DEVELOPMENT OF MENTOR LEADERS FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING:

A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is an effective method of transmitting knowledge and skills from one individual to another and has been identified as a useful technique in enhancing an individual's response to his/her community (Roland, 2008). Unlike a coach, who must have the ability to ask open questions and avoid closed ones, mentoring is solution based (Adams, 2010). In order to be effective as a mentor, one must develop specific skills. This qualitative case study examines and describes the process of developing as a mentor as experienced by women religious working in Africa. The context for this study was the mentoring component of a leadership program conducted in Ghana, Africa. Such a study is important because it contributes to the breadth of literature on leadership programs and how a mentoring component can enhance these types of training programs, especially in underdeveloped countries. The results of this case study were supported by the theoretical perspectives of transformational leadership and self-efficacy. The sample consisted of 18 women religious who were participating in a leadership program that was taking place in Ghana, Africa. Through methods of interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and observations, the researcher analyzed the process of becoming a mentor. This research produced four developmental aspects that emerged related to the development of a mentor: (a) understanding of the role of a mentor, (b) developing confidence in mentoring, (c) handling and responding to obstacles/challenges, and (d) reflecting on the impact of mentoring. The results of this study indicated that a transformational process took place among the participants on their

journey to becoming mentors.

KEYWORDS: Mentoring, Leadership, women religious

1. INTRODUCTION

In African nations, leaders continuously face developmental challenges, spending much of their time reacting to the Western world and are very much in need of effective leadership skills that will address the problems that are affecting the African people (Masango, 2003). Women religious play a vital role in responding to the problems that are affecting the African people through their ministries by providing education, healthcare, and social services to individuals in need (Wakahiu & Keller, 2011). However, in developing countries and regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, more goodwill and governance is needed which requires African leaders to give direction for the benefit of its communities and villages (Masango, 2003).

Masango (2003) states that in order to produce leaders who are honest, competent, and committed, African nations need to develop educational processes that will ensure and support these types of leaders. Wakahiu and Keller (2011) expand further on this need for educational processes in Africa, stating that skill development for women religious in the sub-Saharan region may be an effective strategy for producing change and development. Ironically, the definition of mentor can be traced back to African tradition in which the Ethiopian Amharic term 'Jegna' means to mentor (Cropper, 2000).

Many practitioners agree that mentoring can be an effective method for assisting individuals to improve as leaders (Solansky, 2010), and can be used to generate ideas and synergy, as well as to inspire and empower others (Poon, 2006). However, few studies have empirically determined whether formal or semi-formal mentoring programs can actually impact the development of a

leader (Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011). With so many African nations lacking effective and inspiring leadership, mentorship can be used as a method for improving this deficit and increasing the number of strong leaders in communities and villages throughout the nation. An innovative leadership program, The Sisters Leadership Development Initiative, was begun in 2007 funded by a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) in order to improve leadership competencies among women religious working in Africa. The purpose of this program is to increase access for management and leadership skill-building through training and education adaptable to the specific needs and contexts in which the women in the program are working.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The original goal of the leadership program was to develop a multi-track educational program for African Sisters that would cultivate competencies to administer projects and programs that more effectively address poverty that exists among the people they serve and to provide skills that would allow the Sisters to have a greater impact on their communities and ministries (Marywood, 2007). The skills developed were intended to improve the socio-economic well-being of the people that the participants serve in schools, hospitals and clinics, refugee camps, community farms, and other social agencies (Salvaterra, Wakahiu, Farr, & Zaffino, 2009). During Phase I of this three year pilot program, which took place from 2007-2010, approximately 300 African Sisters from five different African countries (60 women from each country) received leadership training. These Sisters were expected to participate in a mentoring program after receiving their training in which they shared their knowledge with at least three other Sisters by acting as their mentors in order to further the impact of the program throughout the continent.

