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# Perceived Similarity, Expectation-Reality Discrepancies, and Mentors' Expressed Intention to Remain in Big Brothers/Big Sisters Programs

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Perceived Similarity, Expectation-Reality Discrepancies, and Mentors' Expressed  
Intention to Remain in Big Brothers/Big Sisters Programs <sup>1</sup>

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Running Head: MENTORS' INTENTIONS

### Abstract

Studies have begun to document the academic and psychosocial benefits of Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs for at-risk youth (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). However, investigators have noted a problem with mentor attrition (Meissen & Lounsbury, 1981). The purpose of the current study was twofold. First, we explored the relative importance of specific dimensions of perceived similarity (including similarity in attitudes, interests, race, and personality) as well as mentors' expectation-reality discrepancies in predicting mentors' expressed intention in to remain in Big Brothers/Big Sisters Programs. Second, we examined a model whereby interpersonal attraction and relationship quality served as mediators of these associations. Our results suggest that perceived similarity in extraversion as well as the discrepancy between mentors' ideal versus actual roles were significant predictors of mentors' expressed intention to remain in the relationship. Relationship quality and interpersonal attraction appeared to mediate these findings.

Perceived Similarity, Expectation-Reality Discrepancies, and Mentors' Expressed  
Intention to Remain in Big Brothers/Big Sisters Programs

Mentoring is a widely-used intervention that has been applied to a diverse range of populations (Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999). Such interventions are utilized in the hopes of circumventing an equally vast array of problems from corporate burnout and attrition (Koberg, Boss, & Goodman, 1998; Ragins & Cotton, 1999) to teen pregnancy and drug use (Rhodes, et al., 1999). These interventions vary in terms being tied to formal organizational structures versus being spontaneously formed by interested parties (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). The structural relationship between mentor and protégé can also differ across types of mentoring interventions. That is, mentoring can either take the form of a hierarchical relationship between a more experienced, older mentor and a less experienced, younger protégé or, alternatively, of peer mentoring (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). Although diverse in their target populations, settings, and expressed goals, people's past or current participation in some form of mentoring relationship is extremely common. For instance, one national telephone survey revealed that one in three persons interviewed reported having served as a mentor at some point in her or his life (McLearn, Colasanto, & Schoen, 1998). It has long been assumed that mentoring relationships contribute to the resiliency of children and adolescents from impoverished backgrounds. As such, mentoring programs have been an especially popular intervention with this population. Perhaps the most notable of which has been Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS), an organization that serves an estimated 100,000 children and adolescents (McKenna, 1998).

Although the development of the first Big Brothers agency can be traced back to the early 1900's (Morrow & Styles, 1995), research documenting the efficacy of such programs has been slow to follow (Royse, 1998). However, preliminary evidence has been generally favorable. For instance, children and adolescents in mentoring relationships have been found to experience decreased substance abuse, greater self-efficacy and self-esteem, improved independent living skills, and higher performance on measures of academic achievement than children and adolescents without such relationships (Frecknall & Luks, 1992; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996; Mech, Pryde, & Rycraft, 1995). Research also suggests that youth who participate in BB/BS programs are more likely to experience improvements in peer and family relationships as compared to youth who have not participated in such programs (Rhodes, et al., 1999; Rhodes, et al., 2000). Many investigators have commented on problems experienced by mentoring programs with premature mentor attrition (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993; Herman & Usita, 1994; Mech, et al., 1995; Meissen & Lounsbury, 1981). The loss of a healthy, significant relationship for an already discouraged and disadvantaged youth can be especially damaging. Consequently, it is important to examine potential factors related to a mentor's intention to remain in the mentoring relationship. In the current paper, we will briefly summarize available literature on mentor attrition, and then present the results of a study examining a model whereby positive relationship characteristics such as interpersonal attraction and relationship quality mediate the relationship between both similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies and mentors' intention to remain in the relationship.

In exploring potential determinants of whether the relationship between mentor and protégé will endure long enough to be of benefit to the youth, one can examine either characteristics of the mentor, the protégé, or characteristics of the relationship itself. Research on mentor characteristics has primarily emphasized mentors' personality characteristics. In studies investigating mentors' standing on the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire, committed mentors were found to be more conceptual, conscientious, trusting, and feelings-oriented than their non-committed counterparts (Herman & Usita, 1994; Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993). Further, committed mentors have been found to be less socially inhibited than non-committed mentors (Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993). In terms of protégé characteristics, research from corporate mentoring has found that such variables as self-esteem, self-monitoring, emotional stability, and locus of control are related to protégé's likelihood of engaging in, and thus receiving the associated benefits of, mentoring relationships (Noe, 1988; Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Fagenson, 1992). Further, protégés with higher potential or ability are more likely than their low ability counterparts to be chosen by mentors to participate in a mentoring relationship (Allen, Poteet, & Russel, 2000).

Social cognitive research suggests that relationship characteristics may play an even more central role in social judgments than characteristics of either of the participants alone (Kenny, 1994; Lakey, McCabe, Fiscaro, & Drew, 1996). Despite the potential importance of relationship characteristics to longevity of mentoring relationships, research in this area has been relatively sparse (DuBois & Neville, 1997). One specific area to explore is the link between mentor attrition and positive relationship characteristics such as relationship quality and liking for the protégé. Although

relationship quality and liking have been consistently found to be important in relationships in general (Hays & Oxley, 1986; Rook, 1987), no study to our knowledge has examined these variables with respect to attrition from mentoring programs. DuBois and Neville (1997) found that mentors' self-reported closeness was related to perceived benefit to the youth, but these authors did not explore the potential link between closeness and attrition.

