



Research Article

Experiences of Visible Minority Librarians and Students in Canada from the ViMLoC Mentorship Program

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Abstract

Objective – The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of mentors and mentees in the formal mentorship program offered by the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada Network (ViMLoC) from 2018-2022. Findings from this research will help mentors and mentees understand how to establish an effective mentoring relationship. Professional library associations

and libraries can also gain valuable insights to support the visible minority library professionals within their own mentorship programs.

Methods – Between 2018 and 2022, 113 mentors and 145 mentees participated in four sessions of the ViMLoC mentorship program. The ViMLoC Mentorship Committee designed and delivered a survey for mentors and a survey for mentees at the end of each session. Over four sessions, 81 mentors and 82 mentees completed the surveys, representing a 72% and 57% completion rate, respectively. Fisher's Exact Tests were performed to examine if there were significant differences between mentors and mentees in their perceptions regarding ease of communication, relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, likeliness of keeping in contact, and importance of having a visible minority partner.

Results – The mentees perceived mentoring support to be more helpful than the mentors perceived it themselves. The mentees were more likely to keep in contact with their mentors beyond the mentorship program while the mentors did not show as much interest. The mentees who had a positive experience from the formal mentorship program were found to be more likely to mentor others in the future, whereas the same effect did not hold true for the mentors. On the other hand, some findings were the same for both mentors and mentees. Both stated that effective communication would facilitate a good mentoring relationship, which in turn, would lead to positive outcomes and greater likelihood of keeping in contact beyond the mentoring program. There was also consensus of opinion about the most important areas of mentoring support and some essential skills for building a successful mentoring relationship.

Conclusion – This research contributes to the literature by using an empirical research method and comparative analyses of the experiences between mentors and mentees over four sessions of the ViMLoC mentorship program. The study focuses on the perceptions of participants regarding their communication, relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, associations between their past and present mentoring experiences, areas of support, importance of having a visible minority partner, and essential skills for building a successful mentoring relationship. Mentors and mentees differed significantly in how they perceived the helpfulness of mentorship support and how likely they would like to maintain the ties beyond the program. For both sides, effective and easy communication was found to be critical for building a good mentoring relationship and achieving a satisfactory experience.

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of mentors and mentees who have participated in the formal mentorship program offered by the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada Network (ViMLoC). This study focuses on the perceptions of participants regarding their communication, relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, associations between their past and present mentoring experiences, areas of support, importance of having a visible minority (VM) partner, and essential skills for building a successful mentoring relationship. There are limited quantitative studies that address formal mentoring relationships in the field of librarianship, and the existing literature primarily focuses on American settings (Jordan, 2019). This empirical study compares the experiences of mentors and mentees, which is rarely seen in other mentorship research. Findings from this paper will help mentors and mentees understand how to establish an effective mentoring relationship. Professional library

associations and libraries can also gain valuable insights to support the visible minority library professionals within their own mentorship programs, especially in regions where the populations are predominantly Caucasian.

ViMLoC formed in 2012 with a mission to connect, engage, and support visible minority librarians in Canada. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities (VMs) as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Government of Canada, 2021). Maha Kumaran and Heather Cai (2015) conducted the first ViMLoC survey in 2013 which reported that VM librarians lacked mentorship and networking opportunities with other minorities in the country. Accordingly, the ViMLoC mentorship program was inaugurated in 2013 and on an ongoing basis from 2013-2015 nine pairs were matched, becoming the first formal mentorship program for VM librarians to be mentored by VM librarians in Canada (Kumaran, 2013). Many of the formal mentorship programs available for librarians require association fees, are limited to a small geographic area, or are tied with other limited opportunities like residency programs, which are mostly seen at American institutions (Garrison, 2020; Harper, 2020). One reason for establishing ViMLoC was to improve informal professional connections (Majekodunmi, 2013); the mentorship program is a formal way of creating these networking opportunities. ViMLoC is free of charge and participation in the mentorship program is open to librarians and Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) students across Canada who identify as VMs.

After a hiatus, the ViMLoC mentorship program was reinitiated in 2018. The ViMLoC Mentorship Committee (referred to as “the Committee”) recruited VM librarians at every career stage to be mentors and paired them with mentees. Each session ran for two months (October-November in 2018, and May-June in 2020, 2021, 2022). The 2018 session occurred at the end of the year from November to December. After seeing the high demand for visible minorities to mentor each other, the Committee found there was merit to continuing the mentorship program. They observed that 58% of the mentees were students and 40% of mentors worked in an academic library. The Committee decided that offering a mentorship program from May to June would best suit academic work schedules and be ideal for students graduating from their programs. Repeating the mentorship program in May-June 2019 would be too soon after the 2018 session closed, so the Committee decided to postpone the next session until May-June 2020; the subsequent sessions in 2021 and 2022 followed the same timeline. A survey was sent separately to mentors and mentees at the end of each session. The survey responses were used to assess the mentorship program and provided rich information about the mentorship experiences of the participants. The data collected therein formed the basis of this research.

Literature Review

Barriers for VMs in Librarianship

VMs in the library profession can face additional invisible obstacles that their Caucasian counterparts may not. Many of these obstacles have been explained in the literature. For example, Gohr (2017) identified that new library professionals looking for their first position in a competitive job market might have to take on unpaid work experiences to build up their CV. However, for VMs, taking on unpaid work is considered a privilege and financial barrier that their Caucasian counterparts might not face as often.

Even after getting a library job, there are multiple descriptions of workplace barriers for VM librarians in the literature. A consistently cited barrier is that VM librarians need to assimilate themselves into a

Caucasian-dominated work culture (Brown et al., 2018; Gohr, 2017; Lee & Morfitt, 2020). The result, according to Brown et al. (2018), is that VM librarians feel a pressure to police how they present themselves through their words, behaviour, and appearance, which can cause personal anguish. For instance, research found that 38.6% of VM academic librarians “did not feel free to speak their mind and express their views openly,” which adds to that stifling of their true selves (Kandiuk, 2014, p. 510).

While fitting in is not the only option, VM librarians who do not conform may face more microaggressions in the workplace (Brown et al., 2018). Others described how this work situation could amplify feelings of imposter syndrome (Farrell et al., 2017; Lee & Morfitt, 2020). Brown et al. (2018), Hathcock (2015), Johnson (2007), and Thornton (2001) all discussed the feeling of loneliness in the workplace, either from the physical isolation at work events or from the emotional isolation of pretending to fit in. Hathcock (2015) further elaborated on the loneliness of pretending to fit into a structure of White librarianship and needing someone, like a role model or mentor, to show them how to do so. In Thornton’s (2001) study of Black female librarians in the US, she determined that many respondents felt some level of isolation and that was one source for low levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, 71% of Black female librarians had experienced some level of racial discrimination at work, which compounded with feelings of isolation and negatively impacted morale. Comparatively, in a Canadian academic setting, Kandiuk (2014) reported that only 42.8% of the VM academic librarians found that their colleagues were welcoming or somewhat welcoming to difference and diversity, 23.3% were not or somewhat treated with respect and as an equal member, and 16.1% felt they were not or only somewhat valued by work colleagues for their knowledge and work contributions. These seemingly common experiences of isolation for VMs in libraries can lead to low morale and negative work environments that make them want to leave the job and/or the profession altogether (Kendrick & Damasco, 2019; Olivas, 2014; Thornton, 2001).

