

RESEARCH ARTICLE

If momma ain't happy with the mentoring relationship, ain't nobody happy with the mentoring relationship: Parental satisfaction as a predictor of mentoring match strength and length

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Abstract

Much evidence exists on whether an individual's perception of a match relationship impacts match strength and length, but relatively less is known about whether parental perceptions of the match (i.e., whether the match is meeting their goals) impacts the length and strength of mentoring relationships. These relationships were examined in a sample of 350 newly formed youth-mentor matches who completed multiple measures of match strength and satisfaction with the match. Parents/guardians were also surveyed about their level of satisfaction with the match. The primary finding of this paper was that parent/guardian dissatisfaction with the match relationships meeting goals was the only significant predictor of a higher likelihood of match closure. Although youth and mentor self-reports of satisfaction with how match time was spent were the strongest predictors of volunteer and youth match strength ratings, parent/guardian satisfaction with the match relationship also remained a strong predictor of match strength. The implications of these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

mentoring, parent involvement, youth

1 | INTRODUCTION

Whether a mentoring relationship has a positive impact on youth is largely contingent upon whether the relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact (Grossman & Johnson, 1998; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrerra et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2002). Although many mentoring programs strive for matches to last at least a year, average lengths of matches vary substantially. Rhodes (2002) found that approximately half of mentoring relationships last 6 months or less. Among programs serving youth in high-risk situations or system-involved youth, the rate of closure before 1 year is even higher (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Research has also found that when relationships end within 3 months of the match, the mentoring relationship may harm rather than help the youth involved (Darling, 2005; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrerra et al., 2007; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005; Spencer, 2007). In response to these concerns, mentoring programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters continue to explore strategies (e.g., improved recruiting and matching processes, mentor training, and engaging parents/guardians) that aim to increase match length, strength, and satisfaction and ultimately positively impact youth outcomes. Although parental match involvement can be targeted for change and is often something that mentoring programs work to manage over the course of a match, there is relatively little known about how parental involvement and parental approval of the match impacts the relationship. This paper focuses on the effect of parental approval of the match relationship on the strength and length of the match relationship.

Mentoring relationships traditionally have been thought of as encompassing only the relationship between a mentor and a mentee. However, Keller (2005) takes an ecological and family systems perspective and proposes that the mentoring relationship consists of various interconnected combinations of dyads between the mentor, child, parent/guardian, and agency staff person/caseworker. In his model, each dyad is reciprocal in that interactions may occur in both directions, as well as transitive triadic interactions between the parent, mentor, and child. In Keller's framework, parents/guardians have multiple ways of facilitating positive and lasting relationship development between their child and an adult mentor. For example, the parent/guardian can communicate relevant information about the child's challenges and circumstances, health, and personality. The parent/guardian can discuss the family's values and priorities for the child, which can be reinforced by the mentor when views are compatible, or which can prevent the mentor from inadvertently undermining the parent when the mentor disagrees with their perspective. Parents/guardians may also increase the mentor's commitment and motivation by expressing appreciation and encouragement. Thus, by explicating the context in which relationships between mentors and mentees develop, Keller's model highlights that truly understanding a mentoring relationship requires understanding both parental involvements in the match and parental attitudes toward it and toward the mentor.

Although some evidence suggests that familial and parental factors may contribute to the quality and length of mentoring relationships (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Harris, 2002; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014; Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011), no one has directly explored the effects of parental approval of mentoring relationships on match length or on the strength of relationships developed by mentors and youth. Family support of the mentoring relationship has been found to be positively associated with youth outcomes and perceived family support has been associated with match length (DeWit et al., 2016; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). While initial evidence from a meta-analysis of mentoring program evaluation research found that parental involvement in mentoring matches may be associated with positive youth outcomes (Dubois et al., 2002), a subsequent meta-analysis (Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011) did not find parental involvement to be a significant factor. Other research in this area has found that parental involvement, encouragement, and consistency in communication between parents and stakeholders in a child's life is essential for positive youth development (Harris & Wimer, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Taylor & Porcellini, 2013). Others suggest that family involvement can be very challenging and can ultimately undermine the mentoring relationship in various ways (Miller, 2007; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Philip, King, & Shucksmith, 2004; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014; Spencer et al., 2011; Taylor & Bressler, 2000). We acknowledge that parental

involvement is difficult and systemic factors exist that may affect the ability of parents to engage in their children's match relationship.

