NOT SO "MAINSTREAM": THE NEED FOR MODELS OF INDIGENOUS MENTORSHIP

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Improving post-secondary outcomes and retention of Indigenous students may require interventions such as culturally appropriate mentorship. "Mainstream" mentorship perspectives and practices developed within places of Western education and employment may be limited in their ability to address the unique cultural considerations and experiences encountered by Indigenous peoples. Providing Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors with a model of Indigenous mentorship may improve their ability to engage in culturally appropriate practices. In this paper, we review the literature on mainstream perspectives and practices of mentorship, their limitations when it comes to mentoring Indigenous peoples, and present our arguments for the need for mentorship models that address the unique needs of Indigenous peoples.

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015, educational institutions have been more incentivized than ever to make organizational changes. Seven of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action pertain to efforts that reduce long-standing educational disparities for Indigenous peoples. These changes have included Indigenizing the environment (e.g., creating dedicated spaces for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff), incorporating Indigenous values into practice (e.g., land acknowledgements; having an elder-in-residence), and providing greater support to Indigenous students to improve retention (Treleaven, 2018). As Indigenous peoples enter institutions of higher learning, individuals have the opportunity to provide direct support to Indigenous students in the form of mentorship. Mentors may follow a more mainstream conceptualization of mentorship based on the perspectives and practices modelled to them in these Western institutions. In this paper, we briefly review mainstream perspectives of mentorship and their limitations and present our arguments for the need for mentorship models that address the unique needs of Indigenous peoples.

Importance of Mentorship

Broadly, mentorship involves the interpersonal relationship between someone less experienced (i.e., a mentee) and someone with more experience (i.e., a mentor; Kram, 1985). Kram's (1985) founding work on mentorship posits that it serves career and psychosocial functions for the mentee. Career functions focus on helping mentees move up the organizational hierarchy, whereas psychosocial functions support building one's self-worth and identity within and outside of the organization (Kram, 1985). Mentoring relationships differ from other organizational relationships (e.g., coaching, supervisory, social support, and workplace friendships) in that it provides a wider scope of support that is highly reciprocated during a specified period (Eby, 2011). Meta-analyses have shown that receiving mentorship is associated

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with higher incomes, positive career and work attitudes, quicker promotion rates, greater helping behaviours, positive interpersonal relations, higher motivation, less stress, and higher performance (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008). Mentoring is also good for the mentor. Research has shown mentoring to improve mentors' personal satisfaction, career satisfaction, sense of generativity, increased productivity and prestige (Brown et al., 2009).

Mainstream Mentorship Models and Their Limitations

Mentorship can be broadly distinguished by Kram's (1985) mentorship taxonomy of career and psycho-social mentoring. Career functions are divided into sub-functions such as a) sponsorship, b) exposure-and-visibility, c) coaching, d) protection and e) challenging work environments. Psycho-social functions are divided into four sub-functions: a) role modelling, b) acceptance-and-confirmation, c) counselling, and d) friendship. Factor analyses have substantiated Kram's higher-order taxonomy of mentorship's career and psychosocial functions (e.g., Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Noe, 1988; Scandura, 1992; Tepper et al., 1996), and other mentorship models have been developed to address unique academic (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008) and cultural contexts (e.g., Chan et al., 2015; Osula & Irvin, 2009). Although each model helps us to understand the functions of mentorship and how it is applied in certain situations, none are built with the unique experiences many Indigenous students face (e.g., identity conflict and tokenism, Brayboy, 2004; racism (Huffman, 1991); colonization and intergenerational trauma, Bombay et al., 2009). Work specific to mentorship with Indigenous populations is needed to confirm or reject whether currently defined best practices transfer.

Why We Need Indigenous Mentorship Models

In presenting our arguments for the need for mentorship models that address the unique needs of Indigenous peoples, we must review the unique contexts that Indigenous peoples face compared to non-Indigenous groups living in North America and other Western-settler states (e.g., Australia and New Zealand). Namely, their experiences with colonization, which have contributed to general oppression, intergenerational trauma (Bombay et al., 2009) and disparities in several life domains (Cooke et al., 2007).