To be successful in this outreach, the African participants demonstrated effective mentoring skills and personal leadership skills in communication, teamwork, creative problem solving, interpersonal relationships, self-direction, flexibility, professionalism and resource management. Upon completion of the program series of courses, they manifested increased competencies for leadership, visioning, conflict resolution and project management, and reflected greater business acumen, self-confidence and technical competency. With the successful completion of Phase I of this leadership training the project was expanded for an additional three years. The research participants for this case study were recruited from phase II year II of the leadership program.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This study was examined through two theoretical frameworks: transformational leadership and self-efficacy. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership in which a leader has the ability to influence followers based on having admirable qualities that invoke a sense of loyalty and respect toward the leader (Bass, 1985). This theory was used to examine how mentoring can be an effective process for developing effective transformational leaders and can be used to bring about change. Self-efficacy can be described as an internal construct of self and one's capabilities in order to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997). This theory was used in examining the psychosocial development that takes place as an individual grows as a mentor.

3.1 Mentoring and leadership

Leadership development is a growing field of study that defines leadership skills and abilities in a variety of ways (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2001). Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on follower motivation (Burns, 1978) and change. Transformational change and leadership has been identified an as effective strategy to manage the changing environment faced

by various organizations. This theory of leadership is grounded in moral foundations that are based on four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence is when a leader provides a vision to followers and inspires followers to achieve this vision (Pounder, 2008) Within this relationship, the leader empowers followers to move beyond their self-interests and work for the greater good (Tagoe, 2010). Through inspirational motivation, the leader envisions a desirable outcome or goal, articulates how this outcome or goal can be obtained (Tagoe, 2010), and models behavior that increases subordinate's awareness of the outcome or goal, thus creating an environment that promotes subordinates to engage in and involve themselves over and above what is expected of them (Bass, 1985). Individual consideration involves identifying the needs or motives of followers and then finding a way to enhance those motives in order to get a task done (Burns, 1978). The leader will coach and mentor followers, providing feedback and assistance (Pounder, 2008) in reaching the overall goal of the organization and/or community. Intellectual stimulation occurs when the leader stimulates the mindset of the followers by inspiring them to rethink their old ways of problem solving (Pounder, 2008) and encourages them to make use of their skills in tackling new challenging tasks (Nielson & Cleal, 2011)

Leadership and mentoring both essentially involve relationships between more experienced individuals and less experienced individuals and have been linked to positive outcomes such as employee attitudes and performance (Scandura & Williams, 2004). The very nature of mentoring is to enable and empower subordinates through encouragement and support (Poon, 2006). Effective transformational leaders communicate a vision to followers that motivates them to exert extra effort in trying to obtain this vision (Scandura & Williams, 2004). Scandura and Williams

(2004) state that leaders may need to serve as mentors in order to activate transformational leadership and that when the leader is seen as a mentor, a transformational process may be present.

3.2 Self-efficacy

From a psychological and psychosocial perspective, Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy provides a lens through which the mentor development process and perceived impact on mentors can further be understood. Bandura defines perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Individuals make contributions to their own psychosocial functioning through mechanisms of personal agency, none being more pervasive than one's belief of self-efficacy. This belief influences courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put into a given action, and how long they will persevere in the face of adversity. Although self-efficacy is an internal construct of self, the source of self-efficacy is based on a complex interplay between the internal factors and environmental feedback received.

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is developed through four main influential sources. The first, and most effective influence in developing a sense of efficacy is through mastery experience. Successful achievement of a difficult task creates a strong sense of accomplishment. Numerous studies have found that mentors achieve better technical expertise, improved managerial skills, and a stronger leadership capacity through mentoring others (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006). In honing in on these skills and improving their job performance skills, mentors gain a stronger perception of career success (Allen & Eby, 2003). On the contrary, repeated failure may lead to a diminished sense of self-efficacy. The second influence in developing a strong sense of efficacy is through what Bandura (1997) refers to as vicarious

