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## Youth Relational History Affecting Mentoring Relationship Quality

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Youth Relational History Affecting Mentoring Relationship Quality

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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College of Science and Health

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Chicago, Illinois

**Thesis Committee**

Kathryn Grant, PhD, Chair

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## **Biography**

Brittanie Nicole Gage was born in Oak Park, Illinois on January 20, 1993. She graduated from Trinity High School in River Forest, Illinois. In 2015, she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Purdue University, with a minor in Human Development and Family Studies. Brittanie began the Clinical Child Psychology PhD Program at DePaul University in 2020.

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## Abstract

Black youth in low-income communities have a heightened risk of exposure to poverty-related stressors, increasing the risk of poor youth outcomes. Proven moderately effective, youth mentoring programs were created to decrease the risk of negative outcomes and promote positive development. A primary relational experience, the parent – child relationship shapes a youth's relational history and influences their relational capacity, or ability to connect with a mentor. The mentoring relationship quality (MRQ) is a key determinant in mentoring success. Emerging research suggests youth with moderate relational histories experience the most benefits from mentoring, demonstrating a curvilinear relationship.

This study investigated two research questions: 1) Does parent – child relationship quality predict satisfaction in the mentoring relationship? 2) Is there a curvilinear relationship between parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the MRQ, where moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality predict high levels of satisfaction with the MRQ?

Participants of this sample were 20 Black youth between ages 7 and 15. Youth completed measures including Places I Spent Time: Home, measuring parent – child relationship quality and Match Characteristics Questionnaire, measuring satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. Regression analyses were conducted to assess relationships among these variables. Study findings indicate a significantly positive relationship between high parent – child relationship levels and high satisfaction with the MRQ. Unique patterns emerged from curvilinear analyses indicating youth with moderate levels of parent – child relationships actually reported the lowest satisfaction with the MRQ. Study findings overall provide additional evidence for a relationship between parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the MRQ. Additional research is needed to better understand the nature of this relationship. Implications of the unexpected

findings in this study are discussed in relation to cultural protective factors and environmental risk predictors that must be examined to facilitate the development of mentoring programs serving Black youth.

## Youth Relational History Affecting Mentoring Relationship Quality

### **Racial Discrimination Leading to Poverty**

Black rural-urban migration surged after the onset of the First World War in 1914 due to the demand for unskilled workers in manufacturing centers (Massey et al., 2016). The spark in African American populations in U.S. cities, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, simultaneously led to an increase in whites resisting coresidence and, as a result, city governments and the real estate industry began working together enforcing both illegal and mandated mechanisms to keep African Americans separate (Massey et al., 2016). The Civil Rights Act of 1968 was created in an effort to block racial discrimination in cities where African Americans were residentially segregated at a heightened degree in comparison to other ethnic groups (Massey & Denton, 1987; Massey et al., 2016). Yet by the time of the 1968 ruling, families in cities such as Chicago had already reached a 12 percent poverty rate and, by the early 2000s, this rate had risen to 17 percent, with African Americans being the dominant ethnic group (McDonald, 2004). Economic factors (the decline in manufacturing, suburbanization of blue-collar employment, the decrease in need for unskilled workers) in conjunction with the overwhelming push for racial segregation, contributed to the isolation of poor minorities without resources to succeed and led to a rise in poverty in U.S. cities (Massey, 1990; Wilson, 1987).

### **Poverty-related Stressors in Urban Communities**

According to Massey (1990), the distinction between low-income and non-low-income communities is exacerbated when an economic change occurs, concentrating poverty to confined minority neighborhoods. In consequence, the economic turn changes how the environment is experienced, generating additional stressful events for minority families (DuBois et al., 2002; Massey, 1990). Grant and colleagues (2003) defines stressors as “environmental events or

chronic conditions that objectively threaten the physical and/or psychological health or well-being of individuals of a particular age in a particular society” (p. 462). In low-income communities, individuals are faced with poverty - related stressors daily and can encounter both single event and chronic traumatic experiences (Stafford and Marmot, 2003).

These stressors include economic hardship (unemployment and lack of financial security, low income households), dependence on public assistance, inadequate housing (excessive crowding and noise problems), acute experiences of racial discrimination, community violence, lack of neighborhood safety, elevated crime rates, drug and alcohol misuse, child welfare and juvenile justice problems, under-resourced schools and community organizations, personal victimization, abuse, death or illness of a family member, family disruption, parental conflict, gang activity, child maltreatment and neglect, unreliable transportation, lack of access to positive health resources (grocery stores, parks, recreation centers, etc.), pollution, vandalism and graffiti, trash, and abandoned buildings (Braveman et al., 2011; Broussard, 2010; Collins et al., 2010; Conger et al., 2002; Evans & English, 2002; Grant et al., 2003; McNulty & Bellair, 2003; Ross, 2000; Wade et al., 2014). These stressors, in turn, have been shown to explain deficits in health for low-income minority populations of all ages.

### **Effects of Poverty - related Stressors on Youth and Adults**

While 65% of children have never experienced poverty through adolescence, one in 10 children who are poor spend at least half of childhood living in poverty (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). The rate of poverty exposure for African American children and young children experiencing poverty is significantly larger than for white children or older children—so much that Wagner and Adelman (2009) found that fewer than one-third of African American children are never poor.

In addition to low-income youth being extensively exposed to poverty - related stressors in comparison to their middle-income counterparts, few low-income children or adolescents are exposed to zero or only one stressor (Evans & English, 2002). Youth living in urban poverty are less protected from uncontrollable stressors (Collins et al. 2010) such as those listed above (Collins et al., 2010; Conger et al., 2002; Evans & English, 2002; Grant & Compas, 2003; McNulty & Bellair, 2003; Wade et al., 2014). When adolescents are chronically exposed to environmental stressors attributable to poverty, their cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and psychological development can be negatively affected (Collins et al., 2010; Gilman et al., 2003). To understand the impact the context of these neighborhoods can have on youth, Brenner and colleagues (2013) created a neighborhood stressors model and found that youth from greater socioeconomically disadvantaged areas reported higher baseline stress followed by a steeper increase in stress over time.

