



# Creating Critical Mentors: A Review & Analysis of YMAN's Training Programs

*"... Continue to lead & I'll use the information provided..."*  
– Jason Betts, Therapist & Life coach\*

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\*The above quote is an excerpt from feedback YMAN received on their training evaluation. I feel it sums up the most important pieces of this research paper. YMAN is leading in the field of reinventing and reimagining mentoring, and there are legions of organizations, academics, mentors, and mentees that are utilizing this knowledge and information.

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## Introduction

The Youth Mentoring Action Network (YMAN), founded in 2007 by mentor, academic, and high school teacher Torie Weiston-Serdan is a youth-centric critical mentoring organization that focuses on uplifting and empowering Black and Latinx youth in the Inland Empire. Initiative highlights include college application and preparation boot camps (College ABCs), a Black girl's specific mentoring program (Black Girls(EM)Power), music development with a mobile music studio, as well as therapy and wellness programming. Though all these programs are beautifully documented on YMAN's website and in all of their advertising materials, there has been a more forgotten side to YMAN. I would like to properly document and show-off a very important part of what they are doing.

The country has begun to feel YMAN's revolution through its different critical mentoring training sessions with mentoring organizations in need. The work that this organization is doing cannot be described as anything less than groundbreaking and revolutionary, and as they are the first to bring critical mentoring to other organizations, it is important we remain critical of these trainings. We must strive to improve them at every turn and make it the best possible learning experience to provide the most impact for not only the mentors but for the mentees they impact. The impact starts to exponentially grow. With every program coordinator or director trained comes the hope that the power of critical mentoring will be passed down to the mentors. For every mentor trained, the hope is the power of critical mentoring will be passed down to their one mentee, or six mentees, and from there we hope the cycle continues and the mentees one day become mentors, like our own Isabella Chavez.

This final research paper is an analysis & evaluation of the reach, scope, successes, and areas of improvement of YMAN's Critical Mentoring, Mentoring 101, and Youth Participatory

Action Research (YPAR) training sessions. Primarily, I will be answering the following questions: Who and what do these trainings teach? How effective are they? How do the trainees evaluate the trainings? What are some improvements that can be made?

As Dr. Weiston-Serdan, creator of this term, says, critical mentoring can be understood as “mentoring augmented by a critical consciousness, one that compels us to take collective action and to do it alongside our young people, hoping to move mentoring to another level and inspire youth in new ways.” (Weiston-Serdan, 1) Critical mentoring seeks to move past outdated forms of mentoring that are not designed for mentoring target populations such as black and Latinx youth, transgender youth, low-income youth, etc. It is a new form of mentoring that is active, inclusive, and focused on equity and justice. Mirroring this sentiment, printed on my YMAN t-shirt (that I use to blend into the staff) are similar words: “mentoring for equity and justice.”

These trainings are typically held within the mentoring organization’s space and information is disseminated through aesthetically engaging and informative presentations given most often by Director of Outreach Cade Maldonado, then Director of Programs Isabella Chavez but also on a large-scale by founder Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan at -conferences and in consultations with mentoring organizations. The presentations are designed to be interactive, with multiple checkpoints to gauge understanding as well as create individual understandings through group activities. In the trainings I attended with various mentoring organizations, like the San Bernardino based Youth Action Project, these trainings were characterized by large rooms full of foldable tables of chairs, florescent office-like lighting, and at least 30 young brown and black mentors in their organization’s apparel. Mexican food was the most common choice, in large tin containers with aluminum foil on top, and always emptied long before the presentation began. On bellies full of warm food, these mentors were ready to learn about the power of critical mentoring.

## Researcher Positionality

I recognized that though I may physically appear to be just like the target students of the Youth Mentoring Action Network, as a mix of Black and Latina, I have economic privilege, citizenship privilege, light-skin privilege, privilege from an elite high school and college education, among others. I thought the privilege that I do have, could benefit me in aiding these students, while my ethnicity and much of the similarities I have would allow me to get more proximate and immersed in the experience. Knowing that there is, "a long history of outsider academic researchers using research more to promote their influence and prestige than to empower communities they researched," I have been very cognizant of my responsibility as an engaged member of YMAN, but also my responsibility to produce research that is beneficial and likewise, ethical. (Stoecker 2)