Mentorship Identified as a Solution

When referencing all the barriers and negative experiences of being a culturally diverse library professional, a common solution proposed by VM librarians throughout the literature was mentorship. For example, in Johnson’s (2016) interviews of academic librarians of colour, respondents indicated that a lack of mentorship was a barrier to their progress in their career and that any form of mentoring or networking was better than nothing. Echoing that sentiment, in an open-ended question about how their workplace could support VM librarians in Canadian academic institutions, the most common survey response was having mentorship and that “equity-related mentoring” opportunities to support VM librarians needed to be created (Kandiuk, 2014). Moreover, Olivas (2014) found that many VM study participants needed to seek mentorship opportunities beyond their institution because what they received from their library was not adequate.

Many studies focus on mentoring students before or after LIS (library and information science) programs to increase the number of VM students and graduates, which in turn, will increase representation and diverse candidate pool. Montiel-Overall and Littletree (2010) spoke of a specific program to recruit and ensure graduation of Latino and Native American in an LIS program; one of the methods used to ensure high retention was mentorship. McCook and Lippincott (1997) analyzed American statistics in the 1980s to 1990s to find that LIS schools that graduated a higher number of diverse students employed mentoring as a recruitment strategy. The ViMLoC mentorship program also welcomed current MLIS students who identified as VM to apply as mentees, providing them with an opportunity to build a professional network and access other resources that ViMLoC can provide.

Mentorship Benefits for VMs

Since mentorship has often been proposed as a solution to combat the barriers in the profession, the benefits of mentorship for VM librarians in these circumstances need to be elaborated. Some of the more obvious benefits of VM mentorship listed in the literature are related to getting advice from experts with lived experience, refining their CV, and career planning and progression (Alston, 2017; Bonnette, 2004; Boyd et al., 2017). However, considering the circumstances, there is great emphasis on emotional support that mentors have provided. For example, it could be “a shoulder to cry on, a relatable voice, and honesty” (Alston, 2017, p. 159). It could also be social supports through “socialization into the profession” (Boyd et al., 2017, p. 492), or “demystifying and interpreting library culture and politics and assisting the mentee with tips on how to work within the given institutional structure,” along with connecting them with people within their network (Moore et al., 2008, p. 76). Overall, this blend of practical advice, along with psychosocial support from mentors has been found to improve job satisfaction for VM librarians (Alston, 2017).

Benefits of VM Mentors

Oftentimes, VM mentees are paired with Caucasian mentors due to the imbalance of representation within the profession (Ford, 2018). Many have noted that this can be problematic as VM mentees may feel the pressure to assimilate more into the dominant culture of the profession and that Caucasian mentors cannot provide VM mentees with supports that a VM mentor could (Brown et al., 2018; Hathcock, 2015). While the effect of mentorship for VMs is profound, it has been suggested in the literature that having VM mentors providing mentorship to VM mentees can amplify the benefit. For example, Espinal et al. (2018) suggested how a mentoring program specifically for VM librarians would be beneficial to alleviate some of the pressure put on them in a White-dominated profession. For VM LIS students that had VM mentors, they found that there was a “shared understanding of their experience” (Hussey, 2006, p. 76) and that VM mentors can help them navigate through difficult situations based on their own lived experiences (Hussey, 2006). From their national survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews of Chinese American librarians, Ruan and Liu (2017) found that one of the major themes from respondents was mentorship. They revealed respondents’ praises for the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) mentorship program where Chinese American librarians mentored each other. They noted that a benefit of VM mentors was providing assistance to overcome communication and other cultural barriers. Similarly, Moore et al. (2008) touched upon dealing with situations or issues that would be unique to VMs in the profession and how the VM mentor could provide advice about how to deal with it effectively. Furthermore, it has been noted that people from nonminority groups might not detect microaggressions the way a racialized person might, but VM mentors are able to validate situations of microaggressions and provide the VM mentee with reassurance of their experiences (Alabi, 2015). Anecdotally, Cho (2014) examined his experiences with other Asian librarian mentors. He found that having VM mentors benefitted him as it gave him the opportunity to share their experiences together and reflected upon them. Not only did it benefit the VM mentees, a study of VM mentors at academic libraries found that mentoring new librarians was professionally rewarding and increased the VM librarian’s likelihood of pursuing managerial roles (Bugg, 2016).

While there are many benefits to be gained from VM mentors, a negative aspect of VMs mentoring VMs is that there are so few mentors available, especially those with managerial experiences (Hoffman, 2014; Moore et al., 2008). Thus, extra burden is placed on VM mentors, especially when mentorship does not count as credited work. For example, Cooke and Sánchez (2019) highlighted that mentorship was unpaid volunteer work and did not contribute towards tenure application for academic librarians. Nevertheless,

some VM librarians still took on the added task of mentorship to ensure the growth of diversity in the profession (Harper, 2020; VanScoy & Bright, 2017).

Communication in a Mentoring Relationship

The literature about mentoring programs for VMs in libraries focuses more on practical guidelines that highlight the importance of communication, which is pivotal to building and maintaining the relationship. For example, the guidance provided states that regular contact and showing concern allows the VM mentee to openly share and discuss personal concerns with candour (Abdullahi, 1992; Hernandez, 1994). Likewise, in Harrington and Marshall (2014), the respondents from Canadian academic libraries highly rated the importance of the following mentorship activities: sharing experiences, sharing confidential information, and actively listening to concerns. All these elements go into building a mentoring relationship through communication. Anecdotally, Olivas and Ma (2009) described their positive mentoring relationship as VM librarians due to their “[c]lear communication with each other, on a continual basis” (p. 6) which they did through emails and phone calls to discuss their professional experiences.

Communication issues in mentorship can occur due to cross-cultural and intergenerational differences, among many. Amongst VM librarians there are many factors that can lead to a breakdown in communication, which becomes a challenge for the mentoring pair. For example, among the 17 challenges to mentorship listed in Adekoya and Fasae’s (2021) study of academic librarians in Nigeria, “ineffective meetings, communication and feedback between the mentor and mentee” ranked fourth highest. In another study, a respondent identified issues with communication for the breakdown with their mentor, which created a negative mentorship experience (Zhang et al., 2007).

Methods

Survey Design and Delivery

To gather information about the participants’ mentoring experiences and to help improve the ViMLoC mentorship program, the ViMLoC Mentorship Committee designed and delivered a survey for mentors and mentees separately at the end of each session. After ethics approvals from Wilfrid Laurier University and York University, online survey questionnaires were created using Qualtrics XM. Nine questions from the surveys used in the first 2013 ViMLoC mentorship session were slightly updated. An additional 15 new questions were included in the survey for mentees and mentors respectively, with the researchers referring to other studies to inform the new questions (Goodsett & Walsh, 2015; Harrington & Marshall, 2014). The Mentorship Committee also consulted other ViMLoC committee members for feedback. The survey links were sent to mentors and mentees via email. The surveys remained open for one month with a reminder email sent two weeks before the deadline. An informed consent letter was provided at the start of the survey, which indicated that the participants could choose not to participate, withdraw at any point, or skip any questions in the survey. All responses were collected anonymously.