The hypothesis that parental approval impacts match length and strength is predicated on the idea that the mentor becomes part of an interrelated family system where parents play a key role in the lives of their children. That is, the relationship a mentor develops with the child cannot be understood without also understanding the family and agency context in which it develops (Keller, 2005; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Recently, qualitative work by Basualdo-Delmonico and Spencer (2016) demonstrated that mentoring program staff and mentors feel the quality of the relationship between mentor and parent is, in fact, important to match success, and that match quality is improved when parents and mentors clearly communicate and align their expectations for the mentoring relationships. However, they also found that parents/guardians engaged in mentoring relationships in a variety of ways, depending on individualistic factors such as family values, beliefs in the role of a mentor, parenting styles, and perceived support needs of their child. Consistent with this study, other work has found that effective mentoring relationships are more likely to develop when parents and mentors agree on expectations and there are mutual support and understanding (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Meissen & Lounsbury, 1981; Sipe, 2002).

Unfortunately, parent and mentor perceptions of and expectations for the match are often different. Research has found that very low or very high levels of parental involvement contributes to match failure in these instances (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). Parent level of involvement in the match is often determined "on the fly," based on the perceived support needs of the child. Basualdo-Delmonico and Spencer (2016) attributed these differences in role expectations to variations in family norms and values across race and class. That is, the authors speculate that mentors and program staff tended to be White and middle class, while youth and parents were often families of color and nearly always low income and these sets of individuals hold different values and match expectations. Due to individual differences as well as differences caused by systemic oppression, it is possible that there would be a disconnect between parental values and mentor values. Other work has found that mentor-youth match relationships can be sabotaged when parents expect the mentor to become a coparent or when a youth is reluctant to confide in a mentor due to mentor alignment with the parent (Miller, 2007; Morrow & Styles, 1995; Styles & Morrow, 1992; Taylor et al., 1999).

1.1 | The present study

The present analysis extends previous research by systematically assessing the impact of the mentor, youth, and parent/guardian satisfaction with mentoring matches on match strength of relationship ratings and match length. Consistent with previous research, we hypothesize that parental dissatisfaction with the match will ultimately lead to weaker match relationships and contribute to match termination. Our analysis assesses how parent/guardian satisfaction with mentoring matches, as well as shared relationship goals, affected both the strength of the mentoring relationship and mentoring match length for 350 mentoring relationships in a Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) program in the Kentucky-Indiana (KY) region. The data for this paper came from a larger joint project between the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) and BBBS-KY, funded by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2013-JU-FX-0010), to explore whether three types of parent/guardian level variables (psychosocial parent/family characteristics, parent engagement in the mentoring match, and parenting style) influence match quality, match length, and youth outcomes. This study was designed not only to describe these factors, but to investigate how these factors impact match length, match strength, and youth program outcomes. The rationale for, the design of, and the methods used in this study are described in greater detail in the technical report for this project (Courser et al., 2017).

The BBBS mentoring program model examined here is designed to help youth in high-risk situations between 6 and 18 years of age who need a supportive, nonparental adult in their lives to be a role model. The BBBS program model focuses on positive youth development through a one-on-one mentoring relationship where the mentor acts

as a role model, provides guidance and support, and helps engage the youth in positive activities that support his/her development. The BBBS model is not designed to target specific problems, but rather to have a general positive impact on mentored youth (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Many of the youth who participate in BBBS mentoring programs have significant factors that are known to put them at risk, including living in single-parent homes, growing up in poverty, and coping with parents who may be incarcerated or deployed overseas. Potential mentors must provide personal references, participate in an in-person interview with a BBBS Enrollment and Matching Specialist, undergo a criminal background check, and attend an orientation session before a match with a youth is activated.