As a result, research studies have found that adolescents with high levels of poverty - related stress experience higher rates of internalizing symptoms (anxiety disorders, depression, posttraumatic stress symptoms) and externalizing symptoms (aggression, drinking alcohol, using drugs, carrying guns or knives, trouble in school, fighting) (Collins et al., 2010; Grant et al., 2003; Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Wadsworth & Berger, 2006). Children and adolescents are also at a higher risk of meeting full or partial criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kiser et al., 2010). Social and economic deprivation can also have a lasting effect on individuals, making it difficult for children who grow up in low-income families to escape poverty when they become adults (Corcoran, 1995). As the negative effects of poverty - related stressors tend to cumulate, individuals with greater exposure to poverty during childhood are likely to have more difficulty escaping poverty as adults (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009).

Similar to youth, African American adults are disproportionately exposed to poverty relative to white adults (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). The psychological well-being of adult residents living in urban poverty is harmed due to the long-term exposure to distressing and traumatic experiences (Ross, 2002). Neighborhood level stressors inflicted on individuals living in low-income neighborhoods have been found to increase despair far beyond the effects of the individuals' personal stressors—resulting in major strains to their mental health (Cutrona et al., 2006). Studies suggest poverty - related stressors such as discrimination, victimization, economic strain, social disorder, community violence, and food insecurity consequently predict negative psychosocial outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety) for adults living in low-income urban areas (Cutrona et al., 2006; Hill et al., 2005; Ross, 2000; Wadsworth & Santiago, 2008). When examining neighborhood stressor levels, Mair and colleagues (2010) found that both men and women who reported their neighborhood environment as stressful (unsafe, violent, and highly disordered) also reported higher depressive symptoms. Research findings also indicate that cumulative exposure to trauma can predict symptoms of PTSD, characterized as feelings of fear, helplessness, or dismay; dissociation, dreams, flashbacks, and re-experiencing of the traumatic event; avoidance of trauma reminders, detachment and emotional numbing; irritability, sleep disturbance, increased anxiety, hyperarousal, and concentration difficulties (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Breslau, Peterson, & Schultz, 2008). Among adult residents living in low-income urban areas, 69% met diagnostic criteria for PTSD at some point in their lifetime (Switzer et al., 1999). Thus, adults living in poverty experience the same stressors youth do and as a result may have diminished capacity to extend support (Grant et al., 2005).

## **Effects of Urban Stressors on Youth via Compromised Parenting**

**Experience of Parenting in Poverty.** Research findings indicate the large negative impact chronic trauma exposure has on individual family members, which in turn can disrupt multiple family systems (Collins et al., 2010). Parents who experienced poverty in childhood through adulthood and are now raising their own children in poverty continue to face difficulties connected to their own exposure to poverty - related stressors. Caregiver emotional stress was found to be connected to economic hardship, resulting in disruption to the caregiver – child relationship (Conger et al., 2002). Specifically, the parent – child relationship can be negatively impacted when a parent is impaired in response to current and historical trauma exposure in addition to experiencing daily poverty - related stressors (Collins et al., 2010). Poverty - related stressors may strain the mental health of parents, increasing the likelihood of family conflict and decreasing a parent’s ability to interact with other family members in a responsive and nurturing manner (Barajas-Gonzalez & Brooks-Gunn, 2014).

A lack of financial security and access to health insurance may leave a parent concerned about their health and the health of their children (Broussard, 2010). For low-income families, certain poverty - related stressors may incite additional stressors. This may show up as: parents facing job insecurity and low-income work opportunities, which may force children to become susceptible to food insecurity; parents holding several jobs to make ends meet can cause childcare complications; and parents only being able to afford poor quality housing may result in children being exposed to violence and environment health risks (Broussard, 2010; Simon, 1995). Difficult experiences such as violence in the neighborhood or household, death of close friends, and serious mental health problems in the family have been found to have a significant impact on parents’ mental health (Reynolds & Crea, 2016).

**How Parenting is Compromised.** In examining the disproportionate amount of poverty experienced by Black families, McLoyd (1990) notes that parents of these populations are more vulnerable to negative life events. Heightening psychological distress, putting them at a greater risk of developing anxiety or depression, and causing them to feel run-down, tired, hopeless, and sad, poverty - related stressors hinder parents from fostering a nurturing environment for their children (McLoyd, 1990). For example, in a study observing the relationship between neighborhood stressors and psychological distress in African American single mothers, Kotchick and colleagues (2005) found that the presence of gangs, drug dealings, and shootings caused a greater presence of depression and anxiety, predicting less positive parenting practices for the next 15 months. It is clear that a combination of poverty- related stressors and resulting symptoms may cause the parents of low-income households to utilize more punitive disciplinary techniques, disrupt their ability to support and nurture their children, and lessen their satisfaction with the parenting role, which in turn influences the parent – child interaction (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; McLoyd, 1990).

**Compromised Parenting Practices.** According to Appleyard and Osofsky (2003), effective parental practices are largely dependent on the parents' ability to manage their reactions to stress. In the context of urban poverty, parents dealing with their own exposure to trauma may lack an understanding of their child's developmental and age-appropriate needs (Green et al., 2005). Research findings suggest parents living in urban poverty with high level stressors exhibit fewer positive perceptions of their children, hold unrealistic expectations, and misattribute the causes of their child's behavior (Kolko & Swenson, 2002; Pinderhughes et al., 2000). Based on examinations of mothers living in urban poverty, patterns of decreased warmth, maternal unresponsiveness, non-supportiveness, and hostile coerciveness have been found in



parenting practices and at a higher rate for depressed mothers (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; McLoyd, 2002). Parents raising children in urban poverty often possess firm beliefs in obedience and suppression of feelings, the necessity and effectiveness of physical punishment, and immediate compliance from children, which can all be attributed to their own exposure to poverty-related stressors (Green et al., 2005; Liewbow, 1967). As a result, parents may have poor communication skills, exercise harsh discipline practices, demand greater household responsibility, and utilize power-assertive and reactive parenting techniques (McLoyd, 2002; Pinderhughes et al., 2000).