Not only is it necessary to empirically demonstrate the role of positive relationship characteristics, but to determine the factors that help shape the development of these positive relationship characteristics as well. Research on other types of relationships, such as friendships and romantic relationships, has found similarities between the members of the dyad to be an important predictor of liking and relationship quality (Aboud & Mendelson, 1998; Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001; Byrne, 1971; Swim & Surra, 1999; Thomas, Fletcher, & Lange, 1997; White & Hatcher, 1984). Further, some studies have found that similarity in personality or communication skills predict satisfaction beyond either member of the dyads' standing alone on these variables (Burlison & Denton, 1992; Neimeyer, 1984). Perceived similarity has also been found to predict the leader-member exchanges and liking between leaders and group members within business environments (Dose, 1999; Glaman, Jones, & Rozelle, 1996; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993). Various theoreticians have noted the importance of enhancing the similarity between mentors and protégés (Roaf, Tierney, & Hunte, 1994; Reglin, 1998). However, surprisingly little research has been conducted to determine which dimensions of similarity result in the most effective mentor-protégé pairings (Blechman, 1992). Clues as to the dimensions of similarity that might be most pertinent come from

research on corporate mentoring (Burke, McKeen, & McKeena, 1993; Ensher & Murphy 1997). For example, research on corporate mentoring suggests that similarity in personality, background, and preferred activities is related to greater amount of time spent with the protégé (Burke, et al., 1993). It is widely assumed that mentors and protégés in BB/BS programs should be matched on gender and race, but this claim too has yet to be empirically substantiated (Blechman, 1992).

Another fruitful area of inquiry in predicting positive relationship characteristics and subsequent decision to remain in the relationship is that of mentors' preconceived expectations of the mentoring role. It has been noted that while mentors are often asked to donate large amounts of time and financial resources, they frequently are not given sufficient systemic support (Mech, et al., 1995). Thus, mentors might experience feelings of disenchantment when they compare their initial, perhaps idealized, expectations with the actual reality of their mentoring role. In line with this speculation is research in the area of self-discrepancy theory (Strauman, 1996) which indicates that dissonance between one's ideal and actual self-concept frequently gives rise to feelings of dysphoria. Also consistent is research indicating that "expectation-reality discrepancies" are related to a wide variety of negative outcomes including premature dropout from psychotherapy, less improvement in psychological adjustment among psychiatric inpatients, and less academic satisfaction among graduate students (Gregg, 1972; Horenstein & Houston, 1976; Webb & Lamb, 1975). One study of mentors from BB/BS programs found that congruency in expectations between the mentor, protégé, and parent, was predictive of less conflict in the mentor-protégé relationship (Meissen & Lounsbury 1981). However, no studies to our knowledge have examined the congruency between mentors'



preconceived expectations of the mentoring role and the real-world parameters of this role as a predictor of successful mentoring relationships.

The purpose of the current study was twofold: (1) to examine the relative contribution of similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies to the prediction of positive relationship characteristics and intention to remain in the relationship, and (2) to test a model whereby positive relationship characteristics mediate the relationship between intention and both similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies. In terms of the former goal, we were specifically interested in determining which of dimensions of similarity were important in predicting intention. The dimensions of similarity used in this study were those that have been found to be important to interpersonal attraction in either studies of corporate mentoring relationships or in non-mentoring relationships. Specifically, we examined the effects of similarity in personality, attitudes, interests, and race. In light of research suggesting that perceived similarity may be a more important determinant of relationship quality and outcome than actual similarity, similarity was assessed by mentors' reports of self and protégé on the these four dimensions (Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993; Dose, 1999; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Lakey, et al., in press; Turban & Jones, 1988). Additionally, in light of predictions that expectations may be an important determinant of relationship quality and mentors' subsequent decision to maintain the relationship, we examined the discrepancy between mentors' ideal and actual roles.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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In terms of the second goal of the current study, using the conditions for mediation put forth by Baron and Kenny (1986) we offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Mentors' expressed intention to remain in the relationship (criterion variable) will be significantly related to mentors' expectation-reality discrepancies and their perceived similarity between themselves and the protégé (predictor variables).

H2: Positive relationship characteristics (mediator variables; i.e., interpersonal attraction and relationship quality) will significantly predict intention to remain in the relationship.

H3: When the effects of positive relationship characteristics are statistically controlled, the relationship between intention and both perceived similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies will be diminished.

It should be noted that because little work to date has been conducted on similarity or positive relationship characteristics and attrition from BB/BS programs, this was considered a preliminary study, and thus, was cross-sectional in nature. As such, mentors' intention to remain in the relationship was chosen as a proxy for actual attrition. Intention was chosen as our index of relationship outcome because intention has been found to be a consistent predictor of future behaviors (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975) including termination of relationships (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Martz, 1995) or employment (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992). Further, this approach was employed by Ensher and Murphy (1997) in their investigation of the relationship between similarity and the outcome of corporate mentoring relationships. Finally, two common biases inherent in cross-sectional, self-report studies are transient mood effects

and socially desirable responding. Consequently, these variables were measured in the current study and their effects statistically controlled.