Through a fieldnote exercise in class, I learned to be present in the situation and space first, and worry about the qualitative research after. Especially because I am working with YMAN, which is incredibly youth-centric, I, also considered youth, have been pushed by the directors to partake in every activity alongside the IE high schoolers as well as trainings given to other organizations. Being immersed in the programming with our target groups, black and brown low-income youth from the IE, as well as efforts to mobilize other mentorship groups in the IE has benefitted my scope and perception of the issues, concerns, and culture of the IE and YMAN's work. In engaging with these groups, they deserve the best of me and my work, forcing me to constantly self-improve as an individual and as a researcher through my fieldnotes and reporting of YMAN and their youth. Reflexivity, a concept coined by sociologist Paul Atkinson and further developed by sociologist Robert Emerson, has stayed present in my mind while documenting my experiences with and information about YMAN and their youth – "the notion of reflexivity

recognizes that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality-construction." (Atkinson 1990) The work YMAN is doing is the first of its kind in this area and exceptional in changing the lives of its youth. As I am implicated in the construction of the reality surrounding their work and lives, I am reminded of the theories of collective liberation best put by Lilla Watson, "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together...". (Watson 1985)

I would like to be cognizant of recognizing my bias that may stem from having a very structured private school education from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, one that was very detached from communities of color and low-income communities, many of the communities we aim to serve. Detachment from communities very likely leads to a lack of true understanding and a lack of empathy. With these two sentiments comes the dangerous opportunity to misrepresent these communities and ignorantly take up space within the movement or community that does not belong to oneself. I have been very careful to ground my understanding in not only my personal experience as an Afro-Latina, but from critical conscious creating readings from both courses, and by following the guidance of the YMAN youth and staff. I have learned from them and allowed them to guide this research project and create whatever they deemed most necessary and useful for this organization. In this spirit, I recognize my bias and lack of understanding, and actively engage with YMAN and our youth to take and give appropriate space and portray YMAN in the light they are most deserving of.

## Research Setting

Self-awareness, for me, was key in deciding to work with YMAN. Tessa Hicks-Peterson, in *Student Development and Social Justice: Critical Learning, Radical Healing, and Community Engagement*, explains how important developing a critical self-awareness is for those who would like to work in community change:

Self-awareness (of one's values, biases, and positionalities) has a reciprocal relationship with community awareness (of local and global examples of domination and liberation). When we become more cognizant of and committed to addressing the challenges and assets within ourselves, we also become more available and invested in addressing the challenges and assets of our community. (Hicks-Peterson 2017)

Through various self-reflective practices, I realized I viewed YMAN in less of a holistic sense and solely as what I wanted it to be based on my own experiences. Throughout middle school, I did a program that I thought was similar to YMAN, which propelled me to an elite boarding school and small private liberal arts college. I thought YMAN was similar, with a focus on college preparation with a dyad mentorship-based program in which they would pair black and brown lower-income youth with someone from, what I imagined was, a list of eligible mentors. Within my first couple weeks immersed in the YMAN family, I came to find out the only true focus they have is critical mentoring by supporting, advocating for, and centering their youth as well as spreading the love and knowledge of critical mentoring with other mentoring organizations. From these focuses, comes a million initiatives YMAN has taken up to support the Inland Empire's youth, and youth whom they impact through these trainings all across the country. It is much broader and holistic than I could have ever imagined. YMAN truly pushes for wellness and success for the IE youth in every front, shunning the respectability politics that the organization I attended in middle school favored. All initiatives begin with the radical mission of, "leveraging the power of mentoring to create a more equitable and just society for young people." (yman.org, 2016) From

this idea, they have expanded past the direct impact they can have on IE youth, to a broader dream of changing the face of youth mentoring across the country. Though a more indirect impact, YMAN has traveled across the U.S. providing training opportunities to over 85 organizations, conferences, and nonprofits. Figure 1 below is a map I created of some of the trainings YMAN has done:



Both YMAN and I see the IE as a place of a large magnitude of hope and untapped potential. YMAN is passionate about supporting and inspiring this hope and potential with the ultimate goal that by cultivating the IE’s youth, these youth will grow to cultivate the IE in return. In the book *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Capital in Southern California* by sociologist Juan DeLara, he explains the theory behind initiatives like YMAN’s saying, “...changing demographics may provide fertile ground for change, but the work of cultivating and nourishing seeds of change will require more.”(DeLara 2018) Pouring love, care, and supplemental education into youth that have been neglected will allow them to pour the same love, care, and education back into their communities.