McLoyd (2002) notes that several studies determined that parenting practices such as rewarding, explaining, consulting, and negotiating require both patience and concentration—characteristics that are scarce when parents feel overburdened and distraught by environmental stress. Economically deprived parents experience higher levels of anxiety, irritability, and depression. McLoyd (2002) found that highly depressed mothers are more likely to practice punitive and inconsistent parenting (i.e., yelling, hitting children), than more authoritative parenting practices (i.e., reasoning, taking away privileges). Evidence shows that parents may even resort to physically abusing their children in response to facing chronic unemployment or having temperamentally difficult children (McLoyd, 2002). In a study distinguishing between parenting practices of poor Black fathers who were residential or nonresidential, fathers who lived with their own children were found to be less affectionate and attentive toward their children than nonresidential fathers (Liebow, 1967). This treatment toward children may be a result of the psychological burden experienced by residential fathers living in urban poverty that are impacted by economic strain and other stressors (McLoyd, 2002). The emotional distress caused by poverty-related stressors tied with potential guilt for not fulfilling male provider

expectations may undermine paternal expressiveness and in turn cause fathers to distance themselves from their children psychologically (Liewbow, 1967). On the other hand, nonresidential fathers can be more affectionate toward their children because contact is infrequent resulting in less guilt-ridden feelings and an absence of burdened obligation to be a primary provider (Liewbow, 1967). In a study assessing urban mothers' self-reports of their parenting behavior, mothers reported being unaware of how their negative psychological states affected their parenting practices (Zeklowitz, 1982) but could identify that when feeling depressed, it was harder to provide nurturing, patient, and supportive behavior to their children (Longfellow et al., 1982). Therefore, psychological overload likely contributes to compromised parenting practices of parents affected by poverty-related stressors (McLoyd, 2002).

### **Effects of Urban Stressors on the Parent – Child Relationship**

When parents of urban youth have a diminished ability to extend support to their children in response to their own psychological impairments due to exposure to poverty-related stressors, the quality of the parent – child relationship is negatively impacted (Collins et al., 2010). While the parent – child relationship can be a protective mechanism against stressors effects, when impacted by poverty and factors related to it (i.e., racial discrimination, economic hardship, and chronic stress), the parent – child relationship can adversely become a stress mechanism (Collins et al., 2010, Conger et al., 1993). Youth are in turn exposed to more stress—leaving them unprotected, unable to employ healthy coping strategies, and vulnerable to emotional problems (Barajas-Gonzalez & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Broussard, 2010; Bosquet & Egeland, 2001; Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). A compromised parent – child relationship may cause youth to experience psychological and socioemotional outcomes such as hypervigilance of their surroundings, heightened anxiety when separated from trusted adults, irritability and aggression, difficulty

forming trusting and secure relationships, compromised development of their autonomy, emotional dysregulation, increased need for support, and disengagement coping (avoidance, wishful thinking) (Collins et al., 2010; Grant et al., 2014; Osofsky et al., 1993; Wadsworth & Berger, 2006).

Youth in urban poverty who have experienced insensitive, inconsistent, inappropriate, or unreliable caregiving during times of distress are often left feeling angry, disappointed, and with basic doubts regarding their parent's availability and willingness to protect them (Lynch and Cicchetti, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Community violence was found to predict early behavior problems in youth and the distress experienced by mothers exposed to community violence themselves accounted for observed behavioral problems in their children (Linares et al., 2001). In a parallel study examining self-reported data of school-aged children exposed to community violence, youth who reported being victimized by high levels of community violence were more likely to report negative attributes about their mothers than youth exposed to less community violence (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998). From these findings, Lynch and Cicchetti (2002) gather that exposure to poverty-related stressors compromises the parent – child relationship, such that parents may experience activation of their own attachment needs while simultaneously youth feel threatened, which in turn interferes with parents' ability to respond to their child's attachment needs, causing youth to experience difficulty generating feelings of security and furthermore diminishing their confidence in seeing their caregiver as a source of protection.

Described as having “structural social disorganization,” low-income, urban communities lack internal resources, causing a block in the preservation of community organizations that bolster social connectedness and undermining the grounding of proximal institutions (i.e., families and schools) that are key components to establishing conventional values and social

bonds in children (McNulty & Bellair, 2003). With higher rates of incarceration, death and disease, violence, unemployment, mobility, and inconsistency in family membership patterns, the adult to child ratio is disproportionately lower in low-income urban areas in comparison to more affluent communities (Collins et al., 2010; Conger et al., 2002; Hart et al., 2004; Repetti et al., 2002). In low-income urban communities, youth may be left unsupervised when school ends, making after school hours a prevalent time for problems to arise (Rhodes, 2002). These disadvantages diminish social cohesiveness within the community, notably reducing the availability of caring adults, and preventing youth from developing informal relationships with adults (McNulty & Bellair, 2003; Fursteberg, 1994). Increased awareness of the disadvantages youth experience has encouraged researchers, practitioners, and the federal government to create and fund mentoring programs as interventions in an effort to reverse the development of potential negative psychosocial outcome effects and promote academic achievement, prosocial behavior, development of healthy coping strategies, and positive psychological outcomes in urban youth (Rhodes, 2002).

### **Mentoring as a Protective Intervention**

Mentoring programs foster one-to-one relationships between vulnerable youth and nonrelated, caring adults with the intention of bringing positive changes to the lives of mentees (Rhodes, 2002; Southwick, 2007). Youth mentors can be natural (from the youth's social network; family friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, church clergy, etc.) or volunteer (from outside the youth's natural social network) (Sipe & Roder, 1999; Southwick, 2007). Throughout development youth may struggle to share and discuss important changes and issues they are experiencing with family members or peers because of fear of being judged, scrutinized, or provided inaccurate advice (Rhodes, 2002). Non-parental mentors can stand outside of these

parameters, providing a safe haven for mentees to discuss sensitive issues and still conveying adult values, advice, and standpoints (Rhodes, 2002). Youth mentoring relationships can create a model of care and support for youth in an effort to challenge negative opinions they may have of themselves or adult relationships, demonstrating that caring and healthy relationships with adults are possible (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

While the attractiveness of youth mentoring has grown, a handful of well-executed meta-analyses have provided statistical backing in support of the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs. Results of these meta-analyses (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Raposa et al., 2019) indicate that mentoring programs have been proven moderately effective for youth experiencing poverty-related stressors.

### **Mentoring Outcomes**

In a national evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) mentoring program for mostly minority youth, Grossman and Tierney (1998) surveyed youth who received a mentor and youth without a mentor, assessing for problem behavior, academic achievement, family relationships, peer relationships, and self-image. Over an 18-month follow-up period, mentored youth displayed improvement in school absences, less substance use, decreased aggression, more positive relationships, and better academic outcomes (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Regarding mentoring effects on youths' other relationships, Grossman and Tierney (1998) found that in comparison to youth in the control group, youth with mentors reported better relationships with parents and peers, including greater feelings of trust, openness, and deeper communication.