Within this context, 350 newly formed matches that participated in the study were surveyed at match formation (or shortly after at 3 months into the match) and at 12 months (or match closure if before 12 months). We predicted that parental satisfaction with the match would be a significant predictor of match strength and length, even when taking youth and volunteer satisfaction into account. Whereas some mentoring studies have posed satisfaction as a dependent measure predicted by various aspects of the relationship (e.g., Poteat, Shockley, & Allen, 2009; Suffrin, Todd, & Sánchez, 2016), the proposed direction of relationships is consistent with the Rusbult's (1983) investment model, where satisfaction and investment are predictors of commitment, and commitment is a predictor of relationship dissolution. Whereas confirmation of the investment model was within the context of romantic relationships and possibly does not fully generalize to mentoring relationships, the investment model provides credible evidence that (a) satisfaction precedes relationship commitment and (b) it is important to consider satisfaction and commitment as predictors of relationship longevity. We see the strength of the relationship as somewhat consistent with commitment and relationship dissolution as consistent with match closure.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Participants

The study participants were 350 volunteer mentors and matched youth, as well as a parent/guardian of the youth. The mentor/youth dyads were recruited into the program between February 2014 and November 2015. Volunteers were recruited through BBBS-KY outreach activities that included public media advertising, individual and business networking or referrals through BBBS-KY partners, and various community agencies. Youth were recruited from two primary sources: Referrals by school staff (e.g., counselor or teachers) and community sources, which most often are parents or guardians, but can be other youth organizations or community mental health professionals who have been working with a family. Those youth referred through a youth organization or local school system participated in the BBBS site-based program and those who were referred by parents or community sources participated in the BBBS community-based program. In the BBBS site-based program model, match meetings typically happen at school and during the school day; in the BBBS community-based program model, match meetings may be more activity-based and take place at a variety of locations in the community.

Of the 350 matches formed, about two-thirds (66%) were community-based matches with the balance (34%) being site-based matches (see Table 1). No statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between community- and site-based matches on any of the outcomes examined, so these groups were not examined separately. Matches lasted 16 months on average (range: 35 - 1 = 34) and 65% of matches closed, based on numbers available at the end of the study. For most volunteers, the study match was their first (i.e., volunteers had relatively little experience with prior matches with an average of 1.18 total matches) and they were in their early 30s ($M = 30.84$). Slightly more than a third of the volunteers were male (36%) and slightly more than a third of the sample reported being married or cohabiting (36%). About three-quarters of volunteers (74%) reported a White race and about one-quarter (24%) reported a Black race, where few Latinos were represented in the sample (1%).

TABLE 1 Characteristics of 350 matches and parents/guardians examined

	Volunteer	Youth	Parent (%)
Community match	-	66%	-
Match length	-	16.00 (1-35)	-
Match closed	-	65%	-
Match count	1.18 (1-6)	1.57 (1-5)	-
Age	30.84 (14-68)	11.70 (8-18)	-
21-25	-	-	1
25-35	-	-	32
36-44	-	-	36
45-54	-	-	18
55-64	-	-	11
65>	-	-	2
Male	36%	44%	9
White	74%	40%	42
Black	24%	61%	56
Hispanic	1%	4%	4
Has job or in school	96%	-	66
Has high school diploma	92%	-	80
Has bachelor's degree	62%	-	15
Married/cohabiting	36%	-	27
Child receives free/reduced-price lunch	-	86%	-
Child receives public assistance	-	48%	-

Note: Means and percentages (with range).

Nearly all volunteers reported being employed or in school (96%) and they were well educated, as a substantial majority (62%) reported having a bachelor's degree.

Some youth in the study had been involved in prior mentoring matches, as they participated in 1.57 total matches on average. Youth had an average age of 11.70 (range: 18 - 8 = 10) and they were well distributed on sex (i.e., 44% were male). Participants could indicate multiple races, where 61% indicated a Black race and 40% indicated a White race. There were a few Latinos in this sample (4%). Many of these youths participate in social welfare programs, as parents/guardians reported that 86% of them received free/reduced-price lunch and 48% received some form of public assistance.