During the mentorship program, when there was a shortage of mentors or when a mentor had the expertise that could benefit more than one mentee, one mentor could be approached to be matched with two mentees. As such, the questionnaires for mentors were slightly different depending on how many mentees were mentored by them. The survey for mentors who assisted one mentee contained six multiple-choice questions about communication, eight multiple-choice questions about interaction, three multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question about mentorship experience, and one multiple-

choice question and three open-ended questions about mentorship program assessment (Appendix A). In the survey for mentors who assisted two mentees, the questions about communication and interactions (Q4-17 in Appendix A) with the first mentee were repeated for the second mentee. The survey for mentees included six multiple-choice questions about communication, eight multiple-choice questions about interaction, two multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question about mentorship experience, and two multiple-choice questions and three open-ended questions about mentorship program assessment (Appendix B).

Data Analysis

The survey questions were designed to allow comparison of experiences between mentors and mentees in the program. Four questions (Q13-16) from the mentor survey (Appendix A) and the mentee survey (Appendix B) were similar, with minor changes in the wording for the target audience. For instance, in the question about ease of communication, the mentors were asked "How easy was communication with your mentee?" This question was reworded for mentees to read "How easy was communication with your mentor?" Similarly, this research compared the perceptions of mentors and mentees regarding how they felt about their relationship with their mentoring partner (mentoring relationship), how helpful the mentor was in assisting their mentee (helpfulness of mentorship), and how likely they would connect beyond the program (likeliness of keeping in contact). These indicators were all measured using a 5-point Likert Scale. For instance, the response options for the question about ease of communication included "Very Easy," "Easy," "Moderately Easy," "Difficult," and "Very Difficult."

Moreover, in-depth analyses were conducted regarding the associations between four items: ease of communication, mentoring relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, and likeliness of keeping in contact. This study also examined the associations between the respondents' present and previous mentorship experience, and associations between their present experience and intentions to mentor in the future. These analyses were based on Fisher's Exact Test, a statistical test used to determine whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables if 20% or more of the cells in the contingency tables have expected frequencies less than five. The Freeman-Halton Extension of the Fisher's Exact Test for more than 2 x 2 (two-row by two-column) contingency tables was employed (Ibraheem & Devine, 2013; Kim, 2017). STATA 13 was used for all data analyses. For the open-ended questions about the skills that are important for a successful relationship and the most satisfying aspect of the ViMLoC mentoring program, answers from respondents were coded inductively by one researcher, with several answers having multiple elements listed, thus given multiple codes. Subsequently, some codes were aggregated due to similarity. Another assessment of the responses and second review of the code assignments was completed. Frequencies for each code were calculated for the mentor and mentee groups separately.

ViMLoC Mentorship Program Participants and Survey Respondents

From 2018 to 2022, 113 mentors and 145 mentees participated in the ViMLoC mentorship program. Amongst mentors, the largest three ethnicities were Chinese (38%, n=43), South Asian (17%, n=19), and Black (10%, n=11). Nearly 60% (n=64) were working at academic libraries, followed by public libraries (22%, n=25), and special libraries (17%, n=19). Their experience as a librarian ranged from 2-29 years. Of the 113 mentors, 24% (n=27) were in management positions. Regarding mentees, Chinese (21%, n=31), South Asian (20%, n=29), and Black (15%, n=22) were also the most prevalent minorities. Over half the mentees (55%, n=80) were library school students. This mirrored the finding of Harrington and Marshall (2014), where library school students were found to expect mentorship opportunities more than librarians. Those who had librarian experience for less than five years made up 26% (n=38). Among the

mentees, 9% (n=13) had a master's degree in librarianship from outside Canada. It was noted that a mentor or mentee might engage in more than one mentoring session, and a mentee might also serve as a mentor either in different sessions or even within the same session. The counts and percentages presented above included all repeat participants. As shown in Table 1, there were 73 participants in 2018, with the greatest number of mentees (n=48) across the four sessions, which reflected the pressing needs of visible minority mentees after a few gap years since the first ViMLoC mentorship program was launched in 2013. The number of participants experienced a dramatic drop in 2020 due to COVID-19 and bounced back in 2021 and 2022.

Table 1
ViMLoC Mentorship Program Participants and Survey Respondents

Year	Program Participants		Survey Respondents		Survey Completion Rates	
	Mentors	Mentees	Mentors	Mentees	Mentors	Mentees
2018	25	48	18 (16)	25	72%	52%
2020	24	26	16 (2)	20	67%	77%
2021	33	39	25 (8)	22	76%	56%
2022	31	32	22 (1)	15	71%	47%
Total	113	145	81 (27)	82	72%	57%

Note: The number in brackets indicates the number of mentors who assisted two mentees.

In total, 81 mentors and 82 mentees completed the surveys, representing a 72% and 57% completion rate, respectively. Although more mentees participated in the mentorship program, they had a lower survey completion rate compared to mentors in all the years, except in 2020 (see Table 1). We analyzed 190 responses, including 108 responses from mentors and 82 responses from mentees. All questions were optional, therefore the number of responses for individual questions varied.

Results

Mentoring Support Activities

The mentees were asked, "What aspects did your mentor help you with?" This question was reworded for the mentors to read, "What aspects did you help your mentee with?" Each group was provided with a list of 20 mentoring support activities to choose whatever aspects they provided as mentors or received as mentees. Both groups identified the same five areas of mentorship support as their top experiences: sharing professional experience, providing encouragement, providing career counselling, sharing experience about the day-to-day work life, and addressing professional concerns (Figure 1).

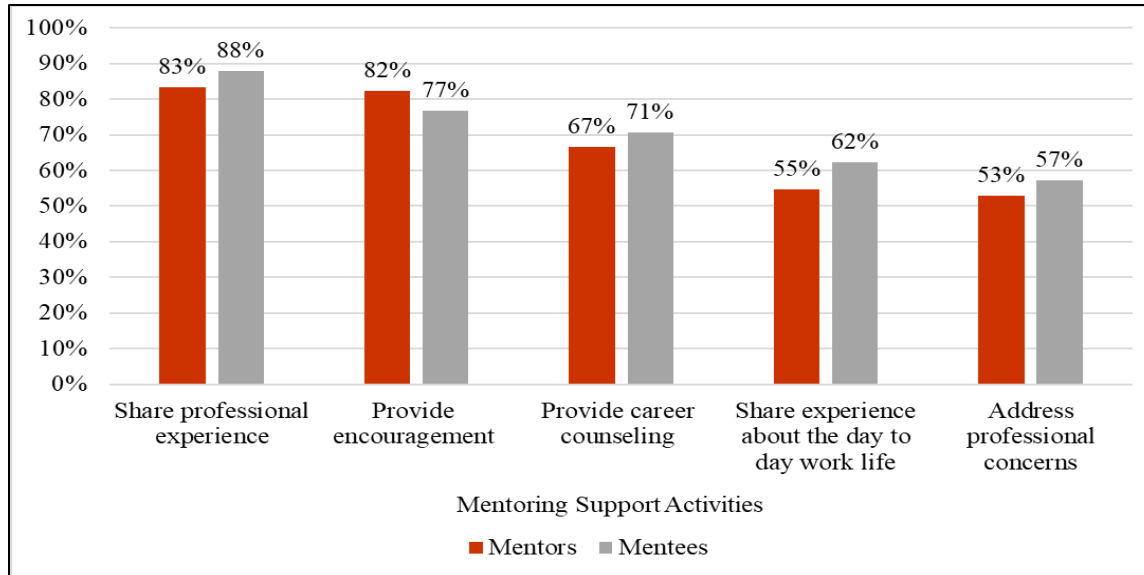


Figure 1
Most reported five mentoring support activities.