Several meta-analytic studies have found overall positive effects across five domains: academic/educational, attitudinal/motivational, emotional/psychological, problem/high-risk behavior, and social/interpersonal in mentored youth (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Raposa et al.,

2019). Notably, DuBois and colleagues (2002) examined existing youth mentoring programs to evaluate the strength and consistency of overall program – related effects and to identify any standout characteristics of successful programs to enhance effectiveness. Assessing programs from 1970 to 1998, researchers found that youth participating in mentoring programs benefited in all five outcome domains, programs targeting youth with disadvantage or environmental risk were most effective, and mentored youth experienced modest gains extending past a year or more beyond the end of their participation in the program (DuBois et al., 2002). To address gaps in the youth mentoring literature such as predictors of program effectiveness and sustained benefits at later points in youth development, DuBois and colleagues (2011) conducted a meta-analysis to expand on the aforementioned findings. The meta-analysis showed coinciding findings (DuBois et al., 2002; Grossman & Tierney, 1998) supporting that youth mentoring programs show a small, but positive effect on mentored youth across all domains (DuBois et al., 2011). Key findings of this analysis indicated that positive outcomes were most common for participants who (1) were identified as having problem behaviors (2) were male youth, (3) and had either preexisting difficulties (individual risks) or had been exposed to significant environmental risk (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentored youth with a combination of high individual risk and low environmental risk or low individual risk and high environmental risk experienced significant positive outcomes—generating a curvilinear association between risk and effect size (DuBois et al., 2011). As a result, DuBois and colleagues (2011) suggest the participants most likely to benefit from mentoring programs are youth presenting with moderate levels of challenges instead of youth with deeply rooted difficulties.

A meta-analysis by Raposa and colleagues (2019) was conducted to potentially enhance past meta-analytic findings by including a comprehensive assessment of all mentoring programs

with a one-on-one, relational approach and using novel statistical techniques to examine youth mentoring outcomes. Consistent with past meta-analytic studies (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Grossman & Tierney, 1998), overall mentoring effects on youth outcomes proved moderately favorable across domains with larger effects on measures of social support and relationship quality (Raposa et al., 2019). The only youth characteristic affecting outcomes was gender (male mentored youth showed larger effects), youth exposed to varying risk showed no differences in effects (Raposa et al., 2019). Raposa and colleagues (2019) concluded that mentoring is a moderately effective intervention for at-risk youth displaying varying psychosocial and academic problems across outcome domains and encourages more research be done to understand potential factors that determine youth mentoring program success. With small to moderate effects of mentoring programs established, researchers have turned their attention toward understanding what leads to more positive mentoring effects.

### **Mentoring Relationship Quality**

Theory has argued that the mentoring relationship itself can be the driving force in determining youth outcomes and program effectiveness, causing current research, though developing, to turn its focus to mentoring relationship quality (MRQ) (Nakkula & Harris, 2005; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The presence of a strong emotional connection between a mentee and their mentor is associated with better outcomes (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Frequency of contact, emotional closeness, and longevity of the relationship were found to contribute to positive youth outcomes in an early meta-analysis of youth mentoring (DuBois et al. 2002). When assessing the MRQ, researchers have evaluated relationship duration, frequency, and consistency of contact between the mentor and mentee, the quality of the formed connection, and the mentor's approach to the relationship (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009).

Rhodes (2002) states that the ‘active ingredient’ of a successful youth mentoring relationship is a close, trusting connection. Cited as foundational characteristics, mutual trust, empathy, mutuality/respect, attunement, and consistency are identified as predicting a high-quality mentoring relationship (Pryce, 2012; Rhodes, 2002; Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). In a study evaluating mentored youth’s perspective of their mentoring relationships, interviewed youth had feelings of likeness, attachment to, and commonality with their mentor (Morrow & Styles, 1995). Researchers suggest MRQ may also be related to attributes of the mentor’s approach such as positive regard, authenticity, empathy, warmth, and the appropriate facilitation of social support and challenge (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Shared relational excitement and experiential empathy are said to foster a positive MRQ when a mentor extends beyond engagement to bring zest when interacting with their mentee (Lester et al., 2017).

Deutsch and Spencer (2009) urge that to understand the significance and effect a mentoring relationship may have on a child’s life, it is essential to assess the child’s perception of closeness and whether their mentor has become a meaningful person in that child’s life. Many may assume a mentor to be a significant non-parental adult in the child’s circle of positive social support, but researchers have found this to not always be the case. Only 40% of youth in a formal mentoring relationship identified their mentor as a significant adult (DuBois et al. 2002). Characteristics of the mentoring relationship and mentor’s approach may encourage the youth to perceive the relationship as more meaningful (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009).

The MRQ not only depends on mentor characteristics, but also on mentee contributions to the mentor – mentee interaction (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). The presence or absence of a connection also may reflect underlying and intangible factors that influence the mentee’s ability to form a positive, strong connection with their mentor. Understanding relational processes that



may contribute to MRQ is important to provide support and maximize positive outcomes in youth mentoring.

### **Relational Capacity**

A potential factor that could influence the MRQ is the mentee's ability to attach and make a connection with their mentor. A youth's prior experiences in other significant relationships may influence their participation (DuBois et al., 2011). In Keller's systematic model of mentoring (2005), the mentor – mentee relationship is a component of a larger and more complex framework that includes additional stakeholders in the youth's life that are interdependent with each other. Specifically, the parent – child relationship is a child's first relational experience, which can influence future relationships the youth may have. Some may enter a mentoring relationship with a history of nurturing and supportive relationships, whereas others may have experienced negative relationships characterized by neglect or insecure attachment (Schwartz et al., 2011).

Within the mentoring relationship, youth who have experienced abuse may hold negative relational expectations and biases, causing them to interpret ambiguous actions by their mentor (i.e., cancelling or late to appointments) negatively (Downey et al., 2004) and respond less positively to mentor support (Rhodes et al., 2000), damaging the MRQ and shortening their mentoring relationship (Schwartz et al., 2011). It was found that 40% of mentoring relationships ended prematurely and youth specifically prone to interpersonal difficulty (i.e., victims of maltreatment, referred for psychological treatment) were most likely to experience premature termination, suggesting that differences in relationship histories affect mentoring relationship quality, length, and outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Instilled insecurity from an unreliable or insensitive caregiver can induce feelings of anger and disappointment in youth,

causing them to view others as unlikely to meet their needs (Rhodes, 2002). The mentoring relationship may trigger vulnerabilities and draw out behavioral patterns in the youth that developed in earlier bonds (Schwartz et al., 2011). The mentee's negative reactions, in turn, may shift the mentor's engagement and persistence in building the relationship, compromising the MRQ and projected positive outcomes in the mentee (Schwartz et al., 2011).

