2013

The invisible hand in youth mentoring: parent, mentor and agency perspective on parental role

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/13137

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

THE INVISIBLE HAND IN YOUTH MENTORING:

PARENT, MENTOR AND AGENCY PERSPECTIVE ON PARENTAL ROLE

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many years ago I started the doctoral program at Boston University to start the path toward a new profession. I left my career behind, never imagining how transformative this journey would actually be. The faculty and staff in the School of Social Work and the Sociology Department helped me focus a critical lens on the social systems and context impacting the communities I care about. I gained new knowledge, language and the tools to think critically about the social world and become better equipped to pursue my commitment to social and economic justice in this diverse world. I want to recognize in particular my committee members, Deborah Belle, Mary Collins, Luz Lopez, and Renée Spencer for their patience and valuable insight through these final stages.

As I leave my status as student and enter into my new role as researcher, I do so with feelings of great gratitude to my advisor and mentor, Renée Spencer. In the last seven years she has extended to me opportunities that have been instrumental in my growth as a researcher and as a professional. Not only has she been my model of true professionalism and excellence as a scholar and researcher, but she has also guided me through the delicate and difficult balance of being committed to one's family and passionate and committed to one's profession. I cannot fully express my sincere gratitude for her mentorship and commitment to my success. Without her guidance and support I would not be leaving with the same confidence in my skills as a researcher and passion for my field of study.

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(Order No.   )

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ABSTRACT

Youth mentoring has become a popular program model promoting positive youth development and outpacing available research to guide all the programmatic growth. The systemic model of mentoring (Keller, 2005) expands the traditional mentor-youth dyadic focus of program development and evaluation, taking into account other important contextual and influencing factors including the role of parents, program staff and the larger agency. However, there remains an absence of literature that examines what is known about parental involvement and the role parents play in their child's formal mentoring relationship. This study explores the nature of parental involvement in formal community-based youth mentoring relationships.

An analysis was conducted of in-depth qualitative interviews collected at multiple data points from parents and mentors of 30 mentoring matches, selected from a larger longitudinal study of youth mentoring relationships, and one-time in-depth interviews with 12 staff members from the agencies supervising the mentoring matches conducted for the purposes of this study (a total of 162 transcripts). Thematic coding and narrative

summaries were utilized to develop themes that were compared within and across cases. This analysis yielded three main findings regarding the nature of parental involvement in mentoring relationships and the beliefs surrounding it, namely 1) the presence of distinct assumptions and expectations held by participants regarding parents and their involvement in mentoring relationships, 2) the identification by participants of five parental roles that were both expected of and actually performed by parents in their child's mentoring relationship, and 3) the identification of three types of parent-mentor interactions, which contributed to the characterization of parent-mentor relationships based on a level of communication and a degree of closeness. These study findings bring the perspectives of parents to the forefront in the examination of parental involvement in mentoring, a topic that is only beginning to gain greater attention within mentoring literature and research. Together these findings suggest that programs may be missing opportunities to tap into an important yet undervalued resource of parents, in supporting and strengthening the youth-mentor relationship.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBBSMB   Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay

BSAGB   Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

UMP   Understanding the Mentoring Process

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Youth mentoring has become a popular and promising practice for those interested in promoting positive youth development (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Freedman, 1993; Rhodes, 2002). The formal youth mentoring program model creates relationships between adult volunteers and youth from disadvantaged environments, hoping to capitalize on the transformational power of caring adults in the lives of "at-risk" youth (Beiswinger, 1985; Rhodes, 2002). Mentoring programs overwhelmingly serve youth growing up in single parent and low-income households (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). The predominant focus of current youth mentoring literature has been on the benefits to youth of the one-to-one relationship between youth and mentors, and the determinants of effective mentoring program practices (Sipes, 2002). The growing field of mentoring continues to outpace the available "theory or research to guide the development of program policies and practices" (Blakeslee & Keller, 2012, p.846). Instead much of the existing knowledge base has derived from the practice experience of those working in the field of youth mentoring and mentoring programs (Blakeslee & Keller, 2012).

Much of existing mentoring research attends to the characteristics and development of the relationship between the mentor and young mentee from a youth-resilience framework with little attention paid to the social context within which the mentoring relationship occurs (Rhodes, 2002). The interactions and relationship with the youth's

family and parent, and the socio-cultural values that surround mentoring are two unexamined contexts that interact with the mentoring dyad. Thomas Keller's (2005) systemic model approach to understanding youth mentoring provides an alternative perspective to the mentor-youth dyad. Bringing parents to the forefront alongside mentors and program staff, situating these connections within the larger programmatic realm of the systemic mentoring model (Keller, 2005) exposes the omission of these important contexts in the existing youth mentoring literature. Keller's model paves the path for a broader examination of what has been, until recently, an absence of attention directed at the role and relationships parents share in the youth mentoring process, the contextual nature of the supervising mentoring agency and the larger cultural values surrounding mentoring.

As mentoring moves beyond a mentor-youth dyadic view of mentoring, families and parents are slowly coming into view as important in the overall youth mentoring process. Although the concept of parental involvement in sectors outside of the context of the home is not new in American ideology (Jeynes, 2011) the exact role that parents play and how they are best engaged in the mentoring process are aspects which have yet to be fully discussed in the mentoring literature. Parents have long been identified as playing a significant role in the development of their children and colloquially considered one of the most influential figures in a child's development. Yet, surprisingly little has been written about the direct or indirect role that families have in the mentoring relationship being fostered for young people. In other fields, like education, greater amounts of attention have been paid to engaging parents in their child's continued development. For

decades, schoolteachers have voiced that they alone can not effectively teach a child to her or his fullest potential without partnering with parents (Jeynes, 2011, p.17) and subsequently education research and literature has extensively examined the dynamic relationship that exists between school and home.

While a meta-analysis conducted by leading youth mentoring researchers concluded that programs that engage and support parents tend to demonstrate more positive youth outcomes (DuBois, et al., 2002) very little else has been added to the mentoring literature over the last decade which addresses the nature of parental involvement in the mentoring relationship (See Spencer, Basualdo Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011; Taylor & Porcellini, in press, for exceptions). Much of the literature that specifically addresses family and parental involvement predominantly reflects knowledge that is based on what Blakeslee & Keller (2012) refer to as "accumulated experience and practice wisdom of those working in mentoring programs" (p. 486). Within youth mentoring research, parents have been identified as obstacles to youth mentoring relationships (Styles & Morrow, 1992) or as a variable (the parent-child relationship) which mentoring can affect (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). While some research has begun to evaluate how parental involvement has been incorporated into program practice (Taylor & Porcellini, in press), there is little that directly explores the role that parents play in their child's mentoring relationship and the impact it may have on youth outcomes.

Knowing that parental involvement has the potential to positively influence youth mentoring outcomes (DuBois, et al., 2002) is a strong incentive to more fully explore the

parental role in the mentoring process. This dissertation will review existing literature that presents a conflicting perception of parents and their role in the mentoring process, discuss the historical and social context that may serve as a basis for this existing tension and present findings from a study which demonstrates the roles parents play in the mentoring relationship from multiple perspectives, a sample of mentors, parents and agency staff. Understanding parental involvement as a more purposeful and engaging process may provide insight as to how their participation can be capitalized upon to maximize the potential benefit for youth in formal mentoring relationships.

Youth Mentoring

Since the Progressive Era Americans have created numerous social campaigns, public programs and charitable services to help children overcome their past, save them from their present, and prepare them for their future. For over a century youth-focused programs have been designed to provide young people with opportunities for education, rehabilitation, recreation, and much more. Many of these programs have primarily focused on youth considered to be troubled, delinquent, or at risk of not succeeding in our society. The youth mentoring model has emerged as a worthwhile approach to serve these youth (Freedman, 1993) rising above many other prevention programs as a low-cost social intervention that relies on relationships as a conduit for human capital (Freedman, 1993; Tierney, et al., 1995). Portrayed as a viable intervention and prevention tool requiring the mere investment of being a friend and role model to a young person, mentoring easily aligns with American values (Freedman, 1993), which possibly explains its popularity as a prevention/intervention model. While mentoring has been shown to be

beneficial to all youth, it has continued to target primarily at-risk youth (Buckley & Zimmerman, 2003; MENTOR, 2006).

The model of youth mentoring is not grounded in one particular academic field of study, but rather researchers in the fields of psychology, community psychology and education have driven much of youth mentoring research (Blakeslee & Keller, 2012). As a field, youth mentoring has been informed mostly by research on youth resilience (Rhodes, 2002). In particular, the finding within risk and resilience research that characterized the involvement of important non-parental adults as protective factors for the resilience of at-risk youth within un-healthy environments (Buckley & Zimmerman, 2003), resonated very strongly within the youth mentoring field. While risk and resiliency research has served as a key framework through which to approach formal youth mentoring, the non-parental adults in the lives of these resilient youth were predominantly natural mentors.

Informal or natural mentors are supportive adults that are from within a youth's own social networks (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). These mentors may be non-parental adults related to the youth, such as a grandparent, aunt/uncle, older cousin or sibling (Sanchez & Reyes, 1999). Other informal mentoring relationships may also develop between a young person and a teacher, coach, neighbor or other adult with whom the youth has a social relationship. The formal mentoring model in large part has relied on the intent of building youth resilience by introducing a protective factor of a non-parental adult in the life of an at-risk youth.

Youth mentoring, unlike many other intervention programs, applies a

developmental versus problem-oriented approach. Keller (2007) characterized youth

mentoring as serving three possible purposes: (1) to prevent psychosocial difficulties or

problem behavior, (2) to promote individual competencies and adjustment through

development; or (3) to foster opportunities for engaging with and integration into the

community. Instead of targeting a specific problem that a youth faces, mentoring instead

offers youth a "caring, adult friend" (Tierney, et al., 1995, p. 2). Through this important

relationship, programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters hope to create a mechanism through

which the mentor can help guide a youth through childhood or adolescence (Tierney, et

al., 1995), and facilitate the friendship of one caring adult that can be the life changing

influence for a troubled youth (Beiswinger, 1985). According to the mission of the

national Big Brothers Big Sisters agency volunteer mentors are not a replacement of the

professional, but are a "tool of the professional; they apply the therapy of friendship,

under the supervision of a trained social worker or caseworker…the Big Brother (or

Sister) is the treatment" (Beiswinger, 1985, p. ix).

Building on this model for change, youth mentoring programs that formally match

youth and non-related adults have grown exponentially in schools, agencies and public

services, representing more than an estimated 5,000 programs across the nation (DuBois,

Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Although formal youth mentoring

programs have roots that reach as far back as the turn of the twentieth century

(Beiswinger, 1985), only 18% of programs today have been in existence for more than 15

years (Rhodes, 2002). The great expansion of youth mentoring programs has been traced

back to a 5-year span between 1994 and 1999 (Rhodes, 2002). In their most recent report

Big Brothers Big Sisters, the largest and most well known national youth mentoring organization, reported working with over 630,000 volunteer mentors, youth and their families (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2012; Public/Private Ventures, 2012). According to a national poll conducted by MENTOR (2006), a national partnership organization of mentoring programs, the number of adults involved in one-to-one mentoring relationships increased during a three year period between 2002 and 2005 from 2.5 million to just under 3 million. This quick and explosive growth has resulted in a broad diversification of youth mentoring models: peer, intergenerational, group, site-based, community-based and online mentoring (Buckley & Zimmerman, 2003; Rhodes, Spencer, Saito, & Sipes, 2006).

Utilizing 2000 Census data, MENTOR (2006) identified 17.6 million youth as likely to benefit from a one-to-one mentoring relationship. These youth were considered at a moderate or high-risk status, meaning they either experiment in risky behaviors (using minor substances, some unprotected sex, etc.) or participate with lower frequency in a few risky, yet less harmful problem behaviors (Dryfoos, 1992 cited in MENTOR, 2006). With only 3 million adult mentors engaged in either formal or informal one-to-one mentoring relationships this leaves a significant "mentoring gap" of 14.6 million youth in need of a mentor (MENTOR, 2006, p.1). Despite the significant and national attention paid to youth mentoring programs its growth continues to outpace available research on the model, though great strides have been made.

Current Research

Initially mentoring research played primarily an evaluative role of youth

mentoring but it has begun to examine the more complex aspects of mentoring relationships. Today youth mentoring literature has reached a point where it can now offer proven and demonstrated practices and standards providing clearer direction for youth mentoring programs (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Research on youth mentoring has primarily fallen into one of three areas: 1) documenting the benefits of mentoring for youth, 2) determining effective mentor practices and 3) defining programmatic best practices (Sipes, 2002). Overall research supports the anecdotal sentiment that mentoring can have a positive impact on youth, both in prevention and promotion (DuBois, et al., 2011). Important adult mentors can have a positive influence on the educational attainment, health, behavior and overall well-being of at-risk youth (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006), however these benefits of mentoring for youth remains modest even after multiple generations of mentoring programs (DuBois, et al., 2002; DuBois, et al., 2011). Further, early and poorly terminated mentoring relationships can have a negative impact on mentoring youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2007a) stressing the importance of critique and evaluation of mentoring beyond the feel good nature conveyed through anecdotal images.

Assessing the mentoring dyad itself, the benefit to youth is not directly related to being in a mentoring relationship but rather to the characteristics of the relationship that promote beneficial outcomes (Sipes, 1999). The sense of closeness, consistency and endurance are three important characteristics of a mentoring relationship that can strengthen the positive effects that mentoring can have on a youth (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). A sense of closeness in the relationship relates to the feelings of trust and

connectedness between a youth and mentor. A lasting mentoring relationship based on consistency and endurance seems more likely to nurture and increase a sense of closeness in a relationship than one that is not defined by these characteristics.

In addition to consistent communication or activity between the mentoring pair, match endurance has also been shown to directly relate to the amount of impact that mentoring has on positive youth outcomes. Youth engaged in mentoring relationship for one year or longer reported experiencing improvements in academics, psychosocial and behavioral outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Contrary to anecdotal sentiment that mentoring doesn't have a downside, relationships that terminate early can have a negative impact on positive youth outcomes. Grossman & Rhodes (2002) found that youth in mentoring relationships that terminated within the first 3 months experienced negative effects including decreased sense of self-worth and academic self-competence, though it was unclear as to how youth psychologically processed the early termination (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Fortunately the average length of a mentoring relationship is 9 months, and mentors and their mentees spend an average of 13 hours together each month (MENTOR, 2006).

Mentor and Youth Characteristics

While volunteering adults represent a diverse group (Foster-Bey, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006), the greatest numbers of those participating in mentoring activities often do not share similar demographic characteristics as the youth receiving their mentorship. Adult mentors are predominantly white and non-Hispanic, more often women, not living with any minors and the greatest numbers of these mentors fall between the ages of 35-44

(Foster-Bey, et al., 2006). Most mentors are college educated and more likely to be employed full-time (Foster-Bey, et al., 2006) and nearly half have incomes greater than $75,000 (MENTOR, 2006). Considering these socioeconomic and educational characteristics of the typical volunteer mentor, it seems likely that most mentors could be labeled as middle or upper social class.

In contrast the youth predominantly targeted and served by mentoring programs are less likely to be from a two-parent home, more likely to be from an ethnic minority group (McLearn, Colasanto, Schoen, & Shapiro, 1998) and growing up in poverty (Furano, et al., 1993). Although all youth in general can benefit from being mentored by a caring adult, mentoring is more effective among youth who experience difficulties or environmental risk (DuBois, et al., 2011). Such risk factors may include behavioral problems or external risks that create challenges and obstacles for a child as he or she grows up (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2007), such as economic need, in a family with a single parent or an incarcerated parent.

Program Variables

Beyond these relationship and individual level characteristics, scholars have recommended a variety of related programmatic and systemic mechanisms that programs can implement to support mentoring matches and increase the potential effectiveness of youth mentoring programs (DuBois, et al., 2002; DuBois, et al., 2011; Miller, 2007). Such practices include a) goodness of fit between volunteer mentors and program goals b) mentor-youth matching based on interests and, c) adequate mentor training and support for match relationship development and duration (DuBois, et al., 2002; DuBois,

et al., 2011). Those mentoring programs that aim to follow such best practices expend significant efforts gathering information to effectively screen and match at-risk youth with a volunteer mentor. They then strive to provide mentors with the technical and relational support to aid in the development of a relationship that is characterized as consistent, enduring and close. The important role that mentoring programs play in structuring policies and implementing best practices in the support of the mentoring dyad is one that has been nationally recognized (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2003). Acknowledgement that the mentoring relationship does not develop in isolation and is influenced in numerous ways by the interactions with the youth's family (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2005) is a fairly new concept within mentoring literature. The likelihood that a youth's family can be an integral force that shapes the mentoring relationship both directly and indirectly has not appeared to gain significant attention across mentoring programs. Overlooking the role of families in formal youth mentoring is a problem that stems back to the inception of mentoring in the early 1900's, when the pervasive thought was that youth most in need of mentors were those that lacked true parental and familial support systems.

Roots of Youth Mentoring

Efforts to foster one-to-one relationships between at-risk youth and non-parental adults can be traced to the social efforts of early social workers such as Jane Addams (Baker & Maguire, 2005) and others involved with youth at the turn of the 20th century. The late 1800's and early 1900's was a time of tremendous growth that dramatically changed the landscape of American society. Increased urbanization, immigration, and

industrialization all significantly contributed to major economic and social disparities among individuals and families. Urban communities across the country became home to a great number of struggling working poor and juvenile delinquency became an increasing social problem (Baker & Maguire, 2005). When a family's problem was with their child, the root cause was believed to be with the parent. Either the parent lacked the knowhow to deal with a feeble-minded child, or lacked values in education and appropriate reform to properly parent a youth who had lost his way and was behaving poorly (Z. D. Smith, 1901). Parents' individual faults were considered at the heart of why a child's education was not attended to. Poor youth were seen to be in need of "socialization, firm guidance and human connection with mainstream adults" (Freedman, 1993, p.30), a perspective that provided fertile ground for the seeds of a youth mentoring movement.

Not surprisingly, youth became a focus of social interventions during this time. The first specialized courts to deal with juveniles separate from the adult court systems were established in Chicago in 1899 and in New York a few years later in 1902 spearheaded by socially active women and men in the community, including Jane Addams, Lucy Flower, Julia Lathrop and Ernest Coulter (Baker & Maguire, 2005; Beiswinger, 1985). Guided by the social beliefs about the poor, several of these individuals pursued efforts to introduce mentors into the lives of delinquent youth hoping to provide then with the proper socialization and the virtues that they lacked. Jane Addams, a founder of the Hale House settlement, and other socially minded women raised funds to hire probation officers who would serve in a mentoring capacity to

troubled youth (Baker & Maguire, 2005). A court clerk, Ernest Coulter, and Judge Julius Mayer recruited volunteer men within their community to befriend the youth coming through the juvenile court system (Beiswinger, 1985). These efforts in Chicago and New York served as the beginnings of an organized youth mentoring movement.

In an appeal to a Men's Club at a Presbyterian Church in New York in 1904, Coulter stated that he believed that the salvation of the troubled youth seen through the courts rested merely in the hands of "some earnest, true man volunteer" who would serve as a big brother, "to look after him, help him to do right, make the little chap feel that there is at least one human being in this great city who takes a personal interest in him; who cares whether he lives or dies" (as cited in Beiswinger, 1985, p.9). This particular call for volunteers resulted in 39 men volunteering themselves to befriend a troubled youth, and has been cited as the first organized mentoring program in the nation (Beiswinger, 1985). Coulter's plea to an audience of well-established and successful men reinforced the belief that troubled youth merely lacked proper role-models and had the misfortune of being without anyone to provide needed guidance and support. Further, it likely promoted an image of troubled youth being victims of poor or absent parenting. These social volunteer-based mentoring efforts mimicked others during the same time period, in which relationships between affluent, upper class volunteers and poor families were formed with the belief that it would help families to overcome their social and economic position (Freedman, 1993; Rhodes, 2002).

Though different, today's economic and social problems facing families are similar in nature to those that troubled youth in the early 1900's. Further, the social

beliefs of Coulter's and Addams' time which held that the plight of poor families was largely due to a lack of virtues in hard work, thriftiness and moral behaviors (Jansson, 2005) are arguably ones that persist today (Handler & Hasenfield, 1997). Despite greater attention over the last century to structural inequalities that contribute to poverty and other social ills, the perception of low-income and single-parent households remains framed by a deficit approach. This is of particular relevance given the predominance of youth served by mentoring programs that are from low-income and single-parent households and mostly of color.

Although the kinds of messages used today to recruit adult volunteers as mentors to youth may not mirror those of a century ago, the picture that is painted of the at-risk youth remains dire. It is estimated that half of youth today will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent home (Tierney, et al., 1995). For youth in low-income homes, adult support is considered to be particularly scarce (Tierney, et al., 1995) considering the social difficulties believed to be impairing parents' availability and ability to be the primary source of guidance and support to their growing children (McLearn, et al., 1998; Schonert-Reichl & Offer, 1992). For these reasons, programs consider youth living in single-parent households members of an at-risk category, and more likely to benefit from a mentoring relationship (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2007). Given the historical roots and the persistence of deficit-thinking about poor families, it is understandable how public perception surrounding mentoring programs maintains the assumption that mentored youth are enrolled because of poor family structure or incapacity to adequately provide positive modeling and support

(Taylor & Porcellini, in press). The persistence of such a deficit-thinking approach

toward families mostly served by mentoring programs may explain why programs in

general seem to continue to overlook parents as a potential resource and asset to the

mentoring relationship. Though some research revealed that programs that attended to

involving and supporting parents demonstrated greater benefits of mentoring for their

youth (DuBois, et al., 2002), in the last century mentoring literature has revealed only a

modest number of programs as having made efforts to address the involvement of parents

in the mentoring program (See Taylor & Porcellini, in press, for examples).

Unfortunately, very little is available within current mentoring literature that can serve to

guide programs in determining what parental involvement is and how it can be used to

impact greater outcomes for mentored youth.

Families and Youth Mentoring

With so little attention paid to the role of parents in the mentoring relationship

(Rhodes, 2005), it is interesting to note the stark contrast between the relationships that

formal mentors foster with their mentee's parents to those among parents and the mentors

of natural mentoring relationships. Eighty percent of informal mentors knew the parents

of their mentee before becoming a mentor and an additional 12% came to know the

parent (McLearn, et al., 1998). However, among formal mentors only 40% knew their

mentee's parent previously and an additional 37% came to know the parent during the

course of the mentoring relationship (McLearn, et al., 1998). Said another way, 23% of

mentors in formal mentoring relationships compared to only 8% of informal mentors

never came to know their mentee's parents. While this data does not speak to the degree

of interactions or depth of the relationship developed between the mentor and their mentee's parent, being better acquianted with a mentee's family is cited as a practice of more effective mentors (Sipes, 2002). Further, youth who feel their mentors knows their families demonstrated increased benefits from mentoring (Johnson, 1999).

Current Research

The mention of parents in youth mentoring literature is difficult to find, regardless of the focus on formal or informal mentoring, and an article search utilizing two online databases confirmed this. On January 14, 2013 a keyword search of *youth mentoring* in PsychInfo database resulted in 147 articles, but when *parent* was added the results diminished to 19 articles. A similar search in the Social Services Abstract database returned 190 articles for *youth mentoring* and only 24 for youth mentoring and *parent*. In a closer examination of the resulting 43 articles there were four general ways in which the term parent was referenced in article abstracts. Most of the articles referenced the term *parent* as 1) a characterizing term such as single, incarcerated or teen parent, 2) a reporters of youth outcomes (e.g. assessing their behavior at home) or 3) part of the parent-child relationship outcome variable. A much smaller number of articles (six) made specific reference to the term *parents* in respect to parental involvement or role in youth mentoring. These articles referenced specific program practices that involved parents (family-mentoring, family activities) or reports of interactions between mentors and parents.

Among the empirical studies many references to parents were specific to the parent-child relationship and suggested that the quality of such relationships increased for

mentored youth (Britner & Kraimer-Rickaby, 2005; Rhodes, et al., 2000; Tierney, et al., 1995). Rhodes, Grossman & Resch (2000) suggest that these improved parent-youth relationships resulting from mentoring may help mediate the overall positive outcomes for a youth associated with being mentored. Other studies point to parenting style, such that youth whose parents demonstrated supportive parenting style, in which they encouraged their child to engage in activities outside of the home, were more likely to benefit from a natural mentoring relationship (Zimmerman, et al., 2002).

Among the sparse literature that directly addressed parental involvement in mentoring, the most cited was a meta-analysis of youth mentoring research conducted by Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002). Their meta-analysis of fifty-five empirical studies examined the overall effect of mentoring programs on youth and the various program factors that may enhance program effectiveness. Their analysis supports the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs, with some programs showing greater effects than others. For example programs that targeted youth in disadvantaged or risky environments had the largest effects (DuBois, et al., 2002).

Although the benefits were moderate or small, researchers also noted that certain program practices might have had an effect on youth outcomes. Such practices included 1) a means of monitoring overall program implementation, 2) the availability of structured activities for mentoring pairs, 3) ongoing mentor training, 4) high expectations for frequency of contact between mentor and youth, and 5) the involvement and support of parents in a mentoring program. Subsequent evidence has reinforced this last practice finding that suggests that programs that make efforts to involve parents yield better youth

outcomes (Higginbotham, MaCarthur, & Dart, 2010; Rhodes, 2005; Weinberger, 2005).

Although the operationalization of family involvement remains rather vague within the mentoring literature, some programs have begun to pay greater attention to the families of the youth being mentored. The most predominant way in which programs are operationalizing family involvement is through program elements and activities developed to support and serve families (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2010; Taylor & Porcellini, in press), which stems from the premise that effectively supporting youth requires supporting their family as well. This family strengthening approach emphasizes involving families in activities that will improve upon their capacity and effectiveness, thus bolstering the kinds of impact that mentoring can have.

Family Involvement as Strengthening Families

Family involvement as an element of family strengthening, is primarily rooted in the premise that positive child development is best pursued when parents are better equipped to parent their child (Taylor & Porcellini, in press) and, "in some cases more effective family functioning might result from a child's participation in a mentoring program" (Taylor & Porcellini, in press, par 3). From this stance family involvement in mentoring programs is a means of strengthening the family bonds, improving the child-parent relationship and thus improving outcomes for youth. Promoted as a strategy for strengthening families (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2004), youth mentoring programs that pursue this path of family involvement have done so in a few distinct ways outlined by Taylor & Porcellini (in press). The first type of program practices involved a form of Family Mentoring, whereby programs provide mentoring to a youth and case

management support and resources to the family. This model extends support to the

family beyond mere knowledge and information, modeling for families ways of accessing

resources. The second form of practices included planned skill-building for the families

of the youth being mentored. These took the form of workshops focused on effective

strategies for supporting their child, and curriculum-guided parent education often

specific to particular families' needs (e.g. parenting a child with aggressive behavior).