This is the nourishment these youth, the seeds of change, require and the nourishment that solely YMAN is working to provide with these youth. And they desperately need it. Historian Walidah Imarisha explains the burden experienced by many of the IE youth, "... Black children especially, seem to be born with terminator seeds planted deep in their bellies, seeds activated by lack of resources, decent education, adequate housing, lack of jobs, opportunity, dignity, respect, freedom, self-determination...". (Imarisha 2016) YMAN hopes to lighten this burden for its youth by providing a myriad of opportunities and experiences, from exposure to college preparation to mental health programming to recreational and community-building events to introductions to youth activism to STEM-focused music mentoring, support and resources to young musicians and artists in the Inland Empire. All of these YMAN initiatives are kept at the core of the organization because, as DeLara says, "for social movements to be successful, they need to invest more heavily in the social infrastructure and human capital that will be necessary to transform inland Southern California into a more just and humane landscape." (DeLara 2018) This issue of a lack of decent education, freedom or self-determination is not unique to the Inland Empire, it is a well-documented and pressing issue across the country with black youth. YMAN, understanding this, came to work on a solution to this broader issue – their revolutionary trainings that come in many forms, from Mentoring 101 to Youth Participatory Action Research, to Critical Mentoring.

## Literature Review:

### Improving Mentorship by Improving Mentor Training

Mentoring in communities of color has historically been a community-based and asset-based endeavor. By this, I mean, naturally occurring mentor relationships between the youth and adults within the community have been standardized in marginalized and minoritized communities. Marian Wright Edelman (1999) supposes that during the years of a segregated America, Black youth did have access to mentoring relationships, but only those that were naturally occurring in family and community. By this I mean relationships between uncles and nephews, the neighborhood pastor and youth clergy, etc. are all examples of naturally occurring community and family mentoring that existed in black communities before mentoring became formalized. This still tends to be the case as few formal organizations or groups provide mentoring structures for Black and Brown youth. As Torie Weiston-Serdan (2017) explains in *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide*, “though major mentoring programs may have found a newly racialized community to serve, at least according to statistics and funding trends, those communities still largely rely on their community-based networks to serve as mentors...”. (Weiston-Serdan, 8) Many of the mentoring organizations that do exist for black youth of color have come about more recently due to the Obama administration’s campaign to mentor youth of color, which was specifically focused on young men and boys within this community and known by many as the My Brother’s Keeper initiative. As a result, funding for mentoring programs that focus on black and brown youth has largely grown, carving the path for the birth of many organizations.

Weiston-Serdan notes that “programs clamor to serve these populations, namely because the private and public funding dedicated to these groups is widely available.” (Weiston-Serdan, 7)

And while these programs are clamoring to work with primarily youth of color, but also LGBTQ youth, low-income youth, and other marginalized groups, they are deeply unprepared to effectively mentor and aid these youth. While organizations and their mentors claim to understand, acknowledge, and address problems in these communities, Weiston-Serdan contends that "they fail to see that the problems are often more nuanced and complex than typical mentoring programs can handle." (Weiston-Serdan, 9) This results in poor mentoring experiences for black youth and little engagement.

To address this, Weiston-Serdan explains that professional development training for mentoring is incredibly crucial saying, mentoring organizations "must invest in training that includes a critical examination of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and ability." (Weiston-Serdan, 94) Thus, in this literature review, I will be looking at the literature surrounding mentorship training and methods, particularly with the aforementioned groups of youth. This training cannot happen just once, but through a year-round process kept alive through internal reflection and conversation. Only by constantly including facilitated and critical trainings in a mentorship program's agenda can they properly and effectively engage, and mentor marginalized and minoritized youth.

*Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles* by Carla Herrera, David L. DuBois, and Jean Baldwin Grossman supports Weiston-Serdan's demand for mentee-experience tailored training for mentors. In this specific work of research, the authors look at types and levels of risk experienced by youth as the dependent variable for training. Risk, in the work, can be understood as youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system or youth with a parent who is incarcerated, all issues of which disproportionately impact the same communities Weiston-Serdan aims to uplift. What the authors of *Role of Risk* fail to mention is

that all of the components that determine risk, are inextricably linked to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. which means that the tailored training must include critical awareness and examination of these systems. Nonetheless, in their research, they found that different levels of risk create different challenges and concerns, which the authors believe requires tailored program training and support. In practice, it was confirmed that "Mentors who received training and consistent program support met more frequently and had longer-lasting relationships with their mentees. Youth whose mentors received training also reported higher-quality relationships." (2) Ultimately, this research piece determined that we can be incredibly hopeful for effective change and benefits for higher-risk youth if programs consistently refine their efforts to ensure that their youth are receiving the tailored types of support and mentoring that this study suggests makes a positive difference.