## Method

### *Participants*

Ninety-five participants (Females = 63; Males = 32) were recruited from three Big Brothers and Big Sisters Agencies in Central and Southern Ohio (40 from Cincinnati, 46 from Columbus, and 9 from Dayton). The age of participants ranged from 19 to 59 ( $M = 30$ -years-old,  $SD = 8.62$ ). The majority of the participants were Caucasian American (78%); 16% percent were African American, and 6% percent reported another ethnic identity. The age of the youth being mentored ranged from 6 to 19 ( $M = 11$ -years-old,  $SD = 2.50$ ). The youth being mentored comprised of 55% Caucasian Americans, 41% African Americans, and 4% of another ethnic identity. All protégés were the same sex as their mentors. The majority of mentor-protégé pairs were comprised of either both a Caucasian mentor and protégé (53%), both an African American mentor and protégé (15%), or a Caucasian mentor and an African American protégé (22%). Other racial pairings included a Caucasian mentor and a protégé from another ethnic group (6%), and a mentor from another ethnic group and an African American protégé (4%).

In order to participate in the current study, mentors must have been involved in the mentoring relationship at least one full month. Because all mentors sign a contract requiring a minimum of a one-year commitment, only participants who had been involved in an ongoing mentoring relationship for less than 12 months at the time of the study were chosen to participate. The length of time mentors in the current sample had been involved in their relationship with the protégé ranged from 1 to 11 months ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD$

= 2.20). In order to prevent possible confounds of multiple mentoring, mentors must have been the sole mentor and only have mentored one child.

### *Procedures*

Lists of telephone numbers of active mentors meeting the requirements outlined above were provided by program officials of the participating Big Brothers and Big Sisters Agencies. Mentors were contacted initially by telephone, given a brief description of the proposed study, and asked if she or he would be willing to participate. If the mentor agreed to participate, she or he was sent a consent form and a packet of questionnaires. The packet contained measures of the following variables: relationship quality, interpersonal attraction, intention to remain in the mentoring relationship, preconceived expectations about the mentoring role, perceptions of the actual mentoring role, positive and negative mood, and social desirability. Participants were also asked to complete questionnaires pertaining to themselves and their protégé of the following variables: race, attitudes, interests, and the Big-5 personality traits. Of the mentors contacted, 42% agreed to participate in the current study. Rates of participation did not significantly vary as a function of gender or agency from which they were recruited. After all data was received, participants were sent a letter debriefing them as to the purpose of the study.

### *Measures*

#### *Positive Relationship Characteristics*

*Interpersonal Attraction.* To measure the degree of interpersonal attraction between the mentor and her or his protégé, mentors completed the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS; Byrne, 1971). This scale was chosen because it has been used

extensively in research on similarity and interpersonal attraction (see Smith, Byrne, & Fielding, 1995 for review). The items contain a range of six statements denoting varying levels of support and disagreement on a particular topic. It contains six items, two attraction items (e.g., "I like my protégé very much." to "I dislike my protégé very much.") and four filler items that are not used to compute an index of liking. This scale has demonstrated good convergent validity with other measures of liking such as the Social Distance Scale (Byrne, 1971). Coefficient alpha for our sample was .78.

*Relationship Quality.* The degree to which mentors were satisfied with the mentoring relationship was measured using the Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). Responses were scored on a four 4-point Likert scale. These points were labeled "Not at all" (1), "A little" (2), "Moderately" (3), and "Very much" (4). We used the depth (e.g., "How significant is this relationship in your life?") and conflict subscales (e.g., "How upset does this person sometimes make you feel?") resulting in a total of 23 items. We did not, however, include the social support subscale. The rationale for excluding the social support measure was that, although it is likely that many that mentors feel supported by their protégés, the items on this subscale assessed the provision of supportive behaviors that are not likely to be solicited by adults from children or adolescents (e.g., "To what extent can you count on this person to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?"). The QRI scales show agreement between college students and their parents' ratings of the relationship and are related to mental health problems such as depression and Bulimia (Grisset, & Norvell, 1992; Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Solky-Butzel, & Nagle, 1997). Alphas for our sample were .75 for the conflict subscale and .83 for the depth subscale.

*Perceived Similarity*

Mentors completed two versions of measures of personality, attitudes, and interests: one as it pertained themselves and one as it pertained to their protégé. Similarity indices were derived by computing intra-class correlations between the mentors' ratings of themselves and their protégé. The benefit of this method of assessing similarity is that the purpose of the task is obscured, thereby reducing the possibility of expectancy effects. Similarity in race was assessed by a dichotomous coding of whether the mentor and protégé were of the same or different race from each other.

*Personality.* The Interpersonal Adjective Scale-Revised (IASR-B5; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990) was used to assess mentors' and protégés' personality characteristics. This measure is a 92-item adjective rating scale. Responses were made on a scale from "Very unlike me" (1) to "Very like me" (7). The extraversion (e.g., "shy" (reverse scored)) and agreeableness (e.g., "soft-hearted") subscales each consist of 16 items; whereas the neuroticism (e.g., "nervous"), openness (e.g., "philosophical"), and conscientiousness (e.g., "orderly") subscales are comprised of 20 items. The IASR-B5 has good internal consistency, factorial validity, and convergent validity with other measures of the Big-5 personality dimensions (Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Coefficient alphas for mentor's ratings of self for the current sample ranged from .82 (openness) to .89 (neuroticism). Coefficient alphas for mentor's ratings of protégé for the current sample ranged from .83 (neuroticism) to .95 (conscientiousness).