The perspectives of mentors and mentees were separately analyzed regarding four items: ease of communication, mentoring relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, and likeliness of keeping in contact beyond the program. Fisher's Exact Tests were further conducted to examine if mentors and mentees significantly differed in their perceptions of each aspect.

Ease of Communication

The mentoring pairs communicated in various ways: email, video chat, online chat/instant messaging, in-person, and telephone. Email and video chat were reported as the most effective methods of communication. This could be due to the COVID-19 pandemic that made in-person interactions difficult or impossible. The survey respondents were asked how easy their communication was with the mentoring partner. Of the 107 responses from mentors, 82% (n=88) indicated "very easy" or "easy" compared to 88% (n=72) of the 82 responses from the mentees. Meanwhile, 6% (n=6) of the mentor responses indicated "difficult" or "very difficult," compared to 2% (n=2) of the mentee responses (Figure 2). The Fisher's Exact Test was performed to determine if the perspectives of mentors and mentees significantly differed. The test resulted in a p-value of 0.543, which is greater than the commonly used significance level of 0.05. Based on this analysis, the perspectives of the two groups regarding the ease of communication were not significantly different.

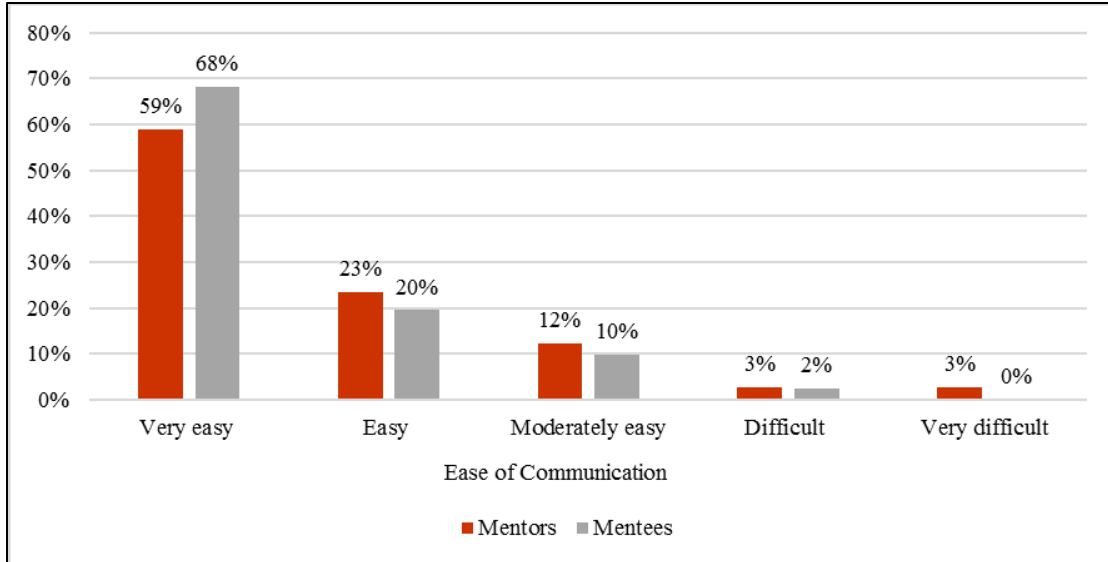


Figure 2
Perceptions of ease of communication.

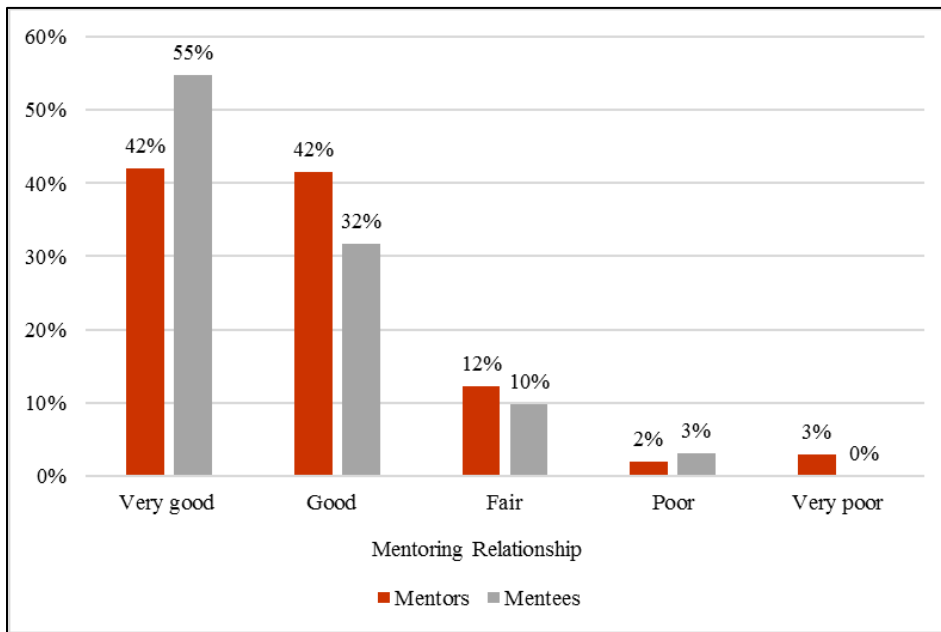


Figure 3
Perceptions of the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring Relationship

There were 106 responses from the mentors and 82 responses from the mentees that described their mentoring relationships. Of these responses, 87% (n=71) of the mentees indicated that their mentoring relationship was “very good” or “good,” compared to 84% (n=88) of the mentors, while 13% (n=11) of the mentees described their relationship as “fair,” “poor,” or “very poor,” compared to 17% (n=18) of the mentors (Figure 3). Overall, it seemed that the mentees were more likely to report a positive relationship than the mentors. However, Fisher’s Exact Test result indicated non-significant differences between the two groups ($P = .203$).

Helpfulness of Mentorship

In the survey for mentees, they were asked how helpful the mentors had been in assisting them. In the survey for mentors, the same question was reworded as how helpful they had been in assisting their mentees. Of the 107 responses from mentors, 81% (n=86) indicated “very helpful” or “helpful” compared to 92% (n=75) of the 81 responses from mentees. Mentors (20%, n=21) were more likely to have a neutral attitude, feel their support was “unhelpful” or “very unhelpful,” compared to the mentees (7%, n=6) (Figure 4). Overall, the mentees showed a great appreciation for the mentoring support they received; by contrast, the mentors seemed to be modest when evaluating their own value in assisting their mentees. The Fisher’s Exact Test indicated a significant difference in perceptions between the two groups ($P = .000$).

