

# A Corporate Mentoring Program Cross-Cultural Experience and the Impact on Self-Identity for Students From an Urban Community

Sonseeahray D. Ross<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Commerce, Miami University Regionals, Hamilton, Ohio, USA

Correspondence: Sonseeahray D. Ross, Department of Commerce, Miami University Regionals, 7847 VOA Park Dr., West Chester, OH, 45069, USA. Tel: 1-513-785-7718. E-mail: rosssd@miamioh.edu

Received: July 7, 2023

Accepted: August 6, 2023

Online Published: August 15, 2023

doi:10.20849/jed.v7i3.1361

URL: <https://doi.org/10.20849/jed.v7i3.1361>

## Abstract

Cross-cultural mentoring can lead to personal development through experiencing cultural differences that cultivate individual virtues and values. Culture is an aspect of self-identity. Self-identity for adolescents is important for their long-term development. This study examines a corporate mentoring program that offers a cross-cultural experience for participants. It aimed to determine if the mentoring program influenced participants' self-identity and if there was a correlation between culture and their self-identity. The study was guided by identity control theory. A 10-question Likert scale survey was administered to the 20 urban high school students at the completion of their mentoring program for the academic year, which included nine sessions. The study found that the corporate mentoring program did impact the self-identity of urban youth; however, there was no correlation between the cross-cultural experience and their self-identity. This finding adds to the research on youth identity formation. Further research is needed on how different cultural influences may contribute to youth identity formation.

**Keywords:** cross-culture mentoring, identity formation, mentoring programs, youth culture, youth identity, youth mentoring

## 1. Introduction

The establishment of self-identity during adolescence holds significant implications for their long-term development. The formation of self-identity in adolescents profoundly influences their self-perception, how they live their lives, and the future goals they pursue. Culture plays an important role in the development of self-identity. Culture is how a person is shaped by the values and attitudes of their community. Many urban youths are restricted to the culture of their immediate community, which includes where they live, attend school, work, and participate in recreational activities. Due to this restriction, little research has been done on how urban youth's self-identity may be shaped through new or cross-cultural experiences. New cultural or cross-cultural experiences would possibly provide variation in the values, attitudes, and communities urban youth experience, expanding their self-identity development. The present study's approach to solving and understanding this problem is to explore the impact of a corporate program on the self-identity of urban youth, with a focus on how this impact may be shaped by cross-cultural experiences.

### 1.1 Relevant Scholarship

Erik Erickson is an original scholar in adolescent identity development. For several decades, Erik Erickson's published works have been at the forefront of research on youth identity. Erikson (1968) posits that identity formation is a key task during adolescence that happens through a developmental process. According to Schachter and Galliher (2018), there exist certain concerns within Erikson's work that have not been adequately addressed in subsequent academic theories and empirical research. This includes discussing broader ideas and acknowledging and incorporating the interpersonal and interactional nature of identity development. Adolescents need social support, belongingness, and identity formation to develop properly (Haertle & Oles, 2023). (Negru-Subtirica (2021) indicates that during this time, adolescents are developing their capacity to plan for and project themselves into the future in their search for who they are. This exploration may link to positive psychosocial functioning, leading them to become more goal-oriented and outgoing. The formation of a positive sense of identity is a vital process in healthy youth development (Newman et al., 2021). Healthy identity formation is important for positive adjustment outcomes which include positive self-concept, self-esteem, agency,

and psychological well-being (Smith et al., 2020). Sociologists have largely focused on youth identity formation, which is the internal and external process of identity markers and social meanings as central components of self-conception, self-presentation, and perceptions held by others (Best, 2011). Identity changes through a development process and may change over time (Legette, 2017). Understanding urban student identity formation through a cross-cultural mentoring program experience might address some of these suggested gaps in the research. For instance, Rodriguez (2017) found that students attending an urban high school were able to gain a positive sense of identity by actively engaging in an afterschool program. This can partially be supported by Haertle and Oles (2023) who suggest that experimental education may provide a framework for identity exploration.

Anthropology has been concerned with adolescence as a biological and physiological stage of human development as opposed to youth as a cultural category that is difficult to describe and define (Bucholtz, 2002; Peterson et al., 2003). There has been little research into how mentors cultivate youth identity and utilize cultural assets (Jones et al., 2022). Mentoring programs frequently suggest working with students or youth at “risk”. According to Poon et al. (2022), the use of “risk” in mentoring literature has permitted heterogeneity of constructs, making it difficult to compare findings across studies. Jones et al. (2022) indicate that youth can draw upon cultural resources for motivation, which is important in mentoring relationships because of their environment, societal, and interpersonal factors.