experience. This type of influence on efficacy involves appraisal of one's capabilities in relation to the attainment of others. People often compare themselves to other individuals whom they perceive as similar to themselves, such as associates, classmates, or others engaged in similar settings. Surpassing those individuals heightens self-efficacy, whereas being outperformed lowers sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This source of efficacy involves witnessing another individual similar to oneself succeed through perseverance at a given task, providing the observer with sense that he/she too can succeed at a similar task. However, witnessing another individual fail despite high effort and perseverance weakens the individual's sense of efficacy and belief that he/she can succeed at a similar task. A mentor may gain an enhanced sense of efficacy from observing and participating in the success of his/her protégé (Eby & Lockwood, 2005), which can reinforce his/her sense of competence (Kram, 1985) and ability to act as a mentor. Although there are countless efficacy benefits that mentors may experience, there are also costs associated with taking on this type of responsibility. Mentoring a protégé who does not perform well can form a negative reflection of the competency of the mentor, thus putting him/her in a position to have to defend his/her credibility (Parise & Forret, 2008). Witnessing an unsuccessful protégé can be detrimental to the efficacy of the mentor and create a sense of failure on the part of the mentor, resulting in feelings of inability to succeed in this role.

The third way in which Bandura's (1997) theory asserts that self-efficacy is strengthened is through social persuasion. Social persuasion can easily be understood as verbal encouragement. Sustaining a sense of efficacy is easier when significant others express faith in one's capabilities. People will respond to praise, and will attempt tasks that are daunting and work to develop skills if someone is encouraging them to do so. If the outcome is successful, the person is likely to believe the words of praise and encouragement; however, if the outcome is not successful, the

individual disputes the praise. Mentoring is an excellent forum for an individual to have an opportunity to obtain feedback regarding job performance needed to improve personal skills, thus broadening one's career development (Lui, Liu, Kwong, & Mao, 2009). If the feedback is positive and/or constructive, the mentor may be prompted to continue improving knowledge and skills, as well as to seek out new opportunities. On the contrary, several studies have revealed that mentoring can be a thankless task when going unnoticed by others, not to mention a contentious task when negative attitudes are received from co-workers (Hansford, Tennet, & Ehrich, 2002). This coupled with lack of support from management can result in a low sense of efficacy for the mentor and inhibit their motivation to participate in a mentoring role.

The fourth source of self-efficacy is reliance on emotional state, and mood (Bandura, 1997). The interpretation of an emotional state may lead a person to succeed or fail. This perspective simply states that a positive mood enhances efficacy; a negative mood diminishes it. For instance, stress may be interpreted by the individual with low self-efficacy as an indication of imminent failure. To the person with high self-efficacy, stress may be interpreted as a sign to work harder, or find other ways to succeed, or rearrange the workload in order to succeed.

Lankua and Scandura (2002) assert that personal learning can change an individual's attitudes, perceptions and behaviors in the work environment, which may increase confidence, competence and efficacy when solving problems in the workplace (Gouillart & Kelly, 1995). The increase in confidence and competence result in mentors' ability to positively relate and respond to their job demands, co-workers, and protégés. According to one study that followed 512 formal mentors in a manufacturing firm for a six month period, personal learning was among the most valuable gains received (Liu et al., 2009). Lankua and Scandura (2007) took this notion even further in a research study which suggests that personal learning can lead to behavioral adjustments on the part of the

mentor in order to maintain high-quality work relationships. These high-quality relationships allow the mentor to access supportive resources from co-workers.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as a descriptive qualitative case study. Case study research is used to understand this real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding requires the research to be conducted within the actual contextual setting because it is pertinent to the phenomenon and enhances understanding (Yin, 2009). The purpose of this study was to describe developing as a mentor as experienced by women religious working in Africa and participating in a leadership program. This bounded study includes participants in Ghana, Africa and covers a six month period of time.

4.1 Population

The population in this research study included women religious from Ghana, Nigeria, India, and the Philippines. This was a sample population of a leadership program. They were not chosen at random, but instead a purposeful sample was chosen based on the logistical timing of their attendance in the program. There were eighteen participants in total. All of the participants were women working in various regions of Ghana and attending this leadership training program in order to become better leaders in their respective congregations and communities. Upon completion of this training, each of the participants went home to their respective Ghanaian region and was expected to mentor at least three other individuals, implementing their leadership skills.

5. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data triangulation is a method of data collection that encourages the researcher to use multiple sources of data in order to substantiate the findings of the research (Yin, 2009). This type of data collection procedure adds strength to the research and may result in a more convincing and accurate case study (p. 116). According to Creswell (2007), there are generally multiple methods of data collection. In this case study, data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and researcher observation.