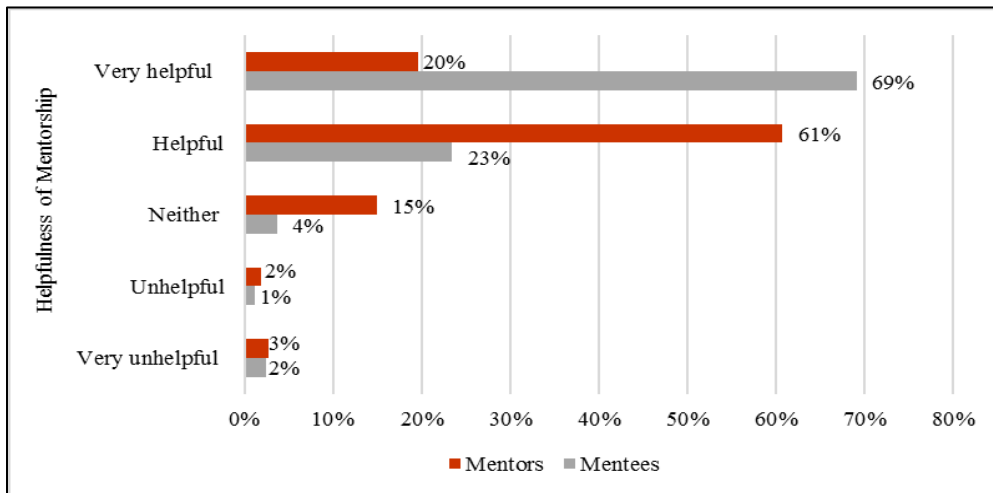


Figure 4
Perceptions of the helpfulness of mentorship.

Likelihood of Keeping in Contact

As the mentorship program ran for only two months, the ViMLoC Mentorship Committee suggested that mentors and mentees could continue to connect with each other even after the program ended if they would like. There were 107 responses from mentors and 80 responses from mentees submitted regarding how likely they would be to keep in contact with their mentoring partner. Of these responses, 58% (n=46) of the mentees were “very likely” to keep the relationship, much higher than that of the mentors (30%, n=32). Compared to the mentees, more mentors indicated “somewhat likely,” “neither likely nor

unlikely," "somewhat unlikely," and "very unlikely" (Figure 5). Overall, it seemed that the mentees were more interested in maintaining ties with their mentors, while the mentors were not as enthusiastic to do the same. Their perceptions were found to be significantly different based on the Fisher's Exact Test ($P = .002$).

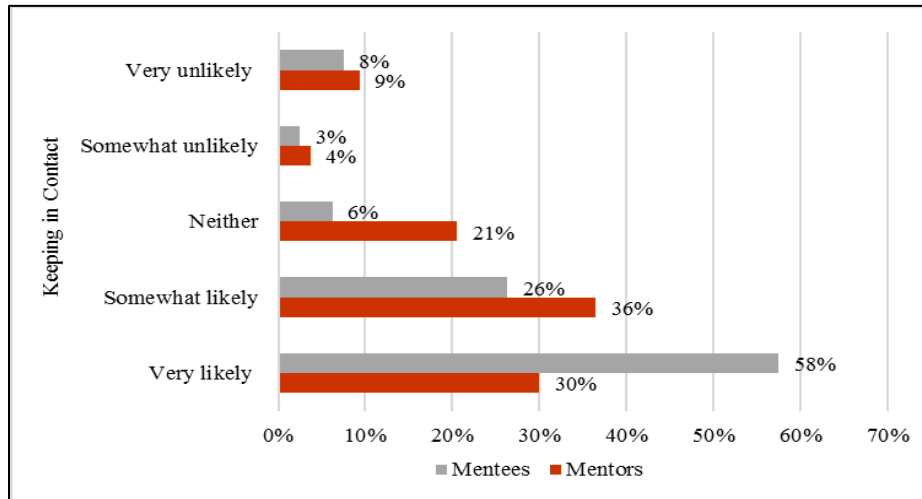


Figure 5
Perceptions of the likeliness of keeping in contact.

In addition, Fisher's Exact Tests were conducted separately for mentors and mentees to examine the associations between the four items: ease of communication, mentoring relationship, helpfulness of mentorship, and likeliness of keeping in contact. Statistically highly significant relationships were identified for both mentors and mentees between any two of the above four elements (all $P = .000$). These results suggested that those who felt it was easier to communicate with their mentoring partner were more likely to report a good relationship and to feel that the mentors were helpful in assisting mentees. The pairs who established a better relationship were more likely to feel that the mentoring support was helpful. Easier communication, building a better relationship, and the feeling that the mentoring support was more helpful were all associated with a greater likelihood of keeping in contact beyond the mentorship program.

Skills for Building a Successful Mentoring Relationship

When mentees were asked, "What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentor?" there were 64 open-ended responses, while 62 mentors responded to their equivalent question that asked, "What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentee?" As presented in Table 2, respondents described 24 important skills or elements, some identifying multiple elements within their response. For example, a mentor's open-ended response was, "Patience and listening skills to determine needs from mentee. Sometimes they don't know what they need to know until they feel comfortable enough to open up." It was coded as "patience," "listening," and "openness." The most common answer amongst both groups was communication (mentees $n=28$, mentors $n=22$). Another common response that ranked highly amongst both groups was some form of open communication, sometimes characterized as being able to open up to the other (mentees $n=13$, mentors $n=10$). In addition, setting goals or expectations was important for the mentoring

relationship, ranking within the top five most common responses for both groups, with mentees indicating 10 times and mentors indicating eight times. The rest of the responses had more fluctuation between mentors and mentees with regard to rating. Honesty rated high amongst mentees (n=11), but only five mentors included it in their response, however, both ranked within the top 10 common responses. Both flexibility or adaptability with scheduling meetings (mentees n=5, mentors n=6) and asking questions (mentees n=6, mentors n=5) ranked within the top 10 responses amongst both groups. In some cases, what mentors perceived as important, such as being a good listener (n=16), being empathetic (n=10), being knowledgeable (n=6), being respectful (n=5), and being encouraging (n=5) did not rank high with mentees. Likewise, mentees perceived being organized (n=9), being friendly (n=6), being willing to learn (n=5), and the frequency of meetings (n=5) to be important when mentors did not rank them as highly. Both groups barely mentioned the category of interpersonal skills, but they specified elements of it separately such as communication.

Previous Mentorship Experiences and Intentions to Mentor

Associations of Past Mentorship Experience with ViMLoC Mentorship Experience

Of the 81 mentors, 58% (n=47) had been mentored by an LIS professional, formally or informally before joining the ViMLoC mentorship program. Over one third (35%, n=28) engaged in a formal mentorship program for the first time. To examine if their previous mentorship experience would relate with their ViMLoC mentorship experience, Fisher's Exact Tests were run to check the associations between having prior mentee experience and the following three variables, one at a time: ease of communication, mentoring relationship, and helpfulness of mentorship. As shown in Table 3, no significant relationship was identified. Having formal mentor experience before did not make a significant difference in their present experience either.

Of the 81 mentees, 77% (n=62) indicated it was their first time participating in a formal mentorship program. Having prior formal mentorship experience was not significantly related with their perceptions of ease of communication, mentoring relationship, and helpfulness of mentorship in the ViMLoC mentorship program.

Associations of ViMLoC Mentorship Experience with Intentions to Mentor in the Future

For mentors, feeling helpful in assisting their mentees in the ViMLoC mentorship program was not significantly associated with how likely they would be to mentor again in the future (Table 3). For mentees, however, helpfulness from the ViMLoC mentorship experience would significantly increase the likelihood of becoming a mentor in the future ($P = .002$).