Slightly more than two-thirds (68%) of parents/guardians reported being between the ages of 25 and 44 and almost all (91%) of parents/guardians participating were female. Most parents/guardians responding (81%) were either a parent or step-parent to the child. The racial makeup of the parent/guardian sample was largely similar to that of their children, with 42% of the sample reporting a White race, 56% reporting a Black race, and 4% having a Latino ethnicity. Slightly more than a quarter of parents/guardians (27%) reported being married or cohabiting and about two-thirds (66%) reported being in school or having a job. Parents/guardians tended to have less education than volunteers, as 80% had their high school diploma and 15% had a bachelor's degree.

2.2 | Measures

The measures used in this study represent data collected in three ways: (a) Record and survey data collected from parents/guardians, mentors, and youth as part of BBBS-KY standard operating practices, including a youth outcome

survey and mentor and youth strength of relationship (SOR) surveys; (b) project-specific survey data collected from mentors and youth through inserts to the standard BBBS surveys of mentors and youth; and (c) through a project-developed parent/guardian survey usually collected in the parent/guardian's home. Before collecting any data, all project instruments, consent forms, and protocols were reviewed and approved by PIRE's Institutional Review Board.

Data collected as part of BBBS standard operating practice (including survey data and administrative data about the match) are housed in the AIM database system, where data are entered by Enrollment and Matching Specialists (EMS). The AIM data contain data on the background characteristics of the volunteer, the youth, and the family of the youth.

BBBS Youth and Volunteer SOR surveys are also entered by EMS into AIM, which were used in our analysis. These measures have been shown to have test–test reliability, consistency of within-dyad assessments, and they are correlated with match duration (Rhodes, Schwartz, Willis, & Wu, 2017). The SOR surveys are administered as part of BBBS of America's standard assessment protocols at 3 months after the match is made, and at 12 months after the match is made (or at match closure if the match closes before the 12-month point). The volunteer SOR contains 15 items assessing feeling connected to, feeling frustrated with, having confidence in, and feelings of closeness towards the youth (e.g., My Little and I are interested in the same things; I feel close to my Little), where volunteers respond on a 5-point Likert scale. Scale scores were calculated by taking the mean of unit-weighted items, as high internal consistency reliabilities (as measured with Cronbach's α) at both time periods suggested the items were measuring the same underlying dimensions at 3 (0.82) and 12 months (0.84). Designed to be a comparable measure for volunteers and youth, the Youth SOR measures the SOR using 10 items (e.g., When I am with my Big, I feel safe; I feel close to my Big). Youth respond to these items on a five-point response scale: 1 = *Never True*, 2 = *Hardly Ever True*, 3 = *Sometimes True*, 4 = *Most of the Time True*, and 5 = *Always True*. Internal consistency reliabilities were similarly high for these measures at 3 (0.81) and 12 months (0.87) and scale scores were calculated by taking the mean.

Satisfaction with the match relationship for volunteer and youth were measured with the single, face-valid item added to insert surveys accompanying the SOR at 12 months. Volunteer satisfaction was measured with an item assessing satisfaction with the quality of time spent with the youth (I am satisfied with how my Little and I spend our time) on a 4-point Likert scale. Youth answered a similar question about how they liked the time they spend with their volunteer (I like how my Big and I spend our time) on a 1 = *Never True*, 2 = *Hardly Ever True*, 3 = *Sometimes True*, 4 = *Most of the Time True*, and 5 = *Always True* response scale. Parent/guardian surveys were administered as Audio Computer Self-Assisted Interviewing or paper and pencil instruments at 12 months, where the interview typically occurred in the parent's home. Among other items, parents/guardians were asked about the progress towards goals set for the match (How satisfied are you with the progress your child and his/her Big have made toward achieving the goals you had in mind for your child?) using a scale that ran from 1 to 4 (1 = *Very Dissatisfied*, 2 = *Somewhat Dissatisfied*, 3 = *Somewhat Satisfied*, and 4 = *Very Satisfied*).