These particular approaches placed the emphasis on engaging and serving families,

extending the scope of services beyond merely those of providing a youth with a mentor.

Thus programs are involving families in accessing resources and education intended to

improve their capacity to support their mentored youth.

Family Involvement as a Resource to the Mentoring Relationship

An alternative approach to involving families by serving family needs, is one

which considers families as a source of support to the youth mentoring relationships.

Rooted in the idea that parents who feel engaged are more likely to support the mentor's

positive influence (DuBois, et al., 2002), finding ways to seek parents' support of the

mentoring relationship has become a best practice for mentoring programs (DuBois, et

al., 2002; Jucovy, 2001; Miller, 2007). Such program practices may include sponsoring

occasional social activities where families can interact with the agency and mentor

(Taylor & Porcellini, in press). As an example the Families and Mentors Involved in

Learning with Youth (FAMILY) (Weinberger, Garringer, & MacRae, 2005) brings

families and mentors together at planned events several times a year to become more

familiar with one another. These planned gatherings give parents and mentors an explicit

opportunity to enhance their communication about the youth's mentoring experience
(Weinberger, et al., 2005). The importance of these opportunities to communicate and
dialogue should not be overlooked as they can be particularly important and desired by
mentors (Herrera, 2004). Being better acquainted with a mentee's family was not only a
key practice among more effective mentors (Sipes, 2002), but also youth experienced
increased benefits from mentoring when they felt their mentors knew their family
(Johnson, 1999). These kinds of family involvement practices serve to promote the
youth-mentor relationship and were not focused on making changes in the parent's skills
or style (Taylor & Porcellini, in press).

Beyond activity-based means of gaining parent support, other program strategies
involved more standardized policy practices where parents are included in the youth
mentoring program model. At the most basic level, programs must obtain parental
consent for a child to participate in formal mentoring, although this does not ensure
parental support of the mentoring relationship (Taylor, LoSciuto, & Porcellini, 2005).
Beyond the consent to participate, programs can garner parental support by recognizing
their right to approve proposed matches (Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, 2005;
Weiberger, et al., 2005) but also continue to involve them through orientations,
informational and regular ongoing conversations about the progress of the relationship
(Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, 2005) and how much their child is benefiting
from mentoring (Jucovy, 2001; Taylor, et al., 2005). These kinds of practices may serve
as a means of gleaning their support for the relationship (Taylor, et al., 2005). Further, it
has been recommended that programs assess parental beliefs and attitudes about

mentoring as a means of determining whether they are likely to be supportive or a

potential sabotour of the relationship (Johnson, 1998; Miller, 2007; Taylor, et al., 2005).

This recommendation brings to light the ways in which parents can affect their child's

mentoring relationships. Rhodes (2002) believes that "when relationships with parents

are valued by all parties in the program, adolescents are less likely to feel trapped by

competing loyalties" (p. 42). When parents feel engaged in the mentoring relationship,

they are more likely to support the mentor's positive influence (DuBois, et al., 2002).

Further when mentors and parents work together to support the relationship, there is

greater potential for positive youth outcomes from formal mentoring relationship

(Rhodes, 2002). Current attention toward involving families in mentoring has overlooked

the ways in which parents are already involved in their child's mentoring relationship.

Parent Roles in Mentoring Relationship

Aside from a handful of passing references to the parental role in mentoring

programs and relationships (Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, 2005; Taylor, et al.

2005; Weinberger, 2005) and recommendations to focus further research on the matter

(Taylor, et al., 2005), very little substantive discussion about the role that parents play in

their child's mentoring relationship exists. Most of what is shared in the literature about

the influence parents have in the mentoring relationship is drawn from sources other than

parents themselves (Spencer, et al., 2011). Although involving parents has gained greater

attention as an important means of supporting the positive benefits of mentoring for

youth, the influential roles that parent's play in mentoring are fraught with tension. The

descriptions of parental involvement beyond cursory requests for consent and updates

about the match relationship development, is often framed as potentially problematic in nature. In their book *Mentoring Children and Adolescents*, Buckley and Zimmerman (2003) discuss parental involvement in a chapter section titled, "Common Problems in Mentoring and Mentor Programs." The authors indicate that developing a comfortable relationship between the mentee's family and the mentor can be challenging because of how a parent is involved. Mentors are cautioned to maintain firm boundaries with parents so as not to be pulled into activities outside of the mentoring role such as providing child care or being a taxi. The authors also state that parents themselves may not want a relationship with the mentor due to feelings of "insecurity, embarrassment, jealousy, and/or mistrust" (p. 51). Another mentoring program guidebook suggested that while regular contact with parents was a method of helping a parent feel invested in the mentoring match, it also was a means of reducing "the possibility that they may become resistant to, or jealous of, the mentor and attempt to undermine the relationship" (Jucovy, 2001, p. 6). The disruptive nature of parents is further supported by those mentors who attribute their match failure to family interference (Spencer, 2007b).

Although parental involvement may be disruptive in some mentoring relationships it has seemingly become the standard for how parental involvement is approached despite evidence in contradiction to the image of parents as jealous, disruptive and likely to overstep boundaries (Spencer, et al., 2011). Spencer, et al. (2011) present such evidence in their analysis of qualitative interviews from 13 parents of youth being mentored in a community-based mentoring program. Their findings yielded four major themes about the perspectives parent's held regarding their child's mentoring

relationship. These included 1) the hopes and expectations parents had for their child's

mentoring relationship, 2) their trust and satisfaction with the relationship, 3) their

perspective on the cultural differences in the mentoring match and 4) parental roles in the

match. Based on the descriptions that parents offered about their child's relationship and

the interactions they had both with their child and the mentor, the authors identified three

specific types of roles that parents enacted, collaborator, coach and mediator. As

collaborators, parents actively worked with mentors to "facilitate the development and

promote the efficacy of the relationship" (2011, p.55). When parents felt the mentor

lacked the experiential knowledge to effectively navigate a relationship with the child,

they stepped in to coach the mentor. Sometimes the role as coach extended beyond the

focus of the match when parents found themselves offering the mentor advice aimed to

support his or her own well-being. Lastly, in the capacity as mediator parents took action

to help preserve the mentoring match or bring it to an end, all in the best interest of their

child, such as reassuring a child that the mentor's decline in availability was due to other

temporary demands on the mentor's time, and not a reflection of their lack of interest in

the youth.

This study not only expands on an understanding of the ways in which parents are

already involved in their child's mentoring relationship, but more importantly it

contributes the voices of parents themselves in the definition of a concept for which they

are the focus. Spencer, et al. (2011) set the stage for a strength-based view of the ways in

which parents are involved in their child's mentoring relations, involvement which is

often outside the purview of program staff and even mentors. Programs that abandoned a

deficit model, recognizing and embracing family and youth strengths experienced greater

youth outcomes (White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic

Americans, 2000).

While Spencer, et al. (2011) bring the voice of parents to the forefront, a deficit-

based view of the families continues to permeate what little discourse exists on parent

and family involvement in youth mentoring literature. This tension persists as mentoring

continues to be promoted as a "means of redressing the decreased availability of parents

or family support and guidance in the lives of youth" (Smith, 2011, p.220). Reminiscent

of the values that surrounded poor youth and their families at the turn of the 20th century,

dismantling deficit-based approaches which are reinforced by social values that presume

youth are in need of mentoring because of "inadequate parenting" (Taylor & Porcellini,

in press, par.2) will be necessary if those in the field of mentoring are invested in

pursuing ways of genuinely involving and engaging families as a means of benefiting

mentored youth.

Parent Involvement in Education

Though the topic of parental involvement in youth mentoring is still in a formative

state, in the parallel field of education a much greater amount of discourse exists on this

same topic. Parental involvement in education has received much attention over the last

several decades (Jeynes, 2011) and may provide important critiques and lessons learned

from which the field of youth mentoring could benefit. Two critical perspectives in

particular offer insight into why struggles with parental involvement remains a

formidable topic even within the field of education. The first critique speaks to the

"schoolcentric" (Lawson, 2003, p.79) nature of parental involvement. Scholars note that schools, teachers and administrators have defined the behaviors, roles and activities deemed as legitimate ways in which parents can effectively engage in their child's education (Brien & Stelmach, 2009; Olivos, 2006). The educational goals and outcomes which parental involvement is meant to support are predominantly defined by schools and reflect the priorities and values of schools (Olivos, 2006). The normalization of the concept of the involved parent, one who promptly responds to teacher notes, requests for support (e.g. fundraisers, class volunteers, chaperones) and make themselves available for school events and teach conferences, exemplifies middle-class family involvement and denies the social conditions which prevent this kind of parental involvement from poor families (Bloom, 2001). Considering that poor families don't often participate in their children's school in "traditionally expected ways" (Brien & Stelmach, 2009, p.7) further dichotomization the concept of parental involvement as the involved and the uninvolved (Brien & Stelmach, 2009). Efforts to formalize parental involvement in schools have been ineffective in increasing the involvement of these parents in large part because of "institutional barriers such as deeply rooted beliefs about professional expertise [that] prohibit parents from getting involved beyond non-intrusive ways" (Brien & Stelmach, 2009, p.7). The perspective that parents lack proper knowledge, skills or proper values to be effective allies to schools for a common educational goal is further propagated by deficit-thinking toward poor, low-income families and families of color, impeding the promotion of genuine and effective parental involvement in education (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman-Nelson, 2010).

Jeynes (2011) argues that securing a genuine partnership requires that the teacher "humbly acknowledge" (p. 162) that their role is to work alongside the parent to support the child's development and education, "not the other way around" (p. 162). This approach requires that parents be viewed as the expert in their child's development and education (Jeynes, 2011). Though Jeynes describes a paradigm shift in the institutional culture within education, the essence of what she and other education scholars purport about the conceptualization of parental involvement in schools and the ideological values and practices that create barriers for effective parental involvement are clear. While there is limited literature within the field of mentoring on this topic of parental involvement, it does not preclude us from further examining and overlaying the effective practices and be weary of the critiques that have been raised within education.

Conceptual Framework

Systemic Model of Mentoring

The mentoring dyad (mentor and youth) has been at the core of how formal youth mentoring has been defined, popularized and practiced since the mentoring movement began. The social contexts within which these mentoring relationships reside have long been overlooked, despite being recognized as areas needing to be understood (Keller, 2005; Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004; Rhodes, 2002). The singular focus on the aspects pertaining to the mentoring dyad neglects the relational ties that naturally exist between the mentor and youth and the matching agency, and the relationship between the mentor and the youth's parent or family (Keller 2005). Parents and program staff also play some role in the mentoring process, bringing their own thoughts and ideas about the

goal for the mentoring relationship (Keller, 2007).

Keller's (2005) systemic model of mentoring captures the complexity of the seemingly simplistic mentor-youth dyad, bringing to the foreground a multitude of interactions that likely influence the mentoring relationship, but remained in the shadows. This complexity is highlighted in the articulation of the relational ties that exist with, between and among the mentor, the youth's parent and the matching agency, and all situated within a larger programmatic structure. Keller proposes that the success of mentoring is contingent on the interactions that occur beyond just those between the mentor-youth dyad. Parents of the young mentee and the supervising mentoring agency are brought to the forefront alongside mentors and youth as influential figures in the youth-mentoring relationship (See Figure 1.1). Little is known about the relationships between parents, mentors and agency staff and the influence they individually and collectively have on the mentor-youth relationship and subsequently youth outcomes. Keller's model lays out the interactions that occur between and among the youth (C), mentor (M), parent (P) and agency worker (W) on which the success of mentoring relationship rests. The relationships that exist between and among these four individuals offer various possible pathways of influence on the mentoring relationship and outcomes for the youth. As Keller describes, these relationships can be *direct*, *reciprocal*, *transitive*, *parallel* or *circular*.

Figure 1.1 Systemic model of mentoring (Keller, 2005)

A *direct* interaction is where one individual initiates an interaction toward another

(M→C). For example the mentor suggests the activity of cooking together to the youth. A

reciprocal interaction (M↔C) may involve the youth mentioning their desire to cook and

the mentor arranging the activity. These two types of relational interactions are most

commonly described in mentoring literature. Keller's systemic model however includes

interactions more commonly described in triadic relationships (Keller, 2005). The

transitive interaction in a mentoring model involves second-order pathways of influence.

For example a parent might suggest cooking as an activity to the mentor and the mentor

in turn suggests this to the youth (P→M, M→C). A combination of transitive interactions

can lead to *parallel* and *circular* pathways of influence. An example of a *parallel*

exchange could involve a parent and a mentor interacting to discuss cooking as a possible

activity, and then each having a separate interaction with the youth suggesting this idea

(P↔M, M→C and P→C). The final possible interaction is *circular* where a youth might

mention to his or her parent an interest in cooking and the parent in turn mentions this to

the mentor who then arranges a cooking activity with the youth (C→P, P→M, M→C).

Each of these types of interactions can be more or less influential than another across mentoring matches. Through this systemic lens the possible influences on the mentoring pair no longer remains restricted to just the mentor and youth. Keller (2005) highlights that this four-person mentoring model exists because of the instrumental role of the larger mentoring agency or program in facilitating the mentoring match, and potentially influenced by the structural aspects of the organization (e.g. training, policies, media messaging). Keller's model provides a conceptual foundation from which to explore in greater depth the specific role that parents have in the mentoring process and further understanding of the interactions and relationship that parents and mentors engage in.

Deficit Thinking

While Keller (2005) provides a systemic orientation that broadens the influential figures in the mentoring process, the presence of larger socio-cultural processes that inform the decisions to interact and the means of interacting, is active in the background. The socio-cultural values that parents, mentors and program staff bring with them to the mentoring process model cannot be overlooked. At the center of the mentoring model are at-risk youth who are likely to be youth of color from low-income households and raised by single-parents. The pervasiveness of deficit thinking approach toward this very category of people must be considered when examining the ways in which parents are expected to be involved in their child's mentoring relationship and how their actual interactions are valued. The concept of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) can provide a theoretical backdrop in which to situate the persistent tension that presides when parents

are brought to the proverbial mentoring table. In its most simplest form deficit thinking is the "process of 'blaming the victim' (….) a model founded on imputation, not documentation" (Valencia, 1997, p. x). Based in the field of education, Valencia (1997) posits that the construct of the at-risk youth views the "poor and working-class children and their families (typically of color)" (p. xi) as responsible for poor academic achievement, ignoring structural inequities.

While the roots of deficit thinking have been tied to early racial discourse, its evolution has broadened to include discourse about the poor, though closely tied to those of color. Social beliefs about the poor held in the 19th century rooted the cause of poverty to the behavior and habits of the poor themselves. Decades later, the theoretical viewpoint defined by Oscar Lewis in 1959 as the *culture of poverty* (Burke Leacock, 1971) posited that a sub-culture existed among the poor who shared a common set of values and attitudes which were both self-perpetuating and self-defeating. These values involved "a sense of resignation or fatalism and an inability to put off the satisfaction of immediate desires in order to plan for the future" (Burke Leacock, 1971, p.4). The presumption of a culture of poverty is that these values are not only adopted by the poor but passed down to their children and linked to low motivation for education or job preparation, which in turn "perpetuate unemployment, poverty and despair" (Burke Leacock, 1971, p.11).

Although the culture of poverty has been countered and debunked (Burke Leacock, 1971; Webster, 2000) undercurrents of these deficit based views about the poor prevail even today. Handler and Hasenfeld (1997) describe a pervasive sentiment about

individuals who seek public assistance, "the failure to support oneself and one's family has always been considered more than just being poor. Violating the work ethic is a moral fault; as such, it contaminates other areas of personal and family life" (p.4). For poor youth, especially those growing up with public assistance, it continues to be widely believed that these youth "suffer from poor environments, do poorly in school, and, for the most part, follow the paths of their parents in dependency or worse" (p.4). These socio-cultural sentiments towards poor families are reaffirmed by the tension that exists in mentoring in reference to the environmental deficits that mentored youth encounter. One premise embedded in the youth mentoring model is the power of a volunteer mentor to enhance the deficit of resources and social capital of young people from low-income backgrounds (Deutsch, Lawrence, & Henneberger, in press). Though this premise is further reinforced by resiliency research pointing to the protective nature of caring adults in the lives of youth from adverse environments, elements of positive youth development have influenced the promotion of a strength-based approach in the mentoring model.

Guiding Frameworks in Youth Mentoring

Risk and resilience research has informed the predominant framework through which formal youth mentoring has been approached (Rhodes, 2002). Resilience research suggest that various personal and environmental characteristics serve as protective factors among youth who demonstrate resilience in spite of the exposure to risk factors through their development (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). These protective factors were found not only in the qualities of the individual youth, but also in the family characteristics and community support (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). The field of youth mentoring

has gravitated to the particular finding that the involvement of an important adult, including a non-parental adult, is a protective factor for youth developing in risky environments (Buckley & Zimmerman, 2003). At its core, the youth mentoring model aims to build youth resilience by connecting at-risk youth with caring and supportive community adults.

The concept of resilience has also driven the philosophy behind positive youth development (Hill, 2008) where youth are recognized for their strengths and the existence of protective factors that they possess. As the field of youth development has advanced, the integration of the youth and their environment (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003) has become more prominent. The core of positive youth development is a move away from a deficit and problem-centered view of youth and rather a perspective that focuses on recognizing and capitalizing on youths' strengths and resources (Damon, 2004). Creating these connections and taking a strength based view of youths' characteristics within the mentoring relationship contribute to why mentoring is considered a promising strategy for positive youth development (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). More importantly, the positive youth development approach not only recognizes individual youth assets and strengths but also those of the youth's familiy and community context, which offer resources to support the positive development of a youth. Programs that ascribe to a strengths perspective recognized the protective factor of supportive families (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006). Applying a collaborative approach toward supporting at-risk youth, which involves community organizations, schools and families, not only align with a strength-based approach but also support the

aim of building youth resiliency.

Expanding the strength-based view of youth to also inform the ways in which families of mentored youth are approached within the mentoring model may create a pathway that allows for capitalizing on the assets and resources that families can offer to strengthen the potential power of mentoring on youth outcomes. This proposed study draws on the holistic perspective of the mentoring relationship highlighted by Keller's (2005) systemic model and uses a strength-based perspective of the concept of parental involvement and role in the mentoring relationship, viewing the family as a source of strength and support for both the youth and the match relationship itself. Although existing research in youth mentoring does not directly explore nor describe the role that parents play in the mentoring relationship, knowing that parental involvement can positively influence this relationship is strong incentive to more fully understand the parental role in the mentoring process. Guided by these concepts and models this proposed research explores what role parents are perceived as having in the formal mentoring model from the viewpoint of mentors, parents, and agency staff.

This Study

This proposed study aims to provide some basis for understanding the ways in which parents are involved in the mentoring relationship. The overarching research question that has guided this study is: What is the nature of parent involvement in formal adult-youth mentoring relationships? Given the paucity of attention to this aspect of the mentoring process, a qualitative approach was taken in order to build a descriptive analysis of the role of parents from multiple perspectives. To capture an understanding of the nature of

parental involvement, additional sub-questions were also addressed in this study and are as follows:

a. What are the similarities and differences in the perceptions among parents, mentors and program staff regarding expectations of parental roles and actual involvement on behalf of parents? How do these similarities and differences in perceptions influence the nature of the mentoring relationship?

b. What is the relationship between mentors and parents? How is this relationship conceptualized and supported by the mentoring program?

   Answers to these questions can provide a broader platform from which programs can consider what parental involvement looks like and how parents may already be involved in the mentoring process. Determining how parental invovlement can be a more purposeful and engaging process may provide needed insight as to how best to capitalize on the strengths and resources that a youth's family can offer in support of the mentored youth and the power of the mentoring relationship on youth outcomes. It is hypothesized that having a better understanding of the other relationship dynamics which can influence the relationship between a youth and a formal mentor, mentoring programs can develop strategies and practices for better matching, match support and ultimately increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth. Further the study hopes to introduce a viewpoint that places parents and families as a source of resource in the mentoring process, and not just targets of further intervention and services, essentially expanding the conceptualization of what parental involvement in the mentoring relationship can look like.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

This qualitative interview study is designed to provide a descriptive account of the nature of parental involvement in youth mentoring relationships. The research focuses on two primary questions:

1. What role do parents play in the mentoring relationship, according to parents, mentors and mentoring program staff?

    a. How do expectations of parental roles compare with parents' actions, as perceived by parents, mentors, and program staff?

    b. How do these similarities and differences in perceptions influence the interactions within the mentoring relationship?

2. What is the relationship between parents and mentors, and how is this relationship conceptualized and supported by the supervising mentoring program?

To answer these questions I utilized both primary and secondary in-depth qualitative interview data from key stakeholders, namely parents, mentors and mentoring program staff. The parent and mentor interview data were drawn from a longitudinal mixed methods study of youth mentoring relationships, Understanding the Mentoring Process (UMP) (Spencer, 2007a). Separate interviews with mentoring agency staff were conducted solely for the purpose of this dissertation study. The parent and mentor interviews offered first-hand accounts of the participant's perspectives on the nature of parental involvement. The interviews with program staff offered insight on the programmatic context in which these parents and mentors' relationships were situated

and supported.

Accounts of parental involvement in the mentoring research and practice literatures rarely incorporate the first-hand experiences of parents themselves (see Spencer, Basualdo Delmonico, & Lewis, 2011 for exception). In this study I sought to bring the voices of parents as primary actors into the discussion on parental involvement. Drawing on the multiple perspectives of parents, mentors and program staff, I looked to map out the collective construction of expectations for parental involvement in mentoring relationship, as well as the lived experiences of both parents and mentors engaged in the youth mentoring process. Examining mentor and program staff perspectives in relation to those of the parents yielded a more nuanced account of the larger programmatic context (Keller, 2005) within which the mentor-youth dyad is situated and the landscape within which parental actions and intentions are not only interpreted but are supported, discouraged, judged and valued.

Parent and Mentor Interview Data

To obtain parent and mentor perspectives I analyzed in-depth qualitative interviews collected for a larger study of youth mentoring relationship processes. The UMP study, conducted by Renee Spencer at the Boston University School of Social Work, examined the contextual and relational factors that contribute to the development of youth mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2007a). As a member of the UMP research study team this researcher was intimately involved in the various phases of research planning, implementation and analysis. I made the decision to utilize parent and mentor secondary interview data from the UMP study after considering the following factors:

- ▪ The scope and quality of the UMP study data provided relevant information that applies to this study's research questions regarding the nature of parental involvement in youth mentoring relationships.

- ▪ My familiarity with the contextual and rigorous nature of the data collection process, recording and transcription of interviews (Notz, 2005), and study limitations.

UMP Study Background

The UMP study tracked the development of 67 same-gender matched mentor-youth pairs (35 female pairs)[1] selected from two nationally affiliated Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring agencies located in the Boston area. The youth's parent or guardian also participated in this study. The community-based program model is the traditional form of mentoring where a volunteer adult mentor and a youth mentee connect for several hours a few times a month to do activities together. The national mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters organization is to develop professionally supported one-to-one mentoring relationships for youth facing adversity, with the aim of contributing to improve psychosocial, behavioral and academic youth outcomes (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2012). The male mentees, their parents and male mentors participating in the UMP study were recruited from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay (BBBSMB) and the female mentees, their parents and female mentors were recruited from the Big Sister Association of Greater Boston (BSAGB). These two

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[1] Include demographic information of the UMP sample as a whole

agencies were selected as study recruitment sites for the UMP study because of their use of high-quality, evidence-based practice models.

Interview Structure

The UMP study invited newly matched mentors, youth and the youth's parent or guardian to take part in the 2-year research study of mentoring relationships. Only those matches where all parties agreed to participate were included in the UMP study sample. Interview data from young mentees, their parent or guardians and their mentors were collected at multiple time-points throughout the duration of each mentoring match relationship up to two years. An initial (Pre-match) interview was collected from all three parties (parent, youth and mentor) at the time the mentoring match between the young mentee and the volunteer mentor was first made by the supervising agency. The mentors and youth were asked to complete a follow-up interview every 3 months during the first year of their mentoring match and twice more if their matched continued into a second year, at 18 and 24 months. Parents were only re-interviewed at 12 and 24 months. If any mentoring match ended during the two years, a final (Match-end) interview was collected from the mentor, the mentee and the mentee's parent or guardian.

Interviews with parents and youth were conducted face-to-face and most often in the home of the family. Mentor interviews were conducted predominantly over the phone. Parent and mentor interviews were one hour in length and the youth interviews lasted about 30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and the transcripts verified. Qualitative interviews were conducted using a semi-structured, general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002, p.342). (See Appendix A for parent and

mentor interview protocols)

Initial (Pre-match) interview questions focused on the participant's motivation for becoming involved in a mentoring program and their belief's and expectations for the newly formed mentoring relationship. During this pre-match interview mentors also provided information about any hopes or expectations for the relationship with their mentee's parent and the involvement of the parent in their new mentoring relationship. Similarly parents were asked in their pre-match interviews to speak to their own beliefs and expectations for their involvement in their child's relationship and for their own relationship with the mentor.

In follow up and match end interviews, mentors were asked to reflect on their actual relationship with their mentee's parent, as well as what they perceived the parent's involvement to be in the mentoring relationship. Similarly, in follow up and match end interviews parents were asked to describe among other things, their actual role and involvement in their child's mentoring relationship and the kind of relationship they were developing with the mentor.

Interview Sampling

This study sample consisted of the parents and mentors in 30 mentoring matches selected from among the 67 mentoring matches participating in the UMP study. The criteria used to select this final sample group from the larger data set were based on the availability of English interview transcripts for two data points for the parents and three data points for the mentors. Initial (Pre-match) interviews from both parents and mentors, along with the availability of a post-interviews from parents and mentors collected at

either an annual follow-up or as a final (Match-end) interview.[2] As follow up interviews

with mentors were conducted more frequently, a third data point for the mentors was

included. This interview was collected at the 3-month time point.

Applying these criteria to the UMP data set (n=67) 30 cases were excluded due to

missing post-interview data from either the parent or mentor, and an additional 7 cases

were removed from the sample because the parent interviews were conducted in a

language other than English and interview transcripts were not yet available in English.

Table 2.1 details the total number of parent and mentor interview transcripts analyzed.

Table 2.1

Numbers of Interviews Available for Analysis and Selected TimePpoints

	Parent	Mentor	Total Interviews
Initial Interviews	30	30	60
Follow-up Interviews	X	30	30
Post-Interviews	30	30	60
Total Interviews	60	90	150

This sample of 30 matches was then divided into two groups based on the length of

the mentoring relationship and labeled as *established* and *dissolved*. *Established*

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[2] In one sample cases, a 24-month interview data replaced the 12-month interview data

that was unavailable for both the parent and mentor.

mentoring relationships successfully reached the agency defined minimum commitment of 12 months and planned to continue their match. *Dissolved* matches were those that were together for at least 6 months but ended prior to reaching 12 months, or did not plan to continue beyond the initial 12-month commitment. A total of 18 matches were categorized as established relationships (8 female and 10 male matches), and 12 were dissolved matches (7 female and 5 male matches). The rationale for this distinction is based on mentoring research that indicates a positive correlation between the duration of the youth-mentor match and positive outcomes for the youth (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). This study would also examine any qualitative distinction of parental involvement based on length of relationship. Table 2.2 demonstrates the sample cases by gender and length of match.