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Figure 1: Triangulation Method of Data Collection
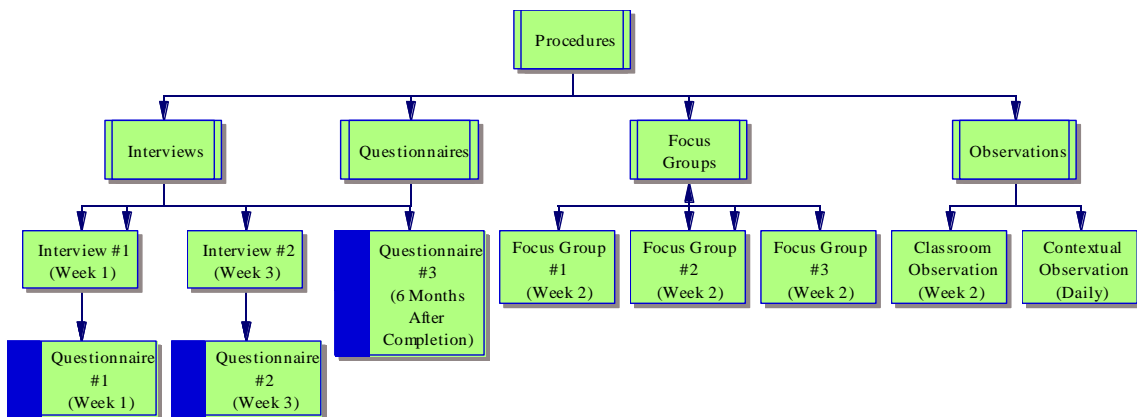
6. DATA PROCESSING

Data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or recombining the evidence to address the initial study proposal. According to Yin (1994), the analysis of case study is one of the least developed aspects of this type of research design. It is difficult to report the findings in a concise manner and there is no one correct way to report a case study. However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to convert a complex phenomenon into an understandable format, and to describe the case within its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

This case study was analyzed using a single-case embedded analysis approach of the entire case. An embedded case study analysis contains more than one unit of analysis (Yin, 2009). An embedded case study may use quantitative methods in analyzing the data. This case study is about the development of a mentor; however, it also examined the training process, the developmental stages that the mentors experienced, the application of mentoring techniques, and the overall impact of mentoring. The identification of these components allowed for a more detailed description of the overall phenomenon of mentor development. In addition, there was some quantitative methods used in the data analysis.

The researcher relied on literature and experience to present the evidence in various ways, using various interpretations. This is necessary according to Baxter and Jack (2008) because statistical analysis is not necessarily used in all case studies. In this study, theory and statistical analysis were used. Analysis from interviews and focus group discussions were reported. Themes that arose throughout the data collection were analyzed and reported. The theories of transformational

leadership and self-efficacy, which were described in Chapter One, were used to guide the analysis of the data.

7. STUDY CONCLUSIONS

The participants in this study are representative of change agents in African culture. They explained many issues they face on a regular basis and expressed a desire to improve the conditions of their people and communities. Mentoring, in this case, is a process that could be implemented in order to spread leadership competencies and influence social change throughout Africa. In order to provide effective mentoring techniques as mentor leaders, there are several developmental aspects the participants in this case underwent.

Findings related to the understanding of mentoring revealed that a true understanding of mentoring becomes more developed as mentors gain experience in the practice of mentoring. Although the participants in this study learned basic mentoring skills in their leadership program, it was evident they gained a better understanding of the concept of mentoring through implementation of mentoring skills after completion of the training.

There was a significant change in the level of confidence portrayed by participants after they completed their leadership training and applied their mentoring skills. After completion of the program, many of the participants stated that they had become more comfortable in mentoring and felt that they were increasing their skill level. Studies in the area of mentoring have asserted that it is an effective way for mentors to improve their own skills and broaden their development (Liu et al., 2009).