We acknowledge that satisfaction ideally would be measured by the same item or set of items for volunteers, youth, and parents/guardians; however, volunteers, youth, and parents have very different roles in mentoring relationships and they likely have different wants and needs to be met by the relationship. Reading comprehension level also guided item wording. The operationalization of satisfaction as a construct for each group had to recognize these significant contextual differences. Whereas we feel all measures focus on whether the match is meeting the *goals* of the respondent, there is variability in the content measured. The volunteers and youth items are more similar and measure whether the time spent together is of high quality. Despite this similar wording, it is likely that volunteers and youth use a different *ruler* to measure satisfaction (e.g., youth based on having fun, volunteer-based on imparting wisdom). Parents likely have some knowledge of how match time is spent, but parents presumably do not have direct access to the information (i.e., they were not there). Parents instead likely have a more general sense of whether the match is meeting their goals, presumably through their child's behavior. We have avoided misleading the reader through using the label, "Satisfaction (quality time)" for youth and volunteers and

“Satisfaction (goals)” for parents when the measures of satisfaction are discussed individually. Potential survey burden guided the decision to use single-item measures, as we had to assure measures could be completed within the constraints of a typical match meeting.

The majority of participants provided data at all measurement points; however, there was some attrition from the study, usually due to matches ending. Volunteer and Youth SOR and SOR Insert data were available for almost all study participants at 3 months (93% and 96%, respectively) and for slightly fewer volunteers and youth at 12 months (79% and 85%, respectively). Twelve-month Parent/Guardian Survey data were available for 87% of the 350 matches. Information on match duration in months and match closure status was available for all matches. All strengths of relationship and satisfaction measures were scored such that higher scores indicated greater strength and satisfaction.

2.3 | Analysis

Ordinary least squares regressions were used to analyze the volunteer and youth match strength dependent variables. Each model regressed match strength at 12 months on a correction for selectivity (discussed later), baseline match strength, and our three predictors of satisfaction with the match (mentor, parent, and youth). There were significant zero-order correlations in satisfaction reports of parents/guardians and volunteers ($r = .21$; $p = .002$), parents/guardians and youth ($r = .30$; $p < .001$), and youth and volunteers ($r = .19$; $p = .003$); however, these magnitudes of relationship do not suggest a source of multicollinearity in our models. Standardized regression coefficients (or β) were also calculated for all models, as these represent semi-partial correlations between the predictor and the outcome. We examined the risk of match closure using a Cox proportional hazards regression model, regressing match closure status on our correction for selectivity and our three predictors of satisfaction with the match, assuming match duration in months as a time to failure. Examining the characteristics predictive of match closure ($p < .05$) using logistic regression (discussed below), only youth who had more matches, $\chi^2(1) = 6.98$; $p = .008$; odds ratio = 2.05, were more likely to have matches that closed.

One potential alternative explanation for project findings is that changes over time (and consequently, predictors of change over time) are observed due to those who remain in the sample to participate at wave two, as opposed to the differences representing true differences in the population to which we wish to generalize. A Heckman (1976) selectivity analysis was conducted to explore this possibility. Parent/guardian data absence at wave two was regressed on match background characteristics (i.e., volunteer, youth, and parent/guardian age, education, race, Hispanic ethnicity, volunteer match count, youth match count, community- vs. site-based matches, parent/guardian marital status, parent/guardian incarcerated, parent/guardian in military, youth receives public assistance, youth receives free/reduced lunch, youth living arrangement, and youth health) using a probit regression model. The expectation-maximization (Dempster, Laird, & Rubin, 1977) algorithm was used to impute missing background characteristics only for this model. Whereas youth and volunteers could also have missing data at 12 months, we reasoned that (a) parents/guardians serve as the primary party of interest in these analyses; (b) due to the nature of the data collected, there were no matches with *no* data at 12 months; and (c) parents/guardians were the primary respondent group with missing data. As such, we felt providing statistical corrections for parent/guardian data absence at 12 months provides more credible estimates than multiply imputing data for 13% of parents/guardians with missing data at 12 months.

A significant omnibus model test suggested that these variables indeed accounted for variance in parent/guardian study attrition, $\chi^2(41) = 70.73$; $p = .003$. The model suggested that parents/guardians having a bachelor's degree, older children, children in lower grades, and children in site-based matches were more likely to drop out of the study. As such, an inverse Mills' ratio (IMR) was calculated from these models and entered as a predictor in all models to partially mitigate biases due to study attrition. This is referenced as selectivity correction IMR in our models reported.