Table 2.2

Number of Mentoring Match Cases

	Established (n=18)	Dissolved (n=12)	Total Matches (n=30)
Female Matches	8	7	15
Male Matches	10	5	15

Sample Demographic

  This final sample of parents (n=30) consisted of predominantly biological parents (80%) and legal guardians, with 83% identifying as single parents. Parents and guardians

ranged in age from 27 to 64 years (M=39, SD 8.2 yrs) and 77% ethnically identified as non-White (African American, Caribbean, Hispanic or other). The average reported household annual income was between $20,000-$30,000, and 62% reported incomes below $30,000. Conversely, mentors (n=30) in this sample had an average income between $60,000 and $75,000, with 53% reporting annual incomes greater than $60,000. These mentors ranged in age from 21-46 years (M=28, SD 6.7 yrs), and the majority identified as single (66%) and White (80%). The demographics of this study sample are similar to the larger and complete UMP sample.

Agency Program Staff Interviews

To capture the specific programmatic contextual setting that framed the support and guidance provided to parents and mentors included in this study, staff members were recruited from the same two mentoring organizations, BBBSMB and BSAGB, which supervised the mentoring match relationships. The mentoring organizations supervising and supporting these youth-mentor relationships are critical agents in the construction of expectations for parental involvement. Through their staff, these organizations enact policies and procedures, conduct monitoring, training and support, all of which create a framework within which mentoring matches are created and developed (Keller, 2005). The program staff interviewed in this study served in primarily one of two roles in their organizations, either in participant enrollment or match support. Enrollment specialist screened and enrolled mentees and volunteer mentors into the mentoring program. Staff supported youth and families through the enrollment process, gathering information about the child's history, personality and interests, and assessing their fit with the

mentoring program model. Staff involved with match support provided ongoing guidance and support to the youth, their parent or guardian and the mentors, once matched. The staff interviewed provided perspectives on the organizational expectations for parental involvement as well as observations of the actions of parents in the youth mentoring relationship.

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 12 mentoring program staff members. The recruitment of program staff began with securing permission from the directors of the mentoring programs at both agencies (See Appendix B for Agency Letter). Once permission was garnered, a recruitment email detailing the interview study was forwarded to the mentoring program staff (14 at BBBSMB and 21 at BSAG) with the invitation to contact the researcher if interested in being a study participant (See Appendix C for Recruitment E-mail). A total of 12 individuals contacted the researcher to be interviewed. Interested staff members were offered the opportunity to conduct the interview at a location other than their agency office. The off-site accommodation was intended to minimize any concerns about confidentiality and create a space where staff felt free to speak openly regarding their personal expectations and experiences with parental involvement in the mentoring relationship and how these compare with the institutional values of the agency. Most all, however, requested that the interview be done on-site at their agency for their convenience.

The in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with the program staff members (n=12) were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded. These one-time staff interviews lasted an average of 70 minutes, with the longest interview being 1.5 hours

and the shortest 30 minutes. These interview were intended to provide a broad agency and practice level perspective on the parental role and interactions in mentoring relationships, and staff's personal perceptions about the role of parents in the youth mentoring relationship. A semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix D) was developed for the purposes of this study. The interview questions were informed by the UMP interview protocols and the overarching themes of the research questions. A topic expert (Colton & Covert, 2007) was used to review the instrument to assess the validity prior to its use. Utilizing the guide, staff members were asked key questions to elicit their thoughts, feelings, knowledge and interactions surrounding the overarching theme of parental involvement in youth mentoring. Interviewed staff were asked to share their understanding of the larger institutional perspective on the role that parents play in the mentoring relationship, as conveyed through agency policies and trainings. Program staff were also asked questions to elicit their own personal perspectives and observations about parental roles in the youth mentoring relationship. Lastly, staff members were also asked to reflect on how their individual and, or the institutional values about parental engagement and involvement were integrated into the support and supervision of the mentoring matches.

Seven of the 12 staff interviewed worked for the BBBSMB agency, which supervised the male mentoring matches, and 5 were from the BSAGB agency, supervising the female matches. These BBBSMB participating staff (5 female) had an average of 3.6 years (SD=3.99) of service with their agency, the most senior staff member having been with the agency for over 11 years and the newest member only 3

months. The 5 BSAGB staff (all female) interviewed had been with their agency for an

average of 4.9 years (SD=2.96), ranging in tenure from 4 months to more than 7.5 years

Data Analysis

All parent, mentor and program staff interview data were analyzed through a multi-

step comparative and thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach. A combination of

multiple analytic tools and common analytic processes was utilized to examine the

interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003)

including familiarization, coding and reflection on data, isolating and defining

relationships in the data and interacting with existing knowledge and discussing findings.

To answer the research questions, a 4-step analytic approach was used: (1) construction

of narrative summaries of each parent-mentor match relationship, (2) development of a

classification scheme (Patton, 2002 p.463) specific to the research question, (3) coding of

parent, mentor and program staff transcript data, and (4) review and comparison of

emergent themes and categories. These steps are detailed in the following section.

Data Preparation and Familiarization

In preparation for the qualitative data analysis process I reviewed all verified

(Poland, 2002), verbatim transcriptions of program staff, parents and mentors interviews

(n=150). I conducted the verification of 34 transcripts, which provided me with a broad

familiarity (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) of the larger set of interview data. This

familiarization process also reaffirmed that interview data from parents, mentors and

program staff contained sufficient information and detail to respond to the research

questions. Participant transcripts were used in full, even though the semi-structured

interview protocols included only a few questions that specifically addressed the role that parents play in the mentoring relationship and the nature of the parent-mentor relationship. Due to the in-depth nature of the open-ended questions used in the interviews, participants often expanded upon or provided additional detail about their experiences around parental involvement while responding to other questions regarding the match relationship. Thus the nature of the parental role and interactions were gleaned from the description and detail that mentors and parents provided about the youth mentoring match as a whole.

Verified transcriptions were loaded into the qualitative analysis software *Atlas.ti* to assist with the organization of the text data and documentation of the analysis. Interview data were organized into various units of analysis to allow for greater comparison in the analysis process. This was done using Document Families within Atlas.ti, a technique of grouping related interviews by a common relationship. Data were grouped by participant type (parent, mentor and program staff), length of match relationship (establish or dissolved), the gender of the match (male or female), and by individual matches (all parent and mentor interviews pertaining to a mentoring match case).

Narrative Summaries

Narrative summaries of each mentoring relationship (n=30) were constructed by synthesizing all available parent and mentor interview data for each match. This allowed me to examine the nature and development of the parent-mentor relationship from both participants' perspectives over time. These summaries highlighted references relating to the following specific themes:

(a) Interactions or communications that parents described having with the mentor or program staff pertaining to their child's mentoring match

(b) Thoughts, feelings or perspectives that parents expressed about their child's mentor or the mentoring match.

(c) Interactions or communications that mentors described having with the parent or program staff when the subject was the parent.

(d) Any thoughts, feelings or perspectives that mentors expressed about their mentee's parent.

Staff perspectives were not included in these narrative summaries, as they were not asked to discuss specific match relationships in their interviews, in order to protect the privacy of the UMP participants. Instead staff interviews focused on more generalized themes about parental involvement and the agency's approach toward parent engagement.

Classification Scheme and Coding of Data

Coding of parent and mentor interview data.

The next analytic step taken was a review of the narrative summaries to create two broad classification schemes, *parental role* and the *parent-mentor relationship*. The *parental role* classification included any data that revealed some form of action on behalf of the parent or an expectation of action in the match. Those data that revealed an emotional expression or process between the parent and mentor were classified as pertaining to the *parent-mentor relationship* category. Using this classification scheme, holistic coding (Saldaña, 2009) was applied to the first half of parent and mentor

interview data. This involved chucking large portions of text for coding as either relating to the category of *parental role* or *parent-mentor relationship* (See Appendix E for example). When relevant, some interview text fell into both categorical codes. Analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009) were used and maintained during this initial coding step to document ideas and thoughts regarding the processes and actions being described within the categorically coded texts (See Appendix F for example).

Drawing on the narrative summaries and the coded data, a matrices was created compiling descriptive text that identified repeating ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Eighteen initial descriptive and process codes (Saldaña, 2009) were inductively derived from these repeating ideas and concepts, and used to then code the parent and mentor interview data. An additional six codes emerged during this round of coding and all parent and mentor interview data were recoded using the complete list of 24 code labels. Thirteen of these pertained to *parental role* processes or descriptions and eleven codes related to the *parent-mentor relationship* (See Appendix G).

Coding of staff interviews data.

Informed by the categorical themes and the coding structure that evolved from initial stages of parent and mentor data analysis, staff interviews were coded using a strategy that supported data-driven codes (Gibbs, 2008). Unlike the interviews conducted through the UMP study, these interviews were focused specifically on the research questions about parental role and the parent-mentor relationship. Thus, the analytic approach taken to the staff data was more bottom-up in nature. Initial coding (Saldaña, 2009) of program staff data involved a variation of line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2007).

Unique code labels including some sub-categories were generated to represent the ideas

and themes described within the staff interview data. This initial round of coding resulted

in 457 coding labels (See Appendix H for example) which were then grouped into ten

categories (See Appendix I).

Thematic Review and Comparative Analysis

After multiple cycles of coding of the available interview data, thematic analysis

was used to locate patterns and themes among the coded data as a whole. Having closely

examined the data from each of the three sources (mentors, parents and program staff)

within this study, I was able to engage in a process of questioning the themes and patterns

that surfaced and distinguish similarities and differences in the views and experiences of

each of the participant sources, who each had their own vantage point regarding the same

phenomena (parental involvement in mentoring relationships).

To discern information about the range of roles associated with parents, the data

were compiled to illustrate the number of times individual codes were found within each

interview. Subsequent analysis focused on the presence of different parental role codes

across the interviews and within each interview, and not on the cumulative number of

times codes were found within interviews. Additionally, coded data were compiled and

clustered in various ways to discern if any patterns existed based on the classification of

the matches by gender (male or female matches), length of match (established or

dissolved) or by participant type (parent or mentor). Drawing on analytic memos and

coded texts, the 16 code labels relating to parental role were refined into five prevalent

themes that spoke to the role of parents in mentoring relationships. These five themes

were developed by clustering the descriptive and process coded chunks of text according to the kinds of parental involvement in the mentoring relationship.

As a means of moving the analysis beyond initial coding and developing coding themes, matrices were generated to illuminate patterns and trends in the coded data and allow for comparative analysis of the data (Gibbs, 2008). The construction of meta-matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.178) began with reading through each individual group of mentor and parent interviews, pertaining to the same match case. I generated a matrix table to document specific aspects of each match case by relevant themes (e.g., parent's role in the match, mentor-parent relationship, role of the agency in defining parent's role or relationship with mentor, communication parent between parent and mentor, or closeness between parent and mentor). These matrices brought together text and descriptive data to explain the complexity of the parent-mentor relationship within each match, keeping intact the individual perspectives of the parent and the mentor. This technique facilitated the comparative analysis within-case and cross-case, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analytic Memoing

Analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009, p.33) were used throughout the analysis. These memos were used to document personal reactions to participant perspectives, critical thoughts about the data and relationships to exiting knowledge based in the mentoring literature about parental involvement. I created memos to document my ideas and thoughts about codes, potential patterns and the presence of possible relationships within and across the data. A consistent review of these memos allowed me to build upon

thoughts and ideas throughout the analysis. The use of memos for personal reflection documentation provided me with the space for self-dialogue about any reactions I had to any participant responses and provide me an opportunity to step back and acknowledge any possible biases, then return to the data with the intent of looking out for personal bias as the coding and thematic analytic process continued.

An example of this was the personal reactions I had to the deficit language that was used by some mentors when describing their interactions with or their perspectives about the parent of their young mentee. Articulating my frustration or reactions then allowed me to be much more thoughtful in my analysis by being more open to the perspectives of mentors, rather than applying a negative or judgmental bias toward such mentors in my readings of their interviews.

Study Rigor

In qualitative methods, concerns of reliability and validity are better described in terms of trustworthiness or credibility of the data being collected and analyzed (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of this study is strengthened by the various strategies enlisted throughout the data collection and analysis process. These strategies are among those recommended to promote confidence in the accuracy of the phenomena being recorded (Shenton, 2004) and include a) familiarity with the culture of the participants and organization, b) triangulation of data sources c) tactics to elicit honest participant responses d) frequent debriefing sessions, e) researcher reflection (Shenton, 2004).

My familiarity with topic of youth mentoring relationships and the culture of the participants and organizations involved in this study stem from my involvement in the

longitudinal study of youth mentoring relationships (PI: Renee Spencer, BUSSW). As a study interviewer, I gained first hand knowledge of the varying experiences that parents had in their child's mentoring relationship as well as mentor's experiences and their perspective about their mentee's parent or guardian. Further, working closely with the agencies supervising the participant matches I engaged with the program staff, providing me with familiarity of the programs that were included in my dissertation study.

As a means of triangulating the data, I sought to include the perspectives of multiple informants. The inclusion of parent, mentor and program staff perspectives allowed for a richer picture of the various attitudes, assumptions and experiences regarding parental involvement in mentoring. Obtaining credible and honest responses from these participants when interviewed was managed by enlisting several tactics. Throughout the UMP interview process with mentors and parents, and the interviews that I conducted with program staff, efforts were made to establish rapport with the participants. Strategies to accomplish this included reiterating the confidentiality of participant responses and the separate and independent nature of the research being conducted from the mentoring agencies, and the use of iterative questioning throughout the in-depth interview process.

Given my personal position as a new parent and my experience with the UMP research, I considered ways to manage any bias that might be informing or influencing where my attention was drawn and maintain the integrity of the patterns and themes discerned from the data. This potential bias was managed through the use of personal memoing (Miles & Huberman, 1994) where I reflected on my thinking and the ways in

which I was experiencing the perspectives of the multiple informants. I also had frequent

and regular debriefing sessions with a field expert (also my advisory) to review the data

analysis process and findings.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Understanding the experiences and perspectives that parents, mentors and program staff have regarding parental involvement in the mentoring relationship is the main focus of this study. The three overarching themes revealed during in-depth analysis of interview data will the discussed in this chapter and are 1) distinct views of parents and parental involvement by participant groups, 2) identification and definition of five parental roles and 3) examination of distinct characteristics of the parent mentor relationship. While the primary research questions were directed at the particular roles that parents play in the mentoring match and the relationship that is formed between parents and mentors, analysis revealed that a broader philosophical approach to parental involvement served as the backdrop for how each participant group then conceptualized aspects of both the parental role and the parent mentoring relationship. The distinct frameworks from which program staff, mentors and parents approached the concept of parental involvement are discussed first and then the subsequent findings which are largely informed by these approaches.

Three Distinct Views of Parents and Parental Involvement

In my analysis of parent, mentor and mentoring program staff interviews I found that these three groups held distinctly different views of parental involvement in the youth mentoring relationship. These views were evident in how each participant group spoke about their expectations for the roles of parents, the relationship that parents develop with the mentor and their interpretations of the actions taken by parents within

the mentoring relationship. The agency staff described a shift in the conceptualization of the mentoring model and how the agencies viewed parents. They indicated a greater appreciation for the influential role that parents played in the mentoring process. Staff spoke to both the ways in which parents positively supported a mentoring match and the interactions and involvement that were detrimental to match development. A considerably greater amount of attention was paid to the latter, however, as many staff described efforts toward preventing parental interference within the mentoring relationship, emphasizing prescriptive parental roles and clear boundaries for parental involvement and interaction with the mentor. This may be attributable, in part, to the fact that during the post-matching phase, staff often devote much more time to working with matches that are experiencing problems.

The views of volunteer mentors were, in contrast, less developed and largely shaped by the information and training they had received through the mentoring agency. Most mentors indicated that they had not thought much about their mentee's parent prior to their mentor training. When asked directly about parental involvement in their newly formed mentoring relationship, mentors often echoed the program's prescriptive guidelines, mixed with their own personal values about the kind of relationship they wanted and how they expected parents to behave in the match. In general mentors reflected a sense of wariness about the involvement of their mentee's parent and conveyed that while they were hoping for the best they felt prepared for the worst.

In contrast to the views of program staff and mentors, parents' own reflections of their involvement in the mentoring process encompassed a much wider range of views

and expectations. Whereas some parents expected to be involved in multiple aspects of the relationship from scheduling to goal planning, others believed a minimal presence was necessary so as not to interfere with the relationship that was developing between their child and the new mentor. Yet other parents linked their level of involvement to the degree of independence they gave to their child. Regardless of the diversity in their approaches, establishing a sense of trust in the match and ensuring the well being of their child was of central importance to parents. In the sections below, I detail each of these three distinct views on parents and parental involvement, beginning with the staff perspective, then the mentor and ending with views of parents.

Staff Approach Toward Parental Involvement

Parents…"can really make or break" a match (BB)[3]. From the interviews with program staff it was evident that their mentoring program had begun to pay greater attention to the specific role and impact that parents and guardians have in the mentoring relationship. This reflected a shift in the attention that previously focused on the 3-way relationship between the program staff, the mentor and the youth. Staff shared that traditionally the family was considered merely part of the youth's background. Rooted in this programmatic model, volunteer mentors were seen to play a critical and distinct role in helping the agency to fulfill its programmatic mission to support young people. From this vantage point, mentors were viewed as an extension of the mentoring agency and

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[3] Quotations taken from program staff interviews will be identified only by the agency level: *BB* refers to BBBSMB staff, *BS* refers BSAGB staff.

some staff often considered the mentors' needs to be of great importance, taking precedence over others. While staff reflected on the pivotal roles that parents play in their child's relationship, their frame of reference seemed tethered by the motivation to protect and support the mentor.

Parents, the "forgotten piece in the mentoring relationship" (BS) at one time, were now being conceptualized as another influential member of the mentoring model for whom staff must also attend to. In their interviews staff shared that their mentoring program now credited parents for having a greater amount of influence over the success of the match than previously acknowledged. Several staff found themselves being more intentional in their efforts to bring parents directly into the mentoring process. Some found that parents, too, needed to consider their own active role in the mentoring relationship, "most parents don't probably think of themselves as a really important part of the relationship (….) people are shocked when I tell them that they need to return our phone calls and talk to the Big Brother about how the match is going" (BB). One staff member described purposefully revising intake questions for parents, asking "what's gonna be **your** role in this? (...) How do **you** want this to go?" (BB), ultimately encouraging a more participatory approach from parents.

As staff reflected on their direct experiences with regards to parental involvement in the mentoring match, most provided a dualistic portrayal of what they believed to be the influence parents had over the success or failure of a match. As one staff member shared "…parents really do dictate whether it's gonna work or not" (BS). In their interviews many staff members' conveyed an overall sense of wariness about the capacity

of parents to be supportive. This was reflected in the ease in which they could envision

scenarios where a parent could be either an ally or a foe to a match relationship. As an

example, one staff described a situation in which a parent could either convey to their

child approval of the mentor or disapproval, passively interfering with the relationship by

putting the mentor in a poor light:

> …well yeah, you know, they can either hurt or harm (…) for example if the Big
>
> is, let's say on vacation, the mom can either reinforce (…) you know, the Big's on
>
> vacation (…) he's coming back in two weeks, especially if the little kid doesn't
>
> have a great perception of time (…) or like mom can not sort of have the Big's
>
> back (…) they might kind of be like, "I haven't' heard from him…" or [to the
>
> agency] be like "He hasn't seen him in three weeks". You know, so that's sort of
>
> one way. (BB)

In their interviews staff described distinct ways in which parents could and did

support the mentoring relationship, finding most parents to be supportive and non-

intrusive in the match relationship. However it was the disruptive nature of parental

involvement and the potentially negative influence that parents posed to the mentoring

relationship that was most prominent in the overall narratives of the staff interviewed.

Parents making it work.

Fundamentally, according to staff, parents hold the power of starting the

mentoring process by giving their child permission to become involved in the mentoring

program. Several staff remarked that amidst all the things parents were managing in their

life the very act of signing their child up for mentoring was a true demonstration of their

commitment and care for their child:

> …they adore their children and …would do anything in the world for them. That
>
> includes, hoping that this will be another support in their lives that really will
>
> assist their child. And I think it takes so much for them to be willing to kind of ...
>
> take a breathe and say "yes, this will be great for my kid" and be willing to say
>
> "you know, I can't do everything for my kid". (BS)

Once a match was underway staff described a range of concrete ways in which they

believed parents helped to make mentoring matches successful. Staff found that parents

could support mentors in their approach with the young mentee, as well as help support

and encourage their own child to invest in the mentoring relationship. However,

according to staff, first and foremost parents' support of the mentoring match hinged on

their active maintenance of regular communication with their child, the mentor and

program staff regarding the match relationship, yet all the while remaining non-intrusive

in its development. Staff expected parents to develop a stable and consistent line of

communication with the mentor, mostly around scheduling outings. Many staff counseled

parents to be understanding, accommodating and flexible with the mentor in order to help

maintain the stability and consistency in match outings necessary for a match to thrive.

Overall, staff held in high regards those parents that presented themselves as "all-in",

prioritizing the match. One staff member describes an example of one such parent:

> … like this one mom, …she was just going on about how she gets free movie
>
> tickets from work and she's gonna give them to the Big Sister so she can
>
> take…the Little Sister to the movies..., just really going above and beyond to

make sure that they can have fun together, rearranging schedules and… really

prioritizing the match. So ... you can just tell that ... that it's really important to

them, so that the Little Sister gets as much out of it as possible. (BS)

In addition to supporting the mentor and youth in meeting up and doing activities

together, several staff also highlighted that parents helped the agency to closely monitor

the match. A few staff framed parents monitoring efforts as a matter of safety, knowing

the whereabouts of their child and listening for their child's satisfaction with the

relationship. As one staff described:

…the parents are the big partner…most kids don't disclose to us if their Big is

doing something that's making them uncomfortable, they tell their parents. They

don't know us, so we try to be a partner in that and try to help empower parents to

talk to their kids about safety. Trying to tell them to talk to their kids about, you

know, 'what did you do with your Big today?'…so that we know that they're

having those conversations with their child. (BB)

Being well versed about the development of the match relationship and willing to openly

report out on this information was yet another positive sign of a parent's positive

engagement, according to staff. Some staff shared that establishing rapport and trust with

parents facilitated the ease and openness of parent's communications with them. As one

staff describes in more detail:

... you're gonna ask them questions that, … are sort of personal sometimes, …'

...what's been going on with the phones and why haven't you been returning the

calls?' 'Oh, the phone's off, you can't pay the bill.' This is something, …that you

have to be able to ... get some trust and you usually have to be able to do it quickly, because ... some parents you do end up talking to very frequently, ...but mostly they're getting called every couple months for matches over a year, … you need to be able to get them to answer the questions and have a productive conversation, otherwise, we're not ©' anywhere. (BB)

Many staff valued the positive relationships they developed with parents who actively sought information or support from the program, yet not in a manner that would be construed as trying to take advantage of available resources. Developing a rapport with parents was believed to be instrumental in establishing a line of communication that supported honest and open communication from the parent. Several staff took notice of not only how easily parents shared information with them, but they also valued parents who openly received guidance from them and found it to be helpful.

Some staff shared that in a few cases when a parent was unresponsive to the agency, they were encouraged to learn, from a conversation with the mentor, that the parent was supporting the match via their strong relationship with the mentor. Overall staff iterated that parents and mentors needed at minimum to have established a relationship in which they felt they could easily talk to one another if problem situations arose in the match even if they didn't communicate on a regular basis: "it is really important to have there be some sort of relationship with the mom [and the mentor] so that... you can like tackle the things, it's not like the first serious conversation you've ever tried to have" (BB). Staff in general acknowledged that parents were important figures, and not mere shadows in the background of a mentoring match.

Family challenges – challenging families.

While there clearly was evidence that staff recognized numerous positive contributions of parents to making mentoring matches work, most staff also commonly raised concerns about disruptive parental behaviors and frustrations with un-involved parents. One staff member speculated that the tendency to focus on the disruptive nature of parents was in large part a byproduct of the amount of time and effort staff members spent attending to problematic issues they perceived to be related to parents in mentoring matches. Another staff shared that if matches were perceived as going well it was not uncommon for these check-ins to be briefer in nature and not elicit the kind of probing questions that staff conducts when a match may not be going well.

Across staff interviews poor communication was identified as the most central challenge to sustaining matches. Considering that parents were seen as the gatekeeper to the youth, their primary responsibility was to be readily available to communicate with the mentor and be responsive to the agency calls. When communication was identified as a problem, parent capacity to successfully fulfill their responsibility was often called into question. When staff described the struggles they encountered with parents, they were often intertwined with an array of reasons staff proposed that likely impacted parents' capacity to appropriately support a match (BS), ranging from personal characteristics to family and environmental circumstances. Staff noted that many of the families and youth served in their mentoring programs were greatly impacted by environmental factors resulting from living in low-income homes and often in unsafe communities. Staff understood that parents' experience with employment or housing instability, or working

multiple jobs, complicated parents' capacity to communicate with program staff or mentors. Coupled with multiple children in the home, a parent's time and resources to sustain the match as a priority was limited. As one staff stated, "I think some of them, (…) don't necessarily have the capacity to be as involved as they would like to be or as we would like them to be because of everything else that's going on in their lives" (BB).

Another staff person situated families' sense of capacity to be fully involved in the mentoring match within the disempowering experiences associate with poverty. This staff person believed that the social systems that many poor families must contend with can foster a passive attitude toward involvement:

> …if you live in public housing,… you don't get to choose anything. You're being told where to live…what services you can get, how much money you get, all those things are things that are out of your control…where a large portion of the families that we serve…there's a real passive nature to it. (BB)

To combat this the program tries to, "…get it in people's heads that you have a lot of choice here and you have a huge say as to what happens, and you're gonna have to manage this" (BB).

Alternatively, other staff associated a parent's unsatisfying history with social services with their weariness toward the monitoring and communication required by the mentoring program. Families who were referred to mentoring through child protection services might see the mentoring staff as yet one more watchful eye, explaining their hesitance toward being very honest or upfront about the mentoring relationship or even defensive response when staff question them regarding the goings on in the match

relationship. Other staff attributed parents' tendency not to be as forthcoming or communicative, a parent's cultural style, a poor understanding of what is expected of them, or feeling confused or overwhelmed by these expectations. As one staff noted:

> …most parents don't probably think of themselves as a really important part of the relationship…I would say that people are shocked when I tell them that they need to return our phone calls and talk to the Big Brother about how the match is going. (BB)

A few staff described talking with some parents who were weary of bothering or overwhelming the mentor by communicating or sharing too much information with them, or merely felt uncomfortable with the amount and kind of communication they were having with the mentor. Some staff also noted that a parent who took a hands-off approach toward parenting might similarly not to get too involved in their child's mentoring match. Alternatively, other staff spoke about parents who monitored their child's match from afar, received positive reports from their child and thus felt further involvement with the mentor or program staff was unwarranted. However, despite any of these possible reasons, several staff still viewed a parents' non-communicativeness as essentially "just sabotaging the relationship" (BS).