Despite youth from low-income neighborhoods having the greatest need for mentoring, programs in these communities are often scarce (Wathen et al., 2021). Mentoring is an adult relationship that comes from personal associations with non-parental adults and has demonstrated benefits for both the mentor and mentee (Gilbert, 2021). Waters et al. (2002) found that mentoring provides high levels of psychosocial support, and this function is strongly related to interpersonal outcomes such as self-esteem. A study by King et al. (2002) further supported this finding by determining that mentored students not only had improved self-esteem but also had more positive personal connections.

### *1.2 Research Question and Research Design*

A quantitative research method was used to understand how the mentoring program impacted participants' self-identity. Data were collected using a survey. Since the study was focused on understanding the impact of the mentoring program on participants' self-identity and associated meaning, the research design focused on participant responses to survey questions. Identity control theory was the theoretical framework used to understand the relationship between participants' identities and the social structure within which they are embedded. Identity Control Theory (ICT) focuses on a person's identities, such as who they are and the relationship between their identities and behavior within the social structures the identity is embedded (Burke & Stets, 2022). Burke (2004) discusses a method of measuring the meaning of identities as an assumption of interactionism into a researchable idea that allows researchers to investigate the self as an active agent linking identities and behaviors. The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: Did the mentoring program positively influence the self-identity of participants?

H<sub>1</sub>: The mentoring program positively influenced the self-identity of participants.

H<sub>0</sub>: The mentoring program did not have a positive influence on the self-identity of participants.

RQ2: Is there a significant correlation between culture and self-identity for participants in the mentoring program?

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between culture and self-identity for participants in the mentoring program.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no correlation between culture and self-identity for participants in the mentoring program.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants and Procedure*

For confidentiality, organizations' names have been redacted. This study draws upon a previous study to explore new research and research questions.<sup>1</sup> The previous study is anchored in the experience of the mentoring program on participants and how this experience impacts participants' self-reflection in a current and future state. Within the study, reference is made to the presence of two cultural experiences but it does not explore the correlation between these cultural experiences and participant self-identity. This study looks specifically at how participants self-reflect on these cultural experiences and the impact on their self-identity. The is focused on high school students in the mentoring program who voluntarily chose to participate in the study. To begin the study, initial contact was made with the community partner organization for approval of the study. Once approval was

received from the community partner organization, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process was completed. After receiving approval from the University IRB, contact was made with students in the mentoring program. Participants had the option to opt into the study while participating in the mentoring program. Those who opted into the study completed the parent/guardian consent and student assent forms.

Participants ( $n = 20$ ) were students of an urban high school in Ohio, in a public school district. The mentoring program included a partnership with a public urban high school, a community organization, and a corporation. The urban high school defined in this study has a 97% minority status and a 99% economic disadvantage (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.). The focus of this study was on student participants in the mentoring program. Participants were in grades 9-12 at the time of the study. Since the study focused on the impact of the mentoring program on participants, data were collected at the mentoring program site. During the academic year of the study, student participants were transported via bus on a monthly basis, from September to May, to the corporate headquarters for the mentoring program. Mentoring activities for participants included mentoring sessions at the corporate partner headquarters. Students attended nine mentoring sessions during the academic year. Mentoring sessions included one-on-one meetings between the mentor and mentee and group activities. Additional activities included speakers and group activities. Participants completed a survey at the conclusion of the academic year during the study. Survey numbers were used to encourage transparency and protect the identities of participants. Surveys were completed independently by all 20 participants. Demographic information was retrieved from the mentoring program applications completed by participants, of whom 14 were female, 6 were male, 6 were in 9th grade, 5 were in 10th grade, 6 were in 11th grade, and 3 were in 12th grade.

## 2.2 Measures

A 10-question, 6-point Likert scale survey was self-administered to participants. The survey was designed to measure participants' perceptions of the program's effectiveness on self-concept, community, culture, and goals. Surveys provide researchers with information such as perceptions and relationships, allowing data to be generalized to larger populations (Hines, 1993; Kelley-Quon, 2018). Likert scales have been evaluated for reliability and validity, as well as their ease of use by researchers and participants (Hasson & Arnetz, 2005). Participants were asked to rank the program's effectiveness on a scale of 6-1 with the survey scale as follows: 6 = Much Better, 5 = A Little Better, 4 = No Change, 3 = A Little Worse, 2 = Much Worse, 1 = Not Sure. The survey included the following questions:

SQ1: My participation in the mentoring program affected how I feel about myself.

SQ2: My participation in the mentoring program affected what my life's decisions mean to me.

SQ3: My participation in the mentoring program affected how significant I feel in the world.

SQ4: My participation in the mentoring program affected what other cultures mean to me.

SQ5: My participation in the mentoring program affected what my culture means to me.

SQ6: My participation in the mentoring program affected what other communities mean to me.

SQ7: My participation in the mentoring program affected what my community means to me.

SQ8: My participation in the mentoring program affected what college means to me.

SQ9: My participation in the mentoring program affected what a career means to me.