In David L. DuBois and Michael J. Karcher's *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, Sánchez, Cólón-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, and Berardi (2014) expound upon the foundational elements for effectively interacting with race and ethnicity in mentoring relationships. Overall, the researchers make four recommendations for this line of work: racial similarity/ dissimilarity, oppression, ethnic identity, and cultural competence. Namely, we will be focusing on cultural competence, which is highly recommended that mentoring programs should be trained in to better their mentoring relationships with Black and Brown youth. Cultural competence can be understood as the capacity an individual has to effectively work with another individual of a cultural group. Sánchez and fellow researchers describe three main tenants of cultural competence, "a) cultural awareness and beliefs, (b) cultural knowledge, and (c) cultural skills." (148) When applied to youth mentoring, the researchers advocate for mentors to be aware of how their perception of and

relationship with their mentees can be skewed by their biases and values if they are not actively confronted and reflected upon through mentor training.

Qualitative research supports this phenomenon. In *"It's not what I expected: A Qualitative Study of Youth Mentoring Relationship Failures"* by Renee Spencer, findings revealed that a major reason some mentoring relationships failed was due to the mentor's inability to properly bridge cultural differences. Some mentors were able to recognize and discussed the perceived discrepancies between the values of their mentee and themselves, but due to ineffective or insufficient cultural competency training, mentors were not assessed to be prepared to, or even know how to, effectively deal with these cultural differences. On the other hand, qualitative research conducted with 12 Big Brothers Big Sisters matches (a nationwide mentoring organization), 10 of which were cross-race, deduced and concluded that mentors' efforts in getting to know youths' cultures is very likely to increase the mentoring relationship's quality. Supporting this, Janis B. Kupersmidt and Jean E. Rhodes in the chapter *Mentor Training* of the aforementioned handbook cite, "The effectiveness of mentor training appears to be manifested through its documented impact on mentors' feelings of closeness, support, satisfaction, and effectiveness. These perceptions positively influence both outcomes and duration [of the mentorship relationship], suggesting the lasting importance of mentor training and the mentor's self-perceptions of efficacy to be a mentor for youth outcomes." (439) Weiston-Serdan contends that this training must be critical, radical, and culturally engaged, and while Herrera, DuBois, and Grossman advocate for youth-risk-tailored training, Sanchez and partners assert the need for culturally competent training.

All of these approaches to training can be placed under the heading of diversity training and in a research paper entitled, *A Meta-Analytical Integration of over 40 years of Research on*

*Diversity Training Evaluation* by Katerina Bezrukova, it was found that diversity training has immediate positive effects on the participants in terms of their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to different marginalized groups. Interestingly enough, there was an additional discovery that over time, changes in their attitude and behavior in terms of diversity and cultural competency decayed and reverted, though their cultural knowledge remained the same or increased. Bezrukova combed through more than 40 years of research from 260 studies and 29,000 participants, finding that “The attitudes these trainings attempt to change are generally strong, emotion-driven and tied to our personal identities, and we found little evidence that long-term effects to them are sustainable.” Though one must not be dismayed as Bezrukova continues and says, “However, when people are reminded of scenarios covered in training by their colleagues or even the media, they are able to retain or expand on the information they learned.” Ultimately, the meta-analysis found that, indeed, successful diversity training occurs and that it is composed of specific criteria. This criterion for successful diversity training advocates for mandatory training that is delivered in a long-term, continual approach. The training must also be actively integrated within the actions of the organization to dually increase awareness and skill.

Within the vast amounts of literature surrounding mentorship, it can be factually understood that increased and improved mentor training means improved mentorship relationships. There seems to be a consensus within the works I analyzed – tailoring the training to the lived experiences of the mentee, be it through cultural competency, a risk-based response, or an intersectional critical approach, greatly increases the effectiveness and satisfaction in the mentoring relationship. It is thus clear that improved mentorship training is key to improved mentoring relationships.