*Attitudes/Interests.* Mentors' and protégés' attitudes and interests were assessed using a modified version of Byrne's 56-Item attitude scale (Byrne, 1971). The original scale has been found to demonstrate significant correlations with theoretically relevant

variables such as interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971; Neimeyer & Mitchell, 1988). Modifications consisted of using more modern terminology and activities. These changes were made in order to increase the relevance of the questions to children between the ages of 7 and 15. The items contain a range of six statements denoting varying levels of support and disagreement on a particular topic. An example of an interests item is "I enjoy sports very much" to "I dislike sports very much." Alternatively, an example of an attitudes item is "I strongly believe that it is important for a person to have a college education in order to be successful" to "I strongly believe that it is not important for a person to have a college education in order to be successful."

#### *Expectation-Reality Discrepancies*

A measure assessing the mentors' expectations of the mentoring relationship was created for the purpose of this study (See Appendix).<sup>1</sup> This measure consisted of 14 items that explore two possible roles the mentor might expect to fill – an advocate or a friend. Responses were made on a five-point Likert scale with endpoints defined as “not true at all”(1) and “very true”(5). An example of an advocate item is, “My protégé would seek my assistance in areas where I have special knowledge or skill (e.g., in writing a report, fixing a bike, etc.).” Whereas an example of a friend item is “My protégé and I would have a lot of fun together.” Mentors completed one version of the form in which they were asked to rate the expectations that they had held prior to the beginning of the relationship with their protégé. Mentors completed a second version in which they rated the actual nature of their relationship with their protégé at the time of this study. An index of discrepancy between the two roles was created by first calculating standardized residuals of one version of the measure regressed upon the other. The difference between

the standardized residuals for the actual role measure was then subtracted from the residuals for the ideal role measure.<sup>2</sup> This procedure avoids the potential problem of confounding the transformed variable with either of the individual measures used to create the variable. Positive values for this scale would indicate that the mentor's expectations were more positive than the reality of their role, what we will refer to as *negative discrepancies* (in this case, we are using “negative” to mean “detrimental”). Values close to zero would indicate that their expectations and reality were identical. Finally, negative values would indicate that the reality of their role was more positive than their expectations, what we will refer to as *positive discrepancies*. The coefficient alpha for mentor's ratings of their ideal role for our sample was .92, and the alpha for their ratings of their actual role was .91. The reliability of the difference score (McNemar, 1969) was .89.

#### *Relationship Outcome*

The measure employed to assess intention to sustain the mentoring relationship was adapted from an existing index composed of three items designed to measure one's propensity to leave the workplace (Lyons, 1971). In this original study, turnover was correlated with theoretically relevant variables such as perceived role clarity. The wording of these items was changed to reflect intention to continue involvement in her or his mentoring relationship, rather than continue employment. Furthermore, a fourth item was created for the purpose of this study (“How long do you intend to stay in this mentoring relationship?”). All responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all”(1) to “Extremely”(5) or “Terminate immediately”(1) to “As long as possible”(5). Intention has been found to be a consistent predictor of future behaviors



(Fishbein & Azjen, 1975) including termination of relationships (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Martz, 1995) or employment (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992). Coefficient alpha for our sample was .94.

#### *Control Variables*

*Mood.* The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was used to measure the respondents' mood at the time they completed the battery. The PANAS consists of 20 descriptive items, ten items relate to each content area: positive affectivity (e.g., "excited") and negative affectivity (e.g., "irritable").

Participants respond to the extent to which they have felt this way today on a 5-point Likert scale, with endpoints labeled "Very slightly or not at all" (1) and "Extremely" (5).

Research indicates that the PANAS possesses good factorial validity (Huebner & Dew, 1995; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) in both adolescent and adult samples.

Additionally, the PANAS possesses convergent and discriminant validity with measures of mental health (Manne & Schnoll, 2001; Watson, et al., 1988), self-esteem, locus of control, and social desirability (Huebner & Dew, 1995). Coefficient alpha for our sample was .90 for positive affectivity and .83 for negative affectivity.

*Social Desirability.* In order to assess impression management tendencies, participants completed the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1988). The BIDR consists of 40 propositions that the respondent rates on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "not true"(1) to "very true"(7). A unique advantage of the BIDR is that it measures two constructs: self-deceptive enhancement (e.g., "My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right.") and impression management (e.g., "I never cover up my mistakes"). The BIDR shows good convergent validity with the

Marlowe-Crowne scale of social desirability (Paulhus, 1988). Coefficient alpha for our sample was .59 for self-deceptive enhancement and .77 for impression management.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between the demographic or control variables and the primary study variables. The results indicated that none of the mentor or protégé demographic characteristics were significantly related to the primary study variables. Host agency was unrelated to the primary study variables as well. Further, the two domains of socially desirable responding, impression management and self-deceptive enhancement, were not related to any of the primary study variables. Consequently, these variables were not included in further analyses. Both negative ( $r = -.27, p < .01$ ) and positive mood ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ) were significantly related to intention. Although the length of time in the relationship was not related to intention to remain in the relationship ( $r = -.13, p > .05$ ), it was negatively related to depth of the relationship ( $r = -.23, p < .05$ ).