In contrast, sensitive and responsive caregiving establishes in youth a sense of self-worth, where they see themselves as worthy of love and others as trustworthy in providing consistent support in times of need (Rhodes, 2002). Youth who have experienced relatively strong relationships in the past are more willing to seek support and take healthy, interpersonal risks with non-parental adults (Scales et al., 2001). In a mentoring relationship, a mentee who has experienced positive relationships may still need guidance and support, but more willing to engage with their mentor, enriching the quality of the match (Schwartz et al., 2011). A study examining youth mentoring relationship closure patterns found that youth perceptions of high emotional support from parents was associated with a reduced chance of early termination of the mentoring relationship (DeWit et al., 2016). On the other hand, in cases where youth have an abundance of adult support, they may be better equipped to respond to mentors, but deem the mentoring relationship unnecessary, and fail to invest fully in the relationship (Schwartz et al., 2011).

When non-parental adults initiate a relationship with youth, they are likely to be perceived and responded to in diverse manners depending on the youth's state of receptiveness (Rhodes, 2002). Thus, the relational histories and access to additional sources of support a mentee holds shape their relational capacity, which in turn influences their approach to the mentoring relationship and potential benefits they may experience from mentoring (Schwartz et

al., 2011).

### **Current Research**

While the literature on youth mentoring programs has grown, questions remain about what contributes to mentoring outcomes. Existing research suggests that mentoring relationship quality (MRQ) is a key determinant in the effectiveness and potential benefits of youth mentoring (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; DuBois et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2002). As studies are increasingly linking MRQ to outcomes, researchers have also identified predictors of MRQ as they relate to mentoring outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2011).

In the DuBois and colleagues (2011) meta-analysis, 73 independent samples were evaluated to assess outcomes and moderators of effectiveness in youth mentoring programs. Among those samples, those that included youth with moderate risk (defined as low environmental risk and high individual risk or high environmental risk and low individual risk) exhibited the largest effect sizes. Producing a curvilinear association with effect size, this finding suggests that youth with moderate (but not missing or overwhelming) risk challenges may be the optimal type of youth for producing positive mentoring outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011). Only one study has explicitly examined the association between relational profiles of youth and mentoring outcomes, reporting youth relationship quality with parents, teachers, and peers before the intervention (Schwartz et al., 2011). Based on the quality of their relationships at baseline, three relational profiles among youth were distinguished—relationally vulnerable, relationally adequate, relationally strong (Schwartz et al., 2011). Youth who showed the greatest improvements from mentoring (i.e., prosocial behavior, academic performance, classroom affect) were characterized by moderately strong relationships, or relationally adequate at baseline. These findings suggest a pattern in which moderate relational risk may be the optimal youth profile for

predicting positive mentoring relationship quality. The proposed study will attempt to replicate this finding and expand on existing research regarding optimal components of youth mentoring programs.

### **Rationale**

Urban youth exposed to poverty-related stressors face a heightened level of environmental risk, potentially impacting their development and intercepting positive youth outcomes. As parents living in low-income communities manage their own exposure to poverty-related stressors, the parent – child relationship may be compromised, leaving youth without a supportive, nurturing adult and disrupting the child’s primary relational history. Created to diminish negative outcomes and promote prosocial behavior in urban youth, mentoring programs are predicted to produce positive youth outcomes. across academic, behavioral, socioemotional, and psychological domains. Research findings suggest moderately positive effects, propelling a rise in youth mentoring programs as a positive intervention. What is less understood is what factors contribute to a youth mentee’s satisfaction in their mentoring relationship quality (MRQ). Mentoring literature suggests that parenting practices, compromised by poverty - related stressors, can result in a negative parent – child relationship and diminished social support, which in turn may affect youth capacity to connect and engage with their mentor. The current study seeks to evaluate a youth mentoring intervention, specifically exploring how the quality of the parent – child relationship influences the mentee’s satisfaction in the quality of their mentoring relationship. Based on emerging research, youth with moderately close parent – child relationships are expected to predict the greatest satisfaction with the MRQ.

## Statement of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis I:** Parent – child relationship quality reported at time point one (T1) will predict satisfaction in the mentoring relationship reported at time point three (T3).

**Hypothesis II:** Moderate levels of parent – child relationship reported at time point one (T1) will predict high levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality reported at time points two (T2) and three (T3), curvilinearly.

## Method

### Participants

This study was part of a larger study that included 198 youth enrolled in a school-based mentoring intervention between spring 2015 and 2019. Participants were 198 youth (58.1 percent female) between ages seven and fifteen ( $M = 11.2$ ). Of the study, 90.8% identified as Black or African American, 7.7% identified as Multi-racial, .7% American Indian, and .7% Other. The current study ( $N = 20$ ) included a youth who had completed each of the measures listed below across three time points.

### Setting

Youth participants were recruited from three elementary schools on the southside of Chicago within the Englewood and Auburn-Gresham neighborhoods. Demographic information for participating neighborhoods is presented in Table 1 (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2022).

**Table 1** *Demographic Characteristics of Participating Chicago Neighborhoods*

	<b>Englewood</b>	<b>Auburn Gresham</b>
Population	24,369	44,878
Race & Ethnicity (%)		
White (Non-Hispanic)	1.2	1.0
Hispanic or Latino	3.9	3.0
Black (Non-Hispanic)	92.1	94.5
Asian (Non-Hispanic)	0.6	0.3
Other/Multiple Races	2.2	1.1
Income under \$25,000 (%)	55.0	36.4

### Measures

**Parent – Child Relationship Quality.** To measure quality of the parent – child relationship from the youth perspective, the Places I Spend Time (PIST): Home subscale was used. This measure used a 3-point scale (Never, Sometimes, A lot) to evaluate the youth’s perspective on the parenting practices they experience at home with a caregiver living in the household. Assessing interactions, engagement, and the parent – child relationship, this measure identified potential compromised parenting practices. Items include, “Someone helps me when things go wrong,” “I learn that I am more than what others think of me,” and “Someone knows what is going on with me.” Psychometrics for this measure are currently being processed.