Table 2
Skills Considered Important for Building a Successful Mentoring Relationship

Response	What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentee? Mentors (n=62)	What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentor? Mentees (n=64)
Communication	22	28
Listening	16	4
Openness	10	13
Empathetic	10	2
Setting expectations/goals	8	10
Knowledgeable	6	3
Flexibility of scheduling	6	5
Honesty	5	11
Respectful	5	4
Encouraging	5	2
Asking questions	5	6
Open-minded	4	3
Curious	4	1
Experienced	4	1
Interpersonal skills	3	3
Patience	3	0
Friendly	3	6
Timely responses	3	2
Frequency of interactions	3	5
Being organized/prepared	3	9
Trust	2	3
Positive attitude	2	4
Willingness to learn	2	5
Acting professionally	1	1

Table 3
 Associations between Past, Present Mentoring Experience, and Future Intentions to Mentor

Indicators	Mentors	Mentees
Having Prior Mentee Experience & Ease of Communication	P = .681	N/A
Having Mentee Experience & Relationship	P = .680	N/A
Having Mentee Experience & Helpfulness of Mentorship	P = .451	N/A
Having Formal Mentorship Experience & Ease of Communication	P = .463	P = .399
Having Formal Mentorship Experience & Relationship	P = .485	P = .577
Having Formal Mentorship Experience & Helpfulness of Mentorship	P = .427	P = .325
Helpfulness of Mentorship & Going to Mentor Again in the Future	P = .063	N/A
Helpfulness of Mentorship & Going to Mentor in the Future	N/A	P = .002*

Note: P values from Fisher's Exact Tests. * Significant at 0.01 level

Importance of Having a Visible Minority Partner

When asked how important it was to them that the mentoring partner was a visible minority, 75% (n=81) of the 108 responses from mentors versus 83% (n=68) of the 82 responses from mentees indicated “very important” or “important.” An equal share indicated “moderately important,” both at 9%. More mentors 14% (n=16) than mentees 8% (n=7) indicated “slightly important” or “not at all important” (Figure 6). However, these differences in perspectives were not found to be significant in the Fisher's Exact Test ($p = .633$).

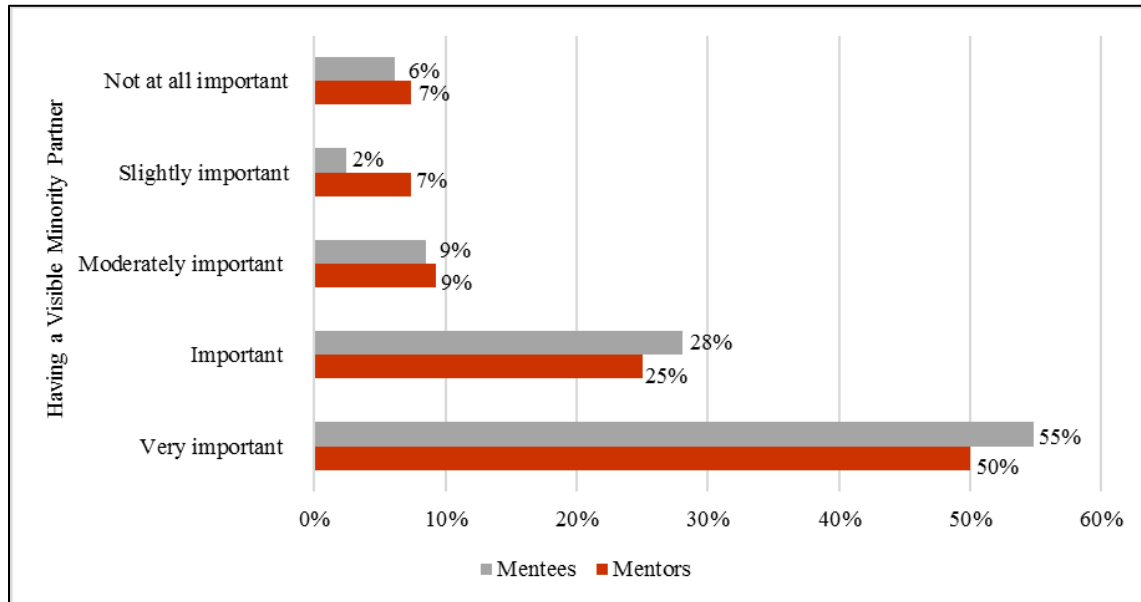


Figure 6
Perceptions of the importance of having a visible minority partner.

Most Satisfying Aspects of the ViMLoC Mentorship Program

Both mentors (n=51) and mentees (n=63) shared comments about what was the most satisfying aspect of the ViMLoC mentorship program, many providing multiple aspects, which provided great insights into the unique contributions that VM mentors could make in supporting VM mentees. When coding the responses from the mentors, they predominantly described the satisfaction of helping someone (n=25). When the specific type of help was indicated, assistance with job hunting (n=4) and advice about career development (n=4) were the most common, closely followed by discussions about adjusting to the work culture (n=3) or helping the mentees towards their goals (n=3). Many mentors remarked how they were able to connect with someone new to expand their network (n=18). Another rewarding aspect that was noted was the ability to share their experiences with others (n=10). However, it was not just a one-way flow of experiences from mentors to mentees, as seven mentors noted that they also learned something from the experience. For example, one mentor mentioned that it was satisfying “[g]etting to understand the perspectives of other new visible minority librarians. Hearing about their accomplishments, as well as their challenges in the current library landscape is eye opening.” Less frequently mentioned, but still notable was that the mentors enjoyed providing the mentees with encouragement (n=6) and the ability to

give back (n=3), meaning they had also received similar professional support and wanted to return the favor to someone else in the profession.

When mentees shared what they thought was the most satisfying aspect, the ability to network and make new connections with other library professionals was the most popular response (n=32). The second most common response was related to the help they received from the mentor (n=29). With most mentees being early on in their library career, they needed more specific help with job hunting (n=8), career guidance (n=4), and awareness of the work culture (n=4). Mentees appreciated having their mentors share their experiences (n=19), with four saying that it made them feel less alone and three that described how their mentors' experiences were something they could role model. Touching upon many of these aspects, one mentee disclosed that they "loved being able to connect and hear from someone who was a visible minority in my desired profession. It can be easy to feel a bit alone in this Caucasian-dominated field and I enjoyed hearing my mentor share their experiences and how they navigate the workplace." Five mentees expressed their satisfaction with the encouragement they received from their mentors and finally, three noted satisfaction with the mentorship program itself and the comfort "[k]nowing that something like that exists."

Within answers from both mentors (n=12) and mentees (n=18) there were notable mentions about being connected with someone who was also a visible minority and shared experiences as visible minorities within the library profession. For example, one mentor described that "[i]t's a nice way to network with someone with similar experiences and have conversations about being a visible minority person in a workplace. I don't see any other avenue where issues of being a visible minority could be discussed in a professional setting." Furthermore, a mentee elaborated that they "have a Caucasian mentor through another program, who I cannot talk to about anything related to race/identity as a visible minority/immigrant. The most valuable part of the ViMLoC mentorship program was the opportunity to connect with a fellow visible minority and ask questions related to that."