For each of the seven similarity variables, correlations were also calculated between the similarity scores and the individual ratings of mentors and protégés that comprised these scores. Significant relationships were found between similarity and ratings of protégé personality for extraversion ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), agreeableness ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ), neuroticism ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ), and conscientiousness ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ). In order to avoid confounding of the similarity measures with ratings of protégé personality, these effects were statistically controlled in the primary analyses.

### *Study Hypotheses*

The means, standard deviations, and ranges of variables examined in the current study are presented in the Table 1. With the exception of similarity in conscientiousness, all of the intra-class correlations were positive and differed significantly from zero, suggesting that mentors on average had the tendency to rate protégés as similar to themselves on the study variables. A repeated measures t-test revealed that participants tended to rate their ideal role ( $M = 52.05$ ) more favorably than their actual role ( $M = 48.53$ ,  $t(93) = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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Baron and Kenny (1986) outline three necessary conditions that must be met in order to demonstrate the presence of mediation. The first condition is that the predictor and criterion must be significantly related to each other. Second, the mediator and criterion must also be significantly related to each other. The final condition is that when the hypothesized mediator is statistically controlled, the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables is diminished. Consequently, zero-order correlations were first calculated between the perceived similarity indices, relationship quality, interpersonal attraction, and the intention to remain in the relationship. Only variables that were significantly related to intention were included in subsequent regression analyses. Table 2 depicts the results of this correlation matrix.

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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As one can see, the results revealed significant relationships between intention and perceived similarity in attitudes ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), extraversion ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ), neuroticism ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ), and openness ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the association between intention and discrepancy between ideal and actual roles was significant ( $r = -.50, p < .01$ ) such that the higher the mentor's negative discrepancy, the less likely she/he was to express a desire to remain in the relationship.<sup>4</sup> The remaining perceived similarity indices were not significant predictors of intention. Relationships between the criterion variable and the mediator variables were also noteworthy. Specifically, intention was significantly related to relationship conflict ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ), relationship depth ( $r = .66, p < .01$ ), and interpersonal attraction ( $r = .75, p < .01$ ).

In order to satisfy the first condition of mediation (i.e., that the predictor and criterion variables are significantly related) we conducted regression analyses with intention as the criterion. Positive and negative mood, length of the relationship, and protégé neuroticism and extraversion were entered as controls in the first step. Expectation-reality discrepancies and the indices of perceived similarity that were significantly correlated with intention were entered as a block. These results are summarized in Table 3.

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 Insert Table 3 about here  
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As one can see, the overall ability of these perceived similarity indices to predict intention was significant ( $R^2\Delta = .16, p < .01$ ), thereby satisfying the first condition of mediation. Furthermore, recall that the second goal of the current study was to determine which

dimensions of perceived similarity would significantly contribute to the prediction of intention. An examination of the regression coefficients indicates that perceived similarity in extraversion ( $\beta = .20, p < .05$ ) and the negative discrepancy between actual versus ideal roles ( $\beta = -.32, p < .01$ ) are significant predictors of intention. Perceived similarity in attitudes, openness, and neuroticism did not significantly contribute to the prediction of intention.

Next, we tested the second and third conditions of mediation, that the mediators (i.e., the positive relationship characteristics) would be significantly related the criterion and that controlling for this effect would result in a decreased relationship between the predictor and criterion. Consequently, a second regression equation was conducted with intention as the criterion. Positive and negative mood, length of the relationship, and protégé extraversion were entered as controls in the first step. The positive relationships characteristics (i.e., interpersonal attraction, relationship depth, and conflict) were entered on the second step, and the perceived similarity in extraversion and expectation-reality discrepancies were entered on the third. Table 4 summarizes the results of this analysis.

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 Insert Table 4 about here  
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As one can see, the positive relationship characteristics significantly predicted intention beyond effects of positive and negative mood ( $R^2 \Delta = .36, p < .01$ ), thus satisfying the second condition of mediation. Specifically, relationship depth ( $\beta = .44, p < .01$ ) and interpersonal attraction ( $\beta = .38, p < .01$ ), but not conflict, significantly contributed to the prediction of intention after controlling for the possible artifacts of positive and negative

mood. Finally, controlling for the effects of the positive relationship characteristics entered on the second step, the relationship between the predictor variables (i.e., perceived similarity in extraversion and expectation-reality discrepancies) and intention was no longer significant ( $R^2\Delta = .00, p > .05$ ), thus supporting the third condition of mediation. Hence, our results suggest the relationship between the predictor variables and intention is mediated by positive relationship characteristics.

One alternative explanation to our mediational model is that rather than positive relationship characteristics mediating the relationship between the predictor variables and intention, the hypothesized predictor and mediator variables are merely competing for the same variance in intention. To test this hypothesis, we computed a regression equation identical to the one described in Table 4, but flipped the order of entry of the predictor and mediator variables. That is, perceived similarity in extraversion and expectation-reality discrepancies were entered in the second step, and conflict, depth, and attraction were entered in the third step. If positive relationship characteristics truly act as mediators, then they would remain significant predictors of intention, even when entered on the third step. The results supported this hypothesis in that the  $R^2\Delta$  of the third step was significant ( $R^2\Delta = .20, p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

In the current study, we explored the relative importance of specific dimensions of perceived similarity including similarity in attitudes, interests, race, and personality in the prediction of mentors' expressed intention to remain in the mentor-protégé relationship. Mentors' expectation-reality discrepancies were also investigated. Finally, we tested a

model whereby relationship quality and interpersonal attraction mediated the relationship between the predictor variables and intention.

