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Natural And Formal Mentors Among Youth In Foster Care: How Do Mentor Type And Relationship Dynamics Explain Variance In The Quality Of The Mentoring Relationship?

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Natural And Formal Mentors Among Youth In Foster Care: How Do Mentor Type And Relationship Dynamics Explain Variance In The Quality Of The Mentoring Relationship?

Abstract

Due to histories of maltreatment, living instability, and relational disruptions, youth in foster care are at increased risk for experiencing poorer well-being outcomes as compared to their non-foster peers. However, research suggests that the presence of a caring, supportive nonparental adult, such as a mentor, may function as a protective factor, offsetting some of the risk that these vulnerable youth face. Research identifies a positive association between mentored youth and improved psychosocial, behavioral, and academic outcomes, and greater effects are associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, leading researchers to investigate for whom and under what circumstances such relationships may be present. Among youth in foster care, both naturally occurring and programmatically matched, formal mentoring relationships have been investigated, though past studies have not explored how mentor type or relationship dynamics may explain variance in the quality of mentoring relationships for this population. Using survey data from 444 natural and formal mentors and interview data from 8 high and low scoring natural and formal mentors, this dissertation uses mixed methods to answer the research questions: To what extent do mentor type and relationship dynamics explain variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship for adolescent and emerging adult youth in and aging out of foster care, controlling for demographic characteristics? What barriers and facilitators of a quality mentoring relationship do natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care experience and identify? Findings from this study indicate that naturally occurring mentoring relationships were associated with longer mentoring relationships, whereas programmatically supported, formal mentors were associated with higher perceived efficacy. Internal dynamics of closeness and compatibility were positively associated with characteristics of quality relationships, such as longer relationships and more frequent and consistent contact. External dynamics, such as interference (i.e., personal/logistical stressors) decreased the length of the mentoring relationship. Finally, mentoring relationships among youth in foster care tended to benefit from a primary growth-focused component with an accompanying fun-focus. This study presents these findings and highlights future research and practice implications in order to promote quality-mentoring relationships among youth in foster care.

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NATURAL AND FORMAL MENTORS AMONG YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE: HOW DO MENTOR
TYPE AND RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS EXPLAIN VARIANCE IN THE QUALITY OF THE
MENTORING RELATIONSHIP?

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DEDICATION

To the mentors who encourage, support, and commit to young people in and aging out of foster care. Your work is so important.

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I would like to first thank my mentor, advisor, dissertation chair, and most importantly friend, Johanna Greeson. Being a student of Johanna's has been among the richest and most meaningful aspects of my PhD experience. Johanna has been an excellent mentor and emulates the qualities that her own research identifies as fundamental to quality mentoring relationships: trusting, accepting, reliable, and encouraging. She provides the support that research identifies as critical in mentoring relationships: advice and information, role modeling, emotional support, concrete support, and facilitating expanded opportunities. For all of this, thank you. I will forever admire Johanna's passionate commitment to her research and her open embrace of emerging scholars.

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ABSTRACT

NATURAL AND FORMAL MENTORS AMONG YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE: HOW DO MENTOR TYPE AND RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS EXPLAIN VARIANCE IN THE QUALITY OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP?

Allison E. Thompson

Johanna K.P. Greeson

Due to histories of maltreatment, living instability, and relational disruptions, youth in foster care are at increased risk for experiencing poorer well-being outcomes as compared to their non-foster peers. However, research suggests that the presence of a caring, supportive nonparental adult, such as a mentor, may function as a protective factor, offsetting some of the risk that these vulnerable youth face. Research identifies a positive association between mentored youth and improved psychosocial, behavioral, and academic outcomes, and greater effects are associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, leading researchers to investigate for whom and under what circumstances such relationships may be present. Among youth in foster care, both naturally occurring and programmatically matched, formal mentoring relationships have been investigated, though past studies have not explored how mentor type or relationship dynamics may explain variance in the quality of mentoring relationships for this population. Using survey data from 444 natural and formal mentors and interview data from 8 high and low scoring natural and formal mentors, this dissertation uses mixed methods to answer the research questions: To what extent do mentor type and relationship dynamics explain variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship for adolescent and emerging adult youth in and aging out of foster care, controlling for demographic characteristics? What barriers and facilitators of a quality mentoring relationship do natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care experience and identify? Findings from this study indicate that naturally occurring mentoring relationships were associated with longer mentoring relationships, whereas programmatically supported, formal mentors were associated with higher perceived efficacy. Internal dynamics of closeness and compatibility were positively associated with characteristics of quality relationships, such as longer relationships and more frequent and consistent contact. External dynamics, such as interference (i.e.,

personal/logistical stressors) decreased the length of the mentoring relationship. Finally, mentoring relationships among youth in foster care tended to benefit from a primary growth-focused component with an accompanying fun-focus. This study presents these findings and highlights future research and practice implications in order to promote quality-mentoring relationships among youth in foster care.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over 400,000 children and youth reside in out-of-home foster care in the United States, nearly a third of whom are aged 13 and older (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Due to their histories of maltreatment, living instability, and relational disruptions, foster youth are at increased risk for experiencing poorer outcomes across key well-being domains as compared to their peers in the general population. Examples of such outcomes include poorer physical health and academic performance as well as increased contact with behavioral health care systems (Auslander et al., 2002; Blome, 1997; Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Farruggia, Greenberger, Chen, & Heckhausen, 2006). Although these challenges are great, they are not insurmountable. Indeed, resilience research supports the notion of “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptations or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228), and global factors associated with resilience comprise both internal assets (e.g., a positive view of self, self-regulation skills, motivation to succeed) as well as ecological factors, including a connection to a caring and competent adult other than a parent, such as a mentor (Masten, 2001; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003).

Researchers posit that mentoring may serve as a protective mechanism for vulnerable youth (Greeson, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2013), and studies suggest a positive relationship between the presence of a mentor and improved well-being outcomes among youth in foster care (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan, & Lozano, 2008; Greeson, Usher, & Grinstein-Weiss, 2010; Munson & McMillen, 2009). Although a growing number of studies demonstrate the benefits of mentoring among vulnerable youth, the effect size, or strength of the impact, for general mentoring programs remains low to moderate, though greater effect sizes have been associated with higher quality

mentoring relationships, particularly among youth with higher environmental risk such as those in foster care (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Nakkula and Harris (2013) define relationship quality as “the characteristics of relationships between adults and youth that are specific to the mentoring experience and thought to directly and substantially influence the mentee’s outcomes” (p. 45). This definition of quality mentoring relationships contains two key components: characteristics of the relationships and youth mentees’ outcomes. Research suggests that characteristics of quality mentoring relationships include the duration of the mentoring relationship, the frequency and consistency of contact, and the presence of perceived mentor efficacy, and these characteristics are positively associated with improved youth outcomes, such as psychosocial functioning and academic outcomes (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005; Spencer, Collins, Ward, & Smashnaya, 2010).

Research also investigates the dynamics that may influence the quality of mentoring relationships (i.e., those that are meaningful and endure over time with consistent and frequent contact and lead to improved outcomes). Most of this research primarily focuses on the dyad’s perceived feelings of closeness, though Nakkula and Harris (2013) suggest that the quality of the mentoring relationship is dependent upon two interrelated constructs: (1) the internal dynamics of the dyadic relationship (e.g., perceived relational compatibility, closeness), *and* (2) the external dynamics not directly influenced by the pair (e.g., programmatic support and personal/logistic stressors, or interference). Quality mentoring relationships are those characterized by higher degrees of internal closeness and compatibility as well as increased programmatic support and decreased stressors. Furthermore, Nakkula and Harris (2013) suggest that the purpose, or structure, of the mentoring relationship moderates the relationship between the dyad’s

perceived closeness and the quality of the relationship. Simply stated, what pairs focus on impacts the strength of what they experience, and dyadic relationships focused on *fun* tend to be characterized by a greater sense of perceived closeness as compared to more *growth-focused* relationships (Nakkula & Harris, 2010). For example, relationships characterized by a high degree of *fun* generally include more activities that are enjoyable to the youth (e.g., going to the movies, hiking, basketball) and are conducted for the sake of spending time together, whereas relationships with a stronger *growth-focus* may include more activities that aim to improve a particular skill or quality for the youth (e.g., homework help, anger management). However, when the relationship focus includes mutual sharing or disclosure, the closeness of relationships characterized by fun increases even more, and relationships characterized by a growth-focus also become closer. In other words, among relationships focused on fun and among those focused on growth, the practice of sharing between the mentor and mentee tends to strengthen the closeness of the dyad and thereby also strengthen the overall quality of the mentoring relationship (Nakkula & Harris, 2010).

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Quality Mentoring Youth Relationships

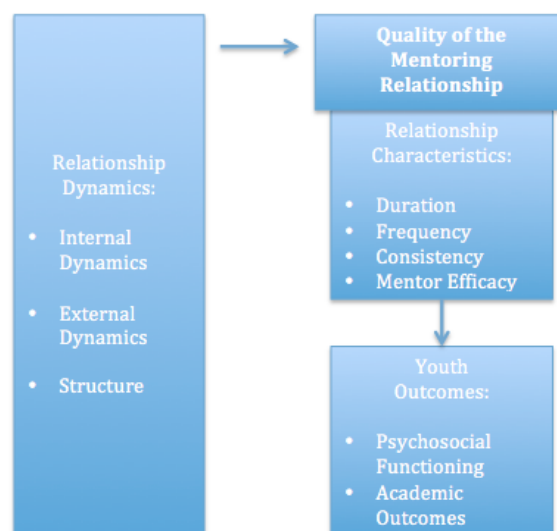


Figure 1 contains a theoretical framework for quality youth mentoring relationships. In sum, the internal and external relationship dynamics as well as the structure of the mentoring relationship may influence quality mentoring relationships, as defined by relationship characteristics (e.g., frequency/consistency of contact, length of relationship, and mentor efficacy) that lead to improved youth outcomes (e.g., psychosocial functioning, academic outcomes).

The relationship dynamics of perceived internal closeness, external dynamics, and structure of the mentoring relationship, which together contribute to the quality of the mentoring relationship, may present unique opportunities and challenges for certain types of mentoring relationships among youth in foster care. For example, the internal dynamics associated with quality mentoring, such as perceived close, compatible, trust-based relationships, may be challenging for youth in foster care to achieve with unfamiliar, formally matched mentors (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters), because many youth in foster care have experienced familial and relational disruptions and maltreatment, perhaps making it difficult to form trust-based bonds with new adults (Britner, Randall, & Ahrens, 2013). As such, supportive and caring nonparental adults, which youth self-select from within their social networks, sometimes referred to as natural mentors, may be better positioned to form such close bonds with youth in foster care as compared to formal mentors (Greeson, 2013). Thus, understanding how foster youth experience close mentoring relationships may be particularly useful for formal mentoring programs that may struggle with facilitating close relationships for youth in foster care.

Although the inherent closeness associated with many natural mentoring relationships among youth in foster care may present an advantage over formal mentoring, there are also potential challenges associated with natural mentoring among

foster youth. For example, because foster youths' communities of origin are often disadvantaged (Barth, Wildfire, & Green, 2006; Roberts, 2002), their self-nominated natural mentors may also be more likely to live or work in disadvantaged, stressed environments. Thus, the external factors contributing to the quality of the mentoring relationship, such as logistical and personal stressors, may be more significant among natural mentors than volunteer, formal mentors, who tend to come from less economically stressed communities (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Because natural mentoring generally occurs organically outside of a formal mentoring program, natural mentors of youth in foster care may also be less likely to receive programmatic support, and garnering parental, or caregiver, buy-in without programmatic outreach may prove challenging for naturally mentored youth in out-of-home foster care placements.

No studies to date have yet explored which type of mentor (i.e. natural versus formal) or which relationship dynamics (i.e., internal closeness, external stressors, or structure of the relationship) may be associated with a higher quality mentoring relationship for youth in foster care, though such research may be valuable in understanding how to better support mentoring, a potential protective mechanism among youth in foster care. Thus, this study seeks to answer three primary research questions: (1) To what extent does mentor type explain variance in relationship characteristics associated with quality mentoring relationships for adolescent and emerging adult youth in and aging out of foster care, controlling for demographic characteristics (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, and gender of the mentor and mentee, mentor educational level, mentor geographic residence, and mentor socioeconomic status)? (2) To what extent do the closeness of the dyadic relationship, the external dynamics, and the structure of the mentoring relationship explain variance in relationship characteristics associated with quality mentoring relationships among adolescent and emerging adult youth in and aging

out of foster care, controlling for mentor type and the aforementioned demographic characteristics? (3) What barriers and facilitators of quality mentoring relationships do natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care experience and identify?

Background and Significance

Quality of the mentoring relationship. For more than a decade, researchers have been interested in better understanding relationship characteristics associated with mentoring that leads to the achievement of successful psychosocial, academic, and behavioral outcomes for youth (Rhodes, 2002). Empirical studies among youth mentees in the general population suggest that quality mentoring relationships, or those associated with the achievement of positive mentee outcomes, are characterized by greater longevity, more frequent and consistent contact, and higher degrees of mentor-perceived efficacy (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Karcher et al., 2005; Spencer et al., 2010). For example, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) analyzed data from a randomized control trial of formal mentoring programs among 1,138 urban adolescents. They found that relationship duration predicted positive youth outcomes. Specifically, youth who were in a mentoring relationship that lasted longer than a year experienced the largest number of improvements as compared to mentored youth in relationships that did not endure over time. In another study of 1,101 mentors from 98 mentoring programs across the nation, frequency of contact, or the number of hours spent together per month, was positively associated with mentoring relationships that led to improved youth outcomes (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). Findings revealed that the strongest mentoring relationships were those in which the mentors spent greater than ten hours a month with their mentees, whereas the weakest relationships were characterized by

fewer than 3 hours per month spent together. Relatedly, DuBois and Neville (1997) collected monthly data over six months among 67 mentors from two programs and found that more extensive and consistent contact between mentors and mentees was positively associated with improved mentor ratings of perceived benefits for youth. Finally, Karcher and colleagues (2005) surveyed 63 formally matched mentors and found a positive relationship between mentors' self-efficacy and the quality of the mentoring relationship, concluding that "mentors whose self-efficacy can be enhanced may experience or perceive increased relationship quality" (p. 107). These studies suggest that the quality of mentoring relationships may be understood in part by examining relationship duration, frequency and consistency of contact, and mentor-perceived efficacy.

Internal dynamics of the mentoring relationship. Rhodes' (2002) developmental model of youth mentoring represents a seminal contribution to the field, as it identifies dynamics that may influence the establishment of quality mentoring relationships, or those that are perceived to be meaningful and endure over time with consistent and frequent contact and lead to positive youth outcomes. Rhodes (2002) suggests that quality-mentoring relationships are predicated on the presence of a close, trust-based relationship that is characterized by "a sense that one is understood, liked, and respected. Without some connection, the dynamics that make mentoring relationships effective are unlikely to ever occur. Adolescents often describe feeling safe in expressing their feelings and thoughts to their mentors. In this nonjudgmental, nonthreatening context they can begin to think critically about their connections to the world and their identity within it" (Rhodes, 2002, p. 36). In other words, mentoring relationships characterized by internally perceived closeness may be associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, leading to improved mentee wellbeing outcomes.

Indeed, the notion of human development within a relational context is not a new idea and was first postulated by Harry Stack Sullivan (1938) in the early part of the twentieth century. His interpersonal theory of personality suggests that personality development occurs within the context of close, significant relationships, and such interconnectedness is necessary for healthy human growth and development. Bowlby (1977), the father of attachment theory, further specified the relational conditions under which optimal development occurs, that is within the context of a close, affectional bond with “some other differentiated and preferred individual who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser” (p. 203). By the latter part of the twentieth century, Ainsworth (1989) began to explore the types of individuals who may be best positioned to provide this bond through which healthy development occurs, suggesting that though there is a need among infants for early attachment with a primary caregiver, this requirement for attachment extends throughout the life course. In fact, throughout various developmental stages, the need for a “differentiated and preferred individual” remains, though the person filling the role need not be a parent or caregiver (Ainsworth, 1989). Indeed, for some youth, this person may be a mentor.

Building off of these earlier theories, Rhodes (2002) suggests that the presence of a strong, close mentee/mentor bond is associated with a quality mentoring relationship, through which the proximal outcomes of social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development are realized, which in turn may lead to the achievement of distal outcomes of interest across psychosocial, academic, and behavioral domains. Mentoring relationships that are perceived to be close by the dyad may be more likely to endure over time and may be characterized by increased and consistent contact between the mentee and mentor, providing more opportunity for the mentor to influence youth outcomes (Spencer et al., 2010). Within the context of a quality mentoring

relationship, Rhodes (2002) theorizes that positive social-emotional development occurs when mentors model caring, emotional regulation, and effective communication as well as provide support. Within the relational context, mentees learn these skills as well as learn to successfully navigate healthy adult relationships. As such, for youth with histories of poor adult relationships, helpful mentors can actually provide a *corrective experience*, meaning that they can offer a positive relationship that may help to rectify negative notions of self and others derived from past unsatisfactory relationships (Rhodes, 2002; Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2005). Cognitive development may occur as the mentor exposes the youth to new ideas and ways of thinking, contributing to an expanded view of the world. Finally, identity development may occur through mechanisms similar to Cooley's (1972) *looking glass self*, suggesting that one's identity is largely shaped by one's perceptions of how they are viewed by people in their close environments. Thus, Rhodes (2002) suggests that mentors have the opportunity to reflect back more positive images of mentees as well as help to expand mentees' conceptions of their current and future selves. Each of these social-emotional, cognitive, and identity development processes work in concert with each other over time to impact more concrete outcomes of interest (e.g., academic performance, risky behaviors, social relationships).

External dynamics of the mentoring relationship. Although Rhodes emphasizes the central importance of an internally close, trust-based dyadic bond, her theory acknowledges that the mentoring relationship is also influenced by environmental factors, or external dynamics, such as programmatic support and family and community context. Likewise, additional theory corroborates the notion that relationship development occurs within an ecological, or environmental, context. For example, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory proposes that the interaction of five

environmental systems influence the quality of individually experienced relationships. Specifically, the first system, the microsystem, contains relationships that most directly impact a young person, such as a close, trust-based relationship with a mentor. However, Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests that there are four additional systems, all which potentially influence the quality of relationships within the young person's microsystem. For example, the mesosystem contains relationships between members of the youth's microsystem that can impact the youth (i.e., the mentor and the youth's parents), and the exosystem encompasses settings that may affect members of the youth's microsystem, which may indirectly affect the youth. For example, the youth's mentor may be regularly required to work overtime, and the toll of the extra work hours may impact the frequency or consistency of contact that the mentor is able to have with the youth. The macrosystem refers to structural factors that may influence the youth and the mentor (e.g., poverty, disadvantaged communities of origin), and such environmental stressors may have an impact on the quality of the dyadic relationship (e.g., mentor needs to work multiple jobs, financial stress and burden experienced by the mentor, frustration in unemployment). Finally, the chronosystem includes socio-historical circumstances and events that shape the larger environment in which the mentoring relationship takes place (i.e., histories of maltreatment, relational loss, living instability).