We also explored the possibility that the idiosyncratic background characteristics of our sample could serve as an explanation for our pattern of findings. The 41 predictors used in our selectivity model were examined as predictors of our relationship strength and satisfaction measures using ordinary least squares regression and match closure using logistic regression. As these models capitalize on chance, we used a Bonferroni corrected, two-tailed α level of $.05/41 = .001$. Using this threshold, there were no significant predictors. Consequently, no covariates were included in our models.

3 | RESULTS

The general pattern of results suggested that parental satisfaction (goals) was important in determining both strength and length of match relationships even when partitioning the variance explained by youth and volunteer satisfaction (quality time). As can be seen in Table 2, all models explained a statistically significant proportion of the variability in match strength and length. Parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) was a significant predictor of volunteer

TABLE 2 Satisfaction with match as a predictor of match strength and length

12 Months volunteer strength of relationship ($r^2 = .45$; $F(5, 209) = 34.58$; $p < .001$)				
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i> ^a	<i>p</i>	β
Intercept	1.63	4.42	<.001	.00
Baseline strength of relationship	0.51	7.87	<.001	.46
Selectivity correction IMR	-1.24	-3.47	.001	-.18
Parent/guardian satisfaction (goals)	0.08	2.30	.022	.13
Volunteer satisfaction (quality time)	0.12	2.59	.010	.15
Youth satisfaction (quality time)	0.08	2.53	.012	.14
12 Months youth strength of relationship ($r^2 = .74$; $F(5, 209) = 119.38$; $p < .001$)				
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i> ^a	<i>p</i>	β
Intercept	0.55	2.03	.043	.00
Baseline strength of relationship	0.56	10.08	<.001	.44
Selectivity correction IMR	-0.51	-1.97	.050	-.07
Parent/guardian satisfaction (goals)	0.06	2.01	.046	.08
Volunteer satisfaction (quality time)	0.04	1.32	.189	.05
Youth satisfaction (quality time)	0.33	12.48	<.001	.52
Risk of match closure ($\Delta -2$ LL: $\chi^2(4) = 42.87$; $p < .001$)				
	<i>b</i>	$\chi^2(1)$	<i>p</i>	OR
Selectivity correction IMR	-0.68	0.31	.578	0.51
Parent/guardian satisfaction (goals)	-0.71	36.94	<.001	0.49
Volunteer satisfaction (quality time)	-0.06	0.15	.701	0.94
Youth satisfaction (quality time)	-0.23	3.80	.051	0.80

Abbreviations: IMR, inverse Mills' ratio; OR, odds ratio.

^aEffects evaluated at 209 degrees of freedom.

and youth reports of match strength and was a significant predictor of match length. Volunteer match satisfaction ratings (quality time) were the strongest predictor of volunteer SOR at 12 months, but youth and parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) report also significantly predicted volunteer SOR rating at 12 months. Similarly, for youth, the strongest predictor of youth SOR ratings at 12 months was youth satisfaction. However, parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) with the match also was a significant predictor of youth SOR ratings at 12 months. Finally (and possibly most important to both researchers and practitioners), our findings suggest that parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) is the strongest predictor of whether matches endure. Higher levels of parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) were the only factor that predicted a lower likelihood of match closure in our sample.

4 | DISCUSSION

Previous research in this area has focused primarily on parent/guardian roles in mentoring relationships, mechanisms by which parent/guardian involvement can support or hinder the development of strong mentor–mentee relationships, and motivations for parents/guardian involvement in mentoring relationships. This study goes beyond previous work by providing quantitative evidence from two types of mentoring programs that parent/guardian, volunteer, and youth satisfaction with mentoring relationships impact both match strength and match length. In keeping with previous research, volunteer reports of match satisfaction (quality time) ratings were the strongest predictor of volunteer SOR ratings and youth reports of satisfaction (quality time) were the strongest predictor of youth SOR ratings. As noted above, we found that parent/guardian satisfaction (goals) with the match influences both youth and volunteer match strength ratings and that parental satisfaction (goals) with the match was the only predictor that was significantly related to match length. Taken together, these findings indicate that parental satisfaction with the match has a strong influence on match strength and length. These findings are important both for the research community and for mentoring programs.