Our results suggest that perceived similarity in extraversion, as well as the negative discrepancy between ideal versus actual roles are significant predictors of mentors' expressed intention to remain in the relationship. Relationship quality and interpersonal attraction appear to mediate these associations. These results have a number of potentially useful implications for increasing the longevity of the mentor-protégé bonds formed in BB/BS programs. First, our results empirically verify the almost intuitive assumption that a mentor's feelings regarding her or his relationship with a protégé is an important factor in predicting the future of this relationship. Moreover, our findings suggest it is the positive feelings of attraction and depth, rather than the negative feelings stemming from conflict, that are important in predicting one's intention to sustain this relationship. Based on these results, practical recommendations for program officials may include the scheduling of periodic meetings to discuss ways to enhance feelings of closeness between mentors and protégés. These meetings could also be designed to identify factors that might interfere with the ongoing development of closeness in the relationship. Group training sessions with an emphasis on topics such as self-disclosure and other intimacy-enhancing techniques may be helpful as well.

Our results also mirror the results of research on non-mentoring relationships by suggesting that perceived similarity is important in fostering positive feelings toward another (Byrne, 1971; White & Hatcher, 1984). This information could be useful to program officials in that it suggests that specific attention should be given to linking mentors with protégés on the basis of similarity, with special attention to similarity in

extraversion. Because our results pertain specifically to perceived rather than actual similarity, an assessment of the development of perceived similarity early in the relationship might also be warranted. Where low levels of perceived similarity are present, program officials might work with mentors to reframe their perceptions by encouraging them to actively identify commonalities between him or herself and the protégé.

Although a number of BB/BS programs report that they attempt to take similarity into account when linking mentors to protégés, this matching process is often unsystematic and is not guided by the scientific literature. Careful empirical examination of this question is important because the findings can be counterintuitive, as was the case in our study. For instance, program officials might reasonably assume that similarity in race, attitudes, and interests would be essential characteristics on which to match mentors with protégés. However, our findings failed to substantiate these assumptions. Rather, we found that perceived similarity in the personality characteristic of extraversion was more critical in predicting intention to remain in the relationship. The failure of race to predict intention in this sample may have been due to the fact that the majority of the mentor-protégé pairs were of the same race (i.e., 65 versus 28). Thus, we may not have had a large enough sample of dissimilar pairs to provide a sensitive test of this hypothesis. Our results are in contrast to research on psychotherapy relationships which suggests that, overall, ethnically matched patients have higher return rates to treatment, remain in treatment longer, and receive higher ratings of psychological adjustment from their therapists than non-ethnically matched patients (Russell, Fujino, Sue, Cheung, et al., 1996; Takeuchi, Sue, & Yeh, 1995). In terms of our failure to find significant results for



perceived similarity in interests and attitudes, it is possible that while often central to the initial judgments of interpersonal attraction and relationship quality, these factors give way to other more stable characteristics such as perceived similarity in personality as relationships develop. This speculation is in line with the results of a longitudinal study of same-sex friendships conducted by Neimeyer and Mitchell (1988). They found that whereas attitudinal similarity was important in initial attraction, similarity in personality was important in later attraction.

A final aspect of our findings that deserves further comment is our results pertaining to the role of mentor expectations. Previous research has explored the detrimental impact of discrepancies in either expectations for oneself or expectations for therapeutic relationships (Horenstein & Houston, 1976; Strauman, 1996). However, no studies to our knowledge have examined discrepancies in expectations as a predictor of positive mentoring relationships. Our results indicated that mentors who possessed high negative discrepancies reported less relationship depth, were less likely to report that they "liked" their protégé, and were less likely to express an intention to remain in the relationship. Our results also revealed that this relationship holds for negative discrepancies in both the advocate and friend role. These findings underscore the importance of BB/BS programs to assess the expectations of perspective mentors. Based on this knowledge, program officials could meet with mentors both early on in the process and periodically throughout the relationship to help them identify and modify specific unrealistic expectations.

Due to the preliminary nature of the current study, several limitations exist that could be addressed in future studies. First, our findings, especially those pertaining to the

core dimensions of perceived similarity, need to be replicated using larger and more diverse populations in order to ensure that these results do not merely represent an artifact of our specific sample. Ideally, a more even gender distribution would also be obtained. Although the smaller number of males relative to females in our sample is, in part, a function of the gender composition of mentoring programs in general, the inclusion of a greater number of male mentors is vital to more effectively assess for possible gender differences in the factors that shape relationship quality and longevity. In terms of design issues, longitudinal studies are essential to determine if our findings with regards to mentors' reported intentions translate into their actual behavior. That is, do the mentors who express the intention to continue the relationship with their protégé genuinely do so? Another limitation of the current study is that both the expectations and actual nature of the mentoring role were assessed concurrently. This cross-sectional evaluation of expectations and reality is potentially problematic in that mentors' recollections of their expectations could have been, in part, confounded by their current perceptions of the relationship. Longitudinal studies would alleviate this difficulty in that expectations could be assessed prior to the initiation of the relationship. Experimental designs are also necessary to permit causal claims. Our model assumes that perceived similarity shapes the quality of the relationship, which in turn impacts mentors' decision to maintain the relationship. However, this assumption needs to be tested directly. Such a study might aim to experimentally manipulate levels of perceived similarity or expectations and observe the effect on relationship quality and outcome.