SQ10: My participation in the mentoring program affected what my future means to me.

Questions 1-3 measured self-concept; questions 4-7 measured community and culture; and questions 8-10 measured goals.

## 2.3 Data Analyses

Binomial and Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient tests were used for the data analysis. Binomial tests were used for RQ1: Did the mentoring program positively influence the self-identity of participants? RQ1 attempts to determine if the mentoring program was successful in positively impacting the self-identity of participants. When an experiment has two possible outcomes: success or failure, a binomial test is used (Glen, n.d.). In the binomial test, responses were categorized as follows: responses of "5" and "6" were categorized as effective; responses of "4", "3", and "2" were categorized as ineffective; and responses of "1" were removed because they could not be categorized as a success or failure. The p-value confidence relationship is expressed as a 95% interval with a 0.05 p-value. A p-value higher than 0.05 ( $>0.05$ ) is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is retained. A p-value of less than 0.05 ( $<0.05$ ) is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Binomial tests were run on each survey question.

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used for RQ2: Is there a significant correlation between cross-culture and self-identity for participants in the mentoring program? RQ2 attempts to determine if there is a relationship between cultural experiences and self-identity. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient measures the relationship between two data sets. The Spearman rank correlation technique evaluates the correlation between two independent variables unaffected by the population distribution and can be used with very small sample sizes (Gauthier, 2001). The two data sets used are participant responses for SQ1: My participation in the mentoring program affected how I feel about myself, and SQ4: My participation in the mentoring program affected what other cultures mean to me. This statistical analysis measures the relationship between how participants perceive themselves in relation to how they perceive other cultures. Responses for SQ1 were entered as data set "X"; responses for SQ4 were entered as "Y". As previously stated, responses of "1" were removed because the score provides no ranking. Two additional tests were completed to determine if there was a correlation between participants' self-identity and their culture and between participants' culture and other cultures.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Recruitment

Student participants in the mentoring program were recruited for the study. These students were in grades 9-12 and came from a public high school in Ohio. They chose to voluntarily participate in the study and were not automatically included as a result of their participation in the mentoring program.

#### 3.2 Participants' Survey Responses and Subsequent Spearman Correlations

Table 1 presents the binomial single-proportion test survey results. This table represents the statistical significance deviations of the research population to assess the distribution of variables based on the sample population. The fixed number of trials yields a result of success or failure. The results for survey questions 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10 show statistical significance. Survey questions 1 and 3 focus on self-identity. From SQ1, we can determine that the program had statistical significance for how participants perceived themselves. However, SQ3 determined that the mentoring program did not yield any statistically significant impact on the perceived level of significance experienced by the participants in the broader context of the world.

Table 1. Survey Questions' Binomial Single Proportion Test

Survey Question	<i>n</i> trials	X Successes	Proportion	<i>p</i> -value
SQ1	19	14	.74	<.001
SQ2	20	16	.80	<.001
SQ3	20	14	.70	.06
SQ4	17	7	.41	.83
SQ5	20	7	.35	.94
SQ6	16	9	.56	.40
SQ7	20	9	.45	.75
SQ8	20	20	1	<.001
SQ9	20	17	.85	<.001
SQ10	20	20	1	<.001

Description: See Section 2.2 for survey questions.

Table 2. Spearman Rank Correlation between Other Cultures and Self Identity

<b>Correlations</b>			Other Cultures	Self-Identity
Spearman's rho	Other Cultures	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.151
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.577
		N	16	16
	Self-Identity	Correlation Coefficient	-.151	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.577	.
		N	16	16

Description: A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between other cultures and self-identity for 16 students in the mentoring program. There was no statistically significant correlation between other cultures and students' self-identity,  $r_s(14) = -.151$ ,  $p = .577$ . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Spearman Rank Correlation between My Cultures and Self Identity

<b>Correlations</b>			My Culture	Self-Identity
Spearman's rho	My Culture	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.017
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.944
		N	19	19
	Self-Identity	Correlation Coefficient	-.017	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.944	.
		N	19	19

Description: A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between their culture and self-identity. There was no statistically significant correlation between students' culture and self-identity,  $r_s(17) = -.017$ ,  $p = .944$ . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Spearman Rank Correlation between Other Cultures and My Culture

		<b>Correlations</b>		
			Other Cultures	My Culture
Spearman's rho	Other Cultures	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.349
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.186
		N	16	16
	My Culture	Correlation Coefficient	.349	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.186	.
		N	16	16

Description: A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between other cultures and their own culture for 16 students in the mentoring program. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between other cultures and their own,  $r_s(14) = .349$ ,  $p = .186$ . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 3.3 Test of Research Questions

RQ1 explored whether the mentoring program positively influenced the self-identity of participants. The results are shown in Table 1. The binomial test conducted analyzed the mentoring program's influence on participants' self-identity. The study population included 20 participants. Participants with a score of 1 on their survey were removed. The sample size included 19 ( $n = 19$ ) participants in this analysis. The observed proportion of 74% (14 out of 19) suggests that more students felt the program influenced their self-identity.