Research in the area of mentoring describes *time* as a major obstacle in mentoring. According to Finkelstein and Poteet (2007), effective mentoring requires adequate time in order to adequately process information. Participants in this study experienced some challenges throughout their mentorship. Most of these obstacles, such as limited resources, issues with time, and mentee cooperation, were foreseen and expected by the participants. The ability of participants to recognize potential obstacles they foresaw in their mentoring roles was also a clear indication of their development and understanding of mentoring. Participants vocalized some level of anxiety in dealing with these types of issues at one time or another during this research study. How they handled these challenges is where they exhibited development. Only one participant stated that she was unable to handle the challenges. But the others found ways to deal with them by being patient and/or accepting the circumstances at hand.

Throughout their leadership program, participants experienced some level of transformation in their mentoring awareness and capabilities. Some participants entered the program with no mentoring skills whatsoever, while others had extensive mentoring skills and did not know it. A gradual process of development by participants throughout this case study shows a clear indication of psychosocial development. Obtaining an understanding of mentoring and gaining the confidence to mentor helped participants identify themselves as mentors. The identification of one's self as a mentor impacted their ability to implement effective mentoring techniques. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy defines perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Mentoring had various impacts on the communities in which the participants live, the congregation in which they serve, and the ministries in which they work. Based on the feedback from the

participants in their final questionnaire, human resources and communication in their congregations, ministries, and communities had improved as a result of their mentoring. Several of their mentees have learned some basic computer skills. They are now able to research information on the Internet and communicate through email. In addition, and most notably, 20% of the respondents stated that their mentees are already mentoring others on how to use the computer. The increased knowledge and skill development has increased productivity because the women can do much of their work on the computers. In addition, they can research grant opportunities and write to the appropriate agencies. This is especially important for community building in African nations where leaders need additional funding to improve their communities and ministries. Many of the respondents expressed their desire to empower mentees and teach them, which continues to result in improved output and productivity by the mentees.

Confidence and self-esteem appear to have increased as a result of mentoring as well. Some participants stated that their mentees have displayed increased self-esteem and complete their work in a more professional way, while others stated they themselves have an increased sense of confidence in carrying out their duties. Other personal improvements were noted, such as mentors now have better knowledge of their mentees, are more supportive, patient, and tactful in working with others, and have more of an awareness of differences within individuals/individuality. These enhanced qualities have helped them in their work and their ability to be strong leaders.

Professional development is a process of change that occurs to meet personal satisfaction, as well as the changing expectations of the context in which one works (Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005). This professional development is a continuous process whereby individuals acquire and improve

knowledge and skills required for effective practice. Transformational change and leadership has been identified as an effective strategy to manage the changing environment faced by various organizations (Bass, 1985). Effective transformational leaders communicate a vision to followers that motivates them to exert extra effort in trying to obtain this vision (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

Through mentoring, participants hoped to spread leadership competencies throughout Africa. The participants in this study work in various ministries, acting as supervisors, teachers, nurses, novice mistresses, and other service providers. They have a desire to face cultural challenges and improve the conditions of their communities and people through development of effective leadership skills. Mentoring has had an impact on the professional development of the participants, which has helped improve conditions in their communities and ministries, as well as in their relationships with peers and colleagues.

Transformational leadership represents a mutually beneficial relationship that transforms followers into leaders and leaders into change agents. As discussed, many African nations are lacking effective and inspiring leadership. The women who were enrolled in this leadership program hoped to improve their leadership competencies and bring positive change in various African nations and improve the lives of the people within their reach. Through mentoring, they are expected to transfer effective leadership skills to others within their communities and ministries, resulting in a ripple effect and increasing leadership competencies and community building throughout Africa. When participants were asked to discuss the importance of the mentoring component in their leadership training, the most commonly noted perceived impact was

a need for increased competency within their communities, ministries, and congregations. According to 33% of the participants, the concept of mentoring would transmit information and multiply skills. Skill building helps to bring out a transformation in the workplace. Their communities are expecting changes and transformations as a result of their leadership training and mentoring efforts. Six of the participants expanded further on this perceived impact and stated that mentoring would bring more people together through relationship building and establishment of a common idea. One of the respondents stated, "…human relationships in work will build relationships and create less tension between individuals." Another claimed, "When things aren't going well in the workplace, when you help people in work to improve – it results in transformation." Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers help each other to advance; it fosters change within the organization and the people in it (Burns, 1978). It also emphasizes the influence of leaders to challenges followers to move beyond their own self-interests (Tagoe, 2010).