Future research should also expand the assessment of both similarity and outcome. For instance, researchers should seek to discern whether it is perceived or

actual similarity that is critical in determining mentor attrition. Research in other types of relationships suggests that perceived similarity may be a more important determinant of relationship quality and outcome than actual similarity (Acitelli, et al., 1993; Dose, 1999; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Lakey, et al., in press; Turban & Jones, 1988). However, this finding has yet to be replicated with respect to mentor-protégé relationships. This question can be addressed by obtaining protégés' self-reports of attitudes, interests, and personality rather than focusing exclusively of mentors' reports of their protégés' standing on these variables. Future studies could also be expanded to evaluate the effect of relationship quality on protégé outcomes such as academic and interpersonal functioning rather than simply on the longevity of mentor-protégé relationship. This question is an important component of future research in that some protégé outcome variables might actually demonstrate negative relationships with relationship quality. That is, it is possible that the process of working toward positive outcomes in the protégé adds strain to the mentoring relationship, and thus compromises some of the positive feelings a mentor experiences toward his or her protégé.

Yet another fruitful area of inquiry is to take an idiographic approach by examining whether the dimensions of perceived similarity that are central to the formation of high quality relationships vary from person to person. For example, when judging the quality of the relationship with their protégé some mentors may weight similarity in race more heavily than similarity in personality. Conversely, some mentors may place a greater emphasis on similarity in personality than on similarity in race. Although idiographic research on similarity is relatively sparse, there is some evidence

for individual differences in the use of specific types of similarity in laboratory-based impression formation tasks (Jamieson, Lydon, & Zanna, 1987).

In sum, there is a relative dearth of empirical studies investigating BB/BS programs from the mentor's perspective as opposed to the perspective of the youth or the youth's parents. Researchers and program officials alike have emphasized perceived similarity between the mentor and protégé, and the nature of the expectations held by mentors as factors that may contribute to the quality and longevity of these relationships (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Mech, et al., 1995; Reglin, 1998; Roaf, Tierney, & Hunte, 1994). However, the centrality of these variables, to date, has been largely speculative in that these ideas have not been subjected to empirical scrutiny. The current study represents preliminary support for the claim that perceived similarity and expectation-reality discrepancies are, in fact, associated with both the quality and longevity of these relationships. It is our hope that these findings will serve as a base upon which to build in future research with the ultimate goal further providing clues as to how to enhance the efficacy of the time-honored intervention of mentorship.

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## Appendix

Directions: The following statements pertain to what you thought your protégé would be like **before you actually met him/her**. Please read each statement and rate how true they would be of your **ideal** protégé.

1. My protégé would be similar to myself.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

2. My protégé would respect my opinions.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

3. My protégé would value my experiences and knowledge.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

4. My protégé would introduce his/her friends to me.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

5. My protégé would think of me as a friend.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

6. My protégé would come to me with problems that he/she had.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

7. My protégé would look up to me.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

8. My protégé would enjoy the time we spend together.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true  
           

9. My protégé would listen to my advice.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

10. My protégé would keep me updated about what's going on in their daily lives.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

11. My protégé would seek my assistance in areas where I have special knowledge or skill (e.g., in writing a report, fixing a bike, etc.).

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

12. My protégé would respect my feelings.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

13. My protégé and I would have a lot of fun together.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

14. My protégé would like to hear about my life.

not at all true   somewhat not true   true   true most of the time   very true

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Although there are existing measures pertaining to protégés' expectations of mentoring relationships (e.g., Mentor Role Instrument; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990), to the authors' knowledge no measures have been developed of mentors' expectations of mentoring relationships. Further, existing measures pertain to corporate relationships, and therefore, are not as relevant to adult-youth mentoring relationships.

<sup>2</sup>The decision to compute our index of actual-ideal role discrepancy differently from our indices of similarity was guided by our desire to capture the direction of the discrepancy (Webb & Lamb, 1975). That is, whereas an intra-class correlation would tell us the degree of similarity versus dissimilarity in mentors' ideal versus actual roles, subtracting mentors' ratings of their actual role from their ratings of their ideal role tells us whether their expectations were more positive than the reality, their expectations and reality were identical, or whether the reality was more positive than their expectations. In this study we assumed that relationship quality, and consequently, the desire to sustain the relationship would suffer when a mentor's expectations were more positive than the reality of their actual mentoring relationship.

<sup>3</sup>It was hypothesized that similarity, rather than complementarity in the Big-5 personality traits would predict intention to remain in the relationship. To evaluate the possibility that some complementary combinations of mentor and protégé personality characteristics would be related to intention, we first calculated median splits on mentors' ratings of self and protégé for each of the five personality variables. Then, a separate univariate ANOVA was computed for each of the five sets of ratings using intention as the dependent variable. Main effects and interactions between mentor and protégé ratings



were examined as the independent variables in these analyses. The analyses revealed a significant Mentor x Protégé interaction for extraversion ( $F(3, 89) = 10.78, p < .01$ ), but not the other four variables. The pattern of means suggested that this effect was in the direction of similarity. That is, participants who possessed similar levels of extraversion (i.e., both above the median or both below the median) expressed a greater intention to remain in the relationship than participants who possessed dissimilar levels of extraversion.