Having dealt with families struggling with basic needs, some staff empathized with the reality of their circumstances, "…you want to help and you provide resources, but at the end of the day, you can only do so much." (BS). Informed by these experiences, many staff believed that some families looked upon the mentor as a source of support to held address these needs, which only blurred the mentor's role, drawing

their attention away from the youth. Several staff shared the internal struggle that the agency faced when trying to support young people who were situated within families that dealt with real struggles. As one staff notes:

> …how do we help parents overcome the legitimate challenges they face to being able to do permission slips or monthly call (….) if we really want to be that kind of agency, we have to think about what we're willing to change (….) So we have to flex as an agency and think about, if we really truly want to go deeper and serve girls in under-served communities, then we have to change some of [our] practices (….) But change is really hard and scary for people. (BS)

While parents may have little control over situations that create challenges for regular communication, like working multiple jobs, dealing with health issues or affording uninterrupted phone services, some staff still held parents personally at fault. These staff raised a variety of challenging parental characteristics including level of education, poor communication skills, English fluency, mental health status or disability, personality, family dynamics or dysfunction, cultural and even parenting style. Acknowledging the adversity that many youth and their families faced, several staff were greatly concerned about parents' capacity to adequately conform to mentoring model and the roles that were determined to be important to sustaining a youth mentoring match as constructed by the agency. As one staff notes, " [parents] don't necessarily have the capacity to be as involved as they would like to be or as we would like them to be because of everything else that's going on in their lives" (BB). Despite these challenges, many staff struggled with parent's inability to fully attend to their child's mentoring match:

… a lot of them have a lot going on and you know, a lot of issues in the family

and this is not necessarily their top priority, so, it is sometimes hard... to support

the match the best that we can if we don't have them on board fully. (BS)

It was clear that many staff perceived the challenging conditions that families

faced as attributing to poor parental involvement. Though parental involvement was

encouraged and necessitated by the program, several staff spoke more wearily about

parental involvement easily citing examples or generating scenarios where a parent's

behavior hindered the mentoring relationship or in the extreme was sabotaging the match.

As one staff stated, "…parents are challenges to everything, ah or can be at least (…) not

willing to take an active role" (BB). Throughout their interviews many staff put parents

in a deficit based light questioning the reliability of their capacity to positively contribute

to the mentoring match. Some staff easy perceived parents who were not communicating

with the mentor or the agency as potentially acting-out because they felt dissatisfied or

jealous of the match. Alternatively, when parent's involvement was overbearing or called

into question, some staff speculated that a parent's own personal deficit experiences or

those of their child explained their desire to extend control over the match in certain

ways. Consequently many of the policies and practices put in place aimed to mitigate the

potential problems parents bring to the relationship development and prevent parents

from "setting up barriers to the relationship" (BS).

Parent involvement on a continuum.

Across their interviews staff categorized parents on a continuum of involvement,

from the uninvolved to the overly involved. Parents who fell on the extremes of this

involvement spectrum were considered to pose the most harm to a mentoring relationship, leaving a narrow band of what was identified as helpful or appropriate involvement. Determining the right amount of parental involvement was more easily described by the boundaries defined by staff as to what parents should not do. As staff described these challenging behaviors of parents, they outlined the ideal standards for parental involvement.

On one end of the involvement spectrum staff described the disengaged parent who was seen as demonstrating little to no involvement in the match. These under-involved parents seemed to know little about the match progress itself when asked by staff during check-ins, or were all together unreachable by staff or the mentor. A parent who was not engaged in communicating with staff or the mentor created significant challenges to match development, particularly if the parent was instrumental in scheduling outings for the youth or there was problems that were coming up during the match outing. Several staff noted that it was possible for matches to persist by bypassing or compensating for a disengaged parent. In these situations, matches often involved both a youth mature enough to independently coordinate outings and a committed mentors working closely with the youth and providing updates to the agency. As long as the relationship was positive and satisfying for both youth and mentor, some staff sometimes took a 'Don't fix what's not broke' stance. However, when a match wasn't go well, several staff acknowledged that parental disengagement or minimal involvement was quickly cited as the primary fault for the match decline or failure. As one staff remarked:

    …when it doesn't work, it's easy to be like 'well look, you know, you guys don't

talk about like scheduling that's why it's falling apart.'…but when it is working

then I think it…it's probably confusing [laughing] to everyone, like well, it's not

broke…there's no model that works in like every, every situation. (BB)

At one agency a parent's poor demonstration of maintaining contact with the agency

could serve as the rational for closing the match. However, if the match between the

mentor and youth was going well, one staff noted that it was difficult to consider closing

the match just because of a parent's non-responsiveness with the agency.

While disengaged or minimally involved parents were seen as challenging, many

staff found these parents to be less troublesome than those labeled as over-involved. As

described by staff, this group of parents encompassed those who were overprotective or

controlling essentially stifling a mentoring relationship from properly developing, to

those parents who seemingly put their own needs ahead of the match. Most staff

members were weary of parents who appeared to insert themselves, their goals or vision

too much into the match, as they were seen to be directing the match attention away from

the friendship and more toward the parents' own needs. Such an example would be a

parent who made too many activity recommendations, particularly if those activities kept

the pair in the family's home, or had an academic undertone, e.g. working on a school

project. As one staff described:

...in this woman's situation, she wanted it to be what she wanted it to be and it's

sort of like 'I'll make it into what I want.' [chuckling] Um, I think when it comes

to understand the role of the match, we see that a lot with families who, they have

a younger sibling and they want the siblings to go along um, so it's ... it's you

know, things that we don't want to have them ... but it's not like, sabotaging. It's

more of like we have ... or ... or asking the Big Sister to tutor or asking her to

babysit. That's where we have to re-clarify. So it's not like egregious, um, you

know, offense… (BS)

Other staff reflected that as they came to understand a parent's concerns, motivations and

individual situation they were able to discuss and readjust a parent's expectations and the

role boundaries for the parent and those held for the mentor. When possible several staff

tried to allay parents' concerns and help mediate the parent-mentor relationship for the

benefit of the match development. However, there were also situations in which a few

staff members found themselves having to take on a more assertive approach with

disruptive parental involvement and give some parents ultimatums in order to secure their

conformity with various program expectations and standards, particularly around

communication and role boundaries.

Staff described various agency policies and program processes designed with the

intent of eliminating the potential pitfalls that parental involvement could create and

instead ensure they were supportive rather than interfering forces in the match. Staff

described the these efforts taking place not just after a match was made, but also much

earlier, in the assessment and enrollment process:

...we talked about …being more strategic about who we bring into the program,

[the agency] has been focused on what kind of kids more than what kinds of

parents. … there was nothing that was focused on being more strategic about the

kinds of parents that we enroll specifically. (BB)

This focus resulted in specific policies including a requirement that any parent or

guardian who had contact with a child applying for a mentor, even if they did not live

with them, must also give their permission for the child's involvement in the mentoring

program. As one staff described, this practice was instituted to avoid situations where a

non-custodial parent was unsupportive of the mentor after the match was made:

> …we used to just go out and enroll them and then wait for the father to call us.
> And then, (…) a lot of times the father wouldn't be supportive, so then we would
> have wasted a huge amount of time going out and enrolling this kid who ended up
> being closed when we could have just done that before going out there ... (BB)

Throughout the enrollment and matching process staff were continuously

assessing parents for skills and traits that would suggest their capacity to support their

child's mentoring relationship. They registered a parent's accessibility when scheduling

programmatic meeting, their ability to report on their child's personality and interests.

Staff took constant note of both the formal and informal interactions they had with

parents or guardians while scheduling meetings, gathering intake information or

discussing potential matches. Along with information gathered from interviews with the

family, home assessments and even the perceived level of engagement a parent had in

their child's school, several staff believed they could anticipate the level of engagement,

commitment and willingness to abide by program rules a parent would demonstrate in the

forthcoming mentoring relationship and the possible challenges that a parent might pose.

While staff introduced to parents during the screening process the expectation for their

involvement in their child's mentoring relationship, it wasn't until the initial match

meeting that these expectations were actually reviewed. Staff reviewed program guidelines outlining the do's and don'ts of parental involvement at both the initial meeting and then again during the first follow-up call once the match was made.

It was evident throughout their interviews that program staff spent a significant amount of their time and effort attending to multiple aspects of parental involvement in mentoring relationship, as it was being addressed at various programmatic levels from program enrollment to match support. Although all program staff could attest to a greater attention paid to parental involvement, the underlying uncertainty that most staff held about parental engagement overall in mentoring was more prominently conveyed through their interviews. Exploring this staff perspective provides an important backdrop for understanding the context within volunteer mentors were recruited and trained within these same mentoring programs to newly embark in a mentoring match.

Mentors' Approach Toward Parental Involvement

Planning For The Worst, Hoping For The Best. Among the three participant types examined in this study, mentors had the least to say about parents in the mentoring relationship. Across their interviews most mentors had given little thought to how their mentee's parent might be involved in their new mentoring relationships. Instead, what was evident in their interviews was an approach toward parents that was largely based on what they had gathered from their training and the individual coaching they received from program staff. Overall mentors described having been prepared for the worst, but were hoping for the best when it came to parent involvement.

In their initial interviews many mentors openly expressed ambiguity or

uncertainty about the role that their mentee's parent might play in their match

relationship. This is exemplified in the following response of a mentor when asked about

her thoughts on the parent's role in the mentoring relationship:

> …I haven't, [sigh] I don't know. I guess I haven't given too, too much thought
>
> about it, um [pause]. Her mom seems like, um, pretty, like, like hands off, like she
>
> doesn't want to interfere with our plans. So, I am not kind of sure what kind of
>
> role she will have in the future. (FM)[4]

Across the interviews with mentors it was apparent that prior to the initial study interview

most of the mentors spent little if any time reflecting on the how the parent of their new

mentee might be involved in the match. Throughout their reflection on this topic, many

mentors returned to the direction they received from their agency training, as reflected by

one mentors' response to a question regarding the kinds of interactions they may have

with their mentee's parent:

> …it's hard to say because they ... I feel like… with the training, they ... they kind
>
> of just focus on our relationship with the Little Sister. And really, you know,
>
> didn't emphasize so much, you know, what the roles should be with the parent
>
> and so it seems like on the surface it should just be to arrange meetings with the
>
> Little Sister. (FM)

While mentors could logically anticipate the need to develop a relationship with parents

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[4] Quotations drawn from mentor interviews will be identified only at the gender level:

FM refers to female mentors, *MM* refers to male mentors.

given the nature of the mentoring relationship, it too was often describe with ambiguity and uncertainty. In response to being asked what kind of relationship a mentor expected to develop with the parent, a mentor states:

> I don't know what, what that's gonna be yet. It, it would be interesting (….) I don't know what, where that brings – it's actually, probably, a good question for me to, to run by uh, the uh, the program. Part of me was, I didn't think there'd be much of a relationship, but clearly, you're going to need them and you're in the house for a little bit, and you're in, 10-15 minutes talkin' to the grandfather when I dropped him off. And, uh, you know, so, so there clearly is a, gonna be something there. I just don't know what it's going to be. (MM)

Based on their interviews, mentors described program training that emphasized the sanctity of the mentor-youth dyad, minimally addressing the relationship to be had with parents. Mentors mostly expected any parent interactions to be cordial yet superficial, and ultimately instrumental in nature focusing predominantly on scheduling match outings. As one mentor stated, "…I hope that it's friendly, you know, pretty light, like, 'this is our plan for the week, is it okay with you?' 'I'm gonna take her out at such and such a time' " (FM).

While mentors hoped for positive parental interactions they felt their program training prepared them for the ways in which parents could interfere with mentoring matches, like overstepping boundaries, making requests of the mentor beyond the mentoring scope or the mentor's role. As one mentor reflects,

> Well, really, they kind of advise us to steer clear of getting involved in any family

things obviously. Like if a parent ever asks you for advice, umm, you can

certainly give it, but they try to give you guidance and say like you know, "I think

that's just something you should try to work out between yourself and yourself

with your daughter". (FM)

For several mentors, their program training left them weary of a parent's

conscientiousness about the commitment and investment of time the mentor was making

toward the match. They hoped that they wouldn't be taken advantage of or find

themselves in the very situations that they had been warned of, "…hopefully he'll view

my commitment level as pretty serious so they won't abuse that … or that he'll be true to

his commitments in terms of the time that she'll be ready…" (FM). While uncommon, at

one extreme a few mentors expected to have a negative relationship with a parent based

on the family-specific information they received from the agency, as seen in this mentor

who shared, "I would only foresee difficulty with her. Her mother...initially used the Big

Sister program to kind of get free stuff and see if she can get some money and funds out

of that" (FM). Alternatively, some mentors described a natural desire to develop a

relationship with parents, or recognized the potential for a constructive relationship with

a parent. One mentor shared:

> I hope to develop a good [relationship] with her mom, you know on where she
>
> could trust me with [her daughter] alone, and know that [her daughter] will be
>
> safe…I value her mother's rules as well, and hopefully we can build that kind of,
>
> you know, not necessarily team relationship, but just that she trusts me with her
>
> daughter. (FM)

When mentors did share their natural proclivity to get to know their mentee's parent, they also seemed intent on not making any missteps as they embarked on their new relationship. Many mentors were hesitant to fully consider pursing any form of relationship with the parent without first consulting with the agency, as seen with this mentor who shared, "I don't know her, her mom that well. I'd like to,…I would actually, and I don't know I kind of want to talk to my social worker, my Big Sister social worker about this, but um, I'd actually like to get to know her mom a little more" (FM).

Based on their interviews most mentors seemed be entering the mentoring relationship from a framework firmly rooted in the dyadic relationship. The introduction of parents into that framework occurred in large part through the programmatic training the mentors received. Considering that mentors received very similar trainings, it was not surprising to find strong similarities in their overall optimistic yet cautious approach toward parental involvement. However, it is likely a reflection of personal values and views that distinguish between mentors who anticipated the worst of parental involvement versus those who focused on the opportunity of such involvement.

Parent Perspectives On Their Own Involvement

It's just how we do things. The analysis of the parent perspective regarding parental involvement in the mentoring relationship revealed a diversity of views. This diversity is reflected in parent's view of the mentoring process and their descriptions of their own involvement reflected not only individual core values and beliefs about the role of the mentor in their child's life, but also individual parenting values and unique family dynamics. Not surprisingly then, across their interviews, parents did not share a united

approach toward what their parental involvement would be in the mentoring relationship. Instead parents describe a wide range of views regarding the kinds and amount of individual involvement they expected to play in their child's mentoring match, from serving a "casual slash professional kind of a role" (Parent to a male match) to being a friend to the mentor and a advocate of the match. While some parents envisioned creating a partnership with the mentor, working collaboratively in support of the youth, others expected only to step in when needed. Most often the diversity among parents regarding the ways in which they envisioned being involved in their child's match was found in how the parent saw the mentoring match in relation to their own family unit. Some saw the relationship existing outside of the family and their involvement depended on the needs of match. Others felt that the introduction of another caring adult in the life of their child was simultaneously an addition to their extended family. These differing views were informed by the cultural values and norms the family held and reflected in the family and parenting style.

A parent's anticipated level of involvement was not an arbitrary one. Even when a parent hadn't fully formulated what their involvement would be exactly, they did have a sense as to how they saw themselves relating to the match and the kind of involvement they might have. In response to being asked what role she would play in her child's mentoring relationship, she responded:

> That's a good questions 'cause uh, I think I'm still learning about that. I'm trying not to be too much in the middle of it, yet you know, it is my child, you know who's leaving the home with a man who we are just getting to know, although I

trust…the situation. I'm trying to give them a good amount of respectful space

and their decisions and their time together but you know, I'm excited just like [my

son] is, curious, so I am involved as much as I need to be, as far as where they're

going to be going and what they're going to be doing. (PM)[5]

Other parents who might similarly describe observing the match from afar, did so

because they believed it to be the best means of fostering the mentoring relationship. One

parent who saw her child's mentoring match as separate from the family describes her

involvement in the following way:

…in general my role I would say is just sit back and watch to see what happens.

They basically have to form a bond on their own, like without my interference or

anything. So I think like even though I'm, you definitely keep a watchful eye, you

know to make sure that everything's going okay, but then to keep my distance to

give them you know the ability to you know bond with each other. (PM)

Alternatively, other parents saw the mentoring relationship as an added resource in

support of their child, eliciting a desire for a team-like dynamic between themselves and

the mentor. One such parent saw herself as part of a team with the mentor while

maintaining balanced involvement,

…the way I look at it, it has to really be a partnership between the mentor, the

child and the parents, you know. It's a 3-way partnership…the parent needs to be

_____

[5] Quotations drawn from parent interviews will be identified only by the match type: *PM*

refers to a parent of a male match, and *PF* refers to a parent of a female match.

involved…not to the point where they're overbearing but to know what's going

on, talk to the mentor, talk to your child,…and then let the mentor and child do

what they need to do. (PF)

Yet other parents approached the mentor-child relationship being developed as

needing to be fashioned within their own family unit as reflected in the following

example:

… I am the parent and you know and you're taking my child out all the time and

you know we don't have a relationship that, that's kinda bad. So um, I, I, I really

would have hoped for him to have some kind of bond, whether it was a little bit or

a lot you know? But some kind of bond, not just, "Oh I'm coming to pick your

son up," and not come in, "Come in!" you know, "Absolutely come in." (PM)

Overall, throughout their interviews parents offer a broad array of perspectives about the

mentoring dynamic and their role within that dynamic. Even in those cases where parents

convey a sense of being minimally involved in their child's relationship, as in this parent

who says, **"**I really don't play a role in their relationship. I mean, just bein' the mom, and

…allowing him to go…" (PM), subsequent discussion detailed a much greater

involvement that likely occurred outside the purview of the mentor or the program. All

parents acknowledged having a role in the basics of supporting the mentoring relationship

(i.e. helping to schedule match outings, monitoring the child's match). The ways in which

they described the kind of relationship they wanted with the mentor was highly

informative of how they regarded their own engagement within the match. Regardless of

how minimal the role they envisioned for themselves, most all parents conveyed that their

primary role was to protect their child. How parents described doing this in regards to their child's mentoring match reflected a range of parental involvement that related to various family factors, including the kind of relationship that the parent had with their child, the needs and personality of the child, parenting style or cultural values.

For mentoring programs, parental engagement seems part of the business of mentoring. They set the standard for what is required of parental involvement in the mentoring match and conduct their training and coaching with the expectation that parents conform to their prescribed mentoring model. Mentors' minimal understanding about parental involvement was most often cautionary in nature, reflective of the messages conveyed through their program training. For parents, the mentoring relationship was just one of many significant relationships into which parents invested their time and energy.

Labeling Parents' Roles in the Mentoring Match: Seeing Eye to Eye

Comparing themes within and across groups of parents, mentors and program staff, five distinct roles emerged defining the interactions that were both expected of parents and those they actually engaged in with their child's mentoring relationship. These roles were as follows: (a) support match outings, (b) serve as a source of information – both for the mentor about the child and for the agency about the match, (c) monitor the match relationship, (d) support the development of the mentor-youth relationship, and (e) ensure the quality of the relationship for the youth. The specific actions that define these roles were more often salient among mentors and staff when they described the kind of parental engagement that was missing. Although there was no

obvious order or priority in the distinct roles as described by the three groups of participants, they are laid out according to the degree of agreement between program staff, mentors and parents for these roles. As can be seen in Table 3.1 below, of the five identified roles only three were identified by all three groups: supporting match outings, monitoring the match relationship and being a source of information. Program staff and parents also both identified the role of supporting the development of the mentor-youth relationship. The one role that was identified in the interviews of parents and not among staff and mentors was that of ensuring the quality of the match relationship.

Table 3.1 Parental Roles as Reflected in Mentor, Staff and Parent Interviews

PARENTAL ROLES	Mentors	Staff	Parents
Supporting Match Outings	X	X	X
Being a Source of Information	X	X	X
Monitor Match Relationship	X	X	X
Support M-Y Relationship Development		X	X
Ensuring Quality of the Relationship for the Youth			X

Support Match Outings

Across all three participant groups, behaviors that would support match outings were commonly cited and deemed the most critical to the match relationship. Participants described a number of ways that parents could support match outings, including communicating consistently with the mentor regarding match scheduling, being accommodating and understanding of the mentor's availability, ensuring access to the

youth through the approval of outings, and having the youth prepared and ready to go when the mentor came to pick up the child for scheduled outings. Of these behaviors the parent's role in communicating with the mentor for the purposes of coordinating and scheduling outings were identified as essential to the success of the match by all three groups. As one mentor said, "her mom's like the liaison between the two of us, if you will, just helping to schedule things …" (FM).

Some parents and mentors had a more expansive understanding of this role that involved serving as the gatekeeper to the child. For parents this meant being part of the planning process, knowing and approving what was being planned, where it was going to be and how long it would last:

> I need to know everything that they're doing, where they're going, how long they're gonna be gone; he's open to all that. He told me, anything if I ever have any questions at anytime. He told me, if I wake up in the morning, at 3 o'clock in the morning and I have a question, don't hesitate to pick up the phone and call him. So that was a good thing**...** (MM)

However, it was also not uncommon for parents to delegate the scheduling of outings to their child and his or her mentor, especially if they considered their child to be mature and independent enough. In some cases, the need for active involvement of the parent in scheduling outings was reduced once a specific routine was established for the outings (e.g. meeting every Saturday). As one mentor said, "she started out very interactive in the…process, and then I think she's become confident and trusting in, in my choices and decisions…for you know, outings" (MM). A parent's accessibility to coordinate outings

was deemed so important to staff and mentors, that it was often considered an indication of a parent's commitment to supporting the match.

Although some parents indicated that they did not feel the need to be intimately involved in the scheduling process, most still maintained their role as gatekeeper, even if at somewhat of a distance, and wanted to be kept in the loop about any outing plans made. Even among those who expected that the youth would relay outing plans, many parents interpreted a mentor's intentional efforts to keep them in the loop a sign of respect for their authority. For mentors, keeping parents looped in was a way of helping parents to "feel like they're included" (MM). Several mentors interpreted a parent's approval power as both natural and helpful, as it could help to steer the mentor toward better activities if warranted:

> she plays a huge role. Anything that…we decide that…we're gonna go out on an outing…, especially very early on, she was very,…she wanted to know exactly where we were going and what we were gonna be doing and probably if she thought it wasn't…going to be a good activity,…she would say, 'Well maybe you oughta try this first'. (MM)

Some program staff and mentors construed this approval power and intimate involvement in the outing decisions as also a potential source of negative influence and sabotage of the match. Staff shared concerns over parents who might withhold permission for a scheduled outing with the mentor as a disciplinary consequence, or cancelling an outing they are not happy with. Parent's who placed too many parameters on outing plans or too often suggested particular activity to do with the youth, were interpreted as self-serving

behaviors and not necessarily effective support for match outings:

> [The parent] would offer up "Well, you know, [the youth]'s got this show that
>
> she's been practicing for and why don't you come to that?" Well, that's fantastic
>
> and I would love to come, but in addition to that, we actually need to have
>
> scheduled meetings, that's one of the goals of the organization and that's how we
>
> develop a relationship and you know, I'm glad to come, but we'll need to have a
>
> legit meeting. (FM)

In addition to the power of approving, parents' accommodating nature and

oversight of the youth's preparedness for match outings were also considered important

aspects of supporting match outings. Agency staff expected parents be conscientious of

the regularity of match outings and understanding of the mentor's own availability,

accommodating when necessary to maximize the opportunities for match outings. Some

parents made accommodations in spite of their preferences for the sake of their child's

match, as described by this parent,

> I didn't really say anything to anybody, I was disappointed he would never do a
>
> weekend, that it was only school nights…there was one time, he brought him
>
> back late and (my son) didn't go to school the next day. And I called him right
>
> away and let him know. Then after that he brought him back earlier. (MM)

Staff further expected parents to actively reach out to the mentor and agency in situations

when there were excessive gaps between outings or any other potential outing or

scheduling issues.

> Ensuring the youth's preparedness involved being ready to leave at the arranged

time, prepared for any monetary costs for activity, or making sure that siblings are not seeking the mentor's attention. One agency also required parents to be physically present during pick-ups and drop-offs from match outings to ensure for smooth pick-ups for the mentor at the time of the scheduled outing. Among the group of mentors, interestingly when discussing the parent's role in supporting match outings a gender difference was present. Male mentors tended to focus on the parent's approving power over outing activities and giving permission for the youth to go with the mentor. As one male mentor put it, "… she's the boss… and she, she calls the shots and that's important, and that, that is important for the Little to understand that you know, hey, mom calls the shots, and do as she says…" (MM). The female mentors however, focused on the parent's actions toward ensuring access to the youth and her preparedness for the match: "…I've never been told, like, 'You can't take her here,' or, you know, they've always got her bags packed, and ready to go,..." (FM). One parent even went so far as to drive the youth to meet up with her mentor, or another parent who encouraged the mentor to schedule outing directly with the youth as to minimize any delay in arranging get-togethers.

Being a Source of Information: Child Expert and Match Reporter

Mentors, parents and agency staff alike all identified the important role parents played in being a source of information for both the mentors and program staff. Specifically, parents possessed information about their child that could serve the efforts of mentors and information about the development of the match that could support the staff effort to monitor the match. For mentors, parents offered specific information that helped guide their relationship building efforts with the child: "she just kind of like gave

me information that I probably wouldn't have known other wise and you know I talked to her and she helped me think of ideas of things that you know, we could do together" (FM). From the staff perspective, parents gathered significant information in the process of monitoring their child's match relationship. While monitoring the match is another distinct parental role (defined and discussed below), staff considered parent's ability to report out about the match status a valuable aspect of their role.