These findings clearly suggest that if matches are to last and have an impact on youth, it is important to manage parent's expectations for the match. Adding to the findings of Basualdo-Delmonico and Spencer (2016) that parent and mentor expectations must be communicated and made clear, our findings suggest that parents who believe the match is not meeting their expectations may lead to diminished match strength (as indicated by both youth and volunteers) and a greater likelihood of a match closing prematurely. Our findings suggest not only that mentoring programs should focus on engaging and providing guidance to parents on their role in the match, but also that program staff should work to monitor and understand parent/guardian satisfaction with match relationships, keeping in mind the parental point of view. For many mentoring programs, this represents a need for significant change in their operational practices. Although additional research is needed to investigate mechanisms on how parent/guardian factors can best be integrated into program practices, mentoring programs can begin by focusing on candid and frequent communication between volunteers and parents about whether the match is meeting parent goals for the match, as well as whether program staff and the volunteer realistically believes those parent/guardian goals can be achieved through a mentoring relationship. These discussions could also work to overcome potential differences between parental and mentor expectations and value systems if mentoring programs can approach the conversations from a parental perspective and with cultural competency.

Interestingly, we found no differences between community-based matches and site-based matches on any of the outcomes examined. Although it could be hypothesized that community-based matches would be less likely to succeed due to environmental factors and less volunteerism, this was not the case in our study. Moreover, although mentors and youth were of disparate backgrounds and mentors had relatively little experience with mentoring, the matches in this study were above average in length (16 months on average). This finding is especially interesting given recent evidence that mentors and youth who are more similar in the background are more likely to have longer mentoring relationships (Christensen, Raposa, Hagler, Erickson, & Rhodes, 2019). Moreover, none of our 41 background characteristics had significant relationships with relationship satisfaction. Although some have

found that similar ethnic and demographic characteristics lead to greater mentoring success, the literature also shows that it is relationship quality that primarily determines match success and not extraneous factors such as demographic characteristics and our findings support this.

One limitation of this study is that satisfaction with the match was measured differently for parents, volunteers, and youth. This was done purposefully, because parents, volunteers, and youth have different roles in the mentoring match and because they often are at very different literacy and developmental stages. Also, it is important to note that the satisfaction measures used in our study were single, face-valid items, as opposed to more comprehensive global measures of satisfaction. Future explorations of parent/guardian satisfaction should focus more on the underlying dimension and constructs of satisfaction as a construct that will vary in meaning and complexity for youth, mentors, and parents/guardians. Another limitation is that match duration is censored in this analysis, because we only know whether matches closed within the study period. More specifically, some matches were observed for only 1 year and some matches were observed for close to 3 years (or 35 months) due to the rolling longitudinal design used. Nonetheless, we do not feel that this is a plausible explanation for our findings, because proportional hazard regression models run separately for cases above and below the median match formation date yielded an identical pattern of relationships between satisfaction and match closure. Furthermore, such a bias would presumably attenuate the relationships observed. Finally, one plausible alternative explanation for our findings is that later parent/guardian satisfaction could be predicted by earlier youth satisfaction with the relationship. We cannot test this due to our study lacking comparable satisfaction measures at baseline; however, we would at least expect a moderate relationship between youth satisfaction and match closure to remain at 12 months. This finding fell just short of statistical significance in our analysis.

The primary finding of this paper is that parent/guardian satisfaction with the match is one of the most important determinants of whether a mentoring relationship will be maintained long enough for the relationship to have a positive impact on the youth in mentoring relationships. Programmatic efforts providing a forum for parents and volunteers to openly communicate about parental matches goals and whether match goals are realistically obtainable before match formation may avoid matches that rapidly close and potentially negatively impact the youth they are intended to help. These efforts should consider the potential value differences between mentors and parents/guardians to ensure that communication is productive. Future studies in this area should build on our work by more carefully examining whether (a) levels of open communication between parental–volunteer open communication about match expectations and match progress and (b) the degree to which parent/guardians have realistic expectations moderate the relationships to match length and match strength found in this paper. Although additional research is needed, our work highlights the practical and methodological importance of parental satisfaction with the mentoring relationship as a predictor of whether strong mentoring matches will develop and whether they will endure.

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