The Impact of Colonization

We highlight that despite Indigenous peoples' subjugation to historical and present settler-colonial oppression, they cannot solely be perceived as passive recipients of violence (Burnette & Figley, 2016). History confirms they have demonstrated the myriad of creative and inspiring ways they have resisted.[1] Unfortunately, in many places across the world colonization has contributed to Indigenous peoples being relegated to marginalized positions in society (Cooke et al., 2007). The ongoing stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination towards Indigenous peoples have also contributed to their marginalization. As seen in a study by Morrison et al. (2008), which compared perceptions of Indigenous peoples from the late 1900s to approximately 10 to 20 years later, they found that many negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples (e.g., "uneducated," "poor") continue to dominate much of society's viewpoints regardless of the lapse

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[1] Examples include establishing an activist group in 1974 to address the forced sterilization of Indigenous women (Women of All Red Nations) and starting social movements that address the protection of Indigenous communities' sovereignty over their land and water (Idle No More).

of time. This is concerning, given that stereotypes are typically suggested to change over time (Devine & Elliott., 1995). Mentors that are cognizant of these issues and how they may impact their Indigenous mentees' experiences are vital to ensuring they are providing the appropriate support to their mentees.

In terms of education, the process of colonization has historically impacted the education of Indigenous peoples. Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples had their own systems of passing on knowledge, often in the form of story-telling and mentoring from elders (Moss et al., 2015). Many of these traditional forms of knowledge-keeping were disregarded by European settlers who encouraged the establishment of parochial residential schooling to Christianize and assimilate Indigenous children (Stonechild, 2006). Despite how the treatment of Indigenous children in these institutions have been criticized due to their clear ethical violations (Meriam, 1928; Marshall & Gallant, 2012; Stonechild, 2006; Yardley, 2011), these institutions were disbanded relatively recently (e.g., the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996; Marshall & Gallant, 2012).

The legacy of these institutions on Indigenous peoples has contributed to distrust of Western education and the disparities in the post-secondary attainment of Indigenous students. Particularly, almost half of Indigenous people aged 25-64 have attained some form of post-secondary education compared to two-thirds of their non-Indigenous counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2011). Encouragingly, the proportion of Indigenous peoples with a 2-year college diploma, trades certificate, and university certificate or diploma is roughly the same as non-Indigenous peoples. However, the proportion of Indigenous peoples with a university degree is almost three times lower than non-Indigenous peoples (26.5%; Statistics Canada, 2011). Interventions, such as providing mentors who can competently respond to the needs of their post-secondary Indigenous students, as well as providing appropriate training and resources to those mentors, are vital to rectify these disparities.

An Example of Indigenous Mentorship in Context

The importance of appropriate mentorship for Indigenous students is exemplified in the health sciences and medical professions. The practical and social barriers to healthcare education for Indigenous students are numerous. Indigenous students commonly cite finances as a major impediment in the application process for medical school (Hollow et al., 2006; Patterson et al., 2009). Costs for preparation courses, the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and the application fees contribute to the financial burden outside of medical school fees themselves (Hollow et al., 2006; Patterson et al., 2009). Students also report a lack of information about the application process and the absence of appropriate academic and professional development programs as impediments (Hollow et al., 2006; Patterson et al., 2009).

Limited social and cultural support within education and healthcare institutions presents further barriers. For instance, being away from family and one's community can be both a deterrent to pursuing higher education (Katz et al., 2010), as well as a source of loneliness among students once they enter their programs (Hollow et al., 2006). Cultural beliefs may conflict with Western medical practices and teachings (e.g., the handling of dead body parts, such as cadavers, to educate students on anatomy and physiology), which can be a source of stress for some students (Hollow et al., 2006). To address these barriers, several scholars have suggested mentorship as a strategy for student retention.

Patterson et al. (2009) found that many Indigenous applicants perceived that earlier intervention by a liaison would have provided better guidance in the application process for medical school. Having tribal leaders or healers who can address students' concerns about cultural differences may also be beneficial in attracting and retaining Indigenous students in healthcare programs (Anonson et al., 2008; Moss et al., 2005). Overall, being exposed to Indigenous health professionals – whether as mentors or role models – is cited to support in motivating Indigenous students to pursue their goals and address students' emotional, social, and academic well-being in a culturally-appropriate way (Acosta & Olsen., 2006; Hollow et al., 2006).