## A Methodology and Thematic Analysis

The Youth Mentoring Action Network travels all over the country and world to disseminate their knowledge and methods of Critical Mentoring to other mentoring organizations or organizations/schools/groups that are engaged with youth. The research that I will engage in this semester involves analyzing the Inland-Empire-based Youth Mentoring Action Network's approach to youth mentoring, as well as the scope, breadth, and impact of YMAN's nationwide and international training initiatives. Essentially, I will be researching and analyzing YMAN's, indirect impact on other organizations, instead of focusing on their direct impact on their youth, which is well-researched, documented and understood. To create and initiate my research, I have had to employ multiple approaches to my research design and action, which have been participatory action research, community-based research, and theory-testing/based research. These aforementioned types of research have been undergirded by various theoretical approaches, mainly post-structuralism and critical race theory that have allowed me to go about learning and understanding my topic most tangibly and effectively.

The type of research I engaged in, to analyze YMAN's critical mentoring training's effectiveness and reach, was participatory action, community-based, and theory-testing approaches to research which each are composed of different elements. Participatory action research, particularly youth participatory action research is defined as research that is "conducted 'with' as opposed to 'on' youth, around the issues most important in their lives." (Cammarota, Fine 2010) This approach is of the utmost importance to YMAN's approach to developing its core value of critical mentoring, as well as the way YMAN operates as a mentoring organization, and what they teach others. It was only clear to me that the youth, mentees, and trainees be included in the

research. One of the most important aspects of participant action research is that the people themselves are those who control the information created from the research, with constant and imperative access to the findings and conclusions of the research. (<http://participatesdgs.org/methods/>). The methods that I used that are in the style of participant-based research are, focus groups, participant inquiries, action research, and testimony analysis. Community-based research is quite similar to participant-based research in that it is inextricable from that which it effects. It is research that is done within the community, with the community, and for the community. It is identifiable as a collaborative form of research between the researchers and the community, as well as its leaders. Within my research, I have collaborated side by side with not only YMAN's Director of Programs, Isabella Chavez but the Director of Outreach, Cade Maldonado. They have been instrumental to the experiments as co-creators of the research, but also as those researched. Community-based research includes many of the same methods as participatory based- research, only with the explicit end goal of achieving "social justice through social action and social change." YMAN also embodies this principle in their desire to spread and educate others on the power of critical and radical youth mentoring to impact the lives in other communities that they are unable to impact directly. Finally, my research is also a highly theory-building and testing approach as my research analyzes how these trainings are facilitated and given as well as what content is in the presentations, to determine if existing theories about critical YMAN believes that their presentations and trainings have been crucial in improving mentoring and it's outcomes in other organizations and my theory-testing approach looks at raw data through surveys and other forms of feedback that gives me an idea if this is true, and if so, how. I then hope to use this data and these findings to formulate a new theory of the effectiveness and scope of YMAN's trainings.

Within these types of research and their methods, are several theoretical approaches that aid in the analysis of my research. Post-structuralism can be most easily described as the process of "critical deconstruction." (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2011) Jacques Derrida (1996) who is heavily involved with coining this concept, "urges critical deconstruction in which that which has been marginalized is transformed into the locus of investigation." (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2011) In my work, I can identify this as looking at the mentoring of youth deemed as atypical (in terms of the familial situation, mental health, gender, sexuality, etc.) or underrepresented groups (the handicapped, POC youth, particularly black youth) and using this as the forum for learning and investigation. Post-structuralism also importantly looks at tearing down and rebuilding the dominant discourse - which is oppressive, ineffective, and destructive forms of mentoring in my research's case – to determine what is missing in this dominant narrative and then to reimagine, reinvent, and bring to light different and/or better-suited discourses. (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2011)

The founder of the Youth Mentoring Action Network, Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan, is also an accomplished academic, who has written on the theoretical approach of Critical Race Theory in her book, *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide*. In this book, she explains the qualities of Critical Race Theory, including that "many civil rights or social justice victories are likely a result of something called interest convergence, the idea that White elite interests have converged with the requests of marginalized people." (Weiston-Serdan, 2017) Which I discuss in the history of mentoring as well as the style of typical mentoring and why YMAN veered away from this approach. Critical Race Theory most notably investigates "hierarchical racial structures of societies and posits that race is a historically and socially constructed category" as well as "the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Researchers must, therefore, "be attentive to overlapping and even conflicting identities." (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, 2011) CRT

provides the foundation and groundwork for all important and pivotal conversations surrounding these identities as well as being the basis and key for the understanding that YMAN believes is essential to critical mentoring.

In some of the presentations given recently, a service entitled Poll Everywhere was used to gather real-time responses from the participants on several different questions that aimed to gauge where the organizations were in terms of their mentoring practices before YMAN, gauge how critical they were in their mentoring before YMAN intervention, as well as gauge their understanding of mentoring as a whole. The figures generated from this data appear throughout the paper and have been incredibly important in establishing the significance of YMAN's training interventions as well as prove that YMAN is reaching out to the correct mentoring organizations to intervene in.

