlds of mentoring, human development, identity development, and adoption, the ability to provide a solid, grounded, and legitimate program has been greatly enhanced. This solid foundation ensures that the components of AMP were intentionally chosen, and that the program is uniquely positioned to greatly impact the lives of the participants. Moreover, the foundation of literature and theory that informs the program of research executed in support of AMP allows for a greater contribution to the knowledge base in both fields of adoption and mentoring.
This program finds its strength in the collaboration between a community and a university program. This partnership allowed the AMP program to draw strength from both resources. As the initial outlay of time, effort, and funding for a program of this nature is quite extensive, the ability to rely on two organizations to support its growth was a major factor in the ultimate success of the program. AMP represents the connection of research and practice, and works to diminish the oft perceived divide between university research and applied practice within the community.

References


Big Brothers Big Sisters. (2013). Whom we serve. Regrieved online from http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.9iILI3NGK6f/b.5968195/k.7035/Something_for_everyone.htm


## APPENDIX A: Adoption Specific Mentoring Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Program Description</th>
<th>Mentor Characteristics</th>
<th>Program Infrastructure &amp; Dosage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>To provide support for children adopted or who have spent time in foster care.</td>
<td>• Mentors must have been adopted or spend time in foster care</td>
<td>• Mentor and mentee pairs are set up as one-to-one matches; however, the individual pairs meet at the same time in a large group format.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                                  |                                                                                     | • Mentors are screened through a parent organization, Mentoring USA and receive complete background checks | • Meet bi-weekly for 1.5 hours
|                                                  |                                                                                     | • Mentors may attend voluntary mentor support groups                                    | • Group sessions may or may not be focused on adoption                                        |
| Adoption and Foster Care Mentoring (AFC Mentoring) | To support youth who have been adopted or spent time in foster care                  | • Mentors must be at least 18 years old, but do not have to have been adopted or spent time in the foster care system themselves | • One-to-one mentor matches
|                                                  | • Support foster care mentees through transitions in care and aging out of the foster care system | • Mentors must attend an initial training focusing on communication, building relationships, and respect. | • Mentors and mentees to meet at least 8 hours per month for a minimum of 12 months
|                                                  |                                                                                     | • Mentors may attend ongoing trainings during their time as a mentor                    | • In addition, mentors are to contact the mentee via phone or email weekly
|                                                  |                                                                                     | • Average mentor retention rate is 18 months                                             | • To supplement individual activities, AFC hosts group events every two month to allow mentor-mentee pairs to interact in a larger group setting
|                                                  |                                                                                     |                                                                                         | • Individual and group sessions may or may not be focused on adoption                        |
| Child Link                                       | To establish trusting relationships between mentor and mentee                          | • Mentors must complete a background check                                              | • 6 week, one-to-one mentoring program in which the mentor and mentee meet at least once a week |
|                                                  | • To encourage personal and professional growth                                       | • Unknown if mentors must be adopted or not                                              | • Mentors tutor mentees on a specific issue (e.g., problem solving, communication) and coach them |
### APPENDIX A: Adoption Specific Mentoring Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Mentoring Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Youth Empowered to Succeed (YES) Mentoring** | - Targeting youth currently in foster care, YES allows mentees to remain in the program following adoption out of care  
- Focused on providing a safe, adult friend to listen and support mentees  
- Mentees made to feel that they make a difference in the world and to hope for a successful future | - Mentors must make a one year commitment and participate in an orientation training, ongoing training, and regular meetings with local mentor coordinators  
- Matches are made taking into consideration gender, location, availability, interests, and specific requests |
| **Mentoring USA**                            | - Designed to create and maintain supportive relationships for children in foster care and who have been adopted  
- Provide personal and academic support that will enhance mentees’ self-esteem                                                                 | - One-to-one mentoring relationships that meet at least once per month in addition to weekly phone and/or email contact for a minimum of 12 months  
- Monthly group meetings supplement individual meetings and allow mentees a chance to connect and form friendships with each other  
- Group meetings may be more structured around cultural education and recreation |
| **Mixed Roots: Adoptee Mentor Program**      | - To provide transracially adopted youth with a mentor in a close, one-to-one relationship  
- The relationship focuses on cultural awareness and                                                                                       | - Mentors must have been adopted themselves  
- Mentors receive background checks and training  
- Ongoing supervision provided  
- Mentor and mentee pairs are set up in one-to-one relationships in which the pairs participate in activities individually  
- There is also a group component in which organized events allow matched pairs to connect around culture and other themes (e.g., sporting events, tours) |
# APPENDIX A: Adoption Specific Mentoring Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>M&amp;M Adoption Focused Mentoring Program through the Children’s Home Society and Family Services</strong></td>
<td>Developed in 1997 by adopted persons to provide adopted youth with stable relationships that reinforced positive beliefs about being adopted</td>
<td>Mentors must be adopted internationally or domestically and be 18 years or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors can be from any ethnic or cultural background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors are interviewed and background checked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors participate in training on mentoring themes, communication, being a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing training throughout the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One-to-one community based matches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors must meet with mentees 3 hours per month for a minimum of one year; however, the majority of matches continue beyond this requirement and last an average of 5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ChinaCare Foundation – Satellite programs at UC Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard, Brown, and Boston University</strong></td>
<td>Focused on connecting children adopted from China to their culture of origin</td>
<td>While mentors and mentees are paired for the duration of the academic year and relate on a one-to-one level, all contact occurs in a larger group setting with the other members of the China Care program at that site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities allow children to develop cultural awareness and identity, as well as foster social and team building skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harvard Korean Adoptee Mentorship Program (HKAMP)</strong></td>
<td>Developmental mentoring program focused on establishing close relationships for adopted youth. Initial goals to provide transracially adopted</td>
<td>Mentors are not required to be adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors were Korean undergraduates at Harvard who wanted to volunteer with children</td>
<td>Majority of mentors are recruited from college student organizations focused on Chinese cultural awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program sought to recruit first year college students who could work with the same mentee for four years</td>
<td>Minimal to no training, as mentors participate in facilitated activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No formal training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors do not receive regular</td>
<td>One-to-one community based mentoring relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No information on required dosage or requirements on total length of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly group meetings to supplement individual contacts focused on activities and games for the mentors and children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX A: Adoption Specific Mentoring Programs

| youth from Korea with a chance to connect to their cultural roots | supervision | During the monthly meetings, adoptive parents of mentees sit in on a presentation about various adoption related topics, run by adult adoptees and guest speakers from the field of adoption |