From their unique position in a child's life, parents had a distinct perspective about their child and could offer invaluable insight about their child's likes, dislikes, personality and temperament. As one mentor said, "Like I think she knows her kids pretty well. She knows their strengths, she knows what works with them and what doesn't" (MM). Mentors looked to parents for information that would support their relationship in general with the youth, or help guide them in how to best handle a particular situation with the child. "…making sure with his mom that this is how she would want me to approach" (MM). Upon learning that he was moving, one mentor described reaching out to his mentee's parent for advice:

> …well the first thing I did was I talked to his mom…she knows him better, you
> know, what the best way to tell him was. 'Cause sometimes they say listen, you
> know mom is definitely better for these things to tell him or she said he'd love to
> hear it from you but um she was appreciative that like that I called her and I
> asked. Um. Just because you just never know how the kid is right in an adverse
> situations like that. 'Cause we never any problems or anything like that, it was
> always more hang out, have fun you know talk about stuff but it wasn't you know,

sensitive situations." (MM)

Likewise, parents wanted the opportunity to share with mentors their perspective on their own child, especially when they felt their child's behavior warranted explanation or was best managed in a certain way. While a parent may share this kind of information with a mentor, it did not guarantee that the mentor had the tools to discern how to best apply this insight to effectively support the match. In one case, a mentor interpreted the youth's desire to have a friend tag along as a sign of his disinterest in the match. Knowing that the program emphasized 1-to-1 match outings, the mentor shared this situation with a program staff who advised him to tell the parent that friends are not permitted on match outings. In her interview this same parent described that conversation with the mentor:

> I thought that they'd connect a little more often but I think that it was disappointing for him because… [my son] kept wanting to bring friends along. [My son] actually has a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder… like phobia regarding school, regarding changes, … like he has some various challenges and sometimes when things are different and new like when he had, even like a regular time, maybe and they had a routine, maybe things would be better but it skipped around so sometimes when it came time for him to, to pick him up, he would feel nervous and be like, "Oh can I bring a friend, can I bring a friend?" So they didn't, there were sometimes where they did stuff just the two of them but like all, like all the other times,…[the mentor] tried to say, "Oh I just want to bring him". "Oh I really want to bring a friend," so I know that he was frustrated

with that because he really just wanted to do things one-on-one…and that was just too bad. So, I think it wasn't as rewarding for him as he wanted it (MM).

Beyond the wealth of insight parents possessed regarding their child, they also possessed information about how their child was responding to the mentoring match. Staff shared that they relied on parents to be well informed about their child's match both in regards to activities and the development of the relationship. Staff described coaching parents in this role by encouraging them to routinely ask their child about how each outing went and gather enough information to substantially report on the match when contacted by program staff. Expecting that parents gather significant information about how the match was developing, staff also relied on parents to reach out to staff and seek support for any looming match challenges that surfaces as they learned about how the match was going. Although staff looked to parents to be responsive in informing them about the status of the match, staff acknowledged that a parent's non-responsiveness couldn't definitively be translated to mean they were disengaged from their role in the match. Instead staff noted that parents could be actively supporting a match despite being unavailable or poorly communicating to the program staff or a mentor.

> …there are a lot of families that none of us can ever reach on the phone, and yet we know they're great matches…this family, when I check in with them quarterly,…I'll try the phone a few times and then finally I'll send e-mail to [the Aunt]…I always get these back from the two girls that…not only filling, "What am I doing with my Big Sister", but they'll add things about "This is the best thing in my life, and I'm having so much fun, and 'oh by the way, I got to do

blah, blah, blah…" And I know that the Aunt…just very subtly, I can just, you

know tell…is giving the letter and saying to the girls, 'While you're sitting here

doing your homework…here are some things from the lady from Big Sister…why

don't you write this news'… (FM)

According to parents, they also provided mentors with information and feedback

specific to how the child was experiencing the match relationship and their level of

satisfaction. Sometimes parents offered this information spontaneously, while other times

parent's shared information with the mentor intending to alleviate a mentor's concerns

about the child's interest or satisfaction with the match. As one mentor describes:

… she kind of tells me how he's feeling because he ... I think he tries to put on the

tough face around me too. He wants me to think he's cool so he doesn't show too

many emotions around me. But she always tells me whenever he's ah, like

something's bugging him or if he's sad or if he's happy or if he's really happy

that I'm there. That's usually communicated through ... through her (MM).

Even though very few mentors articulated any expectation that parents provide

them with feedback about the child's experience with the match, parents' gestures of

appreciation were very meaningful to mentors. However, the lack of positive feedback

was often the subject of mentor complaints when they didn't feel appreciated:

…the Big Sisters are doing this…every week, it would be nice to get some

feedback. Maybe some, "Oh, you're doing a great job." Or, "[the Little] said she

liked going out." you know, just something. But, I just didn't get any of that"

(FM).

Monitoring Match Relationship

Beyond scheduling and sharing information parents also played an active role in monitoring all aspects of their child's match. Although agency staff and parents both identified this as an important parental role, the level of monitoring and the types of things parents were expected to be aware of varied. Program staff viewed monitoring of the mentoring match, a matter of safety and a responsibility that fell in large part to the parents. Staff expected parents to be vigilant about being aware of what was going on in their child's match:

> I also try to emphasize safety issues.... Because um, the parents are the big partner in, you know, most kids don't disclose to us if their Big [Brother/Sister] is doing something that's making them uncomfortable. They tell their parents. They don't know us. So we try to be a partner in, in that and try to help empower parents to talk to their kids about safety. Trying to tell them to talk to their kids about, you know, 'What did you do with your Big today?' and um, so that we know that they're having those conversations um, with their child. (BB)

Aside from the information that parents gathered about the match in talking with their child, staff and mentors expected parents to inquire from the mentor how the child was behaving on their outings. Several mentors anticipated that parents, motivated to ensure that the match was a "healthy" one for their child, would actively check-in with them about the match and expressed frustration when parents didn't initiate these kinds of check-in.

As mentors had surmised, parents were motivated to monitor their child's match

in part to ensure that the match was a "good one" (MM). However, parents also indicated that they wanted to be sure that the mentor was respecting their boundaries. Some parents expressed the desire to be intimately aware of the kind of things the mentor would be doing, saying and even teaching to their child:

> …conversing with him when he's here visiting with [my son], or even going to some of the good things that they do, some of the games, and, and just going with them and hanging out with them a couple of times, 'cause I,…so that would be a way of us all getting to know each other, and then I'd probably feel a lot more comfortable. (PM)

While some parents directly asked their child or the mentor about the match, more often parents conducted their oversight of the match from afar, gathering insight into the match less from interactions with the mentor and more so from their child in both direct and indirect means. Parents gathered information from natural interactions with their child in which he or she casually shared information about the mentor and the match. As one parent shared, his interactions with the mentor was minimal, "…never really had any other conversations [with the mentor] probably because I get so much information from [my daughter]…."(PF). This parent extended his child the independence to arrange the match outings and merely required that he be kept in-the-loop regarding any plans.

Just as importantly, parents described monitoring their child's match through careful observation of their child and the small interactions they witnessed between their child and the mentor. Many parents recognized the importance of being a watchful parent. They closely monitored their child's behavior both in anticipation of a match

outing and upon returning from an outing. Parents who monitored their child's match predominantly through observation, relied significantly on their knowledge about their own child. They felt competent to interpret even their child's non-verbal behaviors to know how the child was feeling about the mentoring match. As one parent describes, "[my child], he's very, uh… and he doesn't really express his feelings that much, but he will draw a lot of things or he expresses, it will be in his drawing, his schoolwork, his behavior (....) I definitely will know" (PM). Parents monitored their child's satisfaction with the match and responding to things that cause dissatisfaction.

Supporting Mentor-Youth Relationship Development

Supporting opportunities for outings, monitoring the match success and communicating to both the agency and the mentor were all aspects of parental involvement that were perceived by agency staff and parents as contributing to the development of the mentoring relationship. Another important role that parents played was to contribute to creating a positive space for the match relationship to develop and the match to persist. Agency staff believed that to create such a space, parents needed to express their satisfaction and approval of the match relationship and mentor and not any dissatisfaction, as that would interfere with the relationship development:

> ...I think if mom…makes it clear to the kid that like, this is like a fine relationship and this in no way threatens her, this doesn't threaten their relationship, like this is sort of separate and non-competing, I think like that makes things so comfortable for the kid and comfortable for the Big and like everyone involved." (BB)

> While staff seemed focused on parents' role of ensuring that their own feelings

about the match contributed to the development of the mentoring relationship, parents themselves were focused on their role in making sure that the mentor felt comfortable and that their child and the mentor "feel comfortable with each other" (PM). Accomplishing this took various forms among the parents interviewed. Numerous parents expressed that supporting their child's relationship with his/her mentor meant giving them space, all the while maintaining a "watchful eye" over the match:

> Um, in general my role I would say is just sit back and watch to see what happens. Um, they basically have to um to form a bond on their own, like without my interference or anything so I think like even though I'm, you know, definitely keep a watchful eye you know to make sure that everything's going okay but then also like to keep my distance to give them you know the ability to you know bond with each other (PM).

Parents who described being more actively engaged in the relationship building, did so by encouraging to their child to participate or initiate communication in the match:

> My role is to make sure that [my child] continues to communicate with us, stay open with him [the mentor] and experience and enjoy it. And to, to support both of them, you know, and make sure it continues to grow the way that it is, and just sit back (PM).

> ...I'll be like, [to my daughter],…text [your mentor] and say hello, you know, and in those little things like that, it's just keepin' the communication open, so we won't feel like things are driftin' away.... (PF).

While parents naturally saw their role as supporting their own child, they also envisioned providing the mentor with support to develop the match relationship and even being a friend to the mentor or at minimum someone the mentor could turn to for support regarding match challenges:

>…well obviously advocating for them to um, you know, do their things once a week and making sure it's something that [my child]'s interested in as well as [the mentor]'s interested in. Um, you know, being here so if there are any problems they can both talk to me about it of course. (PF)

Parents described being a resource for the Other times parents described how they might step in to encourage the mentor by thanking them for their participation:

>We have yet to get him for dinner. But we're workin' on it....for his appreciation dinner, or somethin', but we're work-, we're still working on that…but like we appreciate him so much, I feel like it's important -that we do something- you know, instead of just sayin' thank you all the time.

Parents were also quick to step in and allay any anxieties or struggles their child may be experience in situations natural to a mentoring relationship:

>…this past summer, um, what happened, like [the mentor]'s schedule was really busy,… And she was away a lot, and travelin', and [my child] was just, would say to me, like, "I don't want her to be my Big Sister no more," 'cause they went like a month without seein' each other. An' I'm like, "[Daughter], things come up." You know what I mean? And she's like, "OK, Mommy, you're right." And then ever since then, you know, you spoke to [the mentor], and she was like, "Are you

forgetting about me, or are you too busy for the match?" And [the mentor]'s just

like, "No." 'Cause I was like, "[Mentor], can you call me?" And she was like,

"What's wrong? [The mentor] doesn't wanna meet with me anymore?" And I was

like, 'No, she's just worried that you know, y'all went a whole month without

seein' each other, and was kinda skeptical about it, but she's fine now.'…I play

like the mid--, yeah, I play the middle person, yeah. (PF)

Many parents described similar situations of stepping in to reassure their child about the

mentor, often explaining the reality of an adult's busy schedule. Several parents used

these opportunities to help their children learn to express themselves, encouraging them

to share their feelings (good and bad) with the mentor. Other times a parent may temper

their child's desire for attention or contact with the mentor, as not to overwhelm or "scare

away the Big" (BB).

Ensuring the Quality of Relationship for the Youth

Based on my analysis, only parents described in their interviews their role in

ensuring that the match be a safe and emotionally positive experience for youth. While

both staff and parents identified monitoring the match relationship for any issues of

safety or relationship challenges, this specific role characterizes parental actions that were

directed at the quality of the match experience for the child, "my role is …to make sure

[my child] has a positive experience, and that they both do really" (Parent of female

match). Across parent interviews, ensuring the quality of this match for their child began

with establishing a sense of trust not only in the mentor, but in his or her ability to ensure

the physical and emotional well being of the child. The quality of the mentor was very

important to parents both going into a new match as well as throughout their relationship.

When asked to describe what she knew about the mentor being matched with her child

the parent responds,

> Um, well I know she's very energetic. [laughs] And she does a lot of outside
>
> sports and things like that. And she's really into her family, which I thought was
>
> really good. I think she have, um I don't know if it's 1 or 2 family members that
>
> are handicapped or something. So she really spends a lot of time with family. So
>
> that's good excellent quality because she's a family person. So she cares about her
>
> family, so you know, she would be someone excellent for a child to have, because
>
> she has the know how, and she's gonna have to have that oversight you know to
>
> say family comes first and she'll be able to watch out a little bit more for a child
>
> because she has those family qualities in her. (PF)

 For most parents, the initial degree of trust they had was for the mentoring

process itself and the capacity of the program to vette and recommend a volunteer who

could be given the benefit of the doubt. Parents relied on this agency trust and staff

judgment when accepting the recommended mentor believed to be a good match for the

child. Having limited information and contact with the mentor prior to the first match

outing, many parents relied heavily on their trust in the agency's vetting process, along

with their first impressions and sense of comfort they had upon meeting the mentor for

the first time:

> I'm one of them people that if I have any bad feeling I get that gut feeling inside
>
> like I'm cranky or something. I don't know what it is but that's just me. I've been

like that all my life. So I kinda had a good vibe from him. So, I don't think there

would be any problems, me trying to figure out if they're going to be a good

match. I think they're gonna be a good match. (PM)

While some parents talked about that initial gut feeling they also were very observant of

the mentor's interactions with their child and their child's reaction in fortifying the initial

forms of trust and comfort they needed to feel to let their child begin a relationship with

another adult.

Just being kind to my daughter you know and treating her with respect…just

being good to her…That's what it's all about and like if I didn't like her or if my

vibe didn't take to her, she would not be taking my child nowhere and [my

daughter] never had any bad complaints, you know, she's a good person. (PF)

While a trust in the mentoring process carried some parents through the

introductory meeting and often into the first official match outings, they were also

vigilant about gathering their own information about the mentor as a means of developing

a greater degree of trust in the mentor. For some parents, this was critical as they hope to

quell the natural anxieties and fears about involving a mostly unknown person into their

child's life,

….'cause I actually talked to him, you know, I wanted to know exactly uh, what

was he doing, you know? But, I did, in my mind, you know, I always wonder, you

know, a person that wants to be with, with children, you know are they, they

molesters or somethin'? I, I always wondered that in my mind. But, then I had to

think, 'Wait a minute! I love kids too. I'm not a molester. So it might be just that I

love kids. You know? (PM)

…I mean if all they do is talk about miniature golf that's fine, but if the conversation gets deeper and he is a role model like I, I mean I don't know if, is that something you screen for, people being racist I mean? I don't know. I mean, I don't know if that was included in the screening process. Like he's not going to say something, like, negative about Latinos…(PM)

Finding specific opportunities for mentors and families to get to know one another was one way in which some parents hoped to gather a clear sense about who the mentor was beyond the superficial information they are given up front:

And I've been trying to think, what would be nice, to do, to try to get to know him, and as an individual instead of having someone saying, "Okay, here's the paper, this is his information on it…I feel like as long as he's willing to know who we are, who I am, it'll be a good match. (PM)

For other parents, they relied on their child's reaction to the mentor and the experiences their child shared about the relationship with the mentor:

I trust [the mentor] 100 percent. (...) Because I didn't see any sign, or suspicious things or anything, (...) I didn't hear from [my daughter] any complain, (....) so I [am] told uh everything is going good, so I have no problems so, so if I have no problem I can say [I trust the mentor] 100 percent. (PF)

Other parents expressed the desire to be more intimately involved in the match,

desiring the opportunity to observe the goings-on of the match as a first-hand observer. While this kind of involvement was interpreted as overbearing to program staff, several parents were especially vigilant about their role to protect their child from yet another disappointment. When asked to recall how long she anticipated her son's mentoring match would last, after it first began a year ago, one parent replied,

> …maybe like a few months. I didn't think it would be this long…only because of how I am, you know. I have a big trust issue with my kids, and seeing' how things have been with their, you know their dads, I don't want anybody hurtin' them. I don't want anybody emotionally hurtin' them. (PM)

Further, parents were also motivated to ensure the quality of the match knowing that they were the ones that had to deal with any fall-out when a mentor didn't follow- through or their child was left disappointed:

> …Basically I just hope [the mentor]…is making, um the effort to get [my son]…Because then if he doesn't get him then that's a let down on his part and then he's looking at me like you know, "Where is he at?"…because he's, he's had that, problems with his dad, where, you know, he's had people say they are going to do something for him and they don't do it. So, I hope he just makes good on what he's in for and that's being a mentor. And I hope that he knows what it's going to mean to [my son] or any other child to have that person that might be missing a part in their lives, you now what it's going to mean to that child, that doesn't have that mentoring in their life. So I just hope he makes good on what it is that he's getting himself into and actually just come through and you know not,

because kids when they get disappointed and they take it out in so many different ways, and it's the parent who has to deal with the butt end of it. So, you know, I just hope he can keep that as exactly what he, he's really in for it. (PM)

Parents also took steps to establish trust through conveying information to the mentor in an effort to establish some common ground. Parents wanted to share their hopes and expectations for the match, being clear about the kinds of exposure they wanted and didn't want for their child:

So I was thinking maybe to find out if he'd be open to having a dinner just him, I, and [my son]. And we'd just sit down and talk so he can get an understanding of where I'm coming from, what I'm expecting, what I'm not expecting him to do… um, and things like that. Because I want him to understand why I wanted to do this. I want him to understand the type of person and parent that I am…and what I'm expecting. And what I would like to get out of it, and what I hope [my son] gets out of it, just so he doesn't feel like-it's not a babysitting thing to me. (PM)

At times parent suggested ways they believed the mentor could best support their child (e.g. academics, being supportive after a stressful event, etc.). In one example a parent reaches out to the mentor to help her in asked the mentor to speak with the child regarding his treatment of his younger sibling. The mentor follows up with the youth, who "feels like the Big is giving him really good advice" (BB), and as a result the parent witnesses a positive impact on her son.

Overwhelmingly parents valued the mentoring opportunity for their child and parents recognized their responsibility to step in if a challenge arose in their child's match

or their child was uncomfortable or dissatisfied with the match. The decision to take action was not taken lightly, as parents knew that problem resolution could be the dissolution of the match. While parents spoke firmly about stepping in if they felt their child wasn't okay with the match, it was not the egregious missteps of mentors that parents contemplated. Rather it was the occasional off-putting events that parents mulled over, trying to assess a mentor's inappropriate choice as a harmless mistake or a pattern of inappropriateness that warranted a parent to step in and protect their child:

> **...** there was one time they were both telling jokes…pick up lines for women and [my son] came home and told me, "Oh he has a real good one, ah, hey I like the blouse you're wearing, it would like nice on my bedroom floor." And I'm like "Oh," you know, I mean he was 12 at the time... I mean, here's the thing, at that age, him and his friends are saying that kind of stuff but to have an older guy in his 20s to do that joke... boys that age do joke about girls and talk about it that kind of stuff. But I was hoping he'd be more of a role model that might not talk about that kinda stuff….modeled something that, but that's, it's just me being, me being picky, I don't know (PM).

Most parents were empathic to the situations mentors were in and could more easily overlook fairly harmless interactions if they had been able to establish a basic degree of trust in the mentor, and they knew their child was satisfied with the mentor. As one parent shared,

> …when I was in my 20s I taught elementary school…and when you're in that age and your first working with kids, **y**ou don't know how much to tell them or what

not to tell them. There really is a learning curve there and I can remember I think

of what I said back then I would never say to kids now but I didn't realize, you

know what I mean when you, you don't always know, well you can't say that to

kids so you know, So I should give him a break, it's a learning curve (PM).

It was evident from the interviews with all participants that parents were actively

engaged on multiple levels and at different degrees in their child's mentoring

relationship. Parents played specific and important roles in the relationship, even if their

involvement was not obvious or observed by mentors and program staff. While parental

involvement itself varied across those interviewed, the degree of parent involvement

could not accurately assessed by program staff that based in on observable actions or

mentor's reports. Parents' motivations and styles influenced the ways in which parents

were involved and the degree of their involvement. This broader understanding of

parental involvement can support ways programs can maximize the role of parents

overall.

The Parent-Mentor Relationship

The various roles that parents played in the match relationship predominantly

involved interactions with their child or with their child's mentor. The parent-mentor

relationship often served as an essential conduit through which parents engaged in their

child's match, and through which the mentors experienced parental involvement. The

importance of this relationship was noted by several program staff who held that when

parents established a relationship with the mentor, it too contributed to a successful

match: "the relationships that are the best, do have the parent and the Big having a

relationship with each other" (BB). From the perspective of staff, when parents and

mentors were able to establish an open and comfortable relationship with one another, it

supported their ability to work together around issues that related to the youth that often

went beyond scheduling match outings. Though program staff offered spoke very little

about the intricacies of the parent mentor relationship, my analysis of the individual

matches included in this study revealed a multidimensional nature to the parent-mentor

relationship, the third and last finding of this study. Parents and mentors engaged in an

array of interactions that varied not only in frequency and depth but also purpose. These

exchanged served primarily three functions: instrumental, informational and relational.

Parent and mentor interactions that involved practical tasks pertaining to match outings

fall into the category of serving an *instrumental* function. These types of interactions

included scheduling, selecting and approving outing activities, relaying outing plans and,

or details of the outing afterwards. The category of *informational* interactions were those

in which parents and, or mentors shared information about the youth mentee. This

information served a function of keeping the other abreast as to how the youth was

developing in response to the match relationship or information about the youth that

might support the mentoring efforts being made. Lastly, parents and mentors engaged in

interactions that served to establish rapport, comfort, and trust with the other. These

relational interactions ranged in breadth and depth, corresponding to the kind of

relationships parents and mentors hoped to establish with one another. Interactions in this

category included sharing or requesting personal information in an effort to get to know

the other person. Relational interactions also included efforts to make the other person

feel comfortable by expressing satisfaction with the match or appreciation of the other. Not surprisingly, most of the actual encounters that parents and mentors engaged in served multiple functions, reflecting more than one type of interaction.

Beyond the practical functions of these interactions, they more importantly contributed to the quality of relationships parents and mentors established with one another. Some level of communication and degree of closeness could characterize all of the parent and mentor relationships in this study. Additionally, there was significant agreement in the assessed levels of communication and closeness that parents and mentors described in their relationship with one another. The mutuality of satisfaction with those assessed levels indicated whether the relationship could be labeled as working or not-working.

Parent – Mentor Interactions

Instrumental interactions.

Instrumental interactions related to approving and facilitating match outings between the mentor and the youth and could be found at across all matches. These interactions were the most common form of exchange between parents and mentors. An example of instrumental interactions is seen in this parent's description of the communication that she engaged in with her child's mentor:

> [The mentor] checked in with me after [my son] and him made plans of what they
> was going to do. He would say "Okay what, well next week" or whatever, he's
> like "me and [your son] we're gonna go here unless you've got something
> planned" and I'd say "No no no, that's cool", you know I used to tell him "No

that's cool", but I always asked him, I made time when I knew [the mentor] said

they had something to do, I scheduled stuff around that, you know what I mean,

cause I know [my son], I know for a fact that [my son] need that mentor. (PM)

These instrumental interactions served the basic function of getting match outings to

happen. The regularity of these kinds of exchanges with the mentor throughout the

match, whereby the parent was kept in-the-loop of outing plans or were involved in the

planning process, contributed to the parents' growing confidence in the mentor's

character. As one parent shared,

…I really like [the mentor] cause I know when he had ideas or anything he

wanted to do, he would always come and ask me first, he wouldn't just say okay

[Little] I'm going to come and pick you up, he would call and say do you think

it's okay if I do this or I'm going to be late or [Little] has school tomorrow, is it

okay if I pick him up during the week. So we had good communication so that's

why I liked him so much is because he didn't just take it upon himself to do

whatever, he always involved me or my boyfriend to make sure we always knew

what was going on. (PM).

While most interactions between parents and mentors were instrumental in nature, many

of the conversations around match outings often led to further exchanges that involved

sharing of information about the mentee and his or her needs and served an informational

function in the match.

Informational interactions.

Many parents and mentors described interactions that involved the imparting of

information about the youth's life or his or her development, with the intention of fostering effective support for the youth in the match. Mentors described conversations that revolved around checking-in with the parent to "know what's been going on for the past two weeks, or a week" (MM) and ensure that the "mom and,…Big are on the same page" (MM). The information was then used to consider how the mentor might best support the youth, especially if a particular concern had been raised. One mentor describes the informational function of there interactions in the following way,

> …I would see [the mom] whenever I'd go over there, we'd spend some time talking, her and …her husband, his stepdad as well. They really care about him so they want to know or they were having trouble you know communicating something to him like the importance of school and things. They would ask me to see if I can talk to him about that and things like that so, you know, it was um, definitely there was, they definitely trusted me and they definitely um sort of liked the approach I was taking with him and trying to, in getting him out and sort of messages I was trying to convey to him about how important school was and the type of person he needs to be and things like that… (MM)

The parent of this same match shares her perspective of similar conversations with the mentor that involved collaboration to best meet the needs of the mentee. She describes their interactions in the following way:

> ...we had a lot of communication, us, just basic conversations about what they were doing or [my son] was having some problems with schoolwork at one time and I called [the mentor] and like, "[Big], look, I know [my son] looks up to you

and he listens to me, but, it would just be better for a second voice to you know

tell [my son] that this is what he needs to do, that school is important." He's like

"I got you, I got you! I'll tell him." So things like that I could just pick up the

phone and just basically let him know anything that was going on with [my son]

and he was willing to be there to help to give his advice and stuff… (PM).

While parents may sometimes share information intending to guide or shape the kind of

support they believed their child needed from the mentor, parents also used information

to inform how they, too, might best support the match relationship. This is most apparent

when information is shared about a difficult situation or an impending disappointment

like a canceled outing or match closure. As an example, one mentor describes his

conversation with his mentee's parent about how to best handle a situation where the

mentor was unable to follow-through with a particular outing with the youth. The mentor

recounts,

…I mean, she'll be like 'Oh, ..I won't tell [my son] you… can't make it, just

cause' ... like he asked me to go to like one of his games and he didn't tell me

where it was. And it wound up being at like BU at like 8 o'clock on a Saturday

and it was like ... I found out like, on Friday night and I was on the Cape and it's

like whoa, and so now I felt bad, like ... I told the kid I'd go to his game and now

I'm gonna miss it, because you know, like, I can't get back there in time. And...

she wasn't like "Oh [my son]'s expecting you to be there and you said you would

go." She's always been like, she knows exactly how, … [her son] is, and she'll be

like, "Oh, don't worry about it ... I won't tell him ... I'll tell him after the game

that you know, you were on the Cape and you didn't know. And don't worry

about." You know, like she's never been like "Well, you're not spending enough

time with him. You're supposed to do this and that." She was very comfortable

with me as well. She seems to view me as more of a, of a family friend than as

this like program appointed Big Brother. (MM)

Although the majority of the interactions that parents and mentors engaged in were

directed at the match relationship between the mentor and the youth, a third type of

interaction, relational interactions, were directed at the comfort that parents and mentors

established with one another.

Relational interactions.