Additionally, to study the impact YMAN has had on other organizations through their critical mentoring trainings, training evaluation forms were passed out to recent participants of the trainings and their responses were recorded immediately following the training. Participants were asked to rate YMAN's training on a scale of 1-5 (from poor to excellent) in 10 different evaluated areas (see below).

- A. Training announcement accurately represented the presentation.
- B. Training objectives were made known to you clearly.
- C. Preparation of training for this presentation.
- D. Knowledge of presenter regarding topic.
- E. Ability of presenter to communicate his/her ideas effectively and understandably.
- F. Opportunity for questions, and adequacy of presenter's responses.
- G. Usefulness of this presentation for your job.
- H. Usefulness of handouts.
- I. Training Facility.
- J. Overall quality of this presentation.

This information was sought out to discover the perception and quality of the training from the participants. We were eager to discover where improvements could be made and what

some positive attributes of the trainings facilitated. It is imperative to know where one is starting from in order to make real and continued progress. This was in a sense an all-around screening of the trainings to diagnose any issues or strong suits. After participants evaluated the training in these categories, they were asked to give optional more in-depth feedback, which was then used to further generate any improvements and find strong suits to continue implementing. These comments were coded into categories to find the most salient opinions and feedback from all 88 trainings. Featured below are excerpts of some of the feedback received, along with the highlighted portions that correspond to the codes in the right-hand column:

Excerpts of Feedback from the Training Evaluation	Codes pulled from Training Evaluations
<p>“Interested in discussing training or other learning opportunities for parents students and/or staff at SBCUSD” – Rose Bomentre Director of Student Wellness and Support Services SBCUSD</p> <p>“Consider more time (or longer training/workshop) to do hands-on work &amp; activities that allows time for building or getting “x” amount of steps completes as a starting place creating a mentor program. This helps to participants walk-away for possible places to begin as applicable &amp; appropriate for their organization. Thank you for the handouts as these also can serve as a "starting place" &amp; have a guide.” – Counselor</p> <p>“I wish it was longer, because the topic was really important.” - Anonymous</p>	<p>More instruction</p> <p>Good Resources</p>
<p>“I believe it would be more beneficial to include best practices, terminology, etc. for working with youth. This session felt more like a self-development workshop and it didn’t provide tons of new information about how to mentor. It is important to define mentoring, but the majority of the presentation was based on definitions and sharing commonalities but didn’t include new ways to be an effective mentor.” – Anonymous</p>	<p>More Specific Instruction</p> <p>Nothing New</p> <p>More Resources</p>

<p>“I was expecting effective mentoring techniques or practices to be taught during the training. I guess I was expecting to learn how we can be effective mentors with specifics or ways to engage mentees. I don’t feel like I learned anything I didn’t know already. It would be interesting to attend a mentoring session targeting a specific population. For example, homeless or transgender youth.” – Anonymous</p> <p>“Could possibly use a video to demonstrate various scenarios youth are going through.” - Program Coordinator</p> <p>“Excellent presentation very good topic to take back to our organization. Handouts would be helpful and useful.” - Life coach</p>	
<p>“The presenters were knowledgeable about the topic and held the training as a creative, open-minded space for all of us to voice out ideas, comments, and concerns. For the future, it would be helpful to learn more about how to be a good mentor or how to create a program that will be a good mentor resources for youth.” – Anonymous</p> <p>“I appreciate the information. Some good topics were touched upon. Good resources. There could have been more concrete and specific examples of how to do the work. It feels like we touched upon several ideas, but never fully dove in and got to tangible guidance on how to build strong programs or relationships. I did come away with some new ideas though. Thank you!” – Quinton Page, program manager, Domestic Violence Agency</p> <p>“Instructor delivered information in an easy way to understand, enjoy, &amp; be engaged in training. I found this training to be very insightful and I look forward to coming back to the next training.” - Program Supervisor</p> <p>“Mindfulness-based training to use for youth when you’re not a therapist. Training on how to encourage young teens to continue in school.” – Georgiana Moncada, Education Specialist</p>	<p>Informative</p> <p>More Specific Instruction</p> <p>Good resources</p>
<p>“The presentation was very relevant to my job because I work with youth at schools. I learned about several resources I could use to better serve the youth.” – Tutor/Mentor</p>	<p>Relevant</p> <p>Good Resources</p>