Discussion

Mentors and mentees indicated that email and video chat were the most effective methods of communication. This finding was in agreement with Binder et al. (2022) in which mentors and mentees who interacted through web conferencing tended to report higher satisfaction of their mentoring experiences, but against the result of Jordan (2019) indicating that Skype or video chat was not as popular. The two groups also reported the same top five areas of support activities. Likewise, Harrington and Marshall (2014) found these five aspects were important components of a mentoring relationship, which were categorized under career guidance, psychosocial support, and role model. This could be associated with the mentees' career stages and their corresponding needs. More than half of the mentees in the ViMLoC mentorship program were library school students. Their questions were more frequently about librarians' professional work and general career preparation. In contrast, fewer questions were asked regarding promotion and tenure, as well as research and scholarship activities that librarians put on their professional development agenda years after entering the profession. Moreover, the mentees did have concerns related to their VM identities. The mentors who had similar racial backgrounds and experiences navigating the Caucasian-dominated library landscape could provide comfort, encouragement, and inspiration to the mentees.

The research findings revealed that mentors and mentees significantly differed in how they perceived the value of mentoring assistance. A higher proportion of mentees found mentorship was helpful while a higher percentage of mentors felt their assistance was unhelpful to mentees. The differences could be due

to the fact that 55% of the mentees in the mentorship program were library school students and 26% were early career librarians. Without entering the library profession, the student mentees typically needed guidance in career planning, job search, and interview process. The mentors were all librarians who have gone through the journey from library schools to the job market. They had the experience and capacity to assist the mentees, thus making the mentees feel that it was helpful. For the mentees who were early-career librarians, despite the anonymity of the surveys, they might have been cautious about giving negative feedback about someone in the profession, as they had not secured permanent positions yet.

The mentors and mentees also had significantly different perspectives regarding whether they would like to keep in contact after the mentorship session ended. Mentees were more likely to maintain the ties than mentors. They might have different reasons for continuing the relationship beyond the program. Despite the informal format, mentees could still benefit from the connection if the mentors were willing to continue providing advice and support. As VMs are underrepresented in the library world, the mentors would be invaluable resources for the mentees to draw on in the future. For the mentors, some were willing to connect again because they could learn and grow themselves while supporting their mentees, or they found it personally rewarding to continue helping mentees to succeed. Meanwhile, other commitments might hinder many mentors from continuing the relationship. One respondent commented:

I had a mentee with whom I had reviewed their resume and cover letter. I did not mind doing this a few times during the mentorship. They asked me to review multiple applications a few months after the mentorship ended and after our final wrap up meeting. By this time, I had to let them know that I could only review their application once more due to my other commitments.

The finding from this research suggested that positive experiences from the ViMLoC mentorship program would have a great impact on mentees' intention to mentor in the future. This could be explained by the "spillover effect" derived from the benefits that the mentees received from the present mentoring relationship (Ragins & Scandura, 1999). The act of being mentored creates more mentors, which also seems to hold true according to the literature on VM mentorship. When early-career minority librarians were surveyed, they described their willingness to become a mentor in the future based on their positive experiences as a mentee (Olivas & Ma, 2009). In practice, VM librarians in higher education from Johnson's (2016) dissertation benefited from their mentee experience so that they actively sought out mentor opportunities "[i]n the spirit of service to others" (p. 100). This is similar to Cho's (2014) personal experience; he described the help he received from VM mentors at his institution when he was first starting his career and how he now participates in mentorship programs for VM librarians as a rewarding way to give back. Comparably, Boyd et al. (2017) found that residency programs could help develop library leadership skills in VM librarians and in turn, they would likely go on to recruit VMs to the profession and mentor early career VM librarians.

This research has some implications for library associations and libraries seeking to support VM library professionals within their own mentorship program. First, as the findings indicated, the mentees who had positive experiences from the present mentoring relationship were more likely to mentor others. Therefore, mentorship program managers need to take a proactive role in improving the mentee experience so that more mentees can become mentors to support others. This may strengthen the pipeline for greater recruitment and retention among VM librarians.

Second, the research results showed that previous mentorship experience for both mentors and mentees did not make significant differences in how they communicated and built relationships in the present

program. Hence, regardless of their mentorship experience level, it is essential to give participants some guidance at the start of the mentorship session to ensure that they all are on the same page. Based on our open-ended question about the skills that would be important to build a successful relationship with a mentee/mentor, future mentoring programs for VM librarians should focus on supporting communication skills, especially through encouraging people to open up. This is especially important with VM groups within the profession since it can ease some of the negative experiences from the workplace such as isolation and microaggressions. Furthermore, they should ensure that mentors and mentees can clearly articulate their goals or expectations and formulate good questions to ask each other to gain a beneficial experience for the mentoring pairs.

Third, various approaches could be taken to facilitate the mentoring relationship. The ViMLoC Mentorship Committee provided guidelines to each participant. However, due to the dynamic nature of each mentoring pair and their relationship, those guidelines could not be used to resolve some issues that occurred. The Committee's timely intervention was necessary when issues came up. Examples of issues included: communication being lost or delayed due to scheduling difficulties from being in different time zones or being unable to fit the meetings into respective schedules; mentees not showing much interest in interacting, being uncommunicative, or not having clear expectations of the program; mentors feeling it was hard to build a relationship within two months, or being unable to answer questions outside their field of work. Although the Committee could not intervene in all problems; they took various approaches to help smooth things out when possible. For instance, they sent out two check-in emails (one for all the mentees and the other one for all the mentors) after the mentoring session was launched to make sure the pairs had connected with each other and started a conversation. They helped mentees to find an alternative mentor if the mentee did not find that the mentor was a good match. When there was not a good fit from the pool of mentors, an informal mentor was sought out and recommended to the mentee to connect with. When tensions occurred between a mentoring pair and they reached out to the Committee, the committee members held one-on-one meetings with individuals in an attempt to gather more information, to understand their respective expectations and concerns, and to facilitate the mentoring pair's mutual understanding and communication. It is important that "if a pairing is not compatible or causes harm, then allow the pair to disengage with dignity" (Burke & Tumbleson, 2019, p. 12), and reassign the mentee to a mentor with a better fit whenever possible (Goodsett & Walsh, 2015).

Limitations

First, demographic information of the mentorship program participants, such as ethnicity, geographic location, work experience, and the type of library they work at, was gathered in the program application forms, however, such information was not collected again in the surveys. As the surveys were anonymous, there was no way of linking the survey respondents with their applications. Hence, survey respondents' mentorship experiences could not be examined based on their demographic characteristics.

Second, as the completion rate of the mentees was 15% lower than that of the mentors, it was possible that some mentees who had negative experiences chose not to fill out the surveys, and as a result, their experiences might not be reflected in this research.

Third, this research was based on the data gathered from the four mentoring sessions over 2018-2022. Except in 2018, the mentoring sessions occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. This context could have affected the mentorship experiences of survey respondents. For instance, communication became more

difficult and might have affected relationship building negatively due to the pandemic. Further research efforts can seek to examine more sessions beyond the pandemic.