**Mentoring Relationship Quality (MRQ) Satisfaction** The Match Characteristics Questionnaire (MCQ v2.0; Harris & Nakkula, 2003b) evaluated mentee satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring relationship. This measure is an adapted version (originally created for mentors) that can be utilized for mentee self-report. With an overall internal consistency of .94 and strong reliability and validity, the MCQ contains various subscales. This adapted version used questions from the Overall Internal MRQ (.95) scale, focusing on assessing elements (with

reliability alphas) such as Closeness (.83), Not Distant (.81), Satisfaction (.87), and General Compatibility (.78). The adapted measure consists of 20 items with a 3-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 3 = Always. The questions assessed how the mentee interacts with their mentor, what the mentee believes their mentor provides for them in the relationship, and their overall satisfaction with the match. Sample items include: “I feel like the match is getting stronger,” “I feel frustrated or disappointed about how the match is going,” “I can trust what my mentor tells me,” “My mentor helps to make sure I have the things I need to be successful.”

### **Procedure**

All measures and protocols in this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board at DePaul University. Recruitment strategies for the school-based mentoring intervention included classroom visits, gathering referrals from school personnel, and distribution of program literature at school events. Interested families provided contact information and were invited to complete baseline assessment at their child’s school. In agreement with IRB requirements, all participating youth and their parent and/or guardian received information on the study procedure and signed consent and assent forms prior to completion of the baseline assessment. Each youth participant and their caregiver completed baseline measures including the PIST: Home and MCQ, via an online survey platform. Demographic information including race/ethnicity, age, and gender were also provided by families. Youth were compensated \$60 in gift cards for completing the survey. Families were entered into a lottery after enrolling, where half were chosen to receive a mentor for the upcoming school year (Intervention group) and the other half received resources providing tips and skills on wellness (Control group). If a youth participant was placed in the Control group, they were put on a waitlist and moved into the Mentor group if a spot opened.

Regardless of group assignment, enrolled families were invited to complete subsequent assessments throughout the year and were compensated each time. The baseline assessment, Time point one (T1) was completed by participants in the Spring prior to their first school year enrolled in the program. The second assessment, time point two (T2) was collected in December, and third assessment, time point three (T3) was collected in the Spring of their enrolled year. The PIST measure was distributed at each time point. Youth participants were paired with a mentor at least two weeks into the beginning of the school year therefore the MRQ battery is distributed at time points two (T2) and three (T3).

### **Analytical Plan**

The current study was designed to observe the relationship between the quality of the parent – child relationship and satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring relationship, reported by mentees. It was hypothesized that parent – child relationship quality (PIST) reported at time point one (T1) would predict satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality (MRQ) at time points two (T2) and three (T3). To test this hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. It was hypothesized that moderate levels of self-reported parent – child relationship quality reported at time point one (T1) would positively predict the highest levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality reported at time points two (T2) and three (T3), producing a curvilinear relationship. To test this hypothesis, nonlinear regression analyses were conducted and compared to their respective linear regressions to determine best fit. Curve fit estimations for each relationship were also examined.



## Results

### Correlational Analyses

Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to assess associations between all study variables, including demographic variables (i.e., age and gender). Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and a correlational matrix. Results revealed a significantly positive correlation between the PIST at time point one (T1) and the MRQ at time point two (T2),  $r = .35, p < 0.05$ . This finding suggests mentees who reported higher levels of the quality of their parent – child relationship at time point one (T1) or prior to beginning the intervention, reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of their mentoring relationship at time point two (T2). A significantly positive correlation was found between gender and the PIST at time point one (T1),  $r = .20, p < .05$ , suggesting more female mentees reported higher quality of the parent – child relationship prior to beginning the intervention. A positive correlation between the PIST at time one (T1) and the MRQ at time point three (T3) approached significance,  $r = .32, p = .08$ . This finding suggests mentees who reported higher quality of their parent – child relationships at time point one (T1) reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of their mentoring relationship at time point three (T3).

**Table 2.** *Correlational Matrix*

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	20	10.37	1.07	-	-.09	.02	.09	.23
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	20	1.45	0.51		-	.20*	.31	.33
3. PIST (T1)	20	54.20	7.84			-	.35*	.32 <sup>+</sup>
4. MRQ (T2)	20	48.05	9.12				-	.36
5. MRQ (T3)	20	44.90	5.95					-

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

+. Correlation approached significance ( $p = .08$ ).

a. The Gender variable is dummy coded, Male = 1 and Female = 2.

## Hypothesis Testing

### *Hypothesis 1*

We hypothesized the PIST reported at time point one (T1) would predict the MRQ reported at time point three (T3), controlling for study variable MRQ at time point two (T2). We also controlled for gender given its positive association with the PIST in the correlation matrix. The multiple regression analysis approached significance ( $\beta = .32, p = .065$ ) and indicated the PIST explained 30.9% of the variance in the MRQ,  $R^2 = .309, F(3, 17) = 2.54, p = .09$ . Control variables MRQ at time point two (T2) ( $\beta = .12, p = .40$ ) and gender ( $\beta = 1.67, p = .48$ ) did not significantly predict the MRQ at time point three (T3).

### *Hypothesis 2*

We hypothesized a curvilinear relationship would emerge between the PIST reported at time point one (T1) and the MRQ reported at time points two (T2) and three (T3), in separate models. Specifically, we predicted that moderate levels of the PIST would significantly predict the highest levels of the MRQ, producing an inverted U-shape curve and demonstrating a better fit of the data than the linear model. To test this, the PIST variable was squared to generate a quadratic model, followed by regression analyses conducted to compare to the linear model (Model 1) to the quadratic model, or hypothesized curvilinear relationship (Model 2). Three criteria are used to determine if the quadratic model better explains the relationship between the variables than the linear model: 1) the quadratic model was significant, 2) the quadratic model improved fit with the data over the linear model, and 3) the data plot demonstrated a curved, U-shaped line instead of a straight line (Ratkowsky, 1990).

**Hypothesis 2a.** We hypothesized a curvilinear relationship between the PIST and the MRQ. Specifically, we proposed moderate levels of the PIST reported at time point one (T1)

would significantly predict the highest levels of the MRQ at time point two (T2), producing an inverted U-shaped curve.