<p>“Loved the training and it was very fitting for my job and the youth I serve. Didn’t fully understand the training prior to attending how it would benefit my organization.” – Community Liaison</p>	
<p>“I enjoyed the mission project working together with another member.” -Youth Counselor          “I enjoyed the presentation &amp; flow today. I appreciate the opportunity, information and networking. Continue to lead &amp; I’ll use the information provided. Thank you.” – Jason Betts, Therapist and Life Coach</p> <p>“Enjoyed the training, very informative, &amp; interactive.” – Program Supervisor</p> <p>“Thank you. More resources. Have all write info of non-profit to pass around &amp; emails to collaborate with.” – Desiree Acosta, Mentor/Coach</p>	<p>Collaboration</p> <p>Informative</p> <p>More Resources</p>

Findings

## 1. Why we do this work.

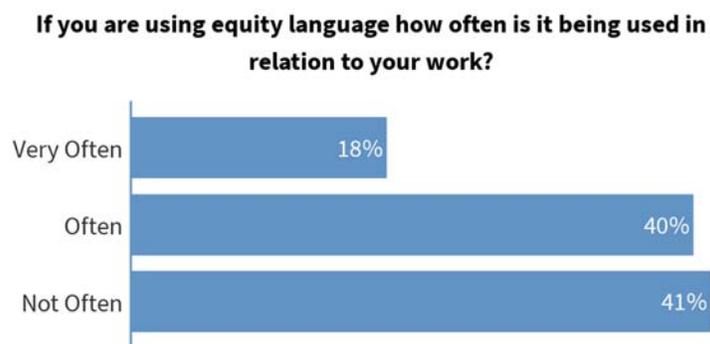
Given the question of what is mentoring? 51 respondents imparted these words featured in the figure below, with the bigger the word is signifying the more times that answer was given. Our trainees have a very accurate sense of what mentoring is, but a classic one. We aim to imbue the trainees and participants of these trainings with a reimagined and radical notion of what critical mentoring is. Meaning, words like revolutionary, radical, critical, equity, justice, and others should also have a place in this word cloud. Nonetheless, the foundation YMAN works with is strong and fraught with opportunity.



Figure 1 shows a word cloud of the most popular responses, out of 51, for the above question.

As previously mentioned in the literature review, mentoring organizations clamor to work with primarily youth of color, for the federal aid and public grants they can receive. Though when they begin this work, they find that they are deeply unprepared to effectively mentor and aid these youth. While these organizations and their mentors claim to understand, acknowledge, and address problems in these communities, Weiston-Serdan says that "they fail to see that the problems are often more nuanced and complex than typical mentoring programs can handle." (9) This results in poor mentoring experiences for black youth and little engagement. Critical mentoring has been found to be very absent in mentoring organizations by our data. At a Critical

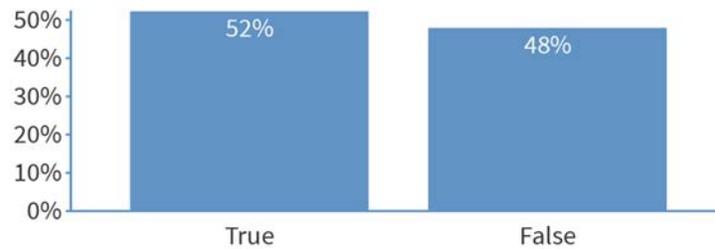
Mentoring training this past semester, participants were asked if they are using equity language (intersectionality, diversity, discrimination, white supremacy, etc.) in relation to their work. The results of this poll were very mixed but showed a significant need for Critical Mentoring Training. There were 82 responses to this poll, 18% stated they used equity language very often, 40% stated they used it often, and 41% said they did not use it often at all. The figure featured below illustrates the poll results:



This poll illustrates clearly that there is an extreme need for critical mentoring trainings to be brought to mentoring organizations and additionally, it shows that YMAN is reaching out to the correct organizations to improve and radicalize their mentoring methods.

This argument is supported by another poll of 46 respondents (figure below) that was done with this anonymous organization's trainees. When asked if they have conversations with their proteges/ mentees about identity, discrimination, and inclusion (all examples of equity language), 48% responded false. While that does show that the majority of mentors at this training do have these vital and important conversations that enhance their mentee's experience and the success of the mentoring relationship, it reveals an alarmingly large number of mentees that do not engage in these conversations. We hope that after the critical mentoring training(s) given, a similar poll would show higher rates of equity language use and conversations of equity with mentees.