Although both Rhodes' mentoring model and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory give voice to the importance of environmental factors in the development of interpersonal and mentoring relationships, the vast majority of research investigating the quality of youth mentoring relationships exclusively examines the dyad's *internal* dynamics (e.g., closeness, compatibility), neglecting to measure or understand the role of the environment in which youth mentoring relationships are situated (Nakkula & Harris, 2013). Drawing from the field of social work's fundamental *person-in-*

environment framework (Hare, 2004; Weiss-Gal, 2008), it may be sensible to examine both internal and external dynamics that together may impact the quality of the mentoring relationship.

The work of Nakkula and Harris (2010; 2013) has moved the mentoring field forward in conceptualizing and understanding the quality of the mentoring relationship in a way that is consistent with a person-in-environment lens, which suggests that individual perception, experience, and behavior are most fully understood within the context of various aspects of the individual's environment (e.g., community, economic, political, spiritual, familial, physical) (Hare, 2004; Weiss-Gal, 2008). Nakkula and Harris' *Mentoring Relationship Quality* (MRQ) framework (2013) posits that the quality of the mentoring relationship is best understood by considering three inter-related dimensions: (1) the internal dynamics (i.e., the perceptions of the mentor and mentee in regard to closeness and compatibility), (2) the external dynamics (i.e., factors that impact the relationship and are not controlled by the dyad), and (3) the structure/purpose of the relationship (i.e., what the dyad focuses on and what they do together).

Structure or purpose of the mentoring relationship. Drawing from a six year longitudinal mixed methods study that collected mentee data from 513 matches and mentor data from 579 matches from the Yavapai Big Brother Big Sister program in Prescott, Arizona, Nakkula and Harris (2010) developed their framework to elucidate components of the internal dynamics, external dynamics, and relationship structure that together contribute to the quality of a mentoring relationship. They conceive of the internal dynamics as those that build and shape closeness (i.e., connectedness, authenticity, compatibility, and intimacy) between the mentor and mentee (Nakkula & Harris, 2013). The external dynamics of the relationship, or factors outside of the dyadic relationship that influence it, include programmatic support (i.e., mentor training,

supervision, structured activities), parental and familial support (i.e., mentee's and mentor's support networks), parental engagement, and interference (i.e., mentor circumstances or stressors that vie for the mentor's time, attention, and resources) (Nakkula & Harris, 2013). The structure of the mentoring relationship is conceptualized on a continuum, with one extreme characterizing relationships that tend to be more youth-focused and *fun* and the other extreme characterizing relationships that tend to be more mentor-prescriptive and *growth-focused* (i.e., the mentor is actively working to help the mentee improve in an area) (Nakkula & Harris, 2010). Interestingly, relationships focused on fun tend to be highly correlated with internal perceptions of closeness whereas relationships that are growth focused to a higher degree tend to negatively correlate with closeness. However, a third marker that falls on the middle of the relationship structure continuum is the notion of *sharing*, which refers to mutual disclosure between the mentor and mentee. In other words, mentors who share various aspects of their lives may talk with their mentees about their family, job, and other personal stories. The concept of *sharing* moderates and increases the strength of the relationship between fun and closeness as well as increases the strength of the relationship between growth-focus and closeness. A similar pattern has been found in other corroborating studies examining the relationship between structure and the quality of the mentoring relationship (e.g., Keller & Pryce, 2012).

Mentor type among youth in foster care. The theories and frameworks described above elucidate internal, external, and structural dynamics that may impact quality youth mentoring relationships. In sum, mentoring relationships characterized by internally perceived closeness and strong external supports, as well as fewer environmental stressors, may be associated with greater longevity, more frequent and consistent contact, and higher degrees of mentor efficacy. Given this information, an

investigation is warranted regarding how to best promote high quality mentoring relationships for youth in foster care. A closer look into naturally occurring and programmatically supported, formal mentoring relationships may provide insight into this query. Natural mentors are supportive, caring adults whom youth self-select from within their existing social networks, and formal mentors are unfamiliar volunteer adults who are matched with youth through a program. Each of these types of mentoring has potential strengths and challenges that may impact the quality of the mentoring relationship for youth in foster care.

From Rhodes' developmental model of youth mentoring (2002), we know that the establishment of a close, trust-based bond between the youth and the mentor may be vital to the realization of successful youth outcomes achieved through a quality mentoring relationship. However, Greeson (2013) suggests that for youth in foster care, the establishment of this bond may be challenging to achieve with formally matched mentors, because youth in foster care have encountered layers of loss, making it potentially difficult to form new trust-based bonds with unfamiliar adults. Thus, she posits that natural mentoring may be a better fit for foster youth, as it relies on the youth to self-select and identify a close relationship with a caring adult. Because these relationships exist organically, they are not *pressured* to form quickly and under artificial circumstances prescribed by adults, which may be the case for many formal mentoring programs. Furthermore, because these relationships do not originate through a program, they may be more likely to endure over time. Thus, natural mentoring is inherently a youth-led process and shifts the decision-making power from adults to youth. For foster youth, this may be uniquely important, as many foster youth regularly experience disempowerment throughout their involvement with child welfare. Greeson (2013) further draws from relational-cultural theory to argue that the achievement of

growth-focused activities (e.g., independent living skills) best occurs within the context of a close relationship, such as that with a natural mentor, as opposed to the dominant child welfare practice of teaching youth these skills within a classroom-based setting. Further, natural mentoring seeks to strengthen youth's social networks and communities, thereby offering a culturally competent and sensitive approach to mentoring foster youth.

Although there is strong theoretical support for natural mentoring, as well as a growing base of empirical research (discussed below), there are several potential challenges inherent to natural mentoring among youth in foster care that deserve attention. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (1994) helps to contextualize the dyadic relationship within a series of interrelated ecological systems, suggesting an impact of the environment on the growth and development of a quality mentoring relationship. Indeed, some studies suggest that foster youth may have fractured social support networks and limited social capital as compared to their non-foster peers (Avery, 2010), and studies indicate that nearly half of all youth with foster care histories do not report the presence of a natural mentor while in foster care (Ahrens et al., 2008; Greeson et al., 2010). Additionally, the communities of origin for youth in foster care are typically disadvantaged and economically distressed (Barth, Wildfire, & Green, 2006; Roberts, 2002). Because youth nominate natural mentors from within their social support networks and communities, many of their natural mentors may come from the same economically distressed communities. Thus, natural mentors of youth in foster care may face added stressors associated with the structural and environmental challenges of the communities in which they reside, vying for their time, energy, and resources and potentially interfering with the mentoring relationship. Finally, because natural mentoring relationships exist organically, most are not programmatically supported. Thus, most

natural mentors do not receive mentor training, nor do they generally have programmatic support in navigating the mentoring experience.

In sum, the environmental challenges associated with natural mentoring among youth in foster care may reflect possible advantages of formal mentoring programs. For example, volunteer formal mentors tend to come from less economically distressed communities (Grossman & Tierney, 1998) and thus may have fewer external stressors. Also, programs may provide training and ongoing support to the dyads. Additionally, formal mentors may offer foster youth access to additional and new social networks and communities. Due to more environmental support and potentially fewer stressors, formal mentors may be better positioned to achieve more frequent and consistent contact than natural mentors. Thus, more research is needed to understand how mentor type may explain variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship, as natural mentoring may be associated with increased internally perceived closeness, while formal mentoring may be associated with more environmental supports and fewer environmental stressors.

Empirical literature. The empirical literature contains studies examining both naturally occurring and formally matched mentoring relationships among youth in foster care. Thus, the following section draws upon the theories previously discussed to further explore how quality-mentoring relationships are achieved among youth in foster care.

Natural mentoring among youth in foster care. A growing number of studies have examined the association between the presence of a natural mentor and improved life outcomes for older foster youth or foster care alumni. In sum, studies indicate that foster youth and alumni with natural mentors are more likely than foster youth and alumni without natural mentors to experience improved psychosocial, academic, health and behavioral outcomes (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016). Specifically, studies

utilizing nationally representative samples have found that naturally mentored foster care alumni are more likely than foster care alumni without natural mentors to report favorable overall health and are less likely to report suicidal ideation, having received a diagnosis of a sexually transmitted infection, and having hurt someone in a fight in the past year (Ahrens et al., 2008). In addition, these naturally mentored former foster youth are more likely than former foster youth without natural mentors to report greater assets and income expectations (Greeson et al., 2010). Other studies using moderately sized samples in geographically limited sites suggest that foster youth with natural mentors are more likely than foster youth without natural mentors to complete high school or obtain a GED and are less likely to experience homelessness (Collins et al., 2010). Naturally mentored foster youth are also less likely than foster youth without natural mentors to exhibit depressive symptoms, experience stress, and are more likely to be satisfied with life (Munson & McMillen, 2009).

Qualitative studies provide insight into the salient features and characteristics of natural mentors and natural mentoring relationships as well as the kinds of supports these relationships provide among youth in foster care. In sum, foster youth describe natural mentors as safe and compassionate adults, using words such as trusting, loving, caring, respectful, empathetic, and like a parent (Greeson & Bowen, 2008; Haas et al., 2014; Munson et al., 2010). Natural mentoring relationships appear to be internally perceived by foster youth as close and meaningful and are described as consistent and authentic in nature, often lasting over long periods of time (Greeson & Bowen, 2008; Munson et al., 2010). The types of support provided by natural mentors to foster youth include advice and information, role modeling, emotional support, concrete resources,

and facilitating expanded opportunities (Ahrens et al., 2011; Greeson et al., 2010; Haas et al., 2014; Munson et al., 2010).

Formal mentoring among youth in foster care. Similar to the outcome studies investigating *natural* mentoring among foster youth, studies examining *formal* mentoring among foster youth also reveal improved psychosocial and academic functioning among mentored foster youth. For example, one study utilizing a subset of data collected from a national, rigorous evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) found that compared to foster youth without a formal BBBSA mentor, foster youth with a BBBSA mentor showed improvements in their social skills as well as greater comfort and trust with others (Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999). Another study utilizing secondary data among a moderately sized sample of foster youth found that youth who received therapeutic mentoring (i.e., the use of mentors who have backgrounds in a helping profession who are paid to mentor and who receive extensive training and ongoing supervision) had a significant reduction in their trauma symptoms compared to non-mentored foster youth (Johnson & Pryce, 2013). Finally, a small pilot study ($n = 7$) found that when matched with Bachelor social work student mentors, foster youth experienced increased educational engagement and interest in post-secondary education (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013). The aforementioned quantitative studies pertaining to formal mentoring among foster youth represent a smaller body of literature as compared to quantitative natural mentoring studies. Unlike the natural mentoring studies, studies are not available that investigate health outcomes and assets among formally mentored foster youth.

The few qualitative studies that have examined formal mentoring among foster youth reveal that such relationships are regarded as positive overall, though less is

known about the characteristics and qualities of positive formal mentors and relationships as compared to natural mentoring among foster youth. Studies suggest that foster youth primarily discuss the development of skill building (e.g., interpersonal and life skills, mastering concrete tasks) within the context of formal mentoring relationships, as opposed to the qualitative natural mentoring studies, in which foster youth tend to emphasize the development of interpersonal connectedness and relational closeness. For example, in one study, foster youth reported feeling improvements in their lives since they began working with their formal mentors, especially in relation to interpersonal skills and accomplishment of concrete tasks (Osterling & Hines, 2006). Overall, youth described their relationships with their formal mentors as helpful and supportive, conveying that the best aspects of having a mentor were the support and encouragement provided, as well as the dependency and consistency of the relationship. Similarly, in another study among older foster youth, youth responded positively to working with a formally matched mentor, saying that having a mentor who served as a role model was a better strategy for helping them to develop life skills than classroom lessons (Uzebo et al., 2008).

Mentoring differences by youth demographics. A limited amount of research has investigated differences in the presence and nature of mentoring relationships by demographics (e.g., race, age, gender) among youth in foster care. Munson and McMillen (2008) examined such differences among a sample of 211 Missouri foster youth. They found that compared to white youth, nonwhite youth were less likely to endorse a natural mentor, though youth living in independent living programs were nearly three times as likely to nominate a natural mentor as compared to youth living with relatives. Also, girls were more likely than boys to report higher levels of

relationship quality. In another study among foster youth, white youth were more likely to have positive attitudes about mentoring than black youth, though age and gender were not significant (Diehl, Howse, & Trivette, 2011). Although the study by Diehl and colleagues did not find a significant difference between age and mentoring attitudes, studies in the general population of youth mentoring *have* found differences in how the mentoring relationship is structured and perceived based on developmental stage (Liang, Spencer, Brogan, & Corral, 2008), and a recent study among pre-adolescent foster youth found a significant, positive association between age and the likelihood of having a natural mentoring relationship (Greeson, Weiler, Thompson, & Taussig, 2016), indicating that age may impact mentoring experiences among young people in foster care.

Present Study

Significance. Drawing from theory and empirical research, we know that youth mentoring shows promise as a protective mechanism for youth in foster care. According to Nakkula and Harris (2013), “What remains murky is how best to assess [relationship] quality across different mentoring models and how to manipulate specific facets of [relationship] quality to influence outcomes for different types of youth and in different environments” (p. 45). Although there are over 5,000 mentoring programs with approximately 3 million volunteer mentors nationwide, and the federal government has awarded roughly \$200 million annually to mentoring programs over the past decade (Corporation for National & Community Service, n.d.; DuBois et al., 2011), no research to date has yet explored which type of mentor (i.e. naturally occurring versus formally matched) may be associated with a higher quality relationship among youth in foster

care. Additionally, we do not know how aspects of internal, environmental, and structural relationship dynamics might explain variance in the quality of naturally occurring and formally matched mentoring relationships for foster youth. Such information constitutes a significant contribution to the fields of mentoring and child welfare practice, as it may further elucidate how policy makers, program developers, and practitioners can best support mentoring relationships among youth in foster care in order to promote a greater impact across a variety of psychosocial, academic, and behavioral outcomes. Among foster youth, this study examines the extent to which mentor type and relationship dynamics explain variance in the relationship characteristics that have been shown to lead to improved youth outcomes (see Figure 2).

Study aims and hypotheses. This study has the following three primary aims:

1. Determine the extent to which mentor type explains variance in the relationship characteristics associated with quality mentoring relationships for adolescent youth and emerging adults in and aging out of foster care, controlling for key demographic characteristics.

H₁: Natural mentoring will be associated with mentoring relationships characterized by greater longevity as compared to formal mentoring, whereas formal mentoring will be associated with more frequent and consistent contact than natural mentoring, controlling for age, race/ethnicity, and gender of the mentor and mentee, mentor educational level, mentor geographic residence, and mentor socioeconomic status. It is unknown which mentor type will be associated with greater mentor-perceived efficacy.

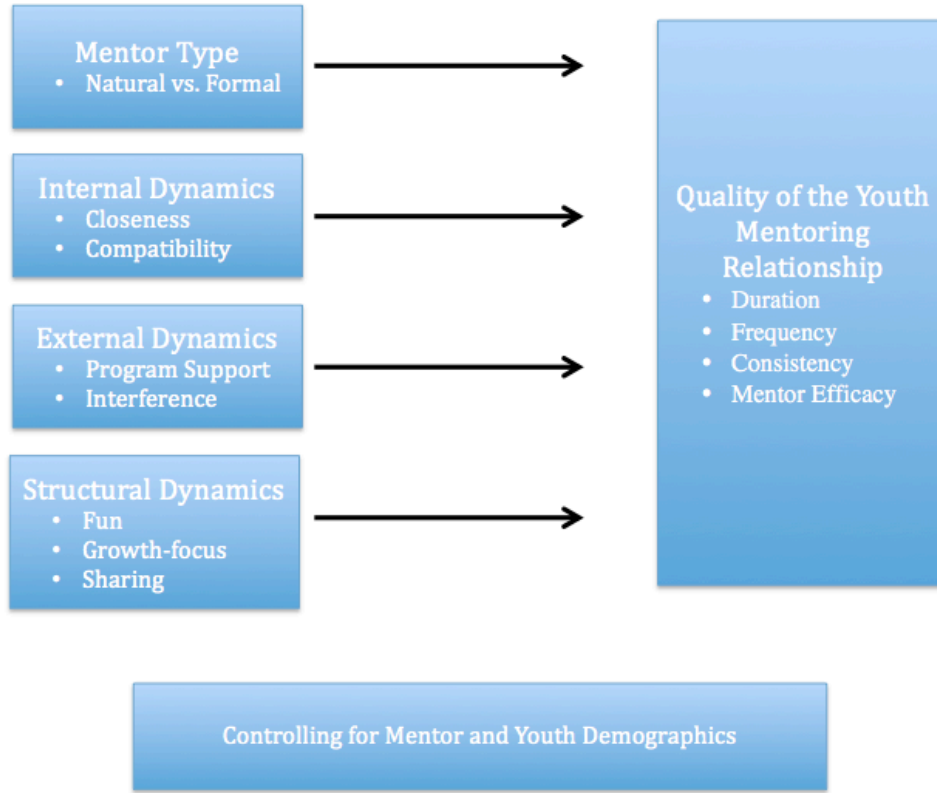
2. Determine the extent to which the internal relationship dynamics, external relationship dynamics, and the structure of the relationship explain variance in the relationship characteristics associated with quality mentoring relationships among adolescent youth and emerging adults in and aging out of foster care, controlling for key demographic characteristics.

H₂: Higher degrees of internally perceived closeness and compatibility as well as greater amounts of external support will be associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, whereas interference will be negatively associated with quality mentoring relationships, controlling for the aforementioned demographic characteristics. Relationships characterized by greater fun-focus will be associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, whereas relationships characterized by greater growth-focus will be associated with lower quality mentoring relationships, controlling for the aforementioned demographic characteristics.

3. What barriers and facilitators of a quality mentoring relationship do natural and formal mentors of youth in and aging out of foster care experience and identify?

No hypothesis is generated for this question, as it is exploratory in nature.

Figure 2. Study Aims



CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Design and Overview

The University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board approved this study, which had two arms. The first was quantitative and explored the relationship between a number of explanatory, or predictor, variables and the variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship among naturally mentored and formally mentored foster youth. The second arm was qualitative and elicited a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of how mentors' experiences elucidated differences in the quality of mentoring relationships among natural and formal mentors of foster youth. Thus, the present study employs a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, meaning that there were two consecutive phases within this study (i.e., quantitative survey data collection and analysis followed by qualitative interview data collection and analysis). Such a design affords the opportunity to gain a more robust understanding of the phenomenon, as it draws on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). Mixed methods allow the researcher to gain both breadth in understanding the relationship between variables of interest as well as depth of understanding regarding the complexities surrounding how individuals experience a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013).