Across all the mentoring matches to some extent, parents and mentors engaged in

interactions intended to build comfort, rapport, or a degree of trust between them. While

some of these interactions or conversations were more explicit in their purpose, others

were subtle in nature, but important nonetheless, to establishing the level of comfort that

parents and mentors had with the other. These relational interactions ranged from simple

conversations to participation in shared events. As one parent recounts, while the

exchanges she had with her child's mentor were few in number, they were significant to

her sense of comfort with the mentor,

You know so I see her and I say hi. You know I might say a few things with her

just to try to get a sense of her personality and how she is. And with the few

exchanges I've had I've been very comfortable with her, I don't have to worry

about, you know, what they doing and where they go, she's very responsible,

so…. I got to know her, just by talking to her I could tell the type of person she was, I wasn't worried outside of that, but she, she goes above and beyond to make you, you know, feel very comfortable I know exactly, she knows exactly where they going and how they going and what they gonna do. And so you're comfortable cause she's so prepared and goes through the, you know extra mile to make sure everything's just right. That I don't even worry about her. (PF)

While a parent may be using conversation with the mentor to gather information about the quality of the mentor, these efforts also served to encourage mentors and establish their comfort with the parent and family. In response to being asked about the parent, one mentor shares,

I think [the mom] is a fantastic mom. …[Little]'s little brother is a great, great kid. He's so cute….her mom I think really trusts me, we laugh a lot….she seems genuinely interested in my life and what I'm up to and vice versa. (FM)

For some parents the relational interactions that they sought went beyond casual conversation and, instead, involved opportunities for the mentor to engage more closely with the family as a whole. These kinds of interactions could significantly impact how a parent felt about their child's mentor, as seen in this parent's description,

I like [the mentor]. He became part of the family, he's real down to earth, he came to cook outs, we had cook outs, he came to our cook outs, we like, we had him participate with us, you know, like family stuff, so you don't feel left out, so, you know, so [my son] didn't feel like, oh well, you know, "How come [the mentor] didn't come?" And let him and [my son] do, do their little thing on the grill, and

whatever it was, maybe some kind of chicken, I don't even know. But you know

they had fun with it, we let them do that, …But, you know, every time…I liked

him, you know he was (I: Yeah) he was really nice, really nice. (PM)

These kinds of family interactions were similarly important to mentors as well. As

another mentor describes the relationship he's established with the parent of his mentee:

…we gotten to know each other before, **[laughs]** um, **[inaudible]** that way, um,

we're very comfortable with each other, like she had a birthday party for [my

mentee], I brought my daughter over, and she had a blast, 'cause she's three,

[Little's sibling]'s four, so they had a blast playing together, an' stuff **….** I think

it's gotten, you know, …friendships build as you know each other better. (MM)

While not as frequently mentors, too, initiated efforts or expressed a desire to develop a

greater relationship with the family or the parent, by doing a joint activity or getting

together for dinner. This mentor expresses her desire to get to know her mentee's parent

better,

I'd actually like to get to know her mom a little more,…just from hanging out

with [her daughter], I'm super impressed with her mom and the things that I think

that she learns from her mom…I'd actually like to like hang out with her mom

and maybe get to know her like…have tea or coffee or something, just hang out

and get to know her…." (FM)

Relational interactions also included those efforts that were intended to make the other

person feel at ease or comfortable, such as a parent sharing his or her satisfaction or

appreciation of the match. This was a significant gesture to one mentor who recalled this

event,

> Her mom got on the phone…two weeks ago…and she said…was complaining
> about how she didn't feel like advising on [her daughter's] homework [laughs],
> and so I said 'Oh really?...Well, that sounds like me when I was her age.' But she
> said, 'I appreciate what you're doing for [my daughter] so much…'…and that
> was really nice to hear from her mother. I hadn't heard that, not that I expected to,
> but it was really nice to hear that… (FM).

Parents and mentors who established, at minimum, a cordial or comfortable relationship
with the other, described greater confidence in the potential for engaging in more
conversation or interactions if called for by the needs of the match. As reflected in this
parent's description of the relationship she had with her son's mentor,

> **…**Well, I, I basically like, if I had a problem with somethin', I could call him, or
> he could call me, but I really let [my mentee] do most contacting with him. You
> know what I mean? I basically back off and let him do that, you know what I
> mean? An' then if there was a problem or somethin', then it would come directly
> to me or if [my mentee] was doin' somethin', or something negative was goin' in
> with that, you know, that he would touch base with me or somethin', you know,
> or did something like major, then he would get a OK with me, but like you know,
> goin' out, takin' him out, I mean, you know, when he takes him out, you know,
> [my mentee] says, "Well Mommy, [my mentor]'s gonna go," 'OK' so you know
> what I mean? So that's not a problem, you know. So basically you know, I let [my
> mentee] do the communication with him, you know. (MM)

Throughout their interviews, parents and mentors described the various encounters they had with one another. Among some relationships, the interactions were minimal or served just one function. However most often within these relationships the interactions that parents and mentors engaged in were multifunctional. Created from the variety of experiences shared by parents and mentors, one example might be of a parent and mentor who both take a moment to chat upon the mentor's arrival to pick up the child for an outing. The mentor provides the parent with specific details about the outing activity planned and the parent shares a troubling episode the child experienced at school. The mentor responds by sharing his own difficulties in school, expresses empathy for the child's situation and assures the parent that he will follow-up with the child during the outing.

Though participants often articulated in their interviews, the motivation behind the various interactions they initiated in the parent-mentor relationship, these motivations were not always made clear to each other. This sometimes led to unrevealed misunderstandings or misinterpreted intent. Such an example is of a parent who expressed a desire to invite her child's new mentor to dinner, with the intentions of sharing information about her hopes and expectations for the match, and providing an opportunity to show appreciation to the mentor for his commitment, making him feel more comfortable with the new match. However, from the mentor's perspective, the dinner invitation was interpreted as somewhat inappropriate, and he stated that he "wasn't comfortable [with] that, at that particular point in time." (MM)

The importance of these various interactions shared between mentors and parents

were significant to shaping the nature of the relationship between them. The frequency and function of their interactions and parents and mentors satisfaction with the amount and kind of interactions contributed to an overall characterization of the relationship that parents and mentors developed with one another.

Relationship Characteristics

Communication.

Aside from the function or motivation for a particular exchange, parent-mentor interactions contributed to the pattern of communication and degree of closeness between them. Throughout their initial interviews, both parents and mentors described the kind of relationship they wanted to have with one another. Even though mentors, more so than parents, hadn't fully conceptualized the parent-mentor relationship, parents and mentors alike entered the mentoring relationship with varying expectations for the level of communication and the depth of closeness with the other. In my analysis of interviews of parents and mentors in the same relationship, despite any variability in the expectations going into the match, both participants provided similar descriptions of the actual level of communication and degree of closeness that they experienced with the other in the match.

Overall, parents described a much broader range of the kinds of interactions they expected to have with the mentor, than did the mentors expect with parents. Both parents and mentors who anticipated minimal engagement with one another did, however, expect interactions that were instrumental in nature. Parents were more likely to anticipate minimal conversation with the mentor if they felt their child was old enough to manage scheduling outings on their own. Many mentors anticipated developing a relationship

with the parent that involved, "just talk[ing] to them before…and after each visit, maybe just to check in, you know, and tell them or figure out what time would work best for the next visit, …and stuff like that" (MM). However when a much higher degree of interaction was expected, it more often came from a parent such as this one,

> I need to know everything that they're doing, where they're going, how long they're gonna be gone; he's open to all that. [The mentor] told me anything, if I ever have any questions at anytime. He told me, if I wake up in the morning, at 3 o'clock in the morning and I have a question, don't hesitate to pick up the phone and call him. So that was a good thing, I mean I have a job telephone number, house phone number (PM).

Closeness.

Beyond expectations for communication, when parents and mentors described the kind of relationship they expected to have with one another, at minimum they hoped for one that was cordial and respectful in nature. Hopes for anything closer were more pronounced in parent interviews than in those of the mentors. One parent who hoped that the mentor would have a "good personality" continued on to describe a desire for a greater degree of closeness with the mentor,

> … we're very, a very friendly family- So we do a lotta huggin', and shakin' hands, and stuff-and trying to feed you, and all. So it was like I hope that we can find a match that'll be comfortable with how we are. You know, so that, that was real important, if I'm letting you in my home, you know, I trust you, so you're coming in, and I hope you're just as spunky as we are (MM).

In contrast, many mentor anticipated a relationship that would be more formal in nature, as seen in this mentor's description,

> I would kind of see it as a parent-teacher kind of relationship. 'Cause, like, I don't…foresee becoming friends with the parent. That's not my goal. So, I don't know, kind of the same kind of relationship I had as a counselor at the special needs camp with the parent….I think my relationship with the parent should be fairly formal. (FM)

In the few cases where a mentor desired more than a formal relationship with the parent, they often simultaneously were mindful of the program guidelines and reflected on the training they received from the agency, as reflected in this mentor's statement:

> I'd love to have a great relationship with [the parent]. I definitely want to keep it, you know, from the training, it's just my understanding you just go to them for scheduling and just kind of keep it, um…like high level, not necessarily get involved with the family more so than the girl, so. (FM)

Although not often, some mentors did share images of a close and growing relationship with the family stating,

> I think the relationship is of a good close friend to the mother, a good friend to the mother and a closer friend to the son….and she's the boss and…she calls the shots and… that is important for the Little to understand that you know, 'Hey, mom calls the shots and do as she says',…I think it's uh, the relationship on both the Little and the mom will grow, uh, as time goes by,…that's important. (MM)

While a parent and mentor may have described at the start of the match differing

expectations for the parent-mentor relationship, it was not necessarily indicative of the actual experience that each had in the parent-mentor relationship itself. The following interview segment describes one mentor's response to being asked to describe the relationship he expected to develop with the parent and subsequent interviews describe the relationship after 3 months and then at 1 year.

Initial Interview:

I don't know…what that's gonna be yet. It… would be interesting uh, [pause] you know, I don't know. …- it's actually, probably, a good question for me to run by…the program. Part of me was, I didn't think there'd be much of a relationship, but clearly, you're going to need them and you're in the house for a little bit, and you're in, 10-15 minutes talkin' to the grandfather when I dropped him off. And, uh, you know, so, so there clearly is a, gonna be something there. I just don't know what it's going to be. (MM)

3Month Interview:

I know [the mom] invited me over for dinner early on, in like the first couple of weeks and I wasn't comfortable for that, at that particular point in time. But I think you know with the holidays or something it might be appropriate, I would think. (MM)

12Month Interview:

I think [the relationship with mom] been pretty steady, we gotten to know each other before, **[laughs]** …that way, um, we're very comfortable with each other, like she had a birthday party for [her son], I brought my daughter over, and she

had a blast, 'cause she's three, [Little's sibling]'s four, so they had a blast playing

together, an' stuff. So yeah, I think, I think it's gotten, you know, … friendships

build, as you know each other better. (MM)

The relationship that developed between parents and mentors was not predetermined or

static aspects of the mentoring process. Even though parents and mentors may have had

certain expectations or visions of the kind of communication or closeness they wanted

from the other, their relationship developed in dynamic ways, influenced and shaped by

the very interactions and experiences that were present as part of the mentoring process.

The range of closeness that could describe the various parent and mentor

relationships is best categorized as degree of closeness. At a minimal level, parents and

mentors described their relationship as cordial or professional-like in nature. Parents and

mentors described this kind of closeness in terms of a mutual respect and a basic degree

of comfort that fostered a confidence that any challenges in the match would be raised

and discussed. When asked about his relationship with the parent, one mentor offers the

following response,

…the mother, I've only talked to when we drop off, or pick up. And like she's

been very nice to me, and a polite person, and, and like we both like each other,

it's just like uh, like you know, like we don't hang out together. I just see her

when I pick him up and drop him off, that kinda thing, so it's a strictly, it's like

that kind of, (…) relationship I guess. (MM).

For some mentors and parents, the growing sense of closeness they often

extended to the closeness felt between the mentor and the family. Parents often described

close relationships with the mentors that were not specific to their personal relationship, but rather the relationship that the mentor had developed with the family. One mentor describes the developed sense of closeness in the following way,

> Yeah, I feel much closer to his whole family which is good. In the beginning it was more of like "Oh,... this is [my son]'s Big Brother, ... you know he does the Big Brother program." And now it's just kind of like "This is just [mentor]." You know what I mean. Now I don't have that kind of,... introductory title of, ... assigned Big Brother figure. So now ... it's like if I ... go to like see a hockey game, me and his brothers are there... we chat ... it's not like "Oh, how was work ..." and you know,... "it's been a year now, wow." ... it's much more kinda ... like, neighborly I guess. Which is great because ... it's kind of what I wanted to get it to anyway. (MM)

In some relationships, the mentor shares his or her genuine care and concern for the youth with the parent such that their relationship grows and the mentor is considered closer to the family. An example is this parent's description of her son's mentor,

> Well…he's told me that…he likes [my son], he's a great kid, he just wants him to be more confident, and try harder in school, and…he talks about [my son] as if it's…a old friend. …he's concerned for him, … and things like that, he wants him to be happy, you know, so it's not as if all of this is the Big Brother, it's like he's been around for awhile, … he's our family friend. (PM)

Dynamics of the Working Relationship

When comparing parents' and mentors' individual descriptions of the

communication that exists between them and the closeness of their relationship with one another or the family as a whole, there is considerable similarity. Some parents and mentors described satisfactory relationships that revolved around minimal communication and a basic degree of comfort, while other parents and, or mentors might express a dissatisfaction with the minimal nature of the communication and relationship closeness. However an agreement in how the parent-mentor relationship was characterized did not translate to the either's satisfaction with the communication or closeness in relationship. When both participants described being satisfied with these aspects of their relationship, the relationship itself was categorized as a working parent-mentor relationship. However, if one or both participants indicated dissatisfaction with the communication or closeness in the relationship, the relationship was categorized as a non-working. The distinction between a working and a non-working relationship is not determined by a prescriptive degree of closeness or level of communication, but rather mutuality in satisfaction with the existing closeness and communication.

Working Relationships

As reflected above, parents and mentors described relationship that reflected a range in frequency and depth of conversations between them, and in the closeness felt. Working relationships were found among parents and mentors who describe both high and low communication and closeness. Just over half of the matches include in this sample were found to represent examples of working parent-mentor relationships. Two of these cases are represented below to demonstrate the distinct kinds of interactions that can exist between a parents and mentors.

<u>Mutual satisfaction with high degree of closeness/communication</u>

Match 130 was a match between a 24-year-old Caribbean-American mentor and an 11-year-old youth, also of Caribbean decent. The youth's parent is 35 years old and divorced. The match lasted approximately 1 year, at which time the mentor moved out of state. In regards to the communication pattern between the parent and mentor, their interviews revealed that the mentor kept the parent informed of all outing plans that he made with the youth. He would ensure that the outing plans wouldn't conflict with any of the parent's plans. The degree of closeness that the mentor developed with the family as a whole was significant and family-like as described by the parent who explains,

I like [the mentor]. He became part of the family, he's real down to earth, (…) [The mentor] would come in and he would talk, he'd talk with everybody in the house (…)we had cook outs and [the mentor] was part of,…he was like family, …if we needed to go to the store he'd go to the store, …like that, just like family.…he didn't isolate hi[m]self with just [my son], he isolated himself with the family (PM)

Similarly the mentor shares his experience in the match describing, "There was no,… taboo topic…I was definitely going there talking with his mom, talking with his grandma, I talked with his brother,(…) it felt like I was sort of, (…) I was part of the family." (MM) Further, in response to being asked if he would have changed anything about the relationship the parent, the mentor replies,

Nooo, I mean, …the family was just really inviting and really, uh, I don't know, just, they were very warm, very warm, very inviting, uh, jus-just sort of the same

> connection I had with [my mentee] is like almost instant connection with the family so it was kind of cool. Probably 'cause,…, we just … from the same area, culturally. So it just sort of made sense in that way, but I mean, even then, it was still very close. (MM)

While this match illustrates a mutually satisfying high degree of closeness other matches experienced much less closeness and communication but were satisfactory to both the parent and mentor.

Mutual satisfaction with low degree of closeness/communication

Match 76 was a mentoring relationship between a single white woman of 22 years and a 15-year-old African American youth. The parent of the youth identified herself as a single 43-year-old of Caribbean decent. The match lasted approximately 10 months and ended because the mentor was moving out of state. Direct communication between the mentor and the parent was minimal in large part because of the age of the youth. The parent considered the match a relationship strictly between the mentor and her daughter. She felt that her daughter was old enough to manage scheduling activities on her own and didn't require her involvement. In describing interactions with the parent, the mentor stated,

> I had like talked to her mom a few times and I had seen her mom before um, but [the Little]'s like old enough where she, I mean she would call her mom and tell her she was going, hanging out with me and that's about it. I didn't really have that much of a relationship with her mom. (FM)

The parent offers a similar assessment of their communication when stating, "…we used

to like just talk or whatever I mean not like long, long conversations but you know, she was a nice girl." (PF) The mentor seemed to reciprocate a similar comfort with the parent and the relationship they had stating, "…I got along great with her mom, I never had a problem with her." (FM). Though these example reflect the extremes of communication and closeness, most working relationships were described as consisting of a comfortable, cordial and friendly relationship that offered substantial comfort in communicating with one another. Although a mentor and parent may share wouldn't mind even more communication or the opportunity to learn more about the other person, they were comfortable and confident that their relationship was sufficient as such they could easily address any challenges or obstacles in the relationship.

Non-Working Relationships

In a smaller number of cases, both the parent and the mentor were dissatisfied with the communication or connection between them. These parent-mentor relationships experienced a disconnect between the level of communication or closeness they desired and that which they experienced in the relationship. The following is one such example:

Low communication/low closeness, dissatisfied

Case 122 was a match that lasted 10 months between a 24-year-old White mentor and a 9-year-old youth. The youth parent identified herself as 42 years old, single and African American. Going into the match, the parent had no expectations that the mentor would be developing much of a relationship with the family outside of his match with her son. The parent described expecting that the mentor maintain "the same type of communication that he would give my son. Maybe a little bit more because I am a parent" (PM). As the

relationship developed both the parent and mentor identified difficulties with communication as a primary reason for the match closure. The mentor's busy work schedule and the family's problems with irregular phone service both contributed to the abrupt ending of the match after ten months. While communication was a significant obstacle, there was also an element of insufficient trust and discomfort that the parent and the mentor described in their relationship. After the first three months of the match, the mentor was skeptical of the families' trust in him, sharing "…it always seemed like they didn't really trust me,…I don't know why" (MM). Although the mentor also hoped to develop a better relationship with the family, the circumstances left few occasions for interactions between the parent and mentor. Unfortunately some of those experiences early on in the relationship left the parent feeling uncomfortable and the mentor with apprehensive feelings about his mentee's family. One particularly meaningful experience involved the mentor proposing to make accommodations in his schedule so that he could bring the youth to his home to make. Although the parent had initially approved this activity, she later canceled the outing. The mentor was disappointed as he had put effort into fitting an outing into the time he was available and also saw how disappointing it was for his Little. The parent describes both her perspective of the planning and explains her apprehension with the activity:

> …when [the mentor] wanted to take him to his home, we did tell him that he was
> welcome to come over here. And that didn't happen. You know, he said he
> wanted to go make cookies… with him. And you know, if you wanna make
> cookies, you're welcome to…come over here and make cookies, you know,

opposed to going someplace I'm not familiar with.

Further in her interview the parent discussed her discomfort by saying,

> …you have to keep your child safe and you know, …forgive me for sayin' this on tape, but white people tend to …do things that shouldn't happen, and that was, I really, to be honest, I'm not prejudiced**…**that's my opinion, that I think that he would have been better as a black male.…Because I don't think a black male would've said "Hey, let's go to my house and make cookies." You know. (PM)

For the mentor this experience and another where scheduled a brief outing with the youth amidst his busy schedule only to return the youth and find his parents "just weren't there", and waited with the youth for another 30 minutes until they returned. The mentor's experiences with the family left the mentor with poor impressions of the family as he stated,

> …obviously there's a reason why he's in the Big Brother program. If he had a sound relationships all over I guess he wouldn't qualify so. …I'm not from that kind of a family, so it kind of was hard to uh [pause] see on the same level (…) obviously he's in it because he doesn't come from a good family (MM).

With little opportunity to develop common ground as to a degree of trust and comfort with one another both parent and mentor seemed unable to surmount the common communication and scheduling challenges that many matches face, despite the great benefit both the parent and mentor believed a mentoring match could have on the youth.

Out of Sync Relationships

Parent satisfaction – mentor dissatisfaction. Another significant portion of the

parent mentor relationship in this sample represented those in which the parent and mentor's overall satisfaction was out of sync. More often the mentor was dissatisfied with the communication or degree of closeness that defined their relationship, while the parent seemed comfortable with what had been established. In many of these cases the parent observed their child's match with the mentor as going well and saw little need for them to be more engaged with the mentor. These parents had established a basic trust in the mentor, which was substantiated by the non-problematic nature of their child's relationship with the mentor. For many of the mentors however, they had little opportunity to interact with the parent such that they could establish a sense of comfort with the parent. Such an example is provided with the following case.

Low communication/low closeness (mentor out of sync)

Match 124 was between a 25-year-old mentor who self-identified as Hindu and a 12-year-old White youth which lasted more than 2 years. The parent of the youth identified herself as 36 years old, single and of White and Native American decent. Entering into the match the mentor felt strongly that his attention would be directed toward his relationship with the youth and not so much on the parent. He hoped however that the parent would be supportive and seek his input about how the youth was doing. The parent saw herself as getting involved only if she was sought out, playing the mediator role if either a problem arose between the mentor and her son. As the relationship progressed, the interactions between the parent and mentor were minimal. Both the parent and mentor described their communication as minimal, with the scheduling being handled between the mentor and the youth. The mentor describes,

The only time I speak with his mom is if she happens to pick up the phone when I

call the house, and I try to talk to her….she's nice, but she doesn't really

…provide …much for any type of conversation, so it's,…just kinda her putting

[her son] on the phone. (MM)

According to the parent's perspective, while she trusted the mentor her trust in her son

led her to feel comfortable to "basically back off" and let the mentor and her son handle

the match, stepping in only if either were to share with her a problem. The mentor

describes spending little time with the family, often waiting outside for the Little when

they have outings scheduled, "…he just comes outside, …and gets in the car. I don't…go

into the house to pick him up, or anything like that…" (MM) While the parent feels the

level of communication and degree of closeness with the mentor is working, for the

mentor, the "relatively nonexistent" relationship is not his ideal. The mentor wished for a

closer relationship with the parent, where the parent was more involved engaging him in

conversation, asking him more questions that would signify her interest in the match.

Instead the mentor's interpretation of his overall experiences lead him to hold a

poor impression of the family, and finding it difficult to identify any strengths within the

family. This is conveyed in the ways in which the mentor talks about the family. In one

example, the mentor shares that while the parent's effort to sign her son up for mentoring

was commendable, he believed that she may actually have been more invested in how the

match outings would give her a break, than the benefit to her son:

… she knows it's a good thing where, …he could have a positive male influence

but I feel like it's almost more she…is welcoming of it because it… gets [her son]

off her hands for a few hours. …which is fair I understand that, …she really does

it for …[her son]'s benefit, I guess you could say. …I wish maybe I was a little

bit closer, I felt like she was a little bit more involved, but again, that's something

you have to be aware of, that there's a reason he's lookin' for a Big Brother

where, … things aren't that great at home and probably doesn't have the

ideal…family life, so, I guess …you're certainly not gonna get the …perfect

situation because if there was a perfect situation, he probably wouldn't …be in the

need for …a male influence, he probably wouldn't be involved in the program.

(MM)

Although the mentor wished for more interactions or a closer relationship, the mentor

remained motivated because of the positive relationship he had with the youth and the

match was sustained because the scheduling of outings wasn't disrupted by the

perceptions of a poor parent-mentor relationship,

I don't really worry about it too much, …it would be great if we were closer,

but… as long as the relationship with, [the Little] and I is going well, and they

haven't … prohibited…put any any sorta guidelines on what we can do, or when

we can kinda hang out, then I guess, that's kinda all I can ask for. (MM)

Parental dissatisfaction – Mentor satisfaction. Among the sample of matches,

only a few involved a parent who was overly dissatisfied with the relationship developed

with the mentor, contrasting the mentor who felt comfortable with the relationship. The

following is an example of this form of out-of-sync relationship.

Low communication/minimal closeness out of sync

Match 109 was between a 25-year old, White mentor and an 11-year old White youth that lasted just over two years. The youth's mother was divorced and 50 years old. In her initial interview the parent anticipated developing a level of communication with the mentor that would be predominantly instrumental in nature. She admittedly hadn't considered developing any closer relationship with the mentor. After the first year however the parent was disappointed by the lack of "rapport" she felt was missing from their relationship,

> …the downside was that, he and I never really developed a rapport like we would touch base through email regarding…times and things like that, but I never felt like,…I don't, I just got a sense that he was never interested in talking to me…. when he'd come he wouldn't come up, [my son would] just go down, he'd pull up and tell him to come down or something. So I don't think he was that comfortable…I just got a lot of signals from him that he wasn't comfortable with me… (PM)

The parent attributed the mentor's seemingly discomfort to their age difference, such that the mentor may not have felt "comfortable talking to people from an older generation" (PM) or merely that he was only interested in developing a relationship with the youth. This disconnect the parent felt was further exacerbated by how the parent observations of the mentor's behavior which she monitored through her child. The parent described one particular event where her son recounted the conversation he had with his mentor during their outing. To the parent's dismay the mentor shared "pick up lines for women" (PM). While the parent was disappointed in the mentor's poor role modeling, she also

interpreted the event as a sign that the mentor didn't respect the relationship that she had

with her son:

> … maybe it's kinda unique but my son really does come home and tell me stuff.
>
> And I think [the mentor]…assumed that you know a lot of kids don't tell their
>
> parents anything and I think he was kinda of the mindset of, "Oh parents ask you
>
> what you're doing." And he didn't really have a, like you know, like, "When
>
> you're mother asks, just tell her, you can tell her we just did this, this, and this,"
>
> and I'm like what's that about you know what I mean?...So I kinda wish he didn't
>
> have such a negative attitude towards mothers (PM)

While the parent clearly was dissatisfied by the lack of relationship with the mentor, the

mentor described a different experience after three months, where he shared:

> … I didn't know what to expect and,…she seemed, uh... at first, I wasn't sure if
>
> she liked me. But, you know, it just seemed like that was her personality, to... to
>
> come off like that, 'cause she's been, …super nice,…and pretty…laid back about
>
> the whole situation and,... that's all I could really ask for, to tell you the truth.
>
> (MM)

The mentor offers no indication of being dissatisfied with the basic relationship that he

and the mother share, which is predominantly mediated through email and phone

communication regarding outing plans. The mother is left to weigh the tradeoff of

contending with her own dissatisfaction with the not-ideal rapport and poor taste the

mentor may demonstrate on occasion and the significant benefit having a mentor

provides her son with opportunities that can "raise up the quality of life" (MM).