**I regularly have conversations with my protege's/  
mentees about identity, discrimination, and inclusion**



Many mentoring organizations around the country are providing mentoring services to black youth using an outdated and fairly archaic sense of mentoring. One that isn't culturally competent, risk-based, or critical. Ultimately, as shown in the literature review, this is an ineffective way to mentor youth of color and YMAN is taking up the fight to ring change and critical, modern, effective, and culturally relevant practices to these organizations.

## 2. Numerical Feedback

I found that there is a high rate of satisfaction and success with the trainings, with 40% of trainees reporting perfect scores in 10 different evaluated areas, and 66% reporting either excellent or very good condition. Additionally, in all evaluated areas, the average score was a 4.66, meaning between very good and excellent, but still learning more towards excellent. This clearly shows that the trainings are a clear success in most evaluated ways, with the only non-4 or 5s being reported in the same sections from the participants who did not give all 4 or 5s. This is undoubtedly a success that must be celebrated, but definitive areas that need improvement also emerged from the data. Featured below is but a small sample of 20 of the 88 evaluation responses generated from the trainings (see Appendix 1 for complete values) :



While 10 different trainees characterized the training as informative, 7 trainees expressed a need for more specified training that included more applicable strategies and 6 trainees expressed a need for more training from YMAN in general. In those 10 evaluations coded as calling the training informative, one said that they "...appreciate the information. Some good topics were touched upon..." while another distinguished that, "The presenters were knowledgeable about the topic." Others simply wrote the word "informative." It is of the utmost significance that the most rearticulated comment was a positive one about the information given. We can easily infer from informative, that these trainings are informing the trainees, and thus they are learning the methods of critical mentoring.

On the other hand, the second most repeated phrase was one articulating a need for more specific instruction. By this they meant, they would like more specific tools to apply critical mentoring and need more pinpointed guidance from the presenters. More concrete examples, resources, and strategies are needed to give these trainees, not only a better sense of critical mentoring but an applicable guide. Participants explained that they, "believe it would be more beneficial to include best practices, terminology, etc. for working with youth. This session felt more like a self-development workshop and it didn't provide tons of new information about how to mentor." It is clear that this participant, like many others, felt like they were informed a lot in terms of aiding themselves and developing themselves as mentors, but not many applicable strategies to aid the youth which is a key component of critical mentoring. Another trainee echoed this sentiment saying, "I was expecting effective mentoring techniques or practices to be taught during the training. I guess I was expecting to learn how we can be effective mentors with specifics or ways to engage mentees...".

Hand in hand with this critique comes another, more instruction. Trainees also expressed the desire for more education and instruction by asking for collaboration with others in their organization or continued trainings with the same individuals. One trainee that asked to collaborate for more instruction said, “Interested in discussing training or other learning opportunities for parents, students and/or staff at SBCUSD.” Another stated the significance of this training for themselves simply, “I wish it was longer, because the topic was really important.” All in all, it is clear that the trainings provided by YMAN are having a positive effect on those who are in much need of these trainings, but that these same individuals require more specific resources and instruction to take back to their home organizations, as well as more instruction time with YMAN.

## Suggestions

My suggestions for YMAN in terms of their critical mentoring trainings include increased take-home resources, more directly applicable critical mentoring strategies & repeated YMAN trainings. I believe to solve the issue of a lack of clear direction following the trainings, that many expressed, there must be an effort to increase the applicability of the training to their real-world mentoring relationships with black and brown low-income youth as well as provide resources that can be referred to and taken home. To me, it seems like founder Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan's book, *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* would be the perfect starting point to improve on in this critiqued area. I believe the first step to making the trainings more practical and applicable would be to imbue the trainings and take-home resources with more of the book's strategies. In other words, we must renew the spirit of these trainings and re-vamp the presentations with more concrete information. The people are asking for more, let's give them more.

As expressed in the literature review, for lasting change within the organization, it is imperative that these trainings continue to happen year-round or annually. To create the culture in which critical mentoring can be kept alive, there must be continual internal reflection and conversations between mentors. In these organizations that are new to receiving the power of critical mentoring, the mentors must mentor each other and be learning resources for each other. Additionally, facilitated trainings from YMAN must be a constant presence in a mentorship program's agenda they can properly and effectively engage, and mentor marginalized and underrepresented youth.



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