During the first phase of the study, a survey was administered among natural and formal adult mentors of youth in foster care to measure the quality of the mentoring relationship (i.e., the duration of the relationship, the frequency and consistency of contact, and mentor-perceived efficacy), the internal dynamics of the relationship (i.e., closeness and compatibility), the external dynamics of the relationship (i.e., program

support and interference), the structural dynamics of the relationship (i.e., fun, growth-focus, and sharing), and a number of demographic characteristics (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, and gender of the mentor and mentee, mentor educational level, mentor geographic residence, and mentor socioeconomic status). Regression models were used to investigate the contribution of the predictor variables on explaining variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship.

During phase two of the study, qualitative methods were used to explore the barriers and facilitators of a quality mentoring relationship as experienced and identified by natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care. Purposive sampling was used to identify outliers among the survey participants on a composite score from Nakkula and Harris' 2008 Match Characteristics Questionnaire (i.e., two high scoring formal mentors, two low scoring formal mentors, two high scoring natural mentors, and two low scoring natural mentors). These participants were contacted for follow-up qualitative individual interviews to help explain the quantitative findings from the survey data. Such a process, sometimes referred to as *maximum variation sampling*, allows the researcher to confirm, refine, or redefine the original explanatory model (Creswell, 2012). Following the qualitative interviews, an iterative coding scheme was utilized to identify themes among natural and formal mentors related to relationship quality and to generate ideas for future research.

Data Collection

Quantitative survey. During phase one of this study, an online survey was administered via Qualtrics to a sample of natural and formal mentors (see Appendix A). There are several key strengths associated with the utilization of an online survey. For

example, online surveys have been successfully used to reach hard-to-find, or scattered, populations experiencing a low base rate phenomenon (Miller & Sønderlund, 2010). Only 0.5% of children/youth in the United States reside in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016), and a much smaller portion of these youth have a mentor. Additionally, most natural mentoring relationships are difficult to identify through a central location, such as a program or center, because such relationships frequently occur naturally within a community without programmatic affiliation. Thus, an on-line survey provides an opportunity to more effectively reach a larger sample of natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care for less cost as compared to traditional on-site or mail-in surveys (Miller & Sønderlund, 2010). Additionally, the completion of an online survey may reduce data entry error associated with paper surveys (Miller & Sønderlund, 2010). The validity of online surveys has been shown to be comparable to the use of paper and pencil surveys (Evans & Mathur, 2005), and the usage of the Internet has become ubiquitous as 87% of Americans across demographic categories reported using the Internet in January 2014 (Pew Research, 2014).

Although the use of online surveys presents several opportunities to strengthen this study, there are also limitations associated with this method, namely related to recruitment and subsequent sampling bias (Im & Chee, 2004). Typical response rates for internet-based recruitment vary from 2 – 12% (Dillman et al., 2009; Im & Chee, 2004). In order to improve response rates, I collaborated with a number of trusted gatekeepers, such as listserv organizers, program directors, and advocacy group leaders (Bull et al., 2012).

Qualitative interviews. During phase two of this study, I conducted telephone interviews with natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care with high and low scores on the MCQ scale (see Appendix B). Each interview lasted approximately 60

minutes. Because I recruited mentors across states, telephone interviews were more feasible than in-person interviews and allowed me to communicate with participants over greater distance. I used a semi-structured interview protocol in order to gather similar information and cover the same material across interview participants while maintaining enough flexibility to probe into unique and unanticipated responses from each interviewee (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The use of individual interviews, as opposed to group interviews, facilitated gathering more in-depth information from each participant, potentially providing a fuller understanding of individual experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Sampling and Recruitment Procedures

Quantitative surveys. A non-probability, purposive sampling procedure was utilized for this study. Daniel (2012) suggests that such sampling procedures are advantageous for populations with characteristics that are difficult to locate or for whom a sampling frame is not available. Indeed, mentors of youth in foster care represent a difficult-to-reach population. In terms of formal mentoring, mentors of foster youth are often part of programs that offer mentoring services to broader groups of youth than only foster youth, making it difficult to identify a sampling frame. Likewise, natural mentoring relationships develop organically within community contexts and generally are not associated with a program or organization, making such relationships difficult to identify. Thus, for this study, a version of respondent-assisted sampling was employed, which is a “nonprobability sampling procedure in which elements are selected from a target population with the assistance of previously selected population elements” (Daniel, 2012, p. 109). In other words, I approached a number of targeted programs and advocacy groups, professionals, and graduate students who were likely to have contact

with formally matched and naturally occurring mentors of youth in foster care, and I asked *them* to invite eligible mentors to participate in my online survey. At the end of the survey, all participants (i.e., natural and formal mentors) had the option of entering their contact information into a series of drawings to win one of ten \$100 Visa gift cards. Contact information for the purpose of the incentive drawings were not linked to the participants' survey responses.

The *natural* mentors for this study were recruited from: (1) a listserv and Facebook study announcement published by FosterClub, a large, national foster youth advocacy organization, (2) targeted child welfare classes within the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy & Practice, and (3) C.A.R.E., a natural mentoring program for youth in foster care. FosterClub maintains a large listserv of supportive adults for youth in foster care, including paid professionals (e.g., case workers, therapists), caregivers (e.g., birth parents, foster parents), natural mentors (e.g., nonparental adult relatives, community leaders, former professionals), and formal mentors (e.g., mentoring agencies). FosterClub posted a study announcement on their Facebook page (see Appendix C), and they sent an email to their listserv of supportive adults (see Appendix D). In addition to recruiting with FosterClub, I also emailed the study announcement to students from SP2's child welfare specialization program, as these students were placed in child welfare field settings as interns and could have had contact with natural mentors of foster youth. Finally, I utilized deidentified survey data collected from a University of Pennsylvania pilot study of natural mentoring among youth in foster care (Greeson & Thompson, 2016). Similar data were collected for the pilot study and were transferrable to my study.

The *formal* mentors were recruited from mentoring programs across the United States as well as through a national mentoring listserv. In order to identify the mentoring programs, I entered the following search string into Google: ["foster care" "mentoring" "STATE"]. I ran this search string 50 times substituting each of the 50 states for the word STATE. I reviewed two Google pages for each search, and I emailed directors from 70 programs asking them to forward my recruitment email and online survey to the mentors from their programs.

In the final study sample (described below), there were 250 natural mentors and 194 formal mentors from more than 50 programs and 46 states. Because the sampling frames for both the natural and formal mentors were unknown, I was unable to calculate a response rate. Although my study was exploratory in nature, and not intended to be generalizable to all mentors of foster youth, I attempted to collect data on eligible mentors who declined to participate in order to better understand my sample. The recruitment email that was sent contained a separate link asking potential participants to answer a couple of short questions intended to ascertain if participants were ineligible to participate or were unwilling to participate and why (see Appendix D). However, the response rate for this secondary question was too low ($n = 15$) to be useful. Though it is impossible to know if the final sample from this study is truly representative of the larger population of adult mentors of youth in foster care, the sample does represent a large number of mentors from diverse geographical areas and programs.

Qualitative interviews. At the end of the survey, participants had the option of checking a box giving me permission to contact them for a follow-up phone interview, and nearly three-quarters (73%) of participants agreed to be contacted for a follow-up. Participants were informed that if they disclosed their contact information for a follow-up

interview, their survey results would be linked with their contact information and would no longer be anonymous. After all quantitative survey data were collected, the surveys were scored, yielding composite individual participant scores for the overall MCQ. There were no significant differences in the average overall MCQ scores for participants who agreed to be contacted ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .57$) and those who did not agree to be contacted ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .58$). Participants with higher overall MCQ scores were those who reported stronger internal closeness/compatibility and fewer external stressors. Conversely, participants with lower overall MCQ scores were those who reported weaker internal closeness/compatibility and more external stressors. Natural mentors and formal mentors were ranked separately based on their overall MCQ survey scores, and two mentors within each group with the highest and lowest scores were approached for interviews based on their ranking. All interviews were between 45 – 60 minutes in length, took place by phone, and participants were compensated with \$25 Visa gift cards.

I balanced the principles of purposive, maximum variation sampling with feasibility in order to determine the sample size for the qualitative interviews ($n = 8$). In considering sample size for maximum variation sampling, Sandelowski (1995) suggests that researchers first identify a sample that is homogenous on a core characteristic of interest while experiencing variation on the target phenomenon under study. Sample size should then be determined “a priori in order to have representative coverage of variables likely to be important in understanding how diverse factors configure the whole” (p. 182). In other words, the mentors in my study shared a common experience of mentoring youth in foster care, but they differed in terms of two core phenomenon of interest: mentor type (i.e., natural versus formal) and relationship dynamics (i.e., internal

closeness and external stressors). Based on these core constructs, I identified four areas of interest for further exploration: high scoring natural mentors, high scoring formal mentors, low scoring natural mentors, and low scoring formal mentors. I interviewed two mentors in each group ($n = 8$) in an effort to gain the perspectives of more than one mentor in each group while balancing feasibility constraints for my study.

Sample Selection

In order to recruit a diverse sample of mentors with a wide range of experiences, I developed broad eligibility criteria while maintaining the core components that scholars and practitioners typically use to define youth mentoring relationships. Specifically, I drew from the work of DuBois and Karcher (2005), who define youth mentoring as a relationship between a young person and an older, more experienced non-parental adult who provides support and encouragement to the mentee. In addition, I drew from mentoring research among foster youth that makes a distinction between the benefits of mentoring relationships with unpaid adults versus paid professionals (Greeson, Thompson, Evans-Chase, Ali, 2015). Thus, participants were eligible to complete the survey if they were at least 18 years old, were not the parent/caregiver of the youth mentee and answered yes to the following question: *Have you mentored or informally supported a youth (aged 13 or older) who has ever been in foster care without being paid to do so?* Eligible participants were then asked to agree to an informed consent page before enrolling in the study (see Appendix A).

There were 1,143 people who completed some portion of the survey, and 707 adult mentors met the eligibility criteria specified above. Of the eligible mentors, 644 (91%) mentors agreed to participate, consented, and were enrolled in the study. In

order to be included in the final sample for this study, mentors had to complete survey items that were critical to the study's aims. Specifically, mentors had to provide valid responses to survey questions that were used to construct the main independent variables (i.e., mentor type and relationship dynamics) and dependent variables (i.e., mentor efficacy, length of relationship, frequency and consistency of contact). In other words, mentors had to report their relationship to the youth so that mentor type could be determined. For the MCQ subscales measuring relationship dynamics and mentor efficacy, mentors had to complete at least half of the items for each subscale so that analyses for missing data could be performed as needed (Cheema, 2014), and mentors had to respond to at least one of the items measuring one of the dependent variables. Of the 644 consenting, eligible mentors, 444 (69%) completed enough of the items as specified above to be included in the analyses for this study. The percent of mentors included in my study among all consenting, eligible participants is within the range of other recent internet-based cross-sectional survey studies among hard to reach populations. For example, other such studies have included 40% (Hall et al., 2017), 50% (Hugo et al., 2016), and 83% (Logie, Lacombe-Duncan, MacKenzie, & Poteat, 2016) of consenting, eligible participants in their final analyses based on participants' completion of sufficient survey items. Thus, the final sample used for this study consisted of 444 adult mentors of youth in foster care.

Measures

Continuous Dependent Variable.

Mentor Efficacy. The dependent outcome, mentor-perceived efficacy, was measured using two Likert-type subscales (i.e., *Handle Mentee's Issues* and *Satisfaction*) from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) version 2.22 (Harris &

Nakkula, 2008). The MCQ has been shown to produce reliable and valid data when completed by the mentor and consists of 66 items and 15 subscales that together measure various dynamics and characteristics related to quality mentoring relationships (Harris & Nakkula, 2008). For each subscale, Likert-type scale responses are converted to yield sub-scale scores ranging from 0-100, with higher scores being more favorable. For both the *Handle Mentee's Issues* and *Satisfaction* subscales, mentors used a six-point Likert-type scale (1=never; 6=always) to respond to statements about their mentoring experiences, such as "I feel like the relationship is getting stronger;" "My mentee is willing to learn from me;" and "I feel like I am making a difference in my mentee's life." Individually, both of these subscales demonstrated adequate internal reliability. In the present study, the alpha for the subscale, *Handle Mentee's Issues*, was .75, and the alpha for the subscale *Satisfaction* was .80. The correlation between the two subscales was medium ($r = .48$; Cohen, 1988), and when the two subscales were combined as a linear composite, the new variable, *Mentor Efficacy*, demonstrated adequate internal reliability (alpha = .82).

Categorical Dependent Variables. Although data for other three dependent outcomes (i.e., length of mentoring, frequency of contact, and consistency of contact) were collected or converted initially to ratio-type data formats, I defined them as categorical variables. Streiner (2002) suggests that although there may be disadvantages associated with converting ratio data into categories (i.e., loss of statistical power which increases the risk of Type II errors), it is best to categorize variables that have the following conditions present: (1) the variable has a lower limit but no upper limit, (2) the majority of the subjects cluster at one end, and (3) the rest of the subjects "trail off" in the opposite direction with high outliers at the end. Indeed, the

three remaining outcomes met these criteria. The variables were highly positively skewed, and most of the participants clumped together at the lower bound while a small group of participants functioned as outliers with very high values for aspects of mentoring relationships. In order to determine appropriate categorizations, I used extant literature to drive the categorical definitions as well as visual graphs (e.g., histograms) to ensure that each category was sufficiently sized and powered to detect significance. These three categorical outcomes are described below.

Length of the Mentoring Relationship. The dependent variable, *length of the mentoring relationship*, was measured on the survey based on two survey questions: “In what year did you begin supporting or mentoring this foster youth?” and “In what month did you begin supporting or mentoring this foster youth?” Following data collection, the length of the mentoring relationship was calculated in months based on the date the mentor completed the survey. In order to determine appropriate categorizations for *length of the mentoring relationship*, I used extant literature on length of intervention. Participants’ responses generally fell into three discrete ranges (e.g., less than one year; one to two years; more than two years), and these categories were corroborated by the literature. Specifically, research suggests that mentoring relationships lasting less than one year may negatively impact youth’s psychosocial development (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Research also suggests that longer length relationships are associated with more positive youth outcomes. Although less is known in the mentoring research regarding the impact of mentoring for discrete time periods after one year, intervention literature in other child and youth-serving systems reveal distinct effects for intervention delivery for two years rather than one year, and three years rather than two years (Rimm-Kaufman, Fan, Chiu, & You, 2007). Another study that synthesized the

intervention literature suggests that multi-year programs have been shown to yield more enduring results than shorter, single-year programs (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001). Thus, I categorized length of the mentoring relationship into three groups: *short-length* (less than one year), *medium-length* (one to two years), and *long-length* (more than two years).

Frequency of Contact. Data on the frequency of mentor-mentee contact was measured by asking participating mentors, “How often do you typically have in-person contact with this foster youth?” Participants could choose from the following responses: (1) at least once a week, (2) less than once a week but at least once a month, (3) less than once a month but at least once a year, (4) less than one time each year, (5) never. Participants that selected options 1, 2, or 3 were then asked a follow-up question specific to their initial response: “How many times each [week, month, or year]?” Following data collection, all responses were converted to the number of meetings per year, and responses of “less than one time each year” ($n = 11$) and “never” ($n = 2$) were converted to 0.

I treated the data on frequency of mentor-mentee contact as a categorical variable, because the distribution for this variable was highly non-normal with three distinct peaks indicating that many of the participants tended to fall into one of the following three discrete categories: 12 times a year (i.e., monthly), 24 times a year (i.e., twice a month), and 52 times a year (i.e., weekly). In order to determine appropriate cut-points for these categories, I reviewed mentoring program standards and extant literature as well as visual graphs (e.g., histograms) to ensure that each category was sufficiently sized and powered to detect significance. For example, at a minimum, some Big Brothers Big Sisters’ program sites ask volunteer mentors to commit to meeting with

their mentees once or twice a month, whereas other program sites specify that mentors must meet with their mentees at least once a week (www.bbbs.org/programs). None of the programs sites encourage mentors to meet with their mentees less than once per month. Indeed, mentoring studies have investigated *frequency of contact* using categories of less than monthly, one to two times per month, and at least weekly (Hurd & Zimmermann, 2015). In order to make logical, distinct, and sufficiently sized categories capturing varying amounts of typical face-to-face contact, I categorized *frequency of contact* into three groups: *infrequent* (less than once per month), *somewhat frequent* (one to two times per month), and *frequent* (more than two times per month).

Consistency of Contact. The dependent variable, *consistency of contact*, was measured on the survey as a continuous variable. Participants were asked, “In the past year, how many times have you cancelled an in-person meeting with this foster youth?”

I treated the data on consistency of mentor-mentee contact as a categorical variable, because the data were highly positively-skewed with little variance. Specifically, the majority of the respondents (69%) reported that they never cancelled a meeting; nearly one-fifth (17%) reported that they only cancelled one meeting; and 15% reported that they cancelled more than one meeting. There were outliers with many cancellations among participants who cancelled more than one meeting. Overall, the responses represented three distinct groups of participants, supporting the use of a categorical variable to measure the variable *consistency of contact*.

In order to confirm the aforementioned cut-points for *consistency of contact*, I drew from extant mentoring and broader intervention literature. Mentoring research confirms that relationships characterized by consistent contact are associated with

improved mentee outcomes (DuBois & Neville, 1997). Drawing from the broader field of intervention literature, distinctions have been made between participants that wholly engage, or participate, in an intervention compared to those that show less fidelity to an intervention (O'Donnell, 2008). Other studies distinguish between participants that miss more than one session and those that do not (Church, DeAsis, & Brooks, 2012; Maheu et al., 2016). Thus, there is precedent for categorizing consistency of participation as never missed, missed once, and missed more than once. Based on this literature, as well as the categories that naturally emerged from my data, I categorized *consistency of contact* into three groups: *never cancelled*, *cancelled once*, and *cancelled more than once*.

Independent Variables.

Mentor type. The independent variable, *mentor type*, was measured as a dichotomous variable with natural mentors coded as 0 and formal mentors coded as 1. Participants were asked, "What is your primary relationship to this foster youth (please choose one)?" Possible response options included: volunteer mentor matched by a program; extended family member, such as an aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent; former child welfare professional, such as a case worker, therapist, or group home parent; family friend; neighbor; teacher; coach; religious leader, such as an Imam, Rabbi, or Pastor; other (please specify). Participants that reported being a volunteer mentor matched by a program were coded as formal mentors, and all other groups were coded as natural mentors, with the exception of the "other" category. Responses from the "other" category were open coded, grouped, and categorized as either natural or formal mentors.