Among the group of matches analyzed in which parents and mentors satisfaction with their relationship was out-of-sync, it was largely possible for their feelings about the situation to exist independent of the success of the mentoring match between the mentor and the youth. The interviews included in this study did not provide sufficient detail to determine a direct relationship between how the working or non-working parent relationship could influence the mentor-youth relationship development. While the degree to which any parent-mentor disconnect could impact the mentor-youth relationship could not be fully determined, the possibility did exist. In particular one's dissatisfaction with aspects of the parent-mentor relationship could influence a motivation to resolve challenges that surfaced in the mentoring relationship, or persist despite difficulties such as scheduling. An example of how a mentor's dissatisfaction might influence participation in the mentoring match is best captured by the experiences of the mentor and his interpretation of the interactions that he shared with the mother of his mentee.

<u>Working to out-of-sync</u>

Match 139 lasted 12 months in length between a 45-year old single White mentor and a 12-year old youth whose White mother was divorced and 32 years old. Both parent and mentor entered into the match, anticipating that they would develop a basic friendship. Once the match began both were satisfied with the regular communication and comfortable discussing with one another any problems with scheduling or concerns that came up about the youth. Overall both describe a positive relationship in which the mentor shared a few dinners with the family. From the parent's perspective their

communication was strong and essential in ensuring that they were "on the same page".

From the parent's perspective she felt that she and the mentor had "a good understanding

of what we both wanted, what we expected". However unknowingly, the parent's efforts

to enlist the mentor's help to arrange outings at certain times when the "needed, …a little

extra help with [the Little]" like school vacations, or suggesting overnight visits were

interpreted as more problematic to the mentor.

According to the mentor he interpreted these requests as more manipulative and

self-serving in nature. The mentor recalled,

I also noticed that…his mom, kind of …hinted around, a little bit to the

fact,…"Hey,…he's going to be on vacation for the week…would you mind,

…doing an overnight?" And I was like, "Umm, no, that's not a good idea, I don't

think that's a good idea. Why would you want to do an overnight?" and she goes,

"Oh, well, you know, just to give him a little break away." Now, …I knew that

for what it was, or saw that for what it was- she needed a break away. I kind of

felt as though …his mom was …using me a bit as a babysitter.

…she had mentioned, …early on about,…the younger brother being,…on an

overnight…at camp and poor [Little] …is stuck with his mother and his aunt. And

I says, "Oh, well, that's too bad."… and she said, "It would be nice if he could

have… an overnight, too" and I said, "Well, maybe you could find him a camp

where he could have an overnight, too." and she goes, "Oh, oh yeah."… my full

time job is behavioral protection officer… it doesn't mean I have to be a

> behavioral protection officer to-to pick up on…what she was…putting out there… honestly you know, I was, I became guarded. 'Cause… that's a manipulation tactic… and, ah that can take any course.

These interactions left the mentor feeling not only manipulated, but also that "she was using the program in the wrong way." As the mentor continues to discuss his experience he reflects on the economic and social class differences between himself and his mentee's parent, such as that he works for the government and she in a convenience store. The mentor also shares having different social circles, "the people that I hang out with are different from the type of people that…I think she may associate with". This difference influences the degree of comfort and "guardedness" that the mentor has toward the parent and how he interpreted his interactions with her, in particular the request she made that he host an overnight visit with her son. In the mentor's mind he needed to be,

> careful here because …she might …insinuate something….to be totally honest with you guys, … I felt that she would not be beyond, an…accusation of sort…. such as something inappropriate ….for, a…monetary gain. …that was just my gut feeling, you know? …so I made sure I was never put into any kinda position to …even have that even be a question.

Once the mentor took a guarded approach toward the parent, he became much more "…cautious …with her...suggestions… I wasn't so apt to…say, 'Oh sure, I'll do that'…I wasn't so, so available … that's when I noticed also, things were changing real quickly ….when I stopped being so accommodating."

> Although parents and mentors are primarily invested in the formal mentoring

relationships for the sake of the child, the relationship that they must establish with one another is no less consequential. The relationship that is constructed between them begins with the interactions they engage in with one another. These interactions can be organized by function: instrumental, informational and relational. More importantly these interactions serve a purpose that extends beyond the development of the mentor-youth relationship itself. The parent-mentor relationship, though secondary in nature is an important one in the mentoring match. There was overwhelming consistency across matches between how parents and mentors assessed the qualities of their relationship with one another. This concordance was however distinct from the degree to which each was satisfied with the state of the parent-mentor relationship. When both a parent and a mentor expressed mutual satisfaction with the relationship, there was a definitive sense that a working relationship was in place. Most importantly, there was no *one* set of relationship qualities that would lead to a working relationship. There was significant variation in the kinds of relationship quality that existed between parents and mentors, it was the presence of dissatisfaction with one or more quality of the relationship that was indicative of a not-working mentoring relationship. Although mentors and parents might have sought the support of program regarding their relationship with the other, they were mostly navigating their relationship on their own.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

At the core of most youth mentoring programs is the drive to maximize the positive effects of mentoring on youth. As a result programs continue to grow and develop in ways that have not yet been well researched or explored within the mentoring literature. Parental and family involvement in mentoring is one such theme. This study brought together the perspectives of program staff, volunteer mentors and the parents of mentored youth to explore how parental involvement is perceived and enacted within the youth mentoring process. Analysis revealed that program staff, mentors and parents conceptualized parental involvement in different ways, holding different assumptions about parents and differing expectations for the roles they should play in the youth mentoring process. While all three participant groups identified similar parental roles, there was variation among participants in the ways in which the roles would be enacted. Beyond the interactions of parents in the match, this study examined the dynamic that exists between parents and mentors. Though informed by Keller's (2005) systemic model, the specific analysis of the parent-mentor relationship offers a much closer examination, resulting in the categorization of three distinct parent-mentor interactions and particular characteristics of the mentor-parent relationship. Overall this study offers a broad examination of the nature of parental involvement in youth mentoring relationships. This section will include a greater discussion of the particular findings and implications for mentoring programs and the field of mentoring in general.

The Role Parents Play

The first overarching research question which guided this study asked, 1) what roles do parents play in the mentoring relationship, according to parents, mentors and program staff, and 2) what are the similarities and differences in these perceptions between participant groups? Study participants related five distinct ways parents were both expected and actually engaged in the mentoring match. These parental roles included, a) supporting match outings, b) being a source of information, c) monitoring the match relationship, d) supporting the development of the mentor-youth relationship and e) ensuring the quality of the match relationship for the youth. Overall staff, mentors and parents expressed similar goals of a positive mentoring relationship resulting from these parental roles, and all identified the parental roles of supporting match outings, being a source of information and monitoring the match relationship. Mentors did not however identify parents as playing a role in supporting the development of the mentor-youth relationship, though parents and agency staff did. It could be that mentors envisioned the development of their relationship with the youth as predominantly driven by their own individual actions and the receptivity of the youth. Considering that mentor training encouraged them to turn to program staff for support in matters of relationship development, they likely were less inclined see parents as a source of support for their individual relationship development. Further, some staff discouraged mentors from discussing relationship challenges that might be sensitive matters to try to talk about with a parent, like dissatisfaction with the youth.

Only one of these parental five roles, ensuring the quality of the relationship for

the youth, was found exclusively in the interviews with parents. This specific role related to the responsibility that parents felt to ensure that the match relationship was one of quality and the promotion of the youth's well being. Motivated to fulfill this role, parents engaged in various behaviors to establish trust in the mentor and monitor their child's reaction to the mentor and the match as a whole. Parents did this in varying ways, taking into consideration the age of the child, their own relationship with the child, and their individual approach as a parent. Parents often engaged in actions within the match that they believed to be in the best interest of their child's well being, even if those actions could ultimately result in the closure of a match. Given this, one could image a scenario where a parent who does not feel completely comfortable with the mentor may avoid efforts to schedule new outings, essentially allowing the match to fade away instead of trying to explain and justify their discomfort to the program or their child. The parent's inaccessibility may be viewed by the mentor or program staff as undermining the relationship, and rightly so. However, drawing on the attitudinal trends toward parents revealed in this study, it is probable that the rationale that the program staff or mentor might attribute to this inaccessibility would likely place the parent in a poor light, such as not being capable of prioritizing the match needs or personally jealous of the match, and not for reasons related to the protection of the youth.

While there was substantial agreement between program staff, mentors and parents as to the different ways in which parents were involved in the mentoring relationship, they had differing views regarding how they envisioned a parent might effectively fulfill these roles. This brings us to the research question of how these

differing perceptions influenced the interactions within the mentoring relationship. Study findings revealed that the assumptions and expectations that all three participant groups held about parents informed the ways in which they approached parental involvement and the motivations they attributed to what drove parental action or lack of action in the mentoring relationship.

Setting the Stage for Parental Involvement

Both agencies involved in this study described a change in program attention from a traditionally narrow focus solely on the mentor-youth dyad, to one that gave greater credence to the impact the youth's family and parents could have on the mentoring match. As a whole these particular programs were committed to addressing ways of engaging parents in the mentoring match beyond the mere consent to participate in the program. Staff recognized that parents were important figures in the child's family system and by virtue important figures in the youth mentoring system. Staff saw parents not only as gatekeepers to the youth, but also as having the power to disrupt the development of the mentor-youth relationship in both intentional and unintentional ways. Even though numerous staff remarked that their individual experiences with parents found them to be non-disruptive and even positive forces in their child's match, they tended to focus on the ways in which parents fell short in fulfilling program expectations for what was defined as constructive parental involvement.

Similar to the tension present in the literature on mentoring, the deficit-based view of parents seemed to stem from general practice wisdom that had been passed down through staff, which bred into a cautionary approach toward parents. Coupled with the

fact that these programs predominantly worked with youth from low-income families and single-parent homes, staff often directed their attention to the problems that arose from the conditions that families lived in. Although staff attributed such things as inconsistent communication to structural challenges that parents faced (cost-restricted phone service, or limited time because of working multiple jobs), they also attributed parental challenges to self-centered aspects that could interfere with a match (jealousy over the mentor-youth match, enlisting the mentor to serve the parent – help with shopping, being their friend). The nature in which staff described parents often called into question the capacity of the low-income and poor families they served to successfully fulfill the expectations for what was believed to be constructive parental involvement.

This deficit approach toward parents translated into program policies and practices aimed at discouraging disruptive behavior to the mentoring relationship. The promotion of strict boundaries between the mentor and the youth's parent and family were intended to avoid scenarios where a parent makes requests of the mentor that extend beyond the defined mentor role, which could dilute the volunteer mentor's time meant for the youth, or potentially threaten the dynamic between the mentor and youth. Though these practices may safeguard against these kinds of scenarios, leading with the perspective that parents are sources of potential threat to the match relationship, only further reinforces the persistence of a deficit view of low income and single-parent families predominantly served by these mentoring programs.

Even though program staff expressed a belief that parents could be strong supporters and advocates of the match, they were predominantly focused on how parent's

power over the match could be interfering instead of how it could be supportive. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that mentors took away a similar message from the program training and support they received around the topic of parents in the mentoring process. Of the group mentors included in this study, most had given very little thought to how parents fit into the mentoring relationship they were establishing with a young person. Several mentors even maintained the presumption that the reason their mentee was involved in the mentoring program was in large part because they lacked adequate parental support and positive role models in their lives. Considering that most of the mentors had not had prior mentoring experiences, they placed great value on the guidance and direction they received from the program. Although mentors described hoping for the best from their mentee's parent, they had been warned of situations in which parents could create obstacles in relationship. Mentors often referred to their training and the rules in place to guide the types of interactions they should have with the parent and the kind of relationship that could be established. This preparation seemed to place mentors on the defensive, skeptical of any parental requests or interactions that seemed to stray from an instrumental role of scheduling match outings or sharing information about the youth. An invitation to dinner with the family early on in the relationship or a request that the mentor talk with the youth about doing well in school, were viewed with skepticism informed by the cautionary training they had received about challenging parental involvement. Mentors were eager to be successful in the mentoring match and thus fearful that expressing any greater connection to the parent beyond a technical one might be interpreted by the mentee as the formation of an alliance between

the mentor and parent, thus undermining delicate mentor-youth relationship.

The trepidation that mentors felt about the parent of their mentee was not matched by the experiences shared by the parent. Instead, parents saw themselves as silent observers, mediators, coaches, advocates, and even as partners with the mentor in the mentoring process. Parents described a wide range of approaches for their own involvement. They relied on their comfort and trust in the mentor, and their personal assessment of their child's need to inform the type and degree of their own involvement; Involvement that also must coincide with their family and parenting style and personal comfort.

Seeing that parents, mentors, and program staff had distinct perspectives about the definition and implications of parental involvement, it was not surprising to find occasions of misunderstanding between the parties as they reflected on their individual expectations or experiences of parent interactions in the mentoring relationship. More importantly, program staff and mentors were more likely to interpret certain parental involvement in a negative light, contradictory in nature with parents' actual intentions for their own involvement. These miscommunications, stemming from the different ways that program staff, mentors and parent all perceived the roles of parents and their different interpretations of certain actions taken by parents, makes it clear that the relationships between program staff, mentors and parents are more complicated than initially expected by all three parties. The ways in which mentors and parents navigated these seemingly different approaches to their relationship with one another leads to the final research question that asked what the nature of the relationship between the parent

and the mentor was.

The Parent – Mentor Connection

Keller's model establishes that parents and mentors engage in interactions that serve to influence the mentoring relationship and outcomes for youth (Keller, 2005). Even at the most basic and minimal level parents and mentors must relate to one another in order to communicate and initiate the mentoring match. Keller (2005) examines the various relationships between parents, mentors, program staff and youth in terms of influential pathways that capture the various interactions within the mentoring model. This study explicates a specific look at the various functions that parent and mentor interactions served. This study analysis defined interactions into three functions: instrumental, informational and relational. These interactions contributed to the types of relationships that parents and mentors developed with one another, relationships that could be characterized by a level of communication and a degree of closeness. In their interviews parents and mentors conveyed both an individual assessment of the communication and closeness within their relationship with one another, and their personal satisfaction with the assessed status. Although both parents and mentors often provided similar assessments of the relationship with the other, it was the mutuality of satisfaction with the assessed status that could be used to characterize the nature of the parent-mentor relationship as working or non-working.

Regardless of the kind of communication patterns or the relative closeness that parents and mentors had with one another, the nature of the working relationship that existed between them was relevant to the experience they were having with the

mentoring relationship as a whole. Though there was no definitive evidence as how a mentor or parent's experience with the other directly impacted the fate of the youth-mentor relationship, it is an experience that cannot be ignored within the mentoring process. Even though program staff agreed that parents and mentors should establish a basic level of communication and comfort with one another, and recognized the positive contribution that a good working relationship could have on a match, very little was being done programmatically to actively establish and facilitate such a relationships within the matches. Given the dynamic and complicated nature of human relationships, it stands to reason that there is no one kind of parent mentor relationship that best serves the needs of all parents, mentors and youth. Instead what may matter more is placing greater attention on helping mentors and parents establish a relationship that best fits their desired roles and perceived needs within the mentoring process.

The Power of Mentoring

The field of youth mentoring has only just begun to explore the dynamic concept of parental involvement in youth mentoring. Keller's (2005) systemic model has made the significant contribution of concretizing the presence of parents in the dynamics of the mentoring relationship, highlighting the pathways of influence within this systemic approach. Fully understanding the role that parents play requires a closer examination of the positions of power implicit in the design and implementation of the youth mentoring model as designed. Mentoring programs (made up of agency administrators and programmatic staff) in this study seem to have defined what constitutes positive parental involvement in large part from practice experience. These constructs of parental

involvement reflect the values and culture of the agency itself, and dichotomize parental involvement into involved and uninvolved. Program staff then enacted this construct through the processes of match screening, intake, training, monitoring and support with mentors and parents. These constructs are further complicated by the positions of power that program staff, mentors and parents all have within the mentoring model. Though parents are perceived as powerful in their position as gatekeeper to the youth, this power is seen as volatile in that it can easily sabotage a mentoring match. Volunteer mentors however play a very special role in the mentoring model, as they are viewed as the primary means through which programs do their work to create positive youth outcomes for youth. Thus, programs maintain a particular sense of obligation to support mentors first in the match relationship, as their time and commitment are essential elements of the mentoring model.

In addition to the power dynamics that are created through the current design of the mentoring model, there are larger social constructs of class and race that must also be recognized as active processes in the dynamic and complex mentoring model. Mentoring programs put great effort into establishing relationships between mentors and youth, who often differ in race, class and culture from one another. Each of these families and mentors bring with them to the mentoring relationship diverse experiences and cultural values, which inform their outlook and approach toward one another. This becomes of great significance when we consider that a deficit view of poor families strongly persists in our society. Coupled with already existing tension that parents can challenge and be potential saboteurs to the mentoring relationship, it is difficult to imagine that program

staff and mentors are not influenced by these perceptions about parents, nor the larger

cultural beliefs about the kinds of families predominantly served by youth mentoring

programs. The deficit approach toward parents may be a key barrier to effectively

engaging families (Weis, et al., 2010) in mentoring.

Study Implications for Mentoring

The field of mentoring is in an opportune position to reevaluate and construct an

approach toward parental involvement that more closely aligns with the same strength-

based values that are being enlisted to engage mentored youth. Agencies have the

authority to develop agency-wide policies and practices that are deliberate in recognizing

and capitalizing on the positive power of parents for the benefit of mentored youth. The

entrenchment of a deficit perspective toward low-income families should be of particular

concern within the field of mentoring. State and national mentoring partnerships should

promote mentoring agencies to engage in a self-assessment of the internal philosophies

and ideologies about the parents and families they serve, from which mentoring program

models are constructed.

Further, mentoring partnerships should promote the full engagement of families

and parents served by mentoring programs in advisory capacity to ensure that the

perspectives parents whose children are being mentored are acknowledged and

incorporated in local mentoring program model. Programs need to evaluate whether their

program policies and practices are perpetuating a deficit view of parents and families,

particularly of low-income and single-parent families. These broad level

recommendations will likely require technical assistance and trainings to help agencies

begin the conversation about engaging parents as assets and evaluate how their program operations align with this perspective.

Based on these study finding programs may find opportunities to improve the positive impact of youth outcomes by implementing practices that expand on the concept of parental involvement. As this study demonstrated that parents are already involved in a variety of ways outside of the purview of mentors and program staff, programs should consider relying less on prescriptive, pre-defined roles for parents and instead work with parents and mentors to determine the kinds of roles and responsibilities that best-fit the needs of the mentoring match, for the good of the youth. Program should consider practices within their processes that actively capitalize on parents as a resource and asset in the youth-mentor relationship. This may require that programs enlist empowerment strategies to better engage parents in the process of developing best practices for parental involvement.

In addition to addressing the role of parents, study results also suggests the need to place greater attention to the parent-mentor relationship that develops, no matter how minimal in nature. Developing practice processes that enable matches to develop individualized plans could greater capitalize on the assets that parents and mentors bring to the mentoring relationship. Parents and mentors should be given the opportunity to discuss the kinds of expectations they have for the working relationship they must develop. This relationship is not one that should consists of a pre-determined level of communication or pre-defined boundaries between them, but instead be developed by parents and mentors together, facilitated by program staff. This may require additional

training and coaching for both mentors and parents in how to successfully collaborate as part of the mentoring model. Motivated by the hope and expectations and informed by practice experience program staff, mentors and parents can constructively work together to develop a plan that capitalizes on the strengths and assets off all toward the goal of maximizing the positive impact that the mentoring relationship can have on the youth.

Social Work Perspective

The presence of social workers in the mentoring model is one that extends back to the beginning of the youth mentoring movement. Social workers have continued to play important roles in mentoring programs, providing the front-line support to mentors and families in their mentoring matches. Given the specialized training and core values of the field, social work can offer valuable insight and direction to support a strength-based approach and empowerment approach toward parental involvement within the mentoring model. Social workers have the capacity to engage strategies that validate the position that parents play in the life of their child and support volunteer's efforts to mentor a youth and work with a family, all the while being cognizant of the ways in which all these individuals are impacted by social system and environment they are part of.

Limitations and Conclusion

The most significant limitation of this qualitative study is the limited generalizability of the findings, given the small sample of staff, parents and mentors involved and the singular nature of the program model studied (community-based mentoring). Study findings cannot be assumed to be similar across the vast number and types of mentoring programs that currently exists. It is also important to note that the self-

selective nature of the participants comprising the sample of this study, may also offer a unique perspective that is not reflective of the broad group of mentors, families and program staff from these two mentoring programs. Further, the proportion of staff interviewed was over representative of one agency (BBBSMB). Findings may not be indicative of how all agency staff members perceived parental involvement, nor the actual agency culture around the topic. These limitations warrant additional research to further examine the nature of parental involvement and the approach toward parents across the various types of mentoring program models. Research should also address how parental involvement, as well as the parent-mentor relationship can directly or indirectly impact youth outcomes from the mentoring relationship.

While this topic within the field of mentoring is not yet fully understood, this study does offer a detailed description of the roles that some parents play in the mentoring process and the perceptions of participants regarding the nature of the parent-mentor relationship. The findings here provide some insights into some ways in which the parent context may influence the quality of the mentor-youth relationship, in some cases by offering significant support for the mentor-youth dyad. The findings suggest that programs may need to pay greater attention to parent-mentor relationships, as parents and mentors in this study were largely navigating these relationships on their own and doing so with mixed success. By not attending to this contextual influence, programs may be missing opportunities to facilitate greater working relationships between parents and mentors that can ultimately support and potentially sustain a positive youth-mentoring relationship. Given the ultimate goal of maximizing the outcomes for youth through

mentoring, it best serves the field of mentoring to pursue a greater understanding of parental involvement and develop strategies and practices that can best capitalize on the strengths that parents can bring to the mentoring relationships that are being developed with their children.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Mentor & Parent UMP Interview Protocols

Community-Based Mentoring Process Study

MENTOR PRE-MATCH IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Introduction: I am very interested in how Big Sister / Big Brother relationships work, so I'd like to talk with you about yours. I have some questions to guide us, but I'm interested in whatever is on your mind about the relationship. While BB/BS stresses confidentiality about the life situation of Littles and their families, BB/BS has given permission for mentors to share this information, as you feel comfortable, for the purposes of this particular study. Whatever we discuss is confidential and will not be disclosed to your Little and your individual answers will not be shared with the BB/BS programs in a way that you could be identified. I have some questions to guide us, but I'm interested in whatever is on your mind about the relationship.

REASONS / MOTIVATIONS FOR BEING A BIG
What made you decide to become a Big Sister (BS) / Big Brother (BB)?
What about this form of volunteerism (1 to 1 mentoring) was appealing to you and why?
Why did you choose community based (versus school-based) mentoring?

HOPES & EXPECTATIONS ABOUT MENTORING
What are you hoping the relationship with your Little might be like?
What fears or concerns, if any, do you have about being a Big?
Who would be the "ideal" Little for you? (qualities, characteristics, interests)

PRE-MATCH KNOWLEDGE & OPINIONS ABOUT YOUR LITTLE
What do you know about your Little? (It is OK for you to share information the agency shared with you about your Little and his/her family, as the agency knows we are asking you about this and these interviews are confidential.)
Based on that information, in what ways do you think this Little IS going to be a good match for your?
In what ways might this Little NOT be such a good match for you?
Are there things that you wanted (e.g., preferences regarding where your Little lives, some aspect of his/her background or situation) but didn't ask for? Why not?
What kinds of things were important to you that he/she should be interested in or share in common with you?
What talents, hobbies, and interests were you hoping to share with your little?
What are you most looking forward to as you think about meeting your Little?
What challenges, if any, do you imagine coming up during the relationship?

RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS: IMPORTANCE FOR MATCH
How important is it to you that your background (racial, ethnic, economic) be similar to

or different from that of your Little?
How might ethnic / racial background, and language differences (if any) be a challenge in the relationship?
How might economic status differences be a challenge in the relationship?
What are some ways you might address these types of challenges in the relationship?

BIG'S PERCEPTION OF HIS/HER ROLE AND IMPORTANCE IN LITTLE'S LIFE
How do you see/understand your role or place in your Little's life?
What do you hope your Little will get out of this relationship?
In what ways do you imagine facilitating this happening?
In what ways can you imagine supporting your Little?
What kinds of support are most critical for kids served by BB / BS programs?
What are some ways you can imagine gaining your Little's trust?
What impact do you hope this relationship will have on your Little?
What impact do you think this relationship will have on you and your life?
How long do you anticipate this relationship lasting and why?
In your opinion, what difference does having a Big make in a child's life?
In your opinion what kind of impact can these types of programs have for children, their families and for mentors?

BIG'S PERCEPTION OF HIS/HER ROLE WITH LITTLE'S FAMILY?
What kind of relationship do you see having with your Little's parents / guardian?
What do you think will be most important in developing a relationship with your Little's parent / guardian?
What are some ways you can imagine gaining the trust of your Little's parent / guardian?
What questions or concerns, if any, do you have about the Little's parents/ family situation?

BIG'S EXPERIENCE WITH BB/BS AGENCY
In what ways has the BB / BS agency supported you in your preparation for being a Big?
Is there anything more they could do to support and nurture mentors in their relationships with Littles?
How prepared to be a Big do you feel going into the match meeting?
(ONLY Big Sister mentors) The Big Brother and Big Sister agencies here in Boston are separate, allowing each to develop gender-specific programming.
What difference do you think this has made in your experience so far?
How important is gender-specific programming to you? Why?
(BOTH BS/BB mentors) In what ways is it important to you and/or your Little to be of the same gender?
What difference might it make that you are both female/male?
Is there anything else you can think of that we haven't covered or would like to add?

Community-Based Mentoring Process Study

PARENT/GUARDIAN PRE-MATCH INTERVIEW

Introduction: I'm very interested in your experience and thoughts about getting your child involved with a BB/BS. Whatever we discuss is confidential and will not be disclosed to your child or your child's BS/BB. Also, no information will be provided to the BB/BS program in a way that you could be identified. I have some questions to guide us, but I'm interested in whatever is on your mind about the relationship

INITIAL IDEAS OF BB/BS
Whose idea was it to sign your child up for the BB/BS program?
Why did they think this might be a good idea?
What did you think of the idea at the time?
What do you think of the idea now? (Has your opinion changed?)
Did you have any concerns or reservations about signing your child up for a mentoring program and introducing a new person into their life? Do you still have those concerns?