Conclusion

There are numerous studies on mentorship within the library profession as a whole. Research on mentorship for VM is increasing as mentoring support has been perceived to be beneficial to VM mentees individually and to the diversification of the library profession. This study contributed to the literature through an empirical research method and comparative analyses of the experiences between mentors and mentees in the ViMLoC mentorship program. Statistically significant differences were identified between the two groups. Mentoring support was perceived to be more helpful by the mentees than by the mentors. The mentees were more likely to keep in contact with their mentors beyond the mentorship program, while the mentors did not show as much interest. A positive experience in the present mentoring relationship would increase the intention of mentees to mentor others in the future, whereas the same effect did not hold true for the mentors. On the other hand, some findings were shared by both mentors and mentees, including the belief that effective communication would facilitate a good mentoring relationship, which in turn, would lead to positive outcomes and greater likelihood of keeping in contact beyond the mentoring program. Mentor and mentee responses indicated they both agreed on the most important areas of mentoring support and some essential skills for building a successful mentoring relationship. In addition to contributing to the librarianship literature, the practical implications of this research are profound as there are very few mentorship programs characterized by VMs mentoring VMs. The experiences shared in this research will be helpful to library associations and libraries who are interested in operating a mentorship program for VM library professionals.

Author Contributions

Yanli Li: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Quantitative Analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing **Valentina Ly:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Qualitative Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing **Xuemei Li:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire 2022 for Mentors (with One Mentee)

Q1 Thank you for participating in this survey! We would like to hear your feedback on the 2022 ViMLoC Mentorship Program so that we can continue to improve it. Please look over the Informed Consent Letter before proceeding.

- I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in this study.
- I have read and understand the above information. I do not want to participate in this study.

Q2 How did you hear about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? (Please select all that apply)

- ViMLoC group
- School
- Conference
- Colleague
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Friend
- Contacted by the ViMLoC Mentorship Committee
- Other

Q3 What are your reasons for participating as a mentor in the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? (Please select all that apply)

- Professional development
- Promotion
- Meeting requirements for tenure
- Passion for helping others
- Networking
- Sharing experience
- Other

Communication:

How many times have you used the methods below to communicate with your mentee:

Q4 E-mail (you sent to the mentee): 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q5 Online chat/instant messenger: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q6 Skype or video chat: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q7 In person: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q8 Telephone: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q9 What was the most effective method of communication?

- Email
- Online chat/instant messenger
- Skype or video chat
- In person
- Telephone
- Other (please specify) _____

Interactions:

Q10 In your early contacts with your mentee, did they discuss their mentorship program expectations with you?

- Yes
- No

Q11 How important was it to you that the mentee was a visible minority?

- Very important
- Important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

Q12 Did you discuss any experiences about being a visible minority in the profession with your mentee?

- Yes
- No

Q13 How easy was communication with your mentee?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Moderately easy
- Difficult
- Very difficult

Q14 How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

Q15 How likely are you to keep in contact with your mentee after the program ends?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Q16 How helpful do you think you were in assisting the mentee?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Q17 What aspects did you help your mentee with? (check all that apply)

- provide encouragement
- provide career counseling
- help with job seeking skills (cover letter, resume, interview, etc.)
- assist with networking
- help with setting mentee's professional goals
- share own professional experience with the mentee
- share experience about the day to day work life
- help with orientation to library culture and workplace expectations
- advise on how to adapt in an organization as a visible minority
- address the mentee's professional concerns
- provide knowledge of a discipline or subject area
- assist with research and scholarship (grant writing, research methods, etc.)
- assist with promotion and tenure (preparation of materials, procedure, criteria, etc.)
- share experience or improve skills in instruction
- share experience or improve skills in collection management
- share experience or improve skills in reference services
- share experience or improve skills in leadership
- share experience or improve skills in community involvement or outreach
- share experience or improve skills in technology-related library work
- Other

Mentorship Experience:

Q18 In the past, were you ever mentored by an LIS professional, formally or informally?

- Yes
- No

Q19 Is this your first experience as a mentor through a formal mentorship program?

- Yes
- No

Q20 Based on this experience, how likely would you be to mentor again in the future?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Q21 What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentee?

ViMLoC Mentorship Program Assessment:

Q22 What has been the most satisfying aspect about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program?

Q23 What has been the least satisfying aspect about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program?

Q24 How did you feel about the level of interaction commitment required (two interactions a month) for the ViMLoC Mentorship Program?

- Too much
- About right
- Too little

Q25 What would you suggest to improve the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? _____

Appendix B
Survey Questionnaire 2022 for Mentees

Q1 Thank you for participating in this survey! We would like to hear your feedback on the 2022 ViMLoC Mentorship Program so that we can continue to improve it. Please look over the Informed Consent Letter before proceeding.

- I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in this study.
- I have read and understand the above information. I do not want to participate in this study.

Q2 How did you hear about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? (Please select all that apply)

- ViMLoC group
- School
- Conference
- Colleague
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Friend
- Contacted by the ViMLoC Mentorship Committee
- Other

Q3 What are your reasons for participating as a mentee in the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? (Please select all that apply)

- Knowing more about the profession
- Seeking guidance in career direction
- Moving up in your career
- Seeking advice on how to transfer skills obtained from your home country
- Learning about the skills and qualifications needed for a librarian-related job
- Networking
- Learning about how to adapt in an organization as a visible minority
- Other

Communication:

How many times have you used the methods below to communicate with your mentor:

Q4 E-mail (you sent to the mentor): 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q5 Online chat/instant messenger: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q6 Skype or video chat: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q7 In person: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q8 Telephone: 0, 1, 2 ...9, 10 and above

Q9 What was the most effective method of communication?

- Email
- Online chat/instant messenger
- Skype or video chat
- In person
- Telephone
- Other (please specify) _____

Interactions:

Q10 In your early contacts with your mentor, did you discuss your mentorship program expectations?

- Yes
- No

Q11 How important was it to you that the mentor was a visible minority?

- Very important
- Important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

Q12 Did you and your mentor discuss any issues or experiences about being a visible minority in the profession?

- Yes
- No

Q13 How easy was communication with your mentor?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Moderately easy
- Difficult
- Very difficult

Q14 How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

Q15 How likely are you to keep in contact with your mentor after the program ends?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Q16 How helpful was your mentor in providing assistance?

- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Somewhat unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Q17 What aspects did your mentor help you with? (check all that apply)

- provide encouragement
- provide career counseling
- help with job seeking skills (cover letter, resume, interview, etc.)
- assist with networking
- help with setting your professional goals
- share own professional experience with you
- share experience about the day to day work life
- help with orientation to library culture and workplace expectations
- advise on how to adapt in an organization as a visible minority
- address your professional concerns
- provide knowledge of a discipline or subject area
- assist with research and scholarship (grant writing, research methods, etc.)
- assist with promotion and tenure (preparation of materials, procedure, criteria, etc.)
- share experience or improve skills in instruction
- share experience or improve skills in collection management
- share experience or improve skills in reference services
- share experience or improve skills in leadership
- share experience or improve skills in community involvement or outreach
- share experience or improve skills in technology-related library work
- other

Mentorship Experience:

Q18 Is this your first experience as a mentee through a formal mentorship program?

- Yes
- No

Q19 Based on this experience, how likely would you be to mentor in the future?

- Very likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Q20 What skills do you think would be important to build a successful relationship with the mentor? _____

ViMLoC Mentorship Program assessment:

Q21 What has been the most satisfying aspect about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? ____

Q22 What has been the least satisfying aspect about the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? ____

Q23 How did you feel about the level of interaction commitment required (two interactions a month) for the ViMLoC Mentorship Program?

- Too much
- About right
- Too little

Q24 Overall, do you feel the ViMLoC Mentorship Program has met your expectations?

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q25 What would you suggest to improve the ViMLoC Mentorship Program? _____