Internal relationship dynamics. The internal dynamics of the mentoring relationship were measured using two separate, but similar, subscales from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) (i.e., *Compatibility* and *Closeness*). Using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=never; 6=always), mentors responded to statements such as “I feel like my mentee and I have a strong bond (are close or deeply connected).” Both subscales demonstrated adequate internal reliability. The alpha for the *Closeness* scale was .82, and the alpha for the *Compatibility* scale was .75.

External relationship dynamics. The external dynamics of the mentoring relationship were measured using two subscales from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) (i.e., *Programmatic Support* and *Interference*). *Programmatic Support* refers to how much mentors feel supported by a program, whereas *Interference* refers to the logistical and personal stressors, or factors, that interfere with mentee meetings. For *Interference*, mentors used a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=completely disagree; 6=completely agree) to respond to statements such as, “I am so busy that it is difficult for me to see my mentee regularly” and “Issues related to money affect the time I can spend with my mentee.” The *Interference* scale was reverse coded for inclusion in the regression analyses. For *Programmatic Support*, mentors used a 6-point Likert-type scale to respond to questions such as, “A program has provided training that helps me be a better supportive adult/mentor” and “I get support from a program that makes me a better supportive adult/mentor.” The questions for the *Programmatic Support* scale were worded in such a way that they were applicable to both natural and formal mentors. Both the *Programmatic Support* and the *Interference* subscales demonstrated adequate internal reliability. The alpha for the *Program Support* scale was .88, and the alpha for the *Interference* scale was .65.

Structure of the mentoring relationship. The structure of the mentoring relationship was measured using three subscales from the Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ) (i.e., *Fun*, *Sharing*, and *Character Development*). Using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=not important; 6=most important), mentors respond to a series of statements asking what they focus on (e.g., “Having times when you do nothing but fun things with your mentee”). All three subscales demonstrated adequate internal reliability. The alpha for the *Fun* scale was .77; the alpha for the *Sharing* scale was .67; and the alpha for the *Character Development* scale was .83.

Control variables. The following control variables were collected via a short demographic section preceding the MCQ survey questions: age, race/ethnicity, and gender of the mentor and mentee, mentor educational level, mentor geographic residence, and mentor socioeconomic status (see Appendix A). Age was measured as a continuous variable at the time of the survey. Race/ethnicity were self-reported categories, and participants could select more than one category. Following data collection, these categories were collapsed into the following: non-Hispanic white only, non-Hispanic black only, Hispanic, and other. Gender was measured as female, male, or other. Mentor education level was measured as a categorical variable, and participants were asked to report their highest level of education (i.e., some high school, high school diploma/GED, 2-year college, 4-year college, graduate school). Mentor geographic region was measured using a question that asked mentors to report the zip code of their residence. Following data collection, all zip codes were coded as Northeast, Midwest, South, or West using Census Bureau regions (www.census.gov). Mentor socioeconomic status was measured as the percent of people living below the poverty level from the mentor’s community of residence. Using mentors’ reported zip

codes, I obtained this information from the Census Bureau's FactFinder site (www.factfinder.census.gov).

Analyses

Quantitative surveys. All descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted using Stata 14 (StataCorp, 2015). First, I obtained descriptive statistics for all variables using the "sum" command in Stata 14 to obtain the mean, standard deviation, and range for each continuous variable. I used the "tab" command to obtain the sample size and percentage for each nominal variable. Missing data were relatively low across individual variables (ranging from 0% to 2.5%).

Multivariate analyses. For the multivariate analyses, I specified a series of regression models to assess the extent to which mentor type, relationship dynamics, and mentor and youth demographic characteristics uniquely explain variance in the quality of the mentoring relationship. As explained on pages 9 – 10, I operationalized my dependent variable, *quality of the mentoring relationship*, using four separate constructs based on the mentoring literature: *length of the mentoring relationship*, *frequency of contact*, *consistency of contact*, and *mentor efficacy*. Thus, I constructed four regression models to regress each of my dependent variables on the same group of 17 predictor variables (i.e., mentor type, closeness score, compatibility score, program support score, interference score, fun focus score, growth focus score, sharing score, mentor age, mentor race, mentor gender, mentor living region, percent of poverty in mentor's community of origin, mentor's education level, youth age, youth race, and youth gender). I used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for my continuous dependent variable, and I used multinomial logistic regression for my categorical dependent variables. For

the four regression models, I simultaneously entered all 17 predictor variables into each model.

Linear regression. For the continuous dependent variable, *mentor efficacy*, I used the “reg” model command in Stata 14 to specify an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model, and this produced the corresponding unstandardized coefficients representing the linear relation between the predictor and the outcome. These coefficients can be interpreted as follows: a one unit increase in the independent variable is associated with a change in the unit of the dependent variable that corresponds to the value of the coefficient, controlling for the other independent variables in the model (Allison, 1999). For example, the coefficient of .44 for the MCQ closeness scale is interpreted as a one point increase on the MCQ closeness scale (i.e., the independent variable) is associated with a .44 point increase on the mentor efficacy scale (i.e., the dependent variable), controlling for the other independent variables in the model (i.e., other MCQ scales, mentor type, and mentor/mentee demographic characteristics).

Logistic regression. For the categorical dependent variables, *length of the mentoring relationship*, *frequency of contact*, and *consistency of contact*, I used the “mlogit” command in Stata 14 to construct three multinomial logistic regression models. Multinomial logistic regression is used to estimate the effect of an independent variable on the likelihood of membership in one reference group versus membership in multiple alternative, non-reference groups while controlling for the other independent variables in the model. For example, the multinomial logistic regression on length of the mentoring relationship estimates the effect of mentor type (natural versus formal) in predicting the likelihood of being in a *medium-length* versus *short-length* relationship and being in a *long-length* versus *short-length* relationship, controlling for the other independent

variables in the model. Multinomial logistic regression can be thought of as a series of more commonly understood binomial logistic regression models whereby one category from the dependent variable is omitted as the reference group and is compared to multiple alternative non-reference groups in a pairwise manner. Similar to odds ratios, the “rrr” command in Stata 14 produces relative risk ratios for multinomial logistic regression models. Relative risk ratios measure the effect of an independent variable on the likelihood of membership in the non-reference group versus membership in the reference group. Relative risk ratios greater than 1 indicate increased likelihood of membership in the non-reference group condition, whereas relative risk ratios less than 1 indicate decreased likelihood of membership in the non-reference group condition. If the relative risk ratio equals 1 (or is close to 1), it suggests no difference or little difference in the likelihood of membership in either group. For example, the independent variable *natural mentor* has a significant relative risk ratio of 4.72, meaning that relative to formal mentors, natural mentors were 4.72 times as likely to be in a *long-length* relationship (e.g., the non-reference group) versus a *short-length* relationship (e.g., the omitted reference group), controlling for the other independent variables in the model. Conversely, the independent variable *interference* has a relative risk ratio of .59, meaning that a one unit increase on the interference scale was associated with a 41% decrease in the likelihood of being in a *long-length* relationship (e.g., the non-reference group) versus a *short-length* relationship (e.g., the omitted reference group), controlling for the other variables in the model.

Length of the mentoring relationship was the dependent variable for the first multinomial logistic regression, which I operationalized as *short-length* (less than one year), *medium-length* (one to two years), and *long-length* (more than two years). I chose to set *short-length* relationships as the reference group, because research suggests that

mentoring relationships lasting less than one year may negatively impact youth's psychosocial development (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Thus, I created the following two logit models: (1) *medium-length* relationships versus *short-length* relationships, and (2) *long-length* relationships versus *short-length* relationships.

Frequency of contact was the dependent variable for the second multinomial logistic regression, which I operationalized as *infrequent* (less than once per month), *somewhat frequent* (one to two times per month), and *frequent* (more than two times per month). I set *infrequent contact* as the reference group, as research indicates that relationships with less contact tend to be weakest in quality (Herrera et al., 2000). Thus, I created the following two logit models: (1) *somewhat frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*, and (2) *frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*.

Finally, consistency of contact was the dependent variable for the third multinomial logistic regression, which I operationalized as *never cancelled*, *cancelled once*, and *cancelled more than once*. The group that never canceled a meeting was set as the reference group, because research indicates that relationships characterized by consistent contact are reportedly associated with more improved mentee outcomes (DuBois & Neville, 1997). Thus, I created the following two logit models: (1) *cancelled once* versus *never cancelled*, and (2) *cancelled more than once* versus *never cancelled*.

Robustness checks and model assumptions. In order to ensure the appropriate use of regression for my study, I considered model assumptions for regression more broadly and also specifically for OLS linear regression and multinomial logistic regression. According to Allison (1999), one core assumption of regression is the mean independence, or the assumption that the independent variables are unrelated to the random disturbance in the model. There are three conditions that lead to violations of this assumption: omitted independent variables, reverse causation, and

measurement error in the independent variables. In order to address these conditions, I included a number of control variables as well as a strong conceptual framework justifying the inclusion of key variables in my models as well as the direction of these variables based on theory and prior research. Additionally, I used validated and reliable measures whenever possible in order to reduce measurement error. I also checked for multicollinearity among all of the independent variables used in both regression models, as the presence of multicollinearity can affect the standard errors, making it harder to detect significant coefficients. I used the “collin” command in Stata 14 to obtain variance inflation factors (VIF) to identify independent variables that were highly inter-correlated in order to assess for multicollinearity. None of the VIFs exceeded 2.5, which is an indication that the independent variables were independent of each other and appropriate for inclusion in my models (Allison, 1999).

For the linear regression model, I considered the following four assumptions: (1) Linearity: the dependent variable is a linear function of the independent variables; (2) Homoscedasticity: the variance of the random disturbance does not depend on the independent variables; (3) Independence of observations: the value of random disturbance for any individual in the sample is uncorrelated with the value of random disturbance for any other individual, and (4) Normality assumption: the random disturbance term approximates a normal distribution (Allison, 1999). In terms of linearity, I used Stata 14 to produce visual graphics (i.e., histogram/scatterplots) to assess the distribution of the dependent variable and its relationship to the other independent variables in the model. The dependent variable, mentor efficacy, approximated a normal distribution and appeared to be an approximate linear function of the other variables in the model. In terms of homoscedasticity, I ran the linear regression model with robust (Huber-White) standard errors. This robustness check indicated consistent statistically

significant associations, where none of the significant relations (predictors with $p < .05$) were influenced. All p -values originally below my alpha criterion of .05 remained below .05 indicating robust statistical inferences. Regarding the independence of observations, the responses from the participants in my sample were not dependent on each other as the participants were drawn from a national sample across more than 50 programs and from 46 states, representing a diverse and dispersed sample. In terms of the normality assumption, the central limit theorem suggests that I can dispense with the normality assumption if the sample is moderately large. Allison (1999) states that a moderately large sample constitutes 200 or more cases, and as my study has 444 cases, I can assume that violations of the normality assumption would not significantly impact statistical inferences.

There are few assumptions related to the use of multinomial logistic regression, other than those associated with the use of regression more broadly and contained in the aforementioned paragraph (i.e., mean independence and multicollinearity). Specifically, logistic regression is robust to many of the key assumptions required by other statistical methods, such as linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and measurement level (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). In terms of assumptions that must be met, the dependent variable must be nominal, have more than two categories, and cannot be perfectly predicted by the independent variables in the model (Kwak & Clayton-Matthews, 2002). The assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) is common to multinomial logistic regression, though is more relevant when used to model behavioral choices, as it assumes that the likelihood of choosing one category over another is not dependent on the presence or absence of other alternative categories (Kwak & Clayton-Matthews, 2002). This is less relevant for the categories in my current study, as my model is not being used to model behavioral choices. Though

there are statistical tests that can be run (e.g., Hausman-McFadden test, Small-Hsiao test) to detect violations of IIA, many statisticians caution against their use, as they can be quite unreliable (Long & Freese, 2006). Rather, it is suggested that multinomial logistic models should be used when it is clear that the categories are distinctly dissimilar from each other. The multinomial logistic models in my study represent distinct, dissimilar categories that are based on participants' unique experiences rather than behavioral choices, and thus, the assumption of IIA is not violated in my study. To further test the unique contribution of the dependent variable categories I created in each of my models, I conducted omnibus chi square tests using the Stata command "test [1-2]" after each multinomial logistic model in order to test the null hypotheses that there were no significant differences between the coefficients of each of the logits (Long & Freese, 2006). Indeed, each logit in the final models has a significantly different relationship with the omitted reference group than the other logit in the model.

Given that missing data rates were relatively low across individual variables (ranging from 0% to 2.5%), both the multinomial and linear regression models used complete-case analysis. This is a standard modeling technique where participants' missing information is excluded using listwise deletion. This resulted in approximately 95% of complete cases (420 out of 444) contributing information to three of the regression analyses, and 93% of complete cases (415 out of 444) contributing information to one of the regression analyses. Simulation studies show listwise deletion produces trustworthy regression estimates under low levels of missing data (< 10%; Bennett, 2001; Dong & Peng, 2013).

Qualitative interviews. Because I used a mixed methods sequential explanatory design for my study, I conducted all of my qualitative analyses after I completed my quantitative analyses. In other words, I used the qualitative interview data to more

deeply explore the findings from my quantitative survey data. Thus, I used an a priori coding structure for my qualitative data analyses based on the independent variables from my quantitative study (i.e., mentor type, internal relationship dynamics, external relationship dynamics, and structural relationship dynamics). The codes I used for the relationship dynamics have been used in prior studies and were developed by Nakkula and Harris (2013). However, I extended the use of these codes to look at the unique experiences of mentors among youth in foster care, and in doing so, I employed elaborative coding (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003).

Coding. First, a professional transcriptionist transcribed each of the audio recordings, and then I read and reviewed all of the transcripts to ensure accuracy. I used an iterative, descriptive coding process whereby I first deductively applied a broad set of a priori codes, and then inductively discovered more nuanced concepts and themes within each of the broader codes. Using a heuristic method of discovery, I then identified common themes and patterns across broad codes. I used Dedoose, a web-based qualitative data management program (2013), to facilitate this process.

During “first cycle coding,” I deductively assigned the a priori codes (i.e., mentor type, internal relationship dynamics, external relationship dynamics, and structural relationship dynamics) to chunks of transcribed interview data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Once the transcripts were divided according to these broader codes, I then inductively identified sub-codes within each larger chunk of interview data. In other words, I let the themes and patterns emerge from the data without applying a set of pre-determined codes or ideas. This was an iterative process, and I grouped and regrouped the codes in order to condense the data into “readily analyzable units” (Miles et al., 2014). For example, within the broader a priori code of *external relationship dynamics*,

the sub-codes of *programmatic involvement* and *youth's social support network* emerged as salient themes. Each of these sub-codes describes specific facets of external relationship dynamics that may impact the quality of the mentoring relationship for youth in foster care.

During “second cycle coding,” I sought to draw connections and identify patterns across codes and themes in an effort to construct a more parsimonious understanding of the data (Miles et al., 2014). For example, the notion of a “spectrum” of experiences (versus binary experiences) emerged across codes. In other words, mentors were not easily categorized as either natural or formal, but often had characteristics of both. Likewise, programmatic involvement could not be simply coded as positive or negative, but rather occurred on a spectrum of helpful to unhelpful. Youth's social support networks were not simply present or absent, but rather there was a spectrum of involvement that seemed to be associated with improved mentoring relationships. These higher-level themes emerged at the end of the data analysis process.

Validity. Throughout the interview process and data analyses, I continuously used memos to record my initial observations, thoughts, reflections, and ideas about the data I obtained through the interview process (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). These memos served several purposes. First, the memos helped to improve, clarify, and expand my questions and probing as I progressed through the interviews. I used these memos to explore areas and responses that were unanticipated. For example, the notion of *hybrid mentoring* (i.e., mentors with elements of naturally occurring and formally supported relationships) emerged as a theme early on in the interviews, and probed deeper into this concept in subsequent interviews.

In addition to memoing, I employed several participant validation techniques, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2015). For example, throughout the interview process, I structured clarifying and follow-up questions to better understand the meaning ascribed to an idea or theme by the participant. Additionally, as I proceeded through the interviews, I asked participants about concepts and patterns that emerged from the interviews as recorded in my ongoing memoing process. I also obtained permission from participants at the end of each interview to follow-up with additional questions via email throughout the research process, and all of the participants agreed. Thus, I conducted member checks and sought feedback from the participants in regard to my codes and meaning-making processes. I used these forms of communication with the participants in my study in an ongoing effort to improve the validity of my qualitative findings.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics including the mean, standard deviation, and range are reported for each continuous variable in Table 1. The sample size and percentage for each nominal variable are also included in Table 1. Descriptive statistics are reported all independent variables (i.e., mentor type, MCQ scales measuring relationship dynamics, and mentor/youth demographic characteristics) and for all dependent variables (i.e., mentor efficacy, length of relationship, frequency of contact, and consistency of contact).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Sample, $N = 444$

Characteristics	N (%) / Mean (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Mentor type</i>			
Natural mentor	250 (56.3%)	-	-
Formal mentor	194 (43.7%)	-	-
<i>MCQ Scales</i>			
<i>Internal Relationship Dynamics</i>			
Closeness	4.3 (1.0)	1.0	6.0
Compatibility	4.7 (.77)	2.2	6.0
<i>External Relationship Dynamics</i>			
Program support	3.4 (1.7)	1.0	6.0
Interference	4.8 (.78)	2.7	6.0
<i>Structure of the Relationship</i>			
Fun focus	4.0 (.98)	1.0	6.0
Growth focus	4.3 (1.1)	1.0	6.0
Sharing	4.0 (.87)	1.0	6.0
<i>Mentor Demographics</i>			
Age (years)	41.8 (12.8)	18.0	74.0
<i>Race</i>			
Non-Hispanic white	284 (64.0%)	-	-
Non-Hispanic black	79 (17.8%)	-	-
Hispanic	46 (10.4%)	-	-
Other	35 (7.9%)	-	-
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	373 (84.8%)	-	-

Male	64 (14.6%)	-	-
Other	3 (0.7%)	-	-
Region			
Northeast	95 (21.5%)	-	-
Midwest	62 (14.1%)	-	-
South	146 (33.1%)	-	-
West	138 (31.3%)	-	-
% of Community in Poverty	15.7 (9.5)	1.5	54.2
Education			
High school	37 (8.4%)	-	-
2-year college	87 (19.6%)	-	-
4-year college	150 (33.9%)	-	-
Graduate school	169 (38.2%)	-	-
Youth Demographics			
Age (years)	18.4 (3.6)	13.0	30.0
Race			
Non-Hispanic white	192 (43.2%)	-	-
Non-Hispanic black	140 (31.5%)	-	-
Hispanic	80 (18.0%)	-	-
Other	32 (7.2%)	-	-
Gender			
Female	280 (63.2%)	-	-
Male	153 (34.5%)	-	-
Other	10 (2.3%)	-	-
Dependent Variables			
Mentor Efficacy	4.68 (.77)	1.6	6.0
Length of Relationship			
Short-length (<1 yr)	125 (28.2%)	-	-
Medium-length (1-2 yrs)	94 (21.2%)	-	-
Long-length (>2 yrs)	225 (50.7%)	-	-
Frequency of Contact			
Infrequent (<1x/mo)	78 (17.6%)	-	-
Somewhat Frequent (1-2x/mo)	125 (28.2%)	-	-
Frequent (>2x/mo)	241 (54.3%)	-	-
Consistency of Contact			
Never Cancelled	302 (69.0%)	-	-
Cancelled Once	73 (16.7%)	-	-
Cancelled More than Once	63 (14.4%)	-	-

Mentor type and relationship dynamics. Slightly more than half of the sample ($n = 250$, 56%) were natural mentors and 44% ($n = 194$) were formal mentors. On a scale of 1 – 6, mentors on average rated the closeness of their relationship as 4.3 ($SD = 1.0$), their relationship compatibility as 4.7 ($SD = .77$), the program support as 3.4 ($SD = 1.7$), the presence of interference as 4.8 ($SD = .78$), the degree of fun focus as 4.0 ($SD =$

.98), the degree of growth focus as 4.3 ($SD = 1.1$), and the degree of sharing as 4.0 ($SD = .87$).