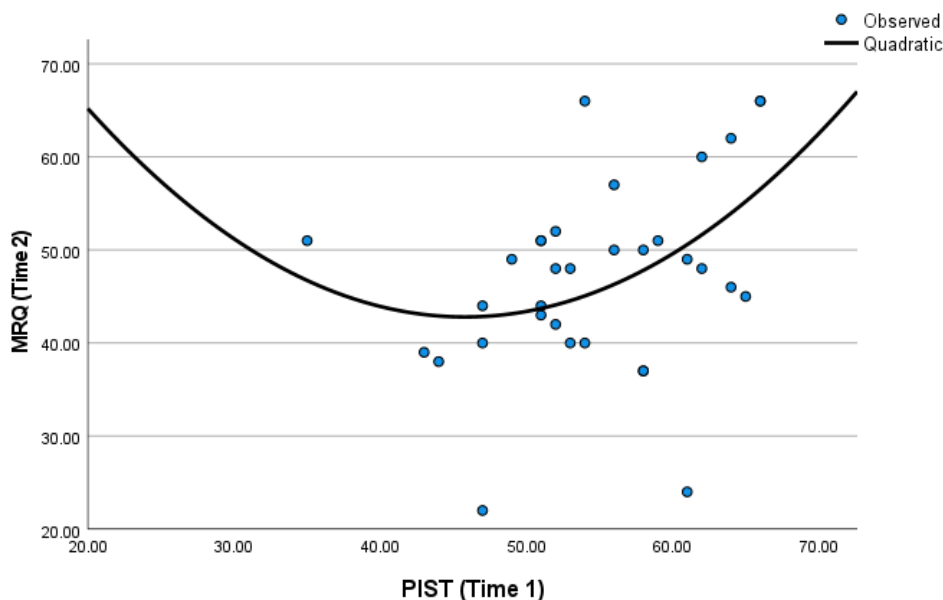
**Results for Quadratic Model Significance Criterion.** The linear model (Model 1) assessing the relationship between the PIST at time point one (T1) and the MRQ at time point two (T2) explained a significant amount of variance,  $R^2 = .125$ ,  $F(1,32) = .353$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Model 1 findings suggested 12.5% of variation in satisfaction with the MRQ at time point two (T2) was accounted for by the PIST levels reported at time point one (T1). The quadratic model (Model 2) assessing the relationship between the PIST at time point one (T1) and the MRQ at time point two (T2) only approached significance,  $R^2 = .178$ ,  $F(2,32) = .422$ ,  $p = .053$ ). But Model 2 explained more variance, attributing 17.8% of satisfaction with the MRQ at time point two (T2) to the quadratic PIST variable.

**Results for Improvement in Fit over Linear Model Criterion.** The variance explained by Model 2 relative to Model 1 increased from  $R^2 = .125$  (Model 1) to  $R^2 = .178$  (Model 2). The standard error decreased from  $SE = 9.80$  (for Model 1) to  $SE = 9.66$  (for Model 2), suggesting the quadratic model was a better fit compared to the linear model. The increased  $R^2\Delta = 0.53$  and decreased  $SE = .20$  in Model 2 indicated there was an improvement in fit of the data from the linear to the quadratic model.

**Results for Data Plot Criterion.** To provide a visual examination of goodness of fit, a curve fit estimation was conducted for the hypothesized quadratic model suggesting the PIST at time point one (T1) would predict the MRQ at time point two (T2), curvilinearly. Figure 1 provided further evidence for the quadratic model as the plotted variables formed a positive bend,  $b_2 = .034$ , suggesting a curvilinear U-shaped curve. The curve fit estimation visually

demonstrated the quadratic finding suggesting moderate levels the PIST reported at time point one (T1) predicted lower levels of satisfaction in the MRQ at time point two (T2).

**Figure 1.** *PIST (Time 1) on MRQ (Time 2)*



**Hypothesis 2b.** We also hypothesized a curvilinear relationship between the PIST and the MRQ at time point three. Specifically, we proposed that moderate levels of the PIST reported at time point one (T1) would significantly predict the highest levels of the MRQ at time point three (T3), producing an inverted U-shaped curve.

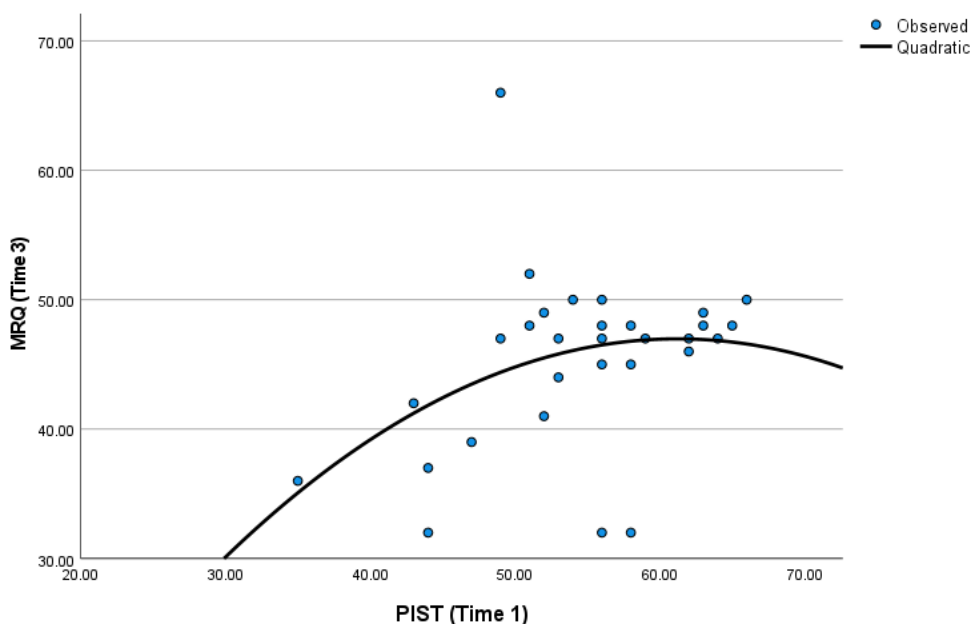
**Results for Quadratic Model Significance Criterion.** The linear model (Model 1) assessing the relationship between the PIST at time point one (T1) and the MRQ at time point three (T3) approached significance,  $R^2 = .103$ ,  $F(1,29) = .321$ ,  $p = .083$ . Model 1 findings suggested 10.3% of variation in satisfaction with the MRQ at time point three (T3) was accounted for by the PIST levels reported at time point one (T1). The quadratic model (Model 2) assessing the relationship between the PIST at time point one (T1) and MRQ at time point three

(T3) did not approach significance,  $R^2 = .134$ ,  $F(2,29) = .366$ ,  $p = .336$ . But Model 2 explained more variance, attributing 13.4% of satisfaction with the MRQ at time point three (T3) to the quadratic PIST variable.