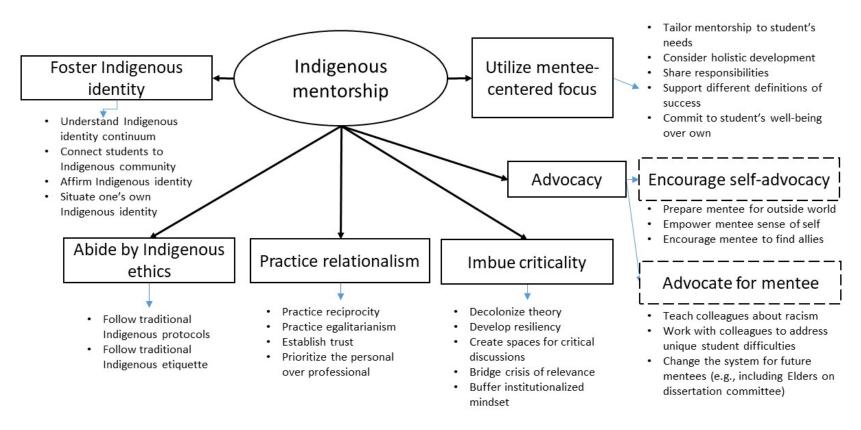**Indigenous Mentorship is Not Just for Indigenous Peoples**

The reality is that the demand for Indigenous mentors may exceed what is available or feasible. Although the number of Indigenous faculty and staff in Canadian universities has been increasing, only 1.4% of university and 3.0% of college professors identify as Indigenous (The Daily, 2020). This presents a challenge, as the proportion of Indigenous postsecondary students has been growing as well (Arriagada, 2021) and outnumbers the number of Indigenous faculty and staff available. Indigenous faculty or staff within institutions may also already be stretched in their capacity to take on responsibilities associated with mentorship. All too often, minoritized individuals incur a "race or cultural tax" whereby they are expected to participate in their institution's equity and diversity initiatives – on top of their baseline work responsibilities (Padilla, 1994). This may contribute to Indigenous faculty and staff experiencing burnout (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019), thus hindering their effectiveness and desire to mentor students. Given these circumstances, Indigenous faculty and staff cannot solely be responsible for engaging in culturally appropriate mentoring practices with Indigenous students.

Given the significant proportion of non-Indigenous faculty and staff in Canadian post-secondary institutions (The Daily, 2020), there is a higher likelihood of Indigenous students being mentored by someone who is non-Indigenous. This reflects the importance of non-Indigenous faculty and staff engaging in mentoring practices that are supportive of their Indigenous students. The question then is "what practices are important?" Theoretical models of Indigenous mentorship may provide this insight.

Models of Indigenous mentorship exist (e.g., Heimlick, 2018; Murry et al., 2021; Windchief & Brown, 2017), yet vary in their stages of validation – with Murry et al.'s model being the most empirically examined thus far (Atay, 2021). As opposed to conveying aspired outcomes, goals, or beliefs, Murry et al.' model provides a behavioural approach to Indigenous mentorship that describes six behavioural domains, including utilizing a mentee-centered focus, advocating, imbuing criticality, practicing relationalism, abiding by traditional ethics, and fostering Indigenous identity (see Figure 1). This makes this model a prime resource on which mentors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) of Indigenous students can base their practices. We emphasize that this model is not designed to be prescriptive (i.e., serve as a checklist of things to do) nor pan-Indigenize mentorship. Rather, it *describes* what mentors of Indigenous students *can* do to be effective with their mentees, which will vary across mentoring relationships and dynamics. Mentors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will still need to use their discretion and account for their own positionality and the needs of their students when engaging in these practices. Nonetheless, the behaviours described in this and other Indigenous mentorship models are a clear starting point for improving the Indigenous student experience and potentially aiding retention.

Figure 1

Indigenous Mentorship Model

Note. Indigenous mentorship behaviours grouped into six overarching categories. Reprinted from "Indigenous Mentorship in the Health Sciences: Actions and Approaches of Mentors," by A. T. Murry, C. Barnabe, S. Foster, A. S. Taylor, E. J. Atay, R. Henderson, and L. Crowshoe, 2020, Teaching and Learning in Medicine, p. 6. Copyright 2021 by The Authors.

Conclusion

In an attempt to improve post-secondary outcomes and retention of Indigenous peoples, interventions such as culturally appropriate mentorship are critical. Mainstream mentorship perspectives and practices may be limited in their ability to address unique cultural norms and experiences Indigenous mentees encounter. Defaulting to Indigenous faculty and staff to bear the responsibility for engaging in Indigenous mentoring practices is not sustainable. Non-Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to be effective mentors. Providing mentors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, a model of Indigenous mentorship may be the first step in improving their abilities to engage in culturally appropriate practices.

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