Demographic characteristics. The average age of the mentors was 41.8 years ($SD = 12.8$), and 85% identified as female. Nearly two-thirds of the sample identified as non-Hispanic white ($n = 284$, 64%). One-third of the mentors lived in the South ($n = 146$, 33%), nearly a third in the West ($n = 138$, 31%), nearly a quarter in the Northeast ($n = 95$, 22%), and 14% ($n = 62$) in the Midwest. Nearly three-quarters ($n = 319$, 72%) of the mentors had graduated from college or graduate school. The average age of youth mentees was 18.4 years ($SD = 3.6$), and the majority of the youth identified as non-white ($n = 252$, 57%) with most of these youth identifying as non-Hispanic black ($n = 140$, 32%) or Hispanic ($n = 80$, 18%). Nearly two thirds of the mentees identified as female ($n = 280$, 63%), roughly one-third as male ($n = 153$, 35%), and 2% ($n = 10$) as other.

Characteristics of the relationship quality. Half of the mentors ($n = 225$, 51%) reported *long-length* relationships, and roughly one-quarter each reported *short-length* relationships ($n = 125$, 28%) or *medium-length* relationships ($n = 94$, 21%). The majority of the mentors ($n = 241$, 54%) reported *frequent contact* with their mentees, and over two-thirds ($n = 302$, 69%) reported never cancelling a meeting with their mentee in the last year. The average mentor rated their feelings of mentor efficacy as 4.7 ($SD = .77$) on a scale of 1-6.

Multivariate analyses.

Mentor efficacy. Table 2 reports the findings from the linear regression on mentor efficacy and contains the unstandardized coefficients and 95% confidence intervals for each predictor in the model. The adjusted R-squared for this model was .64, meaning that the predictor variables (i.e., mentor type, relationship dynamics, and

demographic characteristics) explained 64% of the variance in mentor efficacy for this study.

Table 2. Linear Regression on Mentor Efficacy: Beta Coefficients and 95% Confidence Intervals

Predictor (reference group)	b (95% CI)
<i>Mentor type (formal mentor)</i>	
Natural mentor	-.11* (-.23 - -.00)
<i>MCQ Scales</i>	
<i>Internal Relationship Dynamics</i>	
Closeness	.44‡ (.37 - .51)
Compatibility	.21‡ (.122 - .29)
<i>External Relationship Dynamics</i>	
Program support	.01 (-.03 - .04)
Interference	.20‡ (.13 - .26)
<i>Structure of the Relationship</i>	
Fun focus	-.09† (-.15 - -.03)
Growth focus	.01 (-.04 - .09)
Sharing	.02 (-.05 - .09)
<i>Mentor Demographics</i>	
Age	-.00 (-.01 - .00)
Race (non-Hispanic white)	
Non-Hispanic black	-.10 (-.25 - .05)
Hispanic	-.08 (-.24 - .08)
Other	.05 (-.12 - .22)
Gender (female)	
Male	-.01 (-.15 - .13)
Region (Northeast)	
Midwest	.19* (.03 - .35)
South	.02 (-.10 - .15)
West	-.02 (-.15 - .11)
% of community in poverty	.03 (-.01 - .08)
Education (graduate school)	
High school	-.13 (-.31 - .05)
2-year college	-.07 (-.20 - .06)
4-year college	-.07 (-.18 - .03)
<i>Youth Demographics</i>	
Age	-.01 (-.03 - .00)
Race (non-Hispanic white)	
Non-Hispanic black	.09 (-.03 - .21)
Hispanic	.07 (-.06 - .21)
Other	.03 (-.15 - .21)
Gender (female)	
Male	.06 (-.05 - .16)
Other	-.35 (-.68 - -.02)
N	420
F(26, 393)	29.67‡
Adjusted R-squared	.64
Root MSE	.46

Notes: *p < .05; †p < .01; ‡p < .001

Controlling for relationship dynamics and demographic characteristics, being a natural mentor was associated with a significant decrease of .11 points on the mentor efficacy scale ($b = -.11, p = .04$). In other words, formal mentors on average scored slightly higher on the mentor efficacy scale than natural mentors, controlling for other variables in the model.

Several of the relationship dynamics measured by the MCQ scales were significantly associated with the mentor efficacy scale. Specifically, mentor reported closeness, compatibility, and interference were positively associated with mentor efficacy, whereas a fun focus was negatively associated with mentor efficacy, controlling for all other variables in the model. In terms of closeness, a one point increase on the closeness scale was associated with a .44 point increase on the mentor efficacy scale ($b = .44, p < .01$), meaning that mentors who felt close to their mentees were more likely to also feel efficacious. In terms of compatibility, a one point increase on the compatibility scale was associated with a .21 increase on the efficacy scale ($b = .21, p < .01$), meaning that mentors who felt more compatible with their mentees were more likely to feel efficacious. Interestingly, and somewhat unexpectedly, mentors who reported more interference, or environmental stressors, felt more efficacious, and a one-point increase on the interference scale was associated with a .20 point increase on the mentor efficacy scale ($b = .20, p < .01$). Finally, mentors who had higher degrees of reported fun-focus in their mentoring relationships were less likely to report feeling efficacious, and a one unit increase on the fun-focus scale was associated with a .09 decrease on the mentor efficacy scale ($b = -.09, p < .01$). The MCQ scales of program support, growth focus, and sharing were not significantly associated with the mentor efficacy scale.

In terms of demographic characteristics, only the geographical residence of the mentors was significantly associated with the mentor efficacy scale. Specifically,

mentors who lived in the Midwest were significantly more likely to report a higher degree of mentor efficacy than mentors in the Northeast ($b = .19, p = .02$), controlling for other variables in the model. None of the other mentor or youth demographic characteristics were significantly associated with mentor efficacy.

Length of mentoring relationship. Table 3 reports the findings from the multinomial logistic regression on length of the mentoring relationship and contains relative risk ratios (RRR) and 95% confidence intervals for two logit models regressing the length of mentoring relationships on the predictor variables (mentor type, relationship dynamics, and mentor and youth demographic characteristics). The pseudo R-squared for this model was .19, meaning that the predictor variables (i.e., mentor type, relationship dynamics, and demographic characteristics) explained 19% of the variance in length of the mentoring relationship for this study.

Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression on Length of Mentoring Relationship: Relative Risk Ratios (RRRs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs)

Predictor (reference group)	Medium-Length vs. Short-Length Relationships RRR (95% CI)	Long-Length vs. Short-Length Relationships RRR (95% CI)
<i>Mentor type</i> (formal mentor)		
Natural mentor	2.78 [†] (1.32-5.88)	4.72 [‡] (2.35-9.47)
<i>MCQ Scales</i>		
Internal Relationship Dynamics		
Closeness	1.48 (.95-2.32)	1.88 [†] (1.23-2.87)
Compatibility	1.05 (.59-1.89)	.72 (.42-1.22)
External Relationship Dynamics		
Program support	1.09 (.87-1.35)	1.08 (.88-1.32)
Interference	.91 (.60-1.38)	.59 [†] (.40-.88)
Structure of the Relationship		
Fun focus	1.08 (.74-1.58)	1.18 (.82-1.70)
Growth focus	.92 (.64-1.31)	1.05 (.74-1.49)
Sharing	.94 (.59-1.49)	.82 (.53-1.26)
<i>Mentor Demographics</i>		
Age	1.02 (.99-1.04)	1.03 [*] (1.00-1.05)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	2.28 (.82-6.38)	4.03 [†] (1.56-10.43)
Hispanic	.73 (.26-2.10)	.95 (.37-2.46)

Other	1.58 (.51-4.93)	2.11 (.70-6.30)
Gender (female)		
Male	.34 (.12-1.01)	1.13 (.48-2.66)
Region (Northeast)		
Midwest	1.00 (.36-2.82)	.56 (.20-1.51)
South	1.13 (.50-2.54)	.64 (.30-1.39)
West	.76 (.31-1.87)	.82 (.37-1.84)
% of community in poverty	.97 (.70-1.35)	1.11 (.82-1.50)
Education (graduate school)		
High school	1.32 (.39-4.51)	3.37 [‡] (1.10-10.33)
2-year college	1.09 (.48-2.49)	1.14 (.51-2.57)
4-year college	.85 (.42-1.73)	1.86 (.97-3.57)
<i>Youth Demographics</i>		
Age	1.12 (.99-1.24)	1.39 [‡] (1.25-1.54)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	.81 (.37-1.74)	.73 (.36-1.49)
Hispanic	1.92 (.78-4.71)	1.55 (.67-3.60)
Other	1.37 (.42-4.44)	1.03 (.33-3.17)
Gender (female)		
Male	1.10 (.53-2.27)	1.13 (.58-2.22)
Other	4.08 (.39-42.96)	.81 (.07-9.53)
<i>N</i>		420
Log Likelihood		-352.29
LR chi-square		167.20, 52df [‡]
Pseudo R-square		.19

Notes: A short length mentoring relationship is defined as one that has been intact for less than one year. A medium length mentoring relationship is defined as one that has been in tact for 1-2 years. A long length mentoring relationship is defined as one that has been in tact for more than 2 years. The reference group for the above models is short-length mentoring relationships.

*p < .05; †p < .01; ‡p < .001

In the first logit model, only mentor type was significantly associated with an increased likelihood of a *medium-length* relationship versus a *short-length* relationship. Specifically, naturally mentored foster youth were 2.78 times as likely to be in a *medium-length* relationship than a *short-length* relationship compared to formally mentored foster youth (RRR = 2.78, $p = .01$), controlling for all other variables in the model. There were no internal, external, or structural relationship dynamics or demographic characteristics of the mentors or youth that were significantly associated with an increased likelihood of a *medium-length* relationship over a *short-length* relationship.

The second logit model, comparing the relative likelihood of *long-length* relationships with *short-length* relationships, yielded an increased association with

mentor type as compared to the first logit model (*medium-length* versus *short-length*). Natural mentoring relationships were 4.72 times as likely to be *long-length* (i.e., > 2 years) versus *short-length* (i.e., < 1 year) compared to formally matched mentoring relationships (RRR = 4.72, $p < .01$).

The second logit model also yielded significant relationships between the length of the mentoring relationship and a couple of the MCQ scale relationship dynamics (i.e., closeness and interference). Relational closeness was positively associated with relationship length, meaning that mentors who reported greater degrees of closeness were more likely to be in *long-length* relationships. Given a one point increase on the MCQ closeness scale, mentors were 1.88 times as likely to be in a *long-length* relationship relative to a *short-length* relationship (RRR = 1.88, $p = .01$), controlling for mentor type, other MCQ scale values, and demographics. Conversely, mentors who reported greater levels of interference were less likely to experience *long-length* relationships. A one point increase on the interference scale was associated with a 41% decrease in the probability of being in a *long-length* relationship (RRR = .59, $p = .01$), controlling for other variables in the model.

In terms of demographic characteristics, mentor's age, race, and education as well as youth's age were all associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of being in a *long-length* relationship versus a *short-length* relationship, controlling for other variables in the model. Older mentors were slightly more likely to be in *long-length* relationships relative to *short-length* relationships, and a one year increase in mentor's age was associated with a 3% increase in the likelihood of being in a *long-length* relationship over a *short-length* relationship (RRR = 1.03, $p = .04$). Non-Hispanic black mentors were 4.03 times as likely to be in *long-length* relationships relative to *short-length* relationships than non-Hispanic white mentors (RRR = 4.03, $p < .01$). Mentors

with only a high school education were 3.37 times as likely to be in *long-length* mentoring relationships relative to *short-length* relationships than mentors with a graduate education (RRR = 3.37, $p < .01$). In terms of youth demographics, older youth were more likely to be in *long-length* mentoring relationships, and a one year increase in age was associated with a 39% increase in the likelihood of being in a *long-length* relationship versus a *short-length* relationship (RRR = 1.39, $p < .01$). Other mentor and youth demographic characteristics were not significantly associated with the length of the relationship in the second logit model.

Frequency of contact. Table 4 reports the findings from the multinomial logistic regression on frequency of contact and contains relative risk ratios (RRR) and 95% confidence intervals for two logit models regressing the frequency of contact on the predictor variables (mentor type, relationship dynamics, and mentor and youth demographic characteristics). The pseudo R-squared for this model was .18, meaning that the predictor variables (i.e., mentor type, relationship dynamics, and demographic characteristics) explained 18% of the variance in frequency of contact for this study. Mentor type was not significantly associated with frequency of contact in either logit model.

Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression on Infrequent Contact: Relative Risk Ratios (RRRs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs)

Predictor (reference group)	Somewhat Frequent vs. Infrequent RRR (95% CI)	Frequent vs. Infrequent RRR (95% CI)
<i>Mentor type</i> (formal mentor)		
Natural mentor	.75 (.33-1.71)	.76 (.35-1.66)
<i>MCQ Scales</i>		
Internal Relationship Dynamics		
Closeness	1.11 (.69-1.79)	1.58 [†] (1.02-2.44)
Compatibility	.95 (.51-1.74)	.87 (.49-1.53)
External Relationship Dynamics		
Program support	1.37 [†] (1.07-1.74)	1.17 (.93-1.46)

Interference	1.40 (.88-2.25)	1.80 [†] (1.16-2.78)
Structure of the Relationship		
Fun focus	1.43 (.93-2.20)	1.31 (.88-1.93)
Growth focus	.79 (.53-1.18)	1.44 (.98-2.10)
Sharing	.94 (.59-1.49)	.72 (.44-1.18)
<i>Mentor Demographics</i>		
Age	1.02 (.99-1.05)	.99 (.96-1.02)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	1.02 (.33-3.18)	1.08 (.39-3.01)
Hispanic	1.69 (.41-6.9)	2.17 (.59-7.97)
Other	1.09 (.33-3.61)	.55 (.17-1.76)
Gender (female)		
Male	.78 (.28-2.22)	.70 (.27-1.83)
Region (Northeast)		
Midwest	1.19 (.39-3.61)	1.55 (.57-4.26)
South	1.37 (.56-3.33)	1.80 (.78-4.14)
West	2.20 (.84-5.77)	2.30 (.91-5.79)
% of community in poverty	1.48 [‡] (1.01-2.15)	1.32 (.92-1.91)
Education (graduate school)		
High school	.58 (.13-2.47)	1.08 (.30-3.84)
2-year college	.49 (.17-1.36)	1.34 (.55-3.26)
4-year college	.97 (.46-2.03)	.98 (.48-2.01)
<i>Youth Demographics</i>		
Age	.84 [†] (.77-.93)	.80 [‡] (.73-.88)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	.78 (.31-1.93)	1.49 (.64-3.50)
Hispanic	.72 (.27-1.93)	.96 (.38-2.44)
Other	.82 (.22-3.09)	1.32 (.40-4.38)
Gender (female)		
Male	1.44 (.66-3.12)	1.59 (.77-3.28)
Other	.83 (.11-6.59)	.24 (.03-2.00)
<i>N</i>		420
Log Likelihood		-342.32
LR chi-square		150.85, 52df [‡]
Pseudo R-square		.18

Notes: Infrequent contact is defined less than one in-person contact per month. Somewhat frequent contact is defined as 1-2 in-person contacts per month. Frequent contact is defined as more than 2 in-person contacts per month. The reference group for the above models is infrequent contact.

*p < .05; †p < .01; ‡p < .001

In the first logit model, comparing *infrequent contact* with *somewhat frequent contact*, the only MCQ scale that was significantly associated with frequency of contact was program support, and mentors who reported more program support were more likely to be in relationships characterized by *somewhat frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*, controlling for the other variables in the model (RRR = 1.37, p = .01).

The only mentor demographic characteristic significantly associated with frequency of contact was the poverty indicator, measured as the percent of the mentor's residential community living below the poverty line. A one percent increase in the number of people from the mentor's community living beneath the poverty line was associated with a 47% increase in the likelihood of being in a relationship characterized by *somewhat frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*, controlling for the other variables in the model (RRR = 1.47, $p = .04$). In terms of youth demographic characteristics, only age was significantly related to frequency of contact, and on average, older youth were less likely to have *frequent contact* with their mentors. Specifically, a one year increase in youth age was associated with a 16% decrease in the likelihood of having *somewhat frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*, controlling for the other variables in the model (RRR = .84, $p < .01$).

In the second logit model only the relationship dynamics of closeness and presence of interference were significantly associated with frequency of contact, controlling for the other variables in the model. Both closeness and interference were positively associated with frequency of contact. On average, mentors who were closer were more likely to have more *frequent contact*, and mentors who had more interference were more likely to have more *frequent contact*. Controlling for the other variables in the model, a one-point increase on the MCQ closeness scale was associated with a 58% increase in the likelihood of being in a relationship characterized by *frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact* (RRR = 1.58, $p = .04$), and a one point increase on the interference scale was associated with an 80% increase in the likelihood of having *frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact* (RRR = 1.80, $p = .01$). In the second logit model, none of the mentor demographic characteristics were significantly associated with frequency of contact, though youth age remained a significant predictor of *frequent*

contact. A one year increase in age was associated with a 20% decrease in the likelihood of having *frequent contact* versus *infrequent contact*, controlling for the other variables in the model (RRR = .80, $p < .01$).

Consistency of contact. Table 5 reports the findings from the multinomial logistic regression on frequency of contact and contains relative risk ratios (RRR) and 95% confidence intervals for two logit models regressing the consistency of contact on the predictor variables (mentor type, relationship dynamics, and mentor and youth demographic characteristics). The pseudo R-squared for this model was .10, meaning that the predictor variables (i.e., mentor type, relationship dynamics, and demographic characteristics) explained 10% of the variance in consistency of contact for this study. Mentor type was not significantly associated with consistency of contact in either logit model.