7.1 Development of a Mentor

An assessment of the overall development of participants into mentors takes all of the above concepts into consideration. The participants credited various reasons for their personal development. Some stated that it was due to gaining a better understanding of mentoring through lectures and materials from their leadership program. Many of the participants in this study began their leadership training with a vague understanding of mentoring. However, from the time they began the leadership program to the time that they became mentors, it has become apparent that a significant level of development occurred based on the above premises. It appeared that the participants developed mentoring techniques that they had not initially been aware of due to their

developed understanding of mentoring. For example, one participant realized the importance of allowing her mentees to be independent in order to have an effective relationship. She stated that she now "…guided her mentees without making decisions for them…" Others attributed their growth to practicing their skills, leading to an increased sense of confidence.

Acceptance of feedback from mentees and self-evaluation was also cited as a reason for development. According to Bryant and Terborg (2008), feedback from mentees supports the relationship between mentor and mentee, suggesting that it adds to the knowledge and skill building being shared in the mentorship. Lester et al. (2011) add to this research by asserting that feedback is an important aspect in the development of a protégé as a leader as well because they likely want feedback (negative or positive) from a trusted advisor. Another reason for the increased development of mentors in this study was due to applying mentoring techniques to persons of *equal* intelligence and skill level. One participant claimed that her increased confidence in mentoring was because she "…mentored to her equals not just younger people." Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005) support this claim in a study they conducted about the professional development of mentors, stating that an individual may benefit from the interpersonal skills shared with other adults.

Although there is little research and evidence to justify the assertion that mentorships result in leadership development, scholars and practitioners believe that mentorships are important in leadership development. In addition, Lester, et al. (2011) believe that mentoring is an effective aspect of leadership development on protégés, when tailored to their developmental needs. According to this study, one of the significant benefits of a mentorship program on leadership development is that mentors improve as leaders alongside their protégés. They are both applying

knowledge and skills gained through the mentorship because they are both familiar with the problems and issues at hand, rather than using examples from a training course.

For these reasons, the researchers in this case study believed the developmental aspects of becoming a mentor were important in gaining a comprehensive understanding of becoming a mentor leader, specifically in a nation where strong leadership is lacking, but very much needed. This case study identified four developmental aspects in becoming a mentor: (a) understanding of the role of a mentor, (b) developing confidence in mentoring, (c) handling and responding to obstacles/challenges, and (d) reflecting on the impact of mentoring. Based on the findings in this research, there appears to be a cyclical relationship between all four of these aspects, which is illustrated in Figure 3. When one of these aspects improves, it leads to the development of another aspect. As the participants in this study began to develop qualities of a mentor, it helped them improve upon subsequent qualities of a mentor. For example, when a participant gained an understanding of the role of a mentor, they gained a better sense of confidence in mentoring because they understood the concept of mentoring. When they understood the role of a mentor and gained confidence in their mentoring capabilities, they felt better equipped to overcome obstacles. When they understood the role of a mentor, gained confidence in their mentoring capabilities, and felt better equipped to overcome obstacles, they were able to impact their mentees, their communities and ministries, and themselves. These four developmental processes continue to work in a cyclical manner and continue to grow. As participants continue to mentor, they gain a better understanding of the role of a mentor and more increased confidence in their roles as mentors. They continue to develop the ability to overcome obstacles and have a more profound impact on their mentees, communities and ministries, and themselves.

7.2 Recommendations for Further Study

A recommendation for future studies in the development of mentors would be to conduct a similar study with a larger sample that includes more individuals with various levels of experience. The sample could include multiple individuals who have never mentored or been mentored along with individuals who have extensive experience in mentoring. Although this study included a sample similar to this, there were very few participants who had never mentored at any time in their life. Having a larger sample of individuals without prior mentoring experience would add more insight into the development of mentors. A second recommendation for future studies would be to conduct a longitudinal study and monitor progress and development in phases. A study spanning over the course of a year might provide deeper analysis of development.

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