<sup>4</sup>Although not specifically predicted, the possibility of differential relationships with intention between discrepancies in the friend role and discrepancies in the advocate role was explored. However, the results indicated that both discrepancies in the advocate ( $r = -.41, p < .01$ ) and friend role ( $r = -.44, p < .01$ ) were significantly associated with intention. Thus, it appears that a mentor's expectations related to filling each of these roles for the protégé are relevant to the prediction of his or her desire for continued involvement in this relationship.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min. – Max.
Attraction	12.51	1.52	8 – 14
Conflict	18.58	4.47	12 – 30
Depth	16.42	3.65	8 – 24
Expectations	3.77	12.24	-28 – 39
Impression management	88.59	15.78	48 – 139
Intention	16.25	3.58	6 – 20
Mood negative	13.69	4.37	10 – 33
Mood positive	34.48	8.08	15 – 50
Self-deceptive enhancement	89.87	10.98	68 – 119
Similarity agreeableness	.33**	.35	-0.52 – 0.95
Similarity attitudes	.43**	.31	-0.68 – 0.97
Similarity conscientiousness	.15	.30	-0.95 – 0.95
Similarity extraversion	.33**	.34	-0.66 – 0.89
Similarity interests	.38**	.34	-0.53 – 0.91
Similarity neuroticism	.26*	.34	-0.62 – 0.99
Similarity openness	.25*	.32	-0.48 – 0.94
Similarity race	1.30	.46	1 – 2

\*  $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 2

*Zero-Order Correlations Between the Similarity Variables, Relationship Characteristics and the Intention to Remain*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Attraction	--						
2. Conflict	-.53 **	--					
3. Depth	.69 **	-.38 **	--				
4. Expectations	-.53 **	.39 **	-.56 **	--			
5. Intention	.75 **	-.37 **	.66 **	-.50 **	--		
6. Similarity agreeableness	.13	-.26*	.19	-.11	.06	--	
7. Similarity attitudes	.41 **	-.39 **	.24 *	-.28 *	.29 **	.32 **	--

Table 2 – continued

*Zero-Order Correlations Between the Similarity Variables, Relationship Characteristics and the Intention to Remain*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Similarity conscientiousness	.23 *	-.33 **	.27 *	-.36 **	.13	.14	.37 **
9. Similarity extraversion	.38 **	-.47 **	.28 *	-.18	.26 *	.18	.32 **
10. Similarity interests	.30 **	-.03	.29*	-.33 **	.21	.03	.36 **
11. Similarity neuroticism	.28 *	-.25 *	.40 **	-.25 *	.24 *	.19	.36 **
12. Similarity openness	.52 **	-.36 **	.39 **	-.39 **	.42 **	.27 **	.31 **
13. Similarity race	.07	-.01	-.05	-.02	.10	-.04	.27 *

Table 2 – continued

*Zero-Order Correlations Between the Similarity Variables, Relationship Characteristics and the Intention to Remain*

Variable	8	9	10	11	12	13
8. Similarity conscientiousness	--					
9. Similarity extraversion	.27 *	--				
10. Similarity interests	.22	.22	--			
11. Similarity neuroticism	.37 **	.28 *	.16	--		
12. Similarity openness	.24 *	.36 **	.28 **	.31 **	--	
13. Similarity race	.11	.04	-.02	.06	.11	--

\*  $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 3

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Remain in the Relationship from the Similarity Indices*

Variable	$\beta$	t	Sig.	$R^2\Delta$	Sig.
Step 1					
Length	-.07	-.74	.46	.26	.00
Mood negative	-.24	-2.44	.02		
Mood positive	.24	2.22	.03		
Protégé extraversion	.18	1.64	.11		
Protégé neuroticism	.16	1.64	.11		
Step 2					
Expectations	-.32	-3.09	.00	.16	.00
Similarity attitudes	-.04	-.38	.70		
Similarity extraversion	.20	1.96	.05		
Similarity neuroticism	.00	.012	.99		
Similarity openness	.15	1.30	.20		

*Note.*  $R^2 = .26$  for step 1;  $R^2 = .42$  for step 2.

Table 4

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Remain in the Relationship from Mood, Relationship Characteristics, and Similarity Dimensions*

Variable	$\beta$	t	Sig.	$R^2\Delta$	Sig.
Step 1					
Length	-.07	-.74	.46	.23	.00
Mood negative	-.25	-2.59	.01		
Mood positive	.26	2.28	.02		
Protégé extraversion	.18	1.73	.09		
Step 2					
Attraction	.38	3.53	.00	.36	.00
Conflict	.06	.72	.47		
Depth	.44	4.58	.00		
Step 3					
Expectations	-.03	-.28	.78	.00	.81
Similarity extraversion	.05	.62	.54		

*Note.*  $R^2 = .23$  for step 1;  $R^2 = .60$  for step 2;  $R^2$  for step 3 = .60.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Diagram of study hypotheses.