Table 5. Multinomial Logistic Regression on Consistent Contact: Relative Risk Ratios (RRRs) and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs)

Predictor (reference group)	Cancelled Once vs. Never Cancelled RRR (95% CI)	Cancelled More than Once vs. Never Cancelled RRR (95% CI)
<i>Mentor type</i> (formal mentor)		
Natural mentor	.73 (.36-1.47)	1.18 (.56-2.47)
<i>MCQ Scales</i>		
Internal Relationship Dynamics		
Closeness	1.70 [†] (1.13-2.54)	1.27 (.82-1.95)
Compatibility	.52 [‡] (.30-.89)	.77 (.44-1.35)
External Relationship Dynamics		
Program support	1.07 (.87-1.32)	1.25 (.99-1.56)
Interference	.73 (.49-1.08)	.51 [†] (.33-.78)
Structure of the Relationship		
Fun focus	1.13 (.77-1.64)	.97 (.65-1.44)
Growth focus	.86 (.61-1.21)	1.24 (.83-1.85)
Sharing	.68 (.43-1.08)	1.29 (.79-2.10)
<i>Mentor Demographics</i>		
Age	.98 (.96-1.01)	.98 (.96-1.01)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	2.67 [‡] (1.05-6.76)	1.85 (.70-4.90)
Hispanic	1.37 (.50-3.73)	.77 (.26-2.30)

Other	1.54 (.53-4.46)	.75 (.22-2.56)
Gender (female)		
Male	1.04 (.40-2.72)	.43 (.16-1.16)
Region (Northeast)		
Midwest	.59 (.19-1.77)	.93 (.30-2.90)
South	1.67 (.78-3.59)	1.49 (.62-3.57)
West	.99 (.43-2.31)	1.60 (.65-3.98)
% of community in poverty	.92 (.68-1.27)	1.10 (.79-1.53)
Education (graduate school)		
High school	1.90 (.61-5.94)	.92 (.28-3.04)
2-year college	.72 (.30-1.71)	.59 (.26-1.34)
4-year college	1.02 (.53-1.94)	.58 (.28-1.22)
<i>Youth Demographics</i>		
Age	1.04 (.95-1.13)	1.01 (.92-1.11)
Race (non-Hispanic white)		
Non-Hispanic black	.59 (.27-1.29)	.50 (.21-1.20)
Hispanic	.63 (.26-1.55)	.71 (.29-1.72)
Other	2.62 (.96-7.17)	1.46 (.45-4.71)
Gender (female)		
Male	.42 (.20-.88)	1.40 (.71-2.74)
Other	.98 (.09-10.75)	.97 (.09-9.95)
<i>N</i>		415
Log Likelihood		-315.17
LR chi-square		70.64, 52df*
Pseudo R-square		.10

Notes: Consistent contact is defined as never having cancelled a mentee meeting. Never cancelled is the reference group for the above model.

* $p < .05$; † $p < .01$; ‡ $p < .001$

In terms of relationship dynamics, both closeness and compatibility were significantly associated with consistency of contact in the first logit model, but in opposite directions. Controlling for other variables in the model, mentors who reported closer relationships were more likely to cancel once versus *never cancelling* (RRR = 1.70, $p = .01$), though mentors who reported more compatible relationships were less likely to have *cancelled once* versus *never cancelling* (RRR = .52, $p = .02$). In terms of mentor and youth demographic characteristics, only mentor race was significantly associated with consistency of contact, and non-Hispanic black mentors were 2.67 times as likely to cancel once versus *never cancelling*, controlling for other variables in the model (RRR = 2.67, $p = .04$). None of the other demographic characteristics were significant.

In terms of relationship dynamics in the second logit model, only interference was significantly associated with consistency of contact, and a one point increase on the interference scale was significantly associated with a 49% decrease in the likelihood of cancelling more than once versus *never cancelling* (RRR = .51, $p < .01$). In other words, on average mentors with more stressors were less likely to have *cancelled more than once* versus *never cancelling*, controlling for the other variables in the model. None of the mentor or youth demographic characteristics were significantly associated with consistency of contact in the second logit model.

Qualitative Results

Participants. Eight mentors participated in qualitative interviews for this study, and one-quarter each were low MCQ scoring natural mentors, low MCQ scoring formal mentors, high MCQ scoring natural mentors, and high MCQ scoring formal mentors. On average, mentors with lower MCQ scores reported lower levels of internally perceived closeness and compatibility and greater environmental stressors. Conversely, mentors with higher MCQ scores tended to report higher levels of internally perceived closeness and compatibility and fewer environmental stressors. The average age of the mentors that were interviewed was 38.0 years ($SD = 11.3$), and 88% identified as female. Half of the mentors identified as non-Hispanic white ($n = 4$); two identified as non-Hispanic black; and one each identified as Hispanic and other. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the mentors had graduated from a 4-year college or graduate school.

The average age of the youth mentees was 17.6 years ($SD = 3.2$), and half of the youth identified as non-Hispanic white. Two youth mentees identified as non-Hispanic

black, and two youth identified as Hispanic. Half of the mentees identified as female ($n = 280$, 63%).

Half of the mentors reported *long-length* relationships, and one quarter each reported *short-length or medium-length* relationships. The majority of the mentors ($n = 6$) reported *frequent contact* with their mentees, though two mentors reported *infrequent contact*. Likewise, the majority of the mentors ($n = 6$) reported never cancelling a meeting with their mentee, while two mentors reported cancelling more than once.

Mentor type: Hybrid mentoring. Although much of the extant literature conceptualizes *mentor type* as a binary construct (i.e., formal versus natural), the notion of *hybrid mentoring* emerged from this study. I use the term *hybrid mentoring* to refer to mentors whose relationships fall on a spectrum of formally supported and naturally occurring. Indeed, mentors with higher scores possessed elements from both natural and formal mentoring relationships, meaning that they had informal, community-based connections with youth outside of program settings as well as the support of programs. Conversely, several of the mentors with lower relationship scores either had naturally occurring mentoring relationships with no programmatic support or had formally matched mentoring relationships with no informal connections outside of a program.

The following excerpt illustrates the occurrence of hybrid mentoring between a dental assistant from a community-based clinic and a young man from a child welfare group home with a formal mentoring program. The mentor tells her story of how the relationship started:

I am a dental assistant, and I see these children from the facility [or group home] at the dentist's office. ... That's actually how I met this child. He needed a very scary dental procedure where we were going to remove his front tooth. So I went to the facility and said, 'This child's fixin' to go through a pretty rough procedure. I would like to know, can I mentor him? Can I have him so maybe he will feel a little bit better about going through this procedure of losing his front tooth at age 15?' And so that's how I

got- well his first name is Ben¹. That's how I began to have a relationship with Ben. Ben came into the dentist's office, and I saw there was an obvious need for a relationship and especially trust to remove your front tooth.

The mentor elaborated on the story, stating that after Ben's dental procedure, she remained his mentor. She attributes the closeness of their relationship to their informal connection and meeting in the community as well as the programmatic support offered by the group home. In essence, her relationship is emblematic of the strengths inherent in both natural and formal mentoring, which may contribute to their high scoring mentoring relationship.

Another mentor with a high scoring relationship met her youth mentee while volunteering at a summer camp. During her time at camp, the mentor stated that she and the youth formed a natural connection outside of a pressured context, and then the mentor pursued a formal mentoring relationship with a local mentoring agency. The mentor recalls her story:

She asked me to be her mentor ... And I thought about it and it just didn't feel right just to do that on our own. I felt like I needed the support of a formal relationship so I told Tia the next day after I thought about it, this is at camp, towards the end of camp, we had one very emotional night where everybody shared what they'd gained. Again, that whole camp experience was really a jumpstart to everything. I told her that I wanted to go through the formal mentoring and so I did. So I went through a training that [the program] does for mentors and then got assigned to her. I told them in advance, 'I want to mentor her. Don't give me the pick of the litter. I want Tia.' And so that's how we did it.

Conversely, a couple of natural mentors, particularly those who were mentoring youth with high needs, struggled without the programmatic support that these mentors above utilized. These natural mentors reported lower scoring relationships. Likewise, a couple of the formal mentors reported struggles related to the formation of a close, trust-

¹ All adult mentors' and youth mentees' names have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants in this study.

based relationship within the sole context of a structured program. The lack of an organic, naturally occurring connection was a difficult barrier to overcome. In describing these challenges, one lower scoring, formally matched mentor stated, "I think we had a lot in common technically on paper, but it took a different kind of meeting to figure out whether you click as people."

Internal dynamics of the relationship.

Common ground. For many mentors, the presence of a close, mentoring relationship was associated with shared common ground that seemed to range on a spectrum of importance. From the interviews, mentors prioritized shared, familial blood relationships as the most important bond, followed by similar significant life experiences and then shared interests. For example, one mentor described the challenges associated with mentoring his younger brother, whom he met as an adult. In describing his newly acquired relationship with his younger sibling, the mentor stated, "The most important part was that we had a common ground, that we knew that we are somehow related. And then the other part would be knowing that we had similar experiences." Though this mentor and his brother had very different personalities, interests, and even life experiences, they shared a familial bond and similarly experienced life in foster care, both which seemed to secure their relationship.

Particularly among formal mentors who must overcome barriers associated with the matching process, shared life experiences served as assets that helped to facilitate meaningful connections. For example, one mentor differed from her youth mentee in most demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and yet, they experienced a higher scoring relationship by connecting over the similar loss of their fathers, an intense life experience that seemed to unite them as human beings.

I think I can relate to him in ways with my background, like he lost his dad at a young age and so did I. And I would relate to him like, 'If they could see us now they would be so proud.' You know I can relate in ways that I know he's missing with the parents and I know how he feels because I've been there. I tell him like maybe just take a quiet moment, talk to him. If you're mad at him, say you're mad at him, get it out. So I can kinda relate to what he's missing and kind of give him a heads up that you have a lot to be proud of and we need to continue. I don't say you, I say we. It's not like I'm telling him what to do, it's kinda of what I've done in life and what's helped me. So I use my own personal kind of experiences as an example.

Another formal mentor, who experienced a lower scoring relationship, reflected on the various mentoring roles she plays in her different contexts. She is an assistant professor at a large state college in the Southwest, and she teaches a course about immigration, which she reports is a rather intense and emotionally charged subject for many students. She states that many students are confronted with new ideas and ideologies in her course, and as a result, many students self-reflect in meaningful ways. In comparing her relationships with her youth mentee to those with her college students, she states:

What I did realize, like I said, was that with the mentees, we started with matching on paper our personalities and interests, whereas for the students I've had who kind of have continued a relationship and keep in touch, we don't have a lot in common and so we don't have very many interests but that one class or that one topic that they got interested in for some reason seems to have then developed and become a relationship as well. So I still hear from them and I still see them. So I don't know why that is because normally, if this was a mentor-mentee relationship I don't think we'd be matched with these students because we don't have a whole lot in common.

This mentor reported that, on paper, she and her mentee had a lot of similar interests, but they had difficulty forming a meaningful connection. Similarly, another formal mentor with a lower scoring relationship commented that though she and her mentee had similar interests, they did not experience a close connection in their relationship.

I think we definitely had certain things in common. We definitely both really connected over books. We're both big, avid readers and we still

kind of connect in that way. ... But she was just really hard to connect with in that she seemed a little bit, like, younger than maybe her sort of chronological age. And she also just was kind of absent in some ways.

This mentor went on to explain that their life experiences, backgrounds, views of the world, and religious beliefs were so different that it was difficult to meaningfully connect.

Youth's needs and assets. The level of youth's needs and assets emerged as a theme related to the quality of the mentoring relationship. Specifically, mentors who reported lower scoring relationships often described a number of significant challenges that their youth mentees experienced. Conversely, mentors who reported higher scoring relationships tended to describe a number of internal assets that their youth mentees possessed. For example, one mentor, who reported a higher scoring mentoring relationship, described her youth mentee as a well-developed, mature young woman who was communicative and reliable, making it easier to engage in a relationship. The mentor commented that if her mentee did not possess these qualities, their relationship might have disrupted.

She has a well-formed personality, I would say, a survivor in a lot of ways, but good at using assistance, very mature, amazingly mature, and not real typical I think for a foster kid. Her sense of identity is well developed. ... Her maturity level is really solid. It's more mature than she probably ought to be, so I don't think we've had any huge bumps in the road that way, which I'm grateful for, because I don't know that I would have extreme patience with somebody who just keeps failing to show up or contact me. In fact, I can guarantee I probably wouldn't. I probably would be like, 'I can't do this.'

Several of the mentors with lower scoring mentoring relationships described feeling unprepared for addressing and responding to their mentees' challenges within the relational context. For example, one mentor talked about how ill-prepared his mentee was for adulthood after years of group home placement. The mentor reflected that his mentee never learned adequate interpersonal skills, which made their communication difficult. Another mentor with a lower scoring relationship described the

significant mental health challenges that her mentee experienced, and the mentor disclosed feeling overwhelmed with their relationship:

Brianna is a very difficult person. She has severe psychological issues. She is basically at this point a 19-year old with a 19-year old's legal abilities. She has the psychological aspects of a two-year old but has the intelligence of a doctoral student. ... They had not prepared me for how many medications she was actually on, all of her diagnoses of complete instability both homicidal and suicidal, and it has been downhill ever since. ... I had no idea this is what I was getting into and I was not intellectually prepared or emotionally prepared to handle this person I'm supposed to be mentoring.

Affirmation of mentor's motivation to mentor. Many of the mentors with higher scoring relationships felt that their motivation to mentor was affirmed. Reflecting the sentiment of other mentors, one mentor stated, "I mean it's voluntary on both people's parts. That's the thing. Mentoring- you're not a foster parent, they're not paying you. There has to be enough of validation and that validation is a positive thing."

Some mentors were motivated by a desire to "give back" or "make a difference" in their mentee's life, and when they felt that they were able to effectively meet some of the youth's needs, they tended to perceive themselves as effective and their relationships as higher quality. For example, one mentor stated:

I am a social worker, and I deal with a lot of bad, difficult situations where there's not a lot of hope of significant change anyway. I think that's what kept me going. ... I think I just enjoyed being able to enjoy the hopefulness in her in the future orientation that she had and just play a part of her success.

Another mentor with a higher scoring relationship felt that she was able to effectively step in as a "mother figure" for her mentee. At a young age, her mentee had twins, and this mentor was able to provide many concrete resources and supplies for her babies. In describing her mentee, the mentor said:

She's been in the system for a long time, and she just wanted like a mother figure in her life. And I don't know, she did struggle with depression and just not having anyone to talk to. So now she has me,

and she's able to talk to me about anything. And then I help her with her babies and it works out good.

Even among lower scoring mentoring relationships, when mentors' motivations to mentor were affirmed, the relationships tended to persist. In this way, the affirmation of mentors' motivations may even serve protectively. For example, one mentor with a lower scoring relationship discussed the challenges she encountered connecting with her mentee, and yet she continued to mentor because she was intrigued by the process and committed to the youth.

I guess I thought we would become closer, yes, maybe emotionally or just like the conversation would get easier after a certain point, was not as forced, but I never really felt like it got to that point. I did feel kind of like I was trying to draw her out, like engage, but not, and I don't know if that's how she felt or if that was just her style of interacting with people. But I did feel like I never maybe really got underneath or got to a point where we really were just comfortable; whereas I think that's what I pictured maybe. ... But I did feel like I wanted to continue because I felt like she did – I enjoyed spending time with her. I don't want to say that it wasn't a good relationship. I did have a good time and find it to be an interesting thing to be involved in her life.

Later in the conversation, this mentor expanded on what it meant to be “an interesting thing to be involved in her life.” I asked her what mattered most in her mentoring relationship, and she responded:

What mattered most to me? I think for me I'm really, I'm really just interested in the foster care system, and so it was just really, even if we had a hard time with it, like it was still fascinating and kind of enlightening for me to be up close and personal with a family and the child who had been involved in the system and kind of hear their story and see their house and get to know who they were and kind of get to be a little bit of a part of that. So I think that was part of what drove me to be involved and to continue, and I think, yes, I liked them and I liked the activities that we did and it was enjoyable.

In other words, the intellectual fulfillment, as well as the knowledge that the relationship was enjoyable to the youth, motivated this mentor with a lower scoring relationship to persist.

External dynamics of the relationship.

Programmatic involvement. Mentors from this study reported a number of experiences related to foster care and mentor programming that impacted their ability to form quality mentoring relationships. Similar to other themes in this study, the usefulness of programmatic involvement ranged on a spectrum from helpful to unhelpful. Helpful mentor programming included the provision of training, professional problem solving, and peer support, and these mentors often attributed these forms of support to higher scoring mentoring relationships. On the other hand, unhelpful programmatic involvement often interfered with the growth of the mentoring relationships. Specifically, some mentors reported that youth involvement in foster care programming was associated with greater living instability for youth, high staff turnover, and bureaucratic rules and regulations that hampered social outings and the development of the relationship.

There was a range of experiences in terms of how mentors experienced programmatic mentoring. Some mentors reported that such programs were helpful in navigating difficult situations with their youth mentees. For example, one mentor recalled a time when her mentee was suddenly placed in a pre-adoptive home with a family who did not support the continuation of the mentoring relationship. The mentor turned to the program for advice and support, and found it to be helpful:

I have never felt like I couldn't go to [the program]. Like for example, with this adoptive family, I kind of reached out and said, 'What do I do? They're not letting me see him. Every week there's an excuse.' So I reached out to them in a situation I just didn't know how to handle correctly. And they were always very helpful.

Other mentors utilized their mentoring programs to find support from fellow mentors of youth in foster care. They developed networks of support that were facilitated by the

mentoring program, and the mentors could gauge the normalcy of their experiences vis-à-vis other mentors' experiences. One mentor describes such programmatic support:

They put on an event a couple times a year, and those events help because you get to meet with other mentors and kind of share experiences and look at how other mentees and mentors interact. So that's one thing I noticed in February. I think they had their big event for the year, and I saw while I was there that a lot of mentor/mentees, they weren't really talking. You know what I mean? There was sort of one-word answers here and there, but that awkwardness of the relationship was more generally. So I was like, 'Oh, this is what it's like normally.' It felt more normal at that point. So those were definitely helpful to go to.