HOPES & EXPECTATIONS
What are your hopes and expectations for your child being matched with a Big?
What do you want for your child?
What do you hope the relationship will be like?
What role do you hope the Big will play in your child's life?
What kinds of things would you like your child and his / her mentor to do together?
Who would be the "ideal" Big for your child? (qualities, characteristics, interests)

PRE-MATCH KNOWLEDGE & OPINIONS ABOUT THE BIG
Please tell me what you know about your child's BS/BB.
What do you think about what you know about your child's BS/BB match?
In what ways do you think this Big IS going to be a good match for your child?
In what ways do you think this Big IS NOT going to be a good match for your child?
Are there things that you wanted in a Big (e.g., preferences regarding where your Big lives, some aspect of his/her background or situation, some specific skill or set of experiences) but didn't ask for? Why not?
What are you most looking forward to as you think about meeting your child's Big?
What challenges, if any, do you imagine coming up during their relationship?

RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS: IMPORTANCE for MATCH
How important was it to you that your child's background (racial, ethnic, and economic) be similar to or different from that of his/her BB/BS?
How might ethnic / racial background, and language differences (if any) be a challenge in the relationship?
How might economic differences be a challenge in the relationship?

What would see you as your possible role in helping to address these types of challenges in the relationship?

PERSPECTIVE ON THE MATCH RELATIONSHIP: Goals, Their Role, Signs of Success

What do you feel is your role in your child's relationship with their BS/BB?
Are there things you feel you want to talk with your child's BS/BB about early on in their match?
Will you discuss with the Big what you want for your child?
How much and what kind of communication do you expect from the Big?
What kind of relationship do you see having with your child's Big?
How do you think this relationship will affect you and your family?
What role do you think the BS/BB will play in your family?
Do you have any concerns about what may come out of this relationship?
How will you know that this relationship is going well, or not going well?
How will you know that your child trusts his/her Big?
In your view, what difference will having a Big make in your child's life?
How long would you like this relationship to last?

PARENT'S EXPERIENCES WITH BB/BS AGENCY AND MENTORS

Are there things that an agency could do to be helpful to parents during this initial match?

(ONLY Big Sister parents) The Big Brother and Big Sister agencies here in Boston are separate, allowing each to develop gender-specific programming.
What difference do you think this has made in your experiences so far?
How important is gender-specific programming to you? Why?

(BOTH BS/BB parents) In what ways is it important to you that your child and his/her Big be of the same gender?
What difference might it make that they are both female/male?
Other Mentoring Relationships
Had you tried this kind of relationship for your child(ren) before?
How did those relationships meet or not meet your expectations?
How have these relationships influenced your expectations or hopes for this relationship?
Did you ever have a Big when you were a child?
Did you ever serve as a Big?
Tell me about the experiences you had.
Is there anything else you can think of that we haven't covered or that you would like to add?

Community-Based Mentoring Process Study

PARENT/GUARDIAN FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
12-MONTH

OVERALL EXPERIENCE WITH MENTORING
What has it been like for you to have your child participating in the BBBS program over the past year?
• Has the experience been what you had hoped it would be? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
• Have your thoughts and feelings about your child's Big changed over this past year? How?

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE BIG AND THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP
Please describe your child's relationship with his/her Big.
• What is this relationship like, from your perspective?
• What kinds of things do they do together?
• What has your child told you about the relationship?
• What makes this relationship different from other relationships with adults in your child's life?
• How would you characterize/describe the Big's role in your child's life?
• How do you think the Big feels about your child? How can you tell?
• How well do you think the Big knows your child?
In what ways do you think the Big is and is not a good match for your child?
• Has your perspective on this changed since they were first matched?
• What characteristics did you want the Big to have?
• Were there things that you wanted in a Big but didn't ask the agency for?

RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS: SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES ROLE IN RELATIONSHIP
What are some similarities in backgrounds between your child and her/his Big?
• Similarities in backgrounds and the ways they were raised?
• Similarities in racial & ethnic backgrounds/heritage?
• Similarities in class/economic backgrounds (neighborhoods, financial status,…)?
What are some differences in backgrounds between your child and her/his Big?
• Differences in backgrounds and the ways they were raised?
• Differences in racial & ethnic backgrounds/heritage?
• Differences in class/economic backgrounds (neighborhoods, financial status,…)?
How do you think these similarities and/or differences played out in your child's relationship with the Big?
• Any special opportunities these similarities/ differences have presented?
• Any challenges?

- How has/did the mentor dealt with these?
- Do you wish these similarities/differences were (had been) different?
- How important was it to you that the mentor understand your child's background and life experiences?
  - How important do you think this is/was to your child?

On a scale of 0 to 10 (0=not at all and 10= very much), how much do you feel the differences in backgrounds between your child and his/her Big mattered in their relationship?
- Why? Or what made you decide on that rating?

CHILD'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE BIG
How much do you think your child has enjoyed having a Big?
- How can you tell? (What lets you know whether and how much your child has enjoyed the experience? Specific signs, behaviors, events, etc)
How important is this relationship to your child? How can you tell?
- How does s/he feel about the Big?
- Are there things your child wishes could be different about the relationship with her/his Big?
Would you say that your child's relationship with her/his Big is close (emotionally; i.e. child feels connected to the Big)?
- How can you tell? What specific events or things has your child said to you?
- When did you first get the sense that your child was feeling close to or connected with the Big?
- If not, why not? What would have to happen for the relationship to become close?
Has there ever been a time when you know your child went to her/his Big for help or support?
- Please tell me about that time(s).
- What happened or was happening?
- How did you know about it?
- How did your child respond?
- How did you respond?
- How did this affect your child's relationship with the Big?
- How did this experience affect *your* relationship with your child's Big?
Please tell me about a time when you thought that things were going particularly well between your child and his/her Big?
- What happened or was happening?
- What did your child say to you about these events?
- What affect did this have on your child's relationship with the Big?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do (if anything)?
Most relationships experience some "bumps in the road" as two people get to know one

another and spend time together for many months

Can you tell me about a time when you noticed that your child had a concern with, didn't get along with, didn't like, was disappointed by or was in conflict with her/his Big.

- What happened or was happening?
- Did your child discuss it with you?
- How did you respond?
- Did the Big discuss it with you?
- How concerned did you feel about your child's relationship with his/her Big while this was happening?
- How did it get resolved? What happened?
- How do you think this experience affected your child's relationship with her/his Big?
- How did this experience affect *your* relationship with your child's Big?

Many BBBS relationships do not last a full year, as your child's has. What do think has helped make this relationship last as long as it has?

- Anything you think your child's Big has done to help make it last?
- Your child has done?
- Anything you think you have done?

IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE OF MENTOR IN <u>CHILD'S LIFE</u>

What difference, if any, has this relationship made in your child's life?

- How much do you think your child has benefited from having a Big?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child (positive or negative)?
- Changes in behaviors at home? Attitudes? Contribution to the family? Your relationship with this child?
- Any differences in attitudes towards or behaviors in school?
- Self-esteem?
- Future goals and aspirations (school and/or career/job related)?
- Relationships with peers?
- Relationships with other adults?
- Mood or general well-being?

What goals, if any, does your child's Big have for your child or for their relationship?

- How do you know about these goals?
- What do you think about them?
- Do you wish this were different in any way?

IMPACT & IMPORTANCE OF MENTOR IN <u>FAMILY'S LIFE</u>

What has it been like for *you* to have this Big in you and your child's life?

- Any challenges or surprises?
- What do you like best about your child having a Big? What do you like least?

What role does your child's Big play in your family?

How comfortable did you think your child's Big is around you and in your home?

PARENT'S RELATIONSHIP W/ BIG

How would you describe *your* relationship with your child's Big?
- How has the relationship changed over the course of your child's match?
- How did your relationship with the Big meet or not meet your expectations?

What kind of communication do you have with the Big?
- Is it what you have wanted it to be? How? If not what did you want? Do you wish this were different?

What has been your role in your child's relationship with their Big?
- What have you discussed with the Big about what you want for your child?

In what ways do you trust or not trust the Big?
- In what ways has the Big earned your trust?
- In what ways, if any, has the Big challenged or decreased your level of trust in him/her?

Just like there are bumps in the road in the Big/Little relationship, there can also be challenges that arise in the relationship between a parent and a Big.

Please tell me about one negative experience **you** have had (or one negative thing you had happen) with your child's Big.
- What happened?
- How did you respond?
- Did you and the Big discuss the issue? If so, who initiated the discussion and how did it go?
- How did it get resolved? What happened?
- What effect did this have on how you felt about your child's relationship with his or her Big?
- How concerned did you feel about your child's relationship with his/her Big while this was happening?
- How do you think this experience affected your child's relationship with her/his Big?

RELATIONSHIP ENDURANCE

How long did you think this relationship would last when your child was first matched?
- How long do you think it will last now?

SAME GENDER MENTORING (<u>FOR BIG SISTER MATCHES ONLY</u>)

What impact do you think having a male / female adult in your child's life serving in this role has had on your child?
- What difference does the fact that they are both male/female make in the relationship?

The Big Sister Agency of Boston is separate from the Big Brothers Agency, allowing it to offer gender-specific programming.

What difference do you think this has made in your child's experience?
- How important is gender-specific programming to you? Why or why not?

EXPERIENCE W/ AGENCY

What are some strengths and areas for improvement of the BB / BS programs?

- In what ways has the agency nurtured and supported your child's relationship with the Big?
- Did you feel the agency has adequately supported you and your child in this match? Why or why not?
- Were there some things you wish the agency had done differently?
- Are there things the agency could do to be more helpful to other parents in the program?

Is there anything you know now that you would have liked to have known going into this process?

- Is there anything that the agency has done that has been particularly helpful?

DIFFERENCE MENTORING MAY MAKE IN CHILDREN"S LIVES

In your view, what difference can having a Big make in a child's life?

- In your opinion, what kind of impact can these types of programs have for your child and your family?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS/FEELINGS

Is there anything else you can think of that we have not covered or that you would like to add?

Community-Based Mentoring Process Study

MENTOR END OF MATCH INTERVIEW

THOUGHTS & FEELINGS ABOUT MATCH ENDING
What is your understanding of why the match ended?
- Whose idea was it to end the match (yours, your Little's, your Little's Family, the agency)?
- How was the ending of the match handled?
- Do you wish it were handled differently?
How did you feel about the match ending?
- Did you hope the match would last longer?
- How do you think your Little felt about the decision?
- How do you think your Little's parent felt about the decision?
How has this match ending affected your view of yourself?
- Your view of mentoring?

EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES OF BEING A BIG
Please tell me about your experiences as a Big during this match relationship
- What was it like for you to be a Big?
- Was the experience what you expected/had hoped it would be? Why or why not?
How did you see/understand your role or place in your Little's life?
- What did you hope your Little would get out of this relationship?
What, if anything, were you hoping to accomplish in this relationship?
- Can you give me an *example* of one of the ways that you tried to facilitate this happening?
How have your hopes/expectations for this mentor relationship changed during the match relationship?
- What positive impacts do you think you have made or attempted to make in your Little's life

"FIVE-MINUTE" DESCRIPTION OF LITTLE
"I'd like to hear your thoughts about your Little, but instead of just asking you another question, I'd like for you to do this exercise.
In your own words and without my interrupting you with any questions or comments. I'd like you to speak for 5 minutes, telling me what kind of person your Little is and how the two of you got along together. Do you have any questions before I ask you to begin speaking?"
- *Follow-up questions AFTER the Big has spoken uninterrupted:*
- What did you think when you first met him/her?
- How would you describe him/her now?
- What did you like best about your Little?
- What did you like least?

- How do you think your Little feels about you?
- How would she/he describe you to me?

RELATIONSHIP AS A "GOOD" MATCH
In what ways do you think your Little was and was not a good match for you?
- How did your Little meet or not meet your hopes and expectations?
- Did your thoughts and feelings about this change over the time you were matched?

BIG'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LITTLE: CLOSENESS
How close did you feel to your Little?
- How well do you think you knew him/her?
- How well do you think s/he knew you?
Was there ever a time when you felt particularly close to your Little?
- **(If yes)** Can you tell me about that time? What happened or was happening?
- How did this experience affect your relationship with her/him?
Can you tell me about a challenging or difficult time in your relationship w/ your Little?
- What happened or was happening?
- How did you respond? How did she/he respond?
- Did you ask for advice or guidance from anyone? (e.g., your Little's parent? the BB/BS caseworker? A friend?
- How did this experience affect your relationship with your Little? How did this experience affect your relationship with your Little's family?

BIG'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LITTLE: TRUST
Do you feel that your Little trusted you?
- How could you tell?
Were there feelings, opinions, or life situations you think your Little would not share with you?
- If yes, why do you think this was the case?

BIG'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LITTLE: SUPPORT
In what ways did you try to support your Little?
- What types of support did you think were the most critical and why?
- What types of support do you think were the most important to your Little?
Were there times when you felt you really helped your Little?
- If yes, can you tell me about one of those times?
Was there a time when you thought your Little could have used your help but you felt it was best not to offer it or you offered your help and it was refused?
- If yes, can you tell me about one of those times?

BIG'S EXPERIENCE OF LITTLE'S WORLD
How would you describe your Little's family and your relationship with the family?
- What was the communication like between you and your Little's parent/guardian?

- How do you think your Little's parent/guardian saw your role in their child's life?
- How comfortable did you feel around your Little's family and in their home?

What role did your Little's parent play in your relationship with your Little?

- Do you wish this were different?
- What, if any, challenges occurred in your relationship with the Parent and/or family of the Little?
- What, if any, strengths did you notice about the family?

LITTLE'S EXPERIENCE OF BIG'S WORLD

What kind of relationship did your Little have with *your* family and friends?

- How often did s/he hang out in your neighborhood? Your home?
- How comfortable do you think your Little felt in these settings? How could you tell?

RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS: SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES THE ROLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP

What were some **similarities** in background (where you come from) between you and your mentee?

- Similarities in the way you were raised?
- Similarities in racial & ethnic backgrounds/heritage?
- Similarities in economic backgrounds (neighborhood, class)?

What were some **differences** in background between you and your mentee?

- Differences in the ways you were raised?
- Differences in racial & ethnic backgrounds/heritage?
- Differences in economic backgrounds (neighborhood, class)?

How much do you feel you understand your mentee's experiences related to her/his background (race, ethnicity, social class)?

- How important do you think it was to your mentee that you understand about this part of her/his life?
- **If background of mentor was different from mentees:** How might your relationship have been different if your mentee was from a background more similar to yours?
- **If background was similar:**
- How might your relationship have been different if your backgrounds had been more different?

Did you ever think about or reflect on your backgrounds?

- How comfortable were you with acknowledging and talking about these differences/similarities with your Little?
- How do you think your Little felt about these similarities/differences?

On a scale of 0 to 10 (0=not at all and 10= very much), how much do you feel the differences in backgrounds between you and your Little mattered in your relationship?

- Why? Or what made you decide on that rating?

IMPACT OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIP ON BIG'S LIFE AND LITTLE'S LIFE
What impact do you think this relationship had on your Little's life?
- Her/his sense of self?
- Experiences at school?
- Relationships with others, including with peers and adults?
- View of his/her present life situation and his/her future?

How has being a mentor affected you and your life?
- Your thoughts and feelings about volunteer mentoring?
- Your perceptions of people from similar background as your Little?
- Your view of your self?

Would you be a Big again?
- Would you do anything different next time? If Yes, What?
- What advice would you give to a Big just starting out in the program?

BIG'S EXPERIENCE WITH BB / BS AGENCY
What are some strengths and areas for improvement of the BB / BS programs?
- Did you feel the agency adequately prepared you to be a mentor?
- Why or why not?
- In what ways did the agency nurture and support your relationship with your Little?
- Were there some things you wish the agency had done differently?

(**ONLY Big Sister mentors**) What difference do you think gender-specific programming made in your relationship with your Little?
- How important was gender-specific programming to you? Why?

(**BOTH BS/BB mentors**) In what ways was it important to you and/or your Little to be of the same gender?
- What difference do think it made that you were both female/male?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS/ FEELINGS
- Is there anything else you can think of that we have not covered or that you would like to add?

Appendix B: Letter to Agency Directors

Dear ,

I am the Project Coordinator for the Understanding the Mentoring Process study led by Renee Spencer, Ed.D., and being conducted in partnership with your agency. I am also a doctoral student at the Boston University School of Social Work. For my dissertation research, I am interested in interviewing mentoring program staff members about the role of parents in formal youth mentoring relationships and am writing to ask whether you would be willing to allow some of the staff members in your agency participate to this study.

There is almost no research currently available that speaks to the role that parents play in their child's relationship with a volunteer mentor. Over the last two years I have had the good fortune to collaborate directly with some of your staff on the on the data collection for the Understanding Mentoring Project. I believe that there is much to be learned from them with regard to the role of parents in mentoring.

For my dissertation, I will be examining some of the qualitative interview data with parents and mentors already collected as a part of the Understanding Mentoring Project. This study, however, does not include the perspectives of mentoring agency staff. I am most interested in the experiences and perceptions of agency workers regarding parental involvement in the mentoring relationships. I would like to conduct a one-time interview with 2-3 agency staff who provide match support to community-based mentoring pairs. Maintaining the confidentiality of the parent and mentor study participants prohibits me from asking agency staff about specific matches, however, I think that the staff members? reflections on their experiences with families in their work will add a critical voice in this research. Data collection would involve a sample of no more than 3 program staff participating in one interview conducted by myself. The interview would last about 1 hour and take place in person at a location of their choosing. As a way to thank the staff member for their time they would receive a $15 gift certificate to their choice of either Target or Starbucks.

I am highly committed to adhering to ethical standards in research and will follow established norms for protecting the privacy of staff who choose to speak with me. No identifying information will appear on any of the data collected. Further, staff would need to participate voluntarily and be assured that their decision whether to participate will have no bearing on the their position at XXXXXXX. All information provided by staff in the interview will remain confidential and no identifying information will be reported in the analysis.

I do hope you will consider allowing some of your staff to participate. I think they have much to offer the field on this important topic and I would appreciate the opportunity to

listen to and learn from them. Please let me know if I can provide further information. I can be reached at (617)353-1407 or abdelmon@bu.edu Should you be interested in allowing your staff to participate, I would need a letter from you stating your support for this project for the Boston University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I would be happy to draft such a letter for you if you would find that helpful.

Thank you for your continued dedication to research and for your consideration of this new project.

Sincerely,

Antoinette Delmonico
PhD Candidate

Appendix C: Program Staff Recruitment E-mail

Hi ,

I'm looking to speak with about 5-8 mentoring program staff who support and work with mentoring pairs and their parents. I'm interested in learning more about the roles that parents play in mentoring relationships from the experiences and personal thoughts about parental involvement of program staff.

Participation involves a one-time in-person interview with me that will last about 1 hour and can take place just about any time and any place. As a thank you, participants can choose a $15 gift certificate to either Target or Starbucks.

I will be asking questions about the participants overall experience and perceptions about the roles that parents can play in mentoring relationships. I will not ask about specific matches, but instead want to know about general impressions and perceptions based on staff experience. Everything said during the interview is confidential and will not be shared with anyone at XXXXXXX agency.

Since there is very little information available about parental role in mentoring relationships, I believe that there is much to be learned from interviews with program staff. If you are interested in learning more about this study and want to participate, please contact me, Antoinette (Toña) Delmonico at abdelmon@bu.edu, or through my personal phone at 617-290-2963. Please contact me by June 25th, 2010. I'm happy to talk further about this research and answer any questions.

Thank you,

Toña Delmonico
School of Social Work
Boston University
617-353-1407

Appendix D: Agency Interview Guide

Can you describe your experience working with youth mentoring programs. What positions and roles have you played in these types of programs and what relationship have you had in dealing with families and parents?

When you think about mentoring matches that you have worked with, what role(s) does the Little's parent play in the mentoring relationship?	• What is the nature of your relationship with parents? What type of relationship do parents have with you? How has it changed? Do you wish it were different? • How would you describe the relationships parents have with their child's mentor? How has it changed? Do you wish it were different? • How have parents dealt with challenges that the mentoring relationship may experience? • How have parents supported the mentoring relationship? • Sometimes parents may appear to be a source of challenge to the relationships. Do you think this has ever been the case for the relationships you've worked with? Can you tell me about it?
What is the agency's official perspective on what role parents should play in the mentoring relationship?	• How does the agency convey this message to agency staff, volunteer mentors and parents? • What does the agency's perspective of parents in the mentoring relationship look like in practice? • Does the agency provide any resources to support parents in the mentoring relationship? • If you were to design an agency policy about parents in the mentoring relationship, what would it be?
What is your professional perspective of how parents are involved in the mentoring relationship?	• Should this be different? • What is your approach to interacting with parents in mentoring relationships?

Appendix E: Parent_Mentor Classification Coding

Classification Scheme	Text Example
Parental **Role**	**Interviewer:** So in terms of their relationship, what's your, your role then, in their relationship? **Parent:** My role is to make sure that [Little] continues to communicate with us, stay open with him and experience and enjoy it. And to, to support both of them, you know, and make sure it continues to grow the way that it is. And just sit back. **Interviewer:** Yeah. [laughs] Definitely. Um, what have you discussed with [BigBrother] about what you want for [Little]? **Parent:** Uh, school, college, uh, his overall uh, just him growin' up, the whole teenager thing, sometimes I, I don't get it, you know, he's a boy, I'm a lady- And so he fills me in on, on little things with that, um, oh man, [sighs] it's, it's a few things. But just that teenager, it's somethin' else. [laughs]
Parent Mentor Relationship	**Interviewer:** Ok. Um, so I know you did describe a little bit your relationship with your child's Big. Um, but can you just tell me a little bit more, do you only talk, you know, is it rarely? **Parent:** Yeah, I hardly talk to her at all. I just know she calls cause I see her number on the caller ID, or [Little]'s going out, or [Little]'s not home, and the first thing I know she's with her even if [Little] doesn't leave a message or tell me that she's gone [laughs]. I know she's with her and she's in safe hands. Interviewer: Ok. And has the relationship changed over the course of your child's match between you and [Big]? **Parent:** No. **Interviewer:** No? pretty much the same? **Parent:** Mmhm.

Appendix F: Analytic Memos

Memo Date and Related Data	Memo Comment
MEMO: BB1Yr_124 **2011-10-31**	The Big feels that the Mom values the relationship because it gives her an opportunity to not have to care for Little, or gets Little out of her way. The Mom does value the fact that the Big helps her out by taking the Little out and feeding him, etc., mom has 4 children and appreciates the help. Interesting case of two perspectives on the same issue, one is jilted toward a negative view of the mom and the other is a perspective that everyone can help. No Communication between parent and mentor.

Appendix G: Parent_Mentor Interview Codes

	Mentor Role	
PMRelationship	Affect toward Mentor	
PMRelationship	Affect toward Parent_Fam	
PMRelationship	Agency role in PMRelat	
PMRelationship	Character of PMRelat	
PMRelationship	Closeness with Family	
PMRelationship	Communication between PM	
PMRelationship	Expectations for PMRelat	
PMRelationship	P_M_relationship	
PMRelationship	Trust between PM	
PRole	P_Role_Match	
PRole	Parent Role in Relat	
PRole	PDirection for Match_goals	Being a Source of Information
PRole	PReflects appreciation_impact to Big	Being a Source of Information
PRole	PResource about Little for Big	Being a Source of Information
PRole	PRole Communicate with A	Being a Source of Information
PRole	PRole Communicate with B	Being a Source of Information
PRole	PRole_Support_Little'sFeelingsResponseMatch	Ensuring the Quality of Relationship for Youth
PRole	PRoleParenting_Safety_	Ensuring the Quality of Relationship for Youth
PRole	PExpectations for mentor_match	Ensuring Quality of Relationship for Youth
PRole	PMonitor Little Satisfaction	Monitoring Match Relationship
PRole	PMonitorFromAfar	Monitoring Match Relationship
PRole	PRole Hands-Off	Supporting M-Y Relationship Development
PRole	PSupport Comfort of Big	Supporting M-Y Relationship Development
PRole	PSupport Relat Development	Supporting M-Y Relationship Development

PRole	PApproves_Supports Big to Little	Supporting Match Outings
PRole	PGatekeeper	Supporting Match Outings
PRole	PSupport Match Activity_Timetogether	Supporting Match Outings

Appendix H: Line-by-line Program Staff Coding

P: Um, ... one ... lots of times, um, in the general sense, the example I gave is more of like a ...I mean, it happens, but it's not like ... most of the time. Most of the time parents are like ... acknowledge that they're ... they're dealing with a volunteer and they don't want to ask too much or they don't want to like, put a burden on the volunteer. So, if they're not showing up on time or if there is a small issue or if they'd rather see a change in activities, they're afraid to bring it up. (I: Mmm.) Um, and so I try to coach the parents that actually the Big wants to hear your feedback, you know, ...(I: Yeah.) wants this to be a good thing, so speak up ... um, similarly, around you know, money, spending money on outings. That comes up. (I: Mhm.) Where parents um, you know, don't want to burden their Big, but at the same time, if they don't have the money to spend, you know, that kind of comes up. (I: Sure.) So I ... one of the biggest things I try to coach parents on is keeping communication open with the Big. (I: Mhm.) Even if things are going fantastic ... you know, maybe not every outing, but once every six weeks, you know, try to touch base with the Big. (I: Mhm.) And share feedback, connect to each other. Cause even if things are going great now with a Little who's eight and they're just going to the park and playing basketball, four years down the road when he's twelve, you know, and having, I don't know, pre-adolescent issues come up (I: Yeah.) if mom and Big didn't have that relationship to start with, it will be harder to work together (I: Yeah.) through that more challenging time in the match, so.

I: Yeah. And how [inaudible] sort of about, that there's ... the range ... the age of the youths, the Little (P: Mhm.) in the match and have you seen that that influ ... or how have you seen that influences the role that parents could play? (P: Right.) The [inaudible] is that different?

P: Right. Definitely, although I've seen parents of eight year olds expect too much of their eight year olds (I: Mmm.) to kind of keep up communication. The concept of like 'oh this is between them.' (I: Mhm.) This is the Big ... you know, like, maybe the parent got the kid involved because they're really busy and trying to do too much and they don't have the time to invest in ... calling them a scheduling something. (I: Right.) So they're ... so on the one extreme I guess, they can put too much responsibility, so coaching on like, well actually, we can't really expect, you know, your son to call ... he

- ⚙ Parent communication challenged by fear of burdening Big
- ⚙ Parent not comfortable talking about $ with Big
- ⚙ Parent-Big realtionship is needed at foundation in case something between Big/Little falls through
- ⚙ Parent poorly relies on younger child to facilitate communication/scheduling with Big

Appendix I: Program Staff Code Category Themes

(Reduced from 457 'line-by-line' coding):

1) Agency – Model for Mentoring

2) "Goodness if Fit" in Mentoring Match

3) Agency Identified: Important Factors in the PM relationship for a strong-match

4) Agency- Mentor Relationship

5) Agency-Guardian Relationship

6) Agency Role in Parent-Mentor Relationship

7) Parent-Mentor Relationship

8) Agency identified: Role of Guardian

9) Agency Focus on Parents & Parent Engagement

10) Staff ideas/Suggestions

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