RQ2 explored whether there was a correlation between the culture and self-identity of participants. The results are shown in Tables 2-4. Three Spearman's rank-order correlations were run. The first Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between other cultures and self-identity. There were 16 participants after respondents with a response of 1 were removed. The analysis showed no statistically significant correlation between other cultures and students' self-identity,  $r_s(14) = -.151$ ,  $p = .577$ . The second Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between participants' culture and self-identity. There were 19 participants after respondents with a response of 1 were removed. The analysis showed no statistically significant correlation between students' culture and self-identity,  $r_s(17) = -.017$ ,  $p = .944$ . The third Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between other cultures and participants' cultures. There were 16 participants after respondents with a response of 1 were removed. The analysis showed a statistically significant positive correlation between other cultures and their own,  $r_s(14) = .349$ ,  $p = .186$ .

## 4. Discussion

The results of this study showed that the mentoring program had a positive impact on participants' identities. This means participants' feelings about their self-identity improved as a result of participating in the mentoring program. The correlations between identity and culture showed the following: 1) There was no association between other cultures and students' self-identity. This means that other cultures did not influence how students perceived their self-identity. 2) There was no association between students' culture and self-identity. This means that the students' culture did not influence how they perceived their self-identity. 3) There was a positive correlation between other cultures and students' own. This means students' feelings about their own culture improved in correlation to other cultures. This study draws from a previous study looking into new research questions to understand correlations between culture and identity for urban youth. Little research has been completed on how cross-cultural experiences shape the identity of urban youth. Previous research emphasized how young people's identities are important to their long-term development. Erikson (1968), a leading scholar in identity formation, emphasizes its central role in the adolescent development process. Identity will influence not only what they think but also how they set future goals. Thus, culture also plays a role in identity development

by shaping an individual's values and attitudes toward their community.

These findings imply that urban students' participation in a corporate mentoring program can improve their self-identity. Self-identity is made up of many factors, including community and culture. By participating in a corporate mentoring program, the students were introduced to a new cultural experience. Students interacted with individuals and an environment that was culturally different from their everyday environment. Although the mentoring program positively influenced students' self-identity, the cross-cultural experience did not influence their self-identity. However, the cross-cultural experience impacted their feelings about their own culture.

This study was guided by identity control theory, which examines the relationship between individual identity and social structures (Burke & Stets, 2022). While students from urban communities may have limited cultural experiences and access to mentoring programs, understanding the formation of urban student identities through intercultural experiences addresses a research gap. Jones et al. (2022) shared how mentors foster young people's identities by leveraging culture.

#### 4.1 Limitations and Future Research

Maturation and selection bias are threats to the internal validity of the research. Internal validity is the process by which researchers conclude that changes to the dependent variable result from manipulations in the independent variable (Kaya, 2015). Participants in the research are in different age categories and stages of their participation in the mentoring program. For example, students in grades 9-12 could be in either their first or fourth year of the program. These variables could affect how participants respond to questions and reduce uniformity based on their age, time, and experience in the program. Selection bias is also a threat to internal validity. Participants were recruited for the study based on their participation in the mentoring program. This limited participant responses based on their experience in only this program. They could choose to participate in the study; however, all participants came from the same program. This study is a new study that draws upon a previous study. By drawing upon a previous study, there was no opportunity to re-visit participants to gather additional information. The study was completed based on previously collected data. With 20 participants, the sample size was small, which was further reduced during the data analysis process.

A comparative study of different mentoring programs could be completed in the future to see if there is variation in results. Future studies could also look further into variations in results based on student grade level and years of participation in a mentoring program. A finding from this study determined that there was no association between other cultures and students' self-identity; however, there was an association between other cultures and students' culture. Further studies on the impact of mentoring programs on students' cultures, with a focus on providing a deeper understanding of this dynamic, could be beneficial to academic research. Based on the literature review, additional studies might make further considerations. For example, adding a definition or meaning of a positive sense of identity. This information could then be related to its impact on healthy youth development. While there are many after-school programs, a comparison of the impacts of after-school programs based on the structure and activities would be meaningful since this might lead to variation in possible outcomes. It was mentioned that youth from low-income communities have a greater need for mentoring. While this is a generalized statement, providing context on why this need is necessary with a correlation to specific types of needs and outcomes could provide further validation.

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**Note**

Note 1. From *Connecting Public School Partnerships to Possible Selves for Black Urban Youth*, by S.D. Ross. 2023, Ohio. [Link](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=miami1672955206348024)  
[https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws\\_olink/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10\\_accession\\_num=miami1672955206348024](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=miami1672955206348024)

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