In terms of unhelpful programmatic support, mentors identified poor communication with program staff, youth living instability, and overly burdensome programmatic rules and regulations. One mentor said that during the course of their six-month relationship, her mentee moved several times, and no one ever notified her after each move. The mentor stated, "I would call her group home and want to confirm our Saturday meeting or whatever and the group home had no idea where she was." Another mentor reported that she and her mentee texted and communicated via phone until her cell phone was confiscated by the group home. One mentor concluded that though she wanted to spend more quality time with her mentee, the "bureaucracy" of the system seemed to interfere:

We did talk at one point about going maybe hiking somewhere and all of that, but then she would move away from those distances and I'm like, okay, we've got to figure out something else to do. But then just, I think the difficulty in coordinating with the group homes and making sure I'd tell everybody in the group homes that I'm going to come at this time and take her and so it's just a lot of organizing. You have to be very simple. If you try to plan for an entire day, it's just a lot of bureaucracy that has to happen before, so it's much simpler to just say, 'I'm coming at 6 and bring her home by 7:30,' and just kind of keep it simple. Because one of the things, the group homes themselves, the people who are there are on shifts. And so sometimes you can confirm in the morning with someone and if they don't write it down, then the people who are there at night don't have a clue that that's happening so that makes it a little bit complicated.

Other mentors reported that the range of the mentoring activities was limited due to rules that prevented youth from participating in age-appropriate, normal activities. For example, one mentor said that she and her mentee both enjoyed fishing, and though she wanted to take him fishing, she was unable to do so due to the regulations of the group home. She observed that many of the rules seemed to be dictated by individual workers and were not always consistent.

He was a ward of the state and in a residential placement. You had curfews. You had restrictions on where he could go just because probably of foolish things that happened in the past to other children. People weren't careful, put them in a bad situation. So it kind of went overboard for everyone. They couldn't go to parks. They couldn't be around water. And they eased that up depending on the child, depending on what the worker says restrictions should be.

Youth's social support network. The youth's social support network emerged as a theme that influenced the quality of the mentoring relationship. In particular, the mentor's relationship with the youth's social support network seemed to be associated with the quality of the mentoring relationship. Several mentors who experienced higher scoring mentoring relationships reported better communication and closer relationships with members of the youth's social network, whereas mentors with lower scoring mentoring relationships tended to report more fragmented and strained relationships with members of the youth's social network. For example, one formal mentor with a lower scoring mentoring relationship discussed the struggles she encountered while mentoring the youth. She described a somewhat chaotic relationship that felt confusing at times:

Everybody's separate. She tries to keep everyone separate so no one can talk. We're not supposed to know that she's still contacting her mom for money. I wasn't supposed to know she was in the hospital. She's very good at keeping everyone separated so they can't talk to see what she's really doing. And she usually has friends for about a month and they fall apart.

Similarly, another mentor experienced difficulty in her mentoring relationship when her mentee was placed from a group home to a pre-adoptive home with parents who did not support the mentoring relationship. This mentor, who reported a higher scoring relationship, stated that her typically strong relationship suffered without the support of the pre-adoptive parents:

We were seeing each other once a week and it wasn't long. I think come July a family wanted to adopt him and he was placed with them within four weeks. And it was too soon. And they didn't want me to mentor. I think the first day he was placed, I took him out a little bit and then they wouldn't let me see him again. That couple said they didn't want him anymore and backed out of the adoption, and he's now placed with a biological relative temporarily. And I just now started to meet with him again, and we're doing good.

Conversely, mentors with higher scoring mentoring relationships tended to report strong relationships with members of the mentee's social networks, and these social networks were often more robust. For example, one mentor with a higher scoring relationship stated:

My relationship with Mary was just one cog in the wheel ... Actually, her foster mom is the French teacher at her high school and is a lovely, lovely lady, and so I got to know them a little bit. She's a single woman being a foster mom so she would bring together the support team for Mary now and then. We'd have a dinner. She just was wonderful. So I was able to be a part of a pretty rich support team.

The poignant words of this mentor were echoed among other mentors with higher scoring mentoring relationships. Other mentors described being welcomed by the family for major life events and felt included in the youth's larger family system. One such mentor stated, "I talk to Sara's mother and her sister a lot, and I recently met her brothers at the birth of the babies. They came to the hospital. And her sister and her mother and I are all Facebook friends so we keep in touch that way, communicate that way."

Structural dynamics of the relationship: Balanced purpose. Mentors from this study described the purpose, or structure, of their relationships on a spectrum from fun to growth-focused, with many higher scoring relationships containing elements of both. Indeed, most of the mentors with higher scoring mentoring relationships prioritized the growth-focused nature of their relationship, but also discussed a fun component. Conversely, mentors with lower scoring mentoring relationships tended to participate in fun activities with their mentees but did not have a growth-focused component. For example, one mentor with a higher scoring relationship described a number of outdoor activities that she and her mentee enjoyed doing together. However, she stated that through these activities, opportunities for rich and meaningful, growth-focused discussions occurred:

I kind of touch base on everything life has to offer. I'm not afraid to touch on things, like ask him about drugs in school. If you see drugs, what do you do? How do you handle that? Do you have a girlfriend? Be careful. Don't get yourself in a situation that you could be sorry for life. I'm not afraid to go to those places with him. I just don't kind of keep it at school, how you doing? I kind of like to dig a little deeper. And depending on how he reacts, I either continue more or back off. You know, I don't want to push him to a place that he's not comfortable. But luckily for the both of us, he's very comfortable talking. He asks questions if he has some. And if I know, I tell him. If I don't know, I tell him I don't know. I'm not afraid to not know.

From the mentor's perspective, these growth-focused conversations were reflective of a close, trust-based, quality relationship that she possessed with her mentee, and similar to other mentors, this growth-focus was situated in a relationship characterized by a depth of sharing from both the mentor and the mentee. Likewise, another mentor with a higher scoring mentoring relationship discussed a number of fun activities (e.g., church, game nights, dinners with family) that she regularly did with her mentee. However, she became very emotional and discussed her dual role as a friend/mentor and also as an "authority figure," alluding to the concept of her growth-focused role as a mentor.

But now, I mean our relationship is .. I'm his friend. I'm someone that he can confide in, but I'm also someone who expects a lot of responsibility out of him, and he knows that. So, I guess just being straight-up honest. ... My biggest thing is just always communicate your feelings and be straightforward from the beginning, and so far I've had a wonderful result with this kid. And like I say, I was there for him just today at the court for several hours. And I think that's something he can expect from me. If I say I'm gonna be there, I'm gonna be there. And that's something he's not ever had before. But our relationship now is I am his friend, but I also am his authority figure.

On the other hand, mentors who reported lower scoring relationships tended to lack a growth-focused component, which appeared to be difficult for many mentors. For example, two mentors similarly talked about the enjoyable and fun activities that they did with their mentees, but they struggled with moving beyond these fun activities and engaging in more growth-focused activities, which was an aspect of their relationships that they reported as difficult. Another mentor similarly talked about his struggle in desire to move toward a more growth-focused relationship with his mentee:

I think one thing I could've brought different was more clearly defined goals on the onset for the relationship, and that would be on – I mean not necessarily with the youth but for my own personal, my peers and what I wanted to help with or what the goals were of the relationship. And not having to be too intense, like you said, like a social worker, but I wish I could've maybe had more clearer defined goals of what I wanted to accomplish within a certain amount of time with the youth. I guess for example, just having a set time, date for what I wanted to help this youth accomplish or what they want to accomplish from our activities together. Something like that, where—'Cause we had goals for the mentoring relationship, but I think it was more laidback, maybe almost too laidback, but then it's hard to find a balance. So it's really important to find that balance.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

This study investigated the associations between mentor type (i.e. natural versus formal) and quality mentoring relationships as well as relationship dynamics (i.e., internal, external, and structural) and quality mentoring relationships for youth in and aging out of foster care. The following section discusses the quantitative findings of this study within the context of the qualitative interview data, past research, and mentoring theory. I prioritized the use of my qualitative interview data to interpret my quantitative survey findings because of the mixed methods sequential explanatory design I employed (i.e., qualitative data used to explain findings from previously collected quantitative data).

Mentor Type

The hypothesis that mentor type is significantly associated with a quality mentoring relationship was partially supported. Specifically, I hypothesized that natural mentoring relationships among foster youth would be characterized by significantly greater longevity, whereas formal mentoring relationships among foster youth would be characterized by significantly more frequent and consistent contact. I did not specify a directional hypothesis for the relationship between mentor type and mentor-perceived efficacy.

Regarding *length of the mentoring relationship*, natural mentors were significantly more likely than formal mentors to report the presence of *medium-length* and *long-length* mentoring relationships than *short-length* relationships. Though no prior studies have investigated differences in the length of the mentoring relationship based on mentor type among foster youth, this finding is consistent with both theory and prior mentoring research among non-foster youth. Specifically, Greeson (2013) contends that natural

mentoring relationships among foster youth may be more likely to endure over time than formal mentoring relationships, because natural mentoring relationships form organically within youth's community-based social networks apart from programs. As such, youth are not pressured to quickly form natural mentoring relationships, which may aid in the continuation of these relationships over time. Additionally, many foster youth continue to maintain connections within their communities of origin, even in the face of multiple placement moves. Thus, natural mentoring relationships may be more likely to weather the challenges that accompany placement instability than formal mentoring relationships that are often tied to a community-based program. Thus, when youth in foster care move to new communities, their community-based programming may be disrupted. Also, many formal mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters ask mentors to commit for one year (www.bbbs.org), whereas natural mentoring is not directed by such programmatic guidelines. Additionally, the finding that naturally mentored foster youth tend to experience longer relationships than formally mentored foster youth is consistent with other mentoring studies among non-foster youth. For example, a recent study among young adults (mean age = 30.97) who had been at risk of high school incompleteness found that their natural mentoring relationships ranged in length from six to fourteen years. Conversely, studies among formally mentored non-foster youth indicate that roughly half of all formally matched mentoring relationships disrupt within the first six months (Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009). Thus, the finding from this study that naturally mentored foster youth are more likely to have longer length relationships than formally mentored foster youth is not surprising.

There were no significant differences between naturally mentored and formally mentored foster youth in terms of *frequency* and *consistency* of contact. It is plausible

that there are other predictors not measured in this study that better explain variance in the frequency and consistency of contact between mentors and youth in foster care than mentor type. For example, the qualitative data from this study indicate that placement instability, high staff turn-over, and arduous group home rules and regulations may impact frequency and consistency of contact for both natural and formal mentors. Specifically, mentors discussed their frustration with showing up for visits with their mentees, and staff being unaware of their scheduled visits or being told that their mentee was moved to another placement. Mentors also discussed challenges pertaining to group home rules and regulations that hampered their planned outings. These challenges related to foster care experiences have also been identified by prior research studies as potential barriers to sustained, enduring mentoring relationships among foster youth (Greeson, Thompson, Evans-Chase, Ali, 2015; Greeson, Thompson, Ali & Wenger, 2015). Both prior research as well as the qualitative findings from this study suggest that child welfare experiences may be a better predictor of frequency and consistency of contact than mentor type, and further research is warranted.

In terms of mentor-perceived efficacy, formal mentors were significantly more likely to report higher efficacy scores than natural mentors, meaning that formally matched mentors on average perceived themselves as more successful than naturally occurring mentors. The qualitative data from this study provide insight into this finding. Specifically, programs may offer positive messaging, peer-support, and guidance to struggling mentors so that they are less likely to internalize difficult mentoring-related experiences. For example, as previously reported above, one formal mentor was able to normalize her somewhat challenging relationship with her youth mentee by participating in a program-sponsored dinner for mentor and mentees. She recalled, "I saw while I

was there that a lot of mentor/mentees, they weren't really talking. You know what I mean? There was sort of one-word answers here and there, but that awkwardness of the relationship was more generally. So I was like, 'Oh, this is what it's like normally.' It felt more normal at that point." Conversely, many of the natural mentors did not have programs, or support people, with whom they could gauge and make meaning of their experiences, which sometimes led to feelings of confusion and isolation. These natural mentors may have been less likely to understand their mentoring relationships in the context of the challenges inherent to mentoring youth in foster care and may have been less likely to view themselves as effective mentors. This interpretation is consistent with prior studies that have assessed the impact of mentor training and program support on quality mentoring relationships (DuBois et al., 2011; Martin & Sifers, 2012). Specifically, Martin and Sifers (2012) found a significant, positive relationship between training and mentor satisfaction within the mentoring relationship as well as a marginally significant, positive relationship between agency support and mentor satisfaction. They conclude that both training and ongoing agency support are integral components of mentoring programs that may help mentors to feel more efficacious and may encourage them to continue mentoring.

Relationship Dynamics

My hypotheses that relationship dynamics (i.e., internal, external, and structural) are significantly associated with a quality mentoring relationship were partially supported. Specifically, I hypothesized that relationships characterized by internally perceived closeness and compatibility are positively associated with quality mentoring relationships. I also hypothesized that relationships characterized by increased programmatic support and decreased interference are associated with higher quality

mentoring relationships. Finally I hypothesized that relationships characterized by greater fun-focus are associated with higher quality mentoring relationships, whereas relationships characterized by greater growth-focus are associated with lower quality mentoring relationships.

Internal dynamics. My hypotheses were confirmed regarding the significant positive associations between mentors' closeness scores and mentor-perceived efficacy, length of the relationship, and frequency of contact. Likewise, my hypotheses were confirmed regarding the significant positive associations between mentors' compatibility scores and mentor-perceived efficacy and consistency of contact. These findings are not surprising given the number of studies in the general mentoring literature that indicate a positive relationship between internally-perceived closeness/compatibility and quality mentoring relationships (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; DuBois & Silverthorn 2005; Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer et al., 2010). However, this study is the first to confirm this same association between closeness/compatibility and quality relationships among formally *and* naturally mentored youth with current and past foster care experiences. This empirically verified finding confirms the importance of close, compatible mentoring among foster youth in achieving quality relationships characterized by greater longevity, consistency, frequency, and mentor-perceived efficacy.

The finding regarding the negative association between mentors' closeness scores and consistency of contact is not consistent with the findings above or with the literature. Specifically, this study found that mentors with higher closeness scores were more likely to have *cancelled once* in the past year than to have *never cancelled*. Though this finding is statistically significant, it should be interpreted with caution,

particularly as the difference between cancelling once in the past year and never cancelling may be perceived as rather minimal or of little importance among youth. As previously discussed, the variable, *consistency of contact*, had poor variance, and the number of mentors who never cancelled were more than four times the number of mentors who cancelled once, making meaningful statistical inference challenging.

External dynamics. My hypotheses were partially confirmed regarding the significant associations between external dynamics and quality mentoring relationships. Specifically, mentors with more interference (i.e., logistic/personal stressors) were significantly less likely to be in *long-length* relationships than *short-length* relationships. This association is not surprising, as mentors with more interference, or environmental stressors, may have less time to commit to long-term mentoring relationships. This finding is consistent with prior research. Specifically, Spencer (2007) investigated youth mentoring relationship failures and found that personal and logistic stressors among mentors or their protégées emerged as a salient theme explaining why some mentoring relationships disrupted. Likewise, another study examining predictors of duration in youth mentoring relationships concluded that personal stressors such as childcare or transportation may be associated with an increased risk of short-length relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2007).

Interestingly, there was a positive association between *interference* and *frequency of contact*, *consistency of contact* and *mentor-perceived efficacy*. That is, mentors with more interference reported more frequency of contact, consistency of contact and higher perceived efficacy. It is possible that mentors with more interference tended to take on more commitment, explaining the fact that though they had increased frequency and consistency of contact, the relationships were less likely to last over time.

Perhaps these mentors understood the critical need for youth aging out of foster care to have an important nonparental adult, and though they tried to be present for these youth, they were unable to sustain their involvement over time. The qualitative interview data do not shed light on these findings, and more research is needed to understand why these findings emerged.

In terms of programmatic support, the only significant relationship found in this study was a positive association with *frequency of contact*. In other words, mentors with more programmatic support tended to have more frequent contact with their mentees. The qualitative interviews provide some elucidation for this finding, and mentors with programmatic involvement reported that their programs provided guidelines and accountability measures in terms of frequency of contact. For example, many programs asked their mentors to complete meeting logs, where the mentors logged their contact with their mentees and then submitted these logs monthly to the program. It is possible that such programmatic support and oversight yielded greater frequency of contact among the mentors and mentees from this study. Indeed, findings from a meta-analysis investigating the effectiveness of youth mentor programming concluded that a core component of quality mentoring programs includes the establishment and communication of clear expectations and guidelines for mentors (DuBois et al., 2011).

Structural dynamics. The hypothesis that relationships characterized by a greater fun-focus are associated with higher quality mentoring relationships among foster youth was not confirmed. In fact, the opposite was found. Mentors with relationships characterized by a greater fun-focus reported significantly lower *mentor-perceived efficacy* scores, and this finding was consistent with the aforementioned qualitative interview data. Indeed, several of the mentors that only had fun-focused

relationships, and did not experience a growth-focus, reported feeling discouraged and somewhat unsuccessful in helping their mentees prepare for life after foster care. One such mentor stated, "I think one thing I could've brought different was more clearly defined goals on the onset for the relationship ... I wish I could've maybe had more clearer defined goals of what I wanted to accomplish within a certain amount of time with the youth." On the other hand, interviewed mentors with a growth-focus felt more efficacious in their ability to help their youth mentees. One such mentor said, "But our relationship now is I am his friend, but I also am his authority figure." This mentor discussed both the fun that they had as well as the role she played in her mentee's personal growth and development.

Though this finding is contrary to prior research that suggests fun-focused relationships are associated with higher quality mentoring (Nakkula & Harris, 2010), there are several key differences between this study and prior studies using these measures of relationship dynamics. Specifically, prior studies, such as those conducted by Nakkula and Harris (2010; 2013) have used these measures to assess the structure of mentoring relationships among younger non-foster youth from the general population. Thus, it is plausible that younger non-foster youth with more living stability and fewer relational disruptions may benefit more from mentoring relationships that are more fun in nature as opposed to growth-focused. However, older youth in foster care who potentially have fewer adult relationships and greater imminent need for skill-building prior to exiting foster care may benefit more from growth-focused mentoring relationships, and mentors of older youth in foster care may perceive their growth-focused contribution as more important than a fun-focused contribution.

Youth Characteristics

Although it was not a specific aim of the study nor was it captured in the quantitative survey data, the impact of youth characteristics on the mentors' perceptions of relationship quality emerged in the qualitative interview data as a prominent theme and thus warrants discussion. Specifically, mentors with lower scoring relationships described a number of challenges experienced by the youth mentees, such as poor interpersonal skills and significant mental health challenges. Often, these mentors felt ill equipped to address these challenges, which may have led them to experience poorer quality relationships. Conversely, mentors with higher scoring relationships described a number of internal assets that their mentees possessed, such as well-developed personalities, maturity, reliability, and pleasant demeanors. These mentors more frequently described their mentoring relationships as enjoyable, and as such, these relationships tended to be higher quality. The findings from my study are corroborated by the literature. For example, in a systematic assessment of studies pertaining to effective youth mentoring programs, DuBois and colleagues (2011) identify individual-level influences, such as youths' social competencies, on the quality of mentoring relationships. Drawing from numerous studies, they conclude, "Youth who are better able to regulate their emotions and who have positive temperaments and/or other engaging attributes may be primed for higher levels of involvement with adults than are peers who lack these attributes" (DuBois et al., 2011, p. 63). Conversely, other studies have found that youth who have experienced past harmful adult relationships and repeat rejection may experience mentoring relationships with "heightened interpersonal sensitivity," making it more difficult to form meaningful connections with mentors (DuBois et al., 2011). Thus, youth with greater social and relational skills and fewer interpersonal challenges may fare better in mentoring relationships. Thus, it may be useful for child

welfare systems to consider therapeutic services to help prepare foster youth for mentoring relationships prior to their initiation.

Limitations of the Research

Because this study is the first to investigate the explanatory value of mentor type and relationship dynamics on the quality of the mentoring relationship among youth in foster care, it is exploratory in nature. Thus, there are several limitations worth noting. First, this study made use of cross-sectional data in order to test and refine theoretically supported hypotheses that had not yet been empirically investigated. However, due to the temporal challenges associated with cross-sectional data, this study is not able to infer causality. Second, this study is not generalizable to all natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care as the study is limited by its non-probability sampling procedures. Third, there were limitations in regard to several of the measures I used in this study. Specifically, *consistency of contact* is limited in that the majority of mentors reported never cancelling or only cancelling once in the past year. The lack of variance for this measure made it difficult to meaningfully analyze this concept. Additionally, the alphas for both *interference* and *sharing* were low, indicating that the internal consistency of these measures may have been questionable. Finally, the study is also limited in that it only used the perspectives of adult mentors to investigate quality relationships among youth in foster care. Although the perspective of mentored foster youth regarding quality relationships has been the subject of prior investigation (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2011; Greeson & Bowan, 2008; Munson et al., 2010), the experiences of foster youth's natural mentors are less understood and were thus explored in this study. However, future research is needed examining the perspectives of both adult mentors and mentees in investigating quality relationships among youth in foster care, as prior research suggests

differing perspectives among mentors and mentees (Varga & Deutsch, 2016). Additionally, the inclusion of youth mentees in future studies would allow the measurement of youth outcomes in the investigation of quality mentoring relationships, thereby strengthening the study design. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study represents a significant contribution to the literature as it provides a first look at (1) the relationship between mentor type and the quality of the mentoring relationship among youth in foster care, (2) the association between internal dynamics, external dynamics, and relationship structure and the quality of the mentoring relationship among foster youth, and (3) the perspectives of naturally occurring and formally matched mentors of foster youth on quality mentoring relationships.

Implications

The findings from this study have important implications for further research. First, future research replicating this study and addressing its limitations is warranted. For example, longitudinal studies are needed investigating the explanatory value of mentor type and relationship dynamics on the quality of mentoring relationships over time among youth in and aging out of foster care. Such studies should test the direction of the causal relationships between relationship dynamics and quality mentoring relationships. In other words, it is uncertain if enduring relationships produce closeness over time, or if closeness leads to relationships that endure over time. Similarly, mentors with higher degrees of perceived closeness may be more likely to frequently and consistently meet with their mentees, or the act of meeting frequently and consistently may deepen the closeness of the relationship. Longitudinal studies would shed light on these and other endogenous relationships from the present study. Additionally, future studies are needed that identify sampling frames for natural and formal mentors of foster

youth so that, if confirmed, the findings from this study can be generalized more broadly to natural and formal mentors of youth in foster care. Finally, future studies should seek to triangulate data collection by including the perspectives of the youth mentees as well as the perspectives of the mentors. Such data will provide a richer and fuller perspective on quality mentoring relationships among youth in foster care. For example, the notion of mentor-perceived efficacy is a limited measure of the success of the relationship, as it only measures success from the perspective of the mentor. It is plausible that mentors either may not recognize the impact they have on their youth mentees, or mentors may oversell the impact they have on their youth mentees.

In addition to replication studies, further analyses of the data collected for this study are needed. Although this study investigated the main effects of mentor type and relationship dynamics on the quality of the mentoring relationship, further analyses should explore the indirect mechanisms through which quality mentoring relationships are achieved. An exploration of these indirect mechanisms is consistent with Rhodes' Model of Youth Mentoring (2002), which posits that mentoring relationships that produce positive youth outcomes may be mediated by the establishment of close, trust-based relationships. Theory and research cited in this paper (e.g., Thompson et al., 2016) suggest that natural mentoring relationships may be associated with increased closeness among youth in foster care, and findings from the present study indicate that both mentor type and closeness are significant predictors of quality mentor relationships among foster youth. Thus, it is possible that the relationship between mentor type and the quality of the mentoring relationship is mediated by closeness. These and other mediational analyses should be investigated. Similarly, the qualitative interview data suggest that programmatic involvement may either strengthen or weaken the association

between closeness and the quality of the mentoring relationship. Rhodes' (2002) model also suggests that program practices may moderate the mentoring relationship by impacting the strength of the relationship. Thus, further research is warranted that explores this and other moderators among mentored youth in foster care. The investigation of mediators and moderators is responsive to the field's call for a more nuanced understanding of how mentoring relationships are most effective and under what circumstances (DuBois et al., 2011; Nakkula & Harris, 2013).

Although continued research is needed using these and other data, the findings from this study support several practice implications, namely the promotion of hybrid mentoring among youth in foster care. Both the qualitative and the quantitative data suggest that there are elements of naturally occurring and programmatically supported mentoring relationships that may be associated with higher quality mentoring relationships among youth in foster care. Rather than conceiving of mentor type as a binary construct, programs and practitioners should consider mentoring relationships on a spectrum of naturally occurring to formally matched and should be flexible to support mentors across this spectrum. Specifically, natural mentors may benefit from programming that provides support and encouragement in understanding typical challenges that result from mentoring youth in foster care. Such support may increase natural mentors' perceived efficacy. Formal mentoring programs may consider how to best promote closeness among mentors and foster youth, and may consider matching youth and mentors based on similar life experiences rather than just similar interests. Additionally, mentor programs may create trainings for mentors that promote both fun and growth-focused relationships for foster youth who are at risk of aging out of foster care. Finally, mentor programs for youth in foster care should also consider how to

facilitate communication between foster care systems and mentors so that the youth's foster care experiences do not inhibit the formation of quality mentoring relationships. Systems may consider including mentors in team planning in order to promote such communication. Both systems and mentoring programs should identify interference factors, or personal/logistic stressors, that may need to be addressed to best support mentors in their relationships with foster youth. Programs are needed that support both formally matched and naturally occurring mentoring relationships among foster youth.

Although there are programs that support formally matched mentoring relationships for youth in foster care, such programmatic support is not as common for naturally occurring mentoring relationships among foster youth. However, Caring Adults 'R' Everywhere (C.A.R.E.) is one example of a novel natural mentoring intervention that puts into practice many of the implications identified in this study (Greeson & Thompson, 2016). CARE is a 12-week intervention designed to promote growth-fostering relationships between naturally occurring mentors and foster youth at risk of aging out of care. A trained clinician, who is charged with implementing C.A.R.E., begins by assisting foster youth with identifying potential natural mentors. Once these mentors are identified, screened, and approved, they receive a trauma-informed training designed to equip them with the tools and supports necessary to effectively mentor youth in foster care. Throughout the program, the trained clinician facilitates individual and group meetings, outings, and mindfulness sessions designed to strengthen the dyadic relationships as well as create a community of support. C.A.R.E. represents a growing trend to include natural mentors in programmatic mentoring, and should be further developed and tested in order to increase the number of evidence-based practices that promote relational connections and support for youth in and aging out of foster care.

Conclusion

In sum, this dissertation highlights the elements of mentor type and relationship dynamics in explaining variance in the quality of mentoring relationships among youth in and aging out of foster care. Findings from this study indicate that naturally occurring mentoring relationships may be associated with longer mentoring relationships, whereas programmatically supported, formal mentors may have higher perceived efficacy. Internal dynamics of closeness and compatibility are positively associated with characteristics of quality relationships, such as longer relationships and more frequent and consistent contact. External dynamics, such as interference (i.e., personal/logistical stressors) may decrease the length of the mentoring relationship. Finally, mentoring relationships among youth in foster care may benefit from a primary growth-focused component with an accompanying fun-focus. This study presents these findings and highlights future research and practice implications in order to promote quality mentoring relationships among youth in and aging out of foster care.

APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY

Please answer the following few questions, which will determine if you are eligible to take the full survey for this study.

How did you hear about this survey?

- From a social service agency or case worker
- From a mentoring organization
- From an email through my university
- Other (please specify)

Have you mentored or informally supported a youth (aged 13 or older) who has ever been in foster care without being paid to do so?

- Yes
- No (*If selected, survey ends*)

Are you the parent or caregiver of this youth?

- Yes (*If selected, survey ends*)
- No

Is this youth 13 years old or older?

- Yes
- No (*If selected, survey ends*)

Are you willing to complete a survey about your relationship as a supportive adult or mentor for this youth?

- Yes (*If selected, survey proceeds to the informed consent below*)
- No. Please explain why. (*If selected, survey ends*)

Thank you for your willingness to do so. At the end of the survey, you will have the option of entering a drawing to win one of ten \$100 Visa gift cards.

Please read through the **informed consent** below, which explains the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of your participation, your role in the study, and efforts made to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. By clicking on the "Agree" button at the bottom of the page, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study.

“Natural and Formal Mentors Among Youth in Foster Care: Does Mentor Type Explain Variance in the Quality of the Mentoring Relationship?”

Principal Investigator:

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Voluntary participation

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no benefits or advantages that are now coming to you, or would come to you in the future. Your mentoring program or any other professionals who work with you will not be upset with your decision.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to learn more about factors that contribute to a high quality mentoring relationship among formally matched mentors and naturally occurring mentors of youth in foster care. This study is being conducted for a dissertation, which is a study completed by a doctoral candidate pursuing a PhD, and it is being supervised by a professor with a PhD. Information from this study may be used to better understand and support helpful adult relationships for youth in foster care.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being asked to complete this survey one time, and it is estimated that it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. You are being asked to participate in the survey because you may be a mentor to a youth in foster care. You may choose not to answer a question for any reason, and may terminate your participation at any time.

Anonymity and Privacy

Your survey responses will be anonymous, meaning that your identity will not be linked to your responses UNLESS you agree at the end of the survey to disclose your contact information in order to be contacted by a member of the research team. If you agree to allow the researcher to contact you to ask follow-up questions about your mentoring relationship, your survey responses will be linked to your identity. If you do not agree to allow the researcher to contact you to ask follow-up questions, your survey responses will not be linked to your identity. The researcher will respect your privacy and will only contact you with your permission. The researcher will only know your identity if you provide this information.

Confidentiality

Although complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, diligent efforts will be made to ensure that the confidentiality of your data will be maintained in several ways. The online survey data will be in the form of a computer-based file, which will only be made available to personnel involved in the study through the use of access privileges and passwords. Results may be shared with others who could benefit from the information learned through the study and the information may be published; but no information about who took part in the study will be revealed. Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Results from all participants will be summarized together, with no names attached. If any quotes are taken from your comments, they will be anonymous.

Compensation

At the end of the survey, you will be directed to another site and asked if you would like

to provide your contact information to be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of ten \$100 Visa gift cards. By choosing to provide your contact information for the drawing only, your identity will not be linked to your survey responses.

I hereby agree to the terms outlined above and voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

- Agree
- Do NOT agree (*If selected, survey ends*)

Are you **currently** a supportive adult or mentor for a youth (aged 13 or older) who has ever been in foster care?

- Yes
- No

Please answer the following questions about the most recent foster youth aged 13 or older you support or mentor without being paid.

What is your **primary** relationship to this foster youth (please choose one)?

- Volunteer mentor matched by a program
- Extended family member, such as an aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent
- Former child welfare professional, such as case worker, therapist, group home parent
- Family friend
- Neighbor
- Teacher
- Coach
- Religious leader, such as an Imam, Rabbi, or Pastor
- Other (please specify)

If there is a program that has matched you with the youth, what is the name of that program? _____

Is the youth currently living in foster care or another child welfare placement (like a group home)?

- Yes
- No

In what year did you begin supporting or mentoring this foster youth? _____

In what month did you begin supporting or mentoring this foster youth? _____

How often do you typically have **in-person contact** with this foster youth?

- At least once a week
How many times each week? _____
- Less than once a week but at least once a month
How many times each month? _____
- Less than once a month but at least once a year
How many times each year? _____
- Less than one time each year

- Never

How many times **per month** do you typically have the following additional forms of contact with this foster youth?

- Phone calls _____
- Texting _____
- Email or other forms of social media _____
- Other (please specify) _____

In the **past year**, how many times have you **cancelled** an in-person meeting with this foster youth? _____

What is your zip code? _____

How old are you? _____

What is your highest level of education?

- High school diploma or GED
- 2 years of college or vocational training
- 4-year college degree
- Graduate degree

Please specify your race and ethnicity (check all that apply).

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Other (please specify)

With what gender do you identify?

- Male
- Female
- Other (please specify)

How old is the **foster youth** you support or mentor? _____

Please specify the race and ethnicity of the **foster youth** you support or mentor (check all that apply).

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Other (please specify)

With what gender does the **foster youth** you support or mentor identify?

- Male
- Female

For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which the following statements describe your experience as a mentor or supportive adult (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Pretty Often, Very Often, Always)

I feel like the youth and I are good friends (buddies, pals).
I feel like my relationship with the youth is getting stronger.
I feel unsure that the youth is getting enough out of our relationship.
I feel frustrated or disappointed about how the relationship is going.
The youth is willing to learn from me.
I feel like I am making a difference in the youth's life.
The youth shows me how much he/she cares about me (says things, smiles, does things, hugs me, etc.).
I feel like the youth and I have a strong bond (are close or deeply connected).
I can trust what the youth tells me.

For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which the following statements describe your experience as a mentor or supportive adult (Completely Disagree, Mostly Disagree, Tend to Disagree, Tend to Agree, Mostly Agree, Completely Agree).

The youth and I hit it off right away.
The youth and I have similar interests.
My background makes it easy for me to relate with the youth.
I think the youth and I are a good match for each other.
I think I might be a better supportive adult for a youth who had fewer problems (or less severe).
The youth needs more from me than I can give.
The youth wishes I were different (younger/older, man/woman, etc.).
I wish I had a relationship with a different type of youth (younger/older, boy/girl, more/less physical, etc.).
A program has provided training that helps me be a better supportive adult or mentor.
I get regular guidance or supervision from staff at a program to help with the relationship.
I get support from a program that makes me a better supportive adult or mentor.
The youth's parents or caregivers are actively involved with our relationship.
The youth's parents or caregivers interfere with our relationship.
It is hard for me to get in touch with the youth's parents or caregivers.
I am so busy that it is difficult for me to see the youth regularly.
Being a part of this relationship has meant I can't spend as much time as I would like with friends or family.
The youth is so busy that it is hard to schedule with him/her.
The distance I have to travel to see the youth is a challenge for me.
Issues related to money affect the time I can spend with the youth.
My relationship with the youth has had a negative effect on my relationships with friends or family.

Please indicate the extent to which each focus is important to you as you mentor or support the youth. Remember, there are no "right" answers – each mentor or supportive adult has a different approach (Not Important, A Little Important, Pretty Important, Very

Important, Extremely Important, Most Important).

Sharing your life experiences with the youth.

Having times when you do nothing but fun things with the youth.

Getting the youth to develop his/her character (be honest, responsible, etc.).

Focusing on feelings and emotional things with the youth.

Making time to goof around, laugh, and have light-hearted fun with the youth.

Teaching the youth to manage or improve his/her behavior (control impulses, make better decisions, etc.).

Doing or saying things to improve the youth's attitude towards school.

Telling the youth about your job.

Having time when you and the youth just hang out together (no particular activity to do).

Getting the youth to care more about other people.

Helping the youth with schoolwork.

Spending time just talking with the youth.

Having fun (yourself) while you are with the youth.

Teaching the youth social skills (like table manners, how to meet people, etc.).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you been a mentor?
2. How did you meet your mentee?
3. How would you describe your mentee?
4. Please tell me about the beginning of your relationship, when you first met.
 - a. How would you describe your relationship in the beginning in terms of:
 - i. Your interactions and communication
 - ii. Your sense of closeness and connectedness
 - iii. The activities you did together and how you spent your time
 - iv. What mattered most in your relationship
 - v. Supports that helped your relationship grow initially
 - vi. Challenges or barriers that made it difficult for you to feel successful as a mentor
5. Please tell me about your relationship now.
 - a. How would you describe your relationship now in terms of:
 - i. Your interactions and communication
 - ii. Your sense of closeness and connectedness
 - iii. The activities you did together and how you spent your time
 - iv. What mattered most in your relationship
 - v. Supports that helped your relationship grow initially
 - vi. Challenges or barriers that made it difficult for you to feel successful as a mentor
6. On a scale of 1-10 (one being closest and 10 being very distant), how close would you describe your relationship with your mentee?
 - a. What things do you think help you to experience or feel close to your mentee?
 - b. What things do you think lead to you feeling distant from your mentee?
 - c. What advice would you give to other mentors who want to establish a close connection with their mentees?
7. How do you define a successful, or high quality mentoring relationship? What supports, or other things, have you experienced that have helped you to mentor successfully?
8. What stressors have you experienced that have made it challenging to mentor successfully?
9. If you could change one thing about your mentoring relationship, what would it be?
10. What do you think makes for a good mentoring relationship? What needs to happen? What *mentor* qualities contribute to good mentoring? What *mentee* qualities contribute to good mentoring? What things external to the relationship may impact the quality of the relationship? What activities have helped to strengthen/weaken your relationship?
11. What strengths or challenges have you experienced as a mentor of a youth in foster care that you may not have experienced as a mentor of a youth not in foster care?

APPENDIX C: FACEBOOK POST

Have you been a mentor or supportive adult for a youth who has ever been in foster care? If so, you may be eligible to take a 15-minute survey as part of a University of Pennsylvania study exploring supportive adult relationships among foster youth. Information from this study may be used to better understand and support helpful adult relationships for youth in foster care. All eligible participants can enter a drawing to win one of ten \$100 Visa gift cards at the conclusion of the survey. If you are interested, please click on the survey link.

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Recruitment Email Text:

Have you mentored or informally supported a youth who has ever been in foster care? If so, you may be eligible to participate in a study that explores supportive adult relationships among youth in foster care.

All eligible participants can enter a drawing to win one of ten \$100 Visa gift cards at the conclusion of the survey. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

If you would like to learn more about this study, or if you are willing to see if you are eligible to participate in this study, please click on the link below.

If you have never mentored or supported a youth in foster care, or if you have done so but do not want to participate in this study, please also click the link below. By answering a few short questions anonymously, you can help us better understand mentoring among youth in foster care.

INSERT LINK TO SURVEY FOR NON-RESPONDERS

Please also forward this email to other mentors or supportive adults for youth in foster care who may be interested in participating in the study.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

Allison Thompson

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