**Results for Improvement in Fit over Linear Model Criterion.** The variance explained by Model 2 relative to Model 1 increased from  $R^2 = .103$  (Model 1) to  $R^2 = .134$  (Model 2). But the standard error increased from  $SE = 6.64$  (for Model 1) to  $SE = 6.65$  (for Model 2), suggesting the quadratic model was not a better fit compared to the linear model. Similarly, the linear model did not fit significantly better than the quadratic model.

**Results for Data Plot Criterion.** To provide a visual examination of goodness of fit, a curve fit estimation was conducted for the hypothesized quadratic model suggesting the PIST at time point one (T1) would predict the MRQ at time point two (T3), curvilinearly. Figure 2 provided evidence for the quadratic model as the plotted variables formed a negative bend,  $b_2 = -.017$ , suggesting an inverted U-shaped curve. The curve fit estimation visually demonstrated the quadratic finding suggesting moderate levels of the PIST reported at time point one (T1) predicted higher levels of satisfaction in the MRQ at time point three (T3).

**Figure 2.** *PIST (Time 1) on MRQ (Time 3)*



## **Discussion**

The current study asked two research questions: 1) Does the level of parent – child relationship quality significantly predict the level of satisfaction in the mentoring relationship quality, reported by mentees? 2) Does a curvilinear pattern emerge within this relationship, such that moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality significantly predict the highest levels of satisfaction in the mentoring relationship quality, in comparison to low or high levels of parent – child relationship quality? Strong evidence indicated a significant linear relationship between parent-child relationship quality and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. Mixed evidence for a curvilinear relationship between these variables also emerged.

### **Correlational Findings**

The relationships between parent – child relationship quality reported at time point 1 (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality reported at time points two (T2) and three (T3) indicated positive associations. A significantly positive correlation was found between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality at time point two (T2). This finding suggests mentees who reported higher levels of the quality of their parent – child relationship at time point one (T1) or prior to beginning the intervention, reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of their mentoring relationship at time point two (T2). A positive correlation between parent – child relationship quality at time one (T1) and the satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality at time point three (T3) approached significance. This finding suggests that mentees who reported higher quality of their parent – child relationship at time point one (T1) reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of their mentoring relationship at time point three (T3). As

these associations are connected to the hypothesized associations, these findings will be discussed in detail in the hypotheses portion of the Discussion section below.

A significantly positive correlation was found between gender and parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1). This finding suggests that female mentees reported higher quality parent – child relationships prior to beginning the intervention than male mentees.

### ***Fit with Prior Literature***

This finding fits with gender socialization theories that argue that girls are raised to prioritize connection and interpersonal relationships whereas boys are socialized to focus on autonomy (Liang et al., 2014). Past research also argues that girls are more likely than boys to have closer and growth-oriented relationships, characterized by high levels in instrumental or relational support and growth-focused activities (Liao & Sánchez, 2019). In alignment with past research, this finding over suggests socialization patterns (i.e., help-seeking, relational development) of girls may lead openness to mentoring relationships and increase satisfaction.

### **Hypothesis 1**

The association between parent – child relationship quality reported at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship at time point three (T3) (controlling for gender and satisfaction at time point 2 (T2) approached significance, indicating an emerging positive relationship. This finding suggests that mentees reporting higher levels of parent – child relationship quality prior to beginning the intervention reported higher levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship eight months into the relationship. But the relationship only approached significance so it should be interpreted with caution.

### ***Fit with Prior Literature***

Consistent with some previous research, this finding suggests youth experiencing relatively strong relationships in the past may be more willing to seek support and take healthy, interpersonal risks with non-parental adults such as their mentors (Scales et al., 2001). The fact that this finding only approached significance could indicate a moderate effect consistent with the hypothesis that youth with an abundance of adult support may be readily equipped to respond to mentors but not see the mentoring relationship as indispensable, diminishing full investment in the relationship (Schwartz et al., 2011). The lack of significance could also be attributable to the limited sample size. See limitations section below. In general, however, this finding further supports previous literature suggesting youth relationship history is a contributing factor to willingness and capacity to engage with a mentor (DuBois et al., 2011).

### **Hypothesis 2**

Interesting trends emerged when comparing linear with curvilinear patterns between parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality.

#### ***Evidence for a Linear Relationship between Parent – Child Relationship Quality (T1) and Satisfaction with the Mentoring Relationship Quality (T2)***

The linear model examining the relationship between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality at time point two (T2) was significant. This finding suggests that higher reported levels of parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) significantly predicted higher levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality at time point two (T2).

**Fit with Prior Literature.** This finding provides additional support for the results and interpretation provided for Hypothesis 1 summarized above. In sum, consistent with previous



research, this finding suggests youth with positive relational histories may be better equipped to respond to mentors and experience satisfaction within the mentoring relationship (Romero-Canyas et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2011).

***Evidence for a Quadratic Relationship between the Parent – Child Relationship Quality (T1) and Satisfaction with the Mentoring Relationship Quality (T2)***

For the hypothesized curvilinear relationship between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality at time point two (T2), mixed findings were revealed. All three of the criteria for establishing evidence for a quadratic effect revealed some evidence of a curvilinear relationships. On the other hand, the linear model was significant whereas the curvilinear model only approached significance. Furthermore, inspection of the curve revealed that the pattern was the opposite of that hypothesized: moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality predicted lower levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality.

**Fit with Prior Literature.** Taken together, the findings provide some evidence for a curvilinear relationship in addition to a linear one. Surprisingly, however, the curvilinear relationship was the opposite of the one hypothesized. To our knowledge, there are no prior findings to support this pattern. Some possible ideas for how and why this pattern might have emerged in this sample and not in others include cultural strengths and protective factors explicitly of the current sample influencing willingness to engage in the mentoring relationship and overall satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality.

Prior studies in this area have not included samples that are almost exclusively Black and residing in some of the most chronically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the nation. Thus, this sample is distinct both in 1) the level of systematic and institutionalized racism, marginalization,

and oppression and poverty-related stressors experienced (Sanchez, 2017) and also 2) the cultural strengths that are brought. Cultural values have been nurtured in the African American community to combat racism, instill cultural strengths, and promote youth development both in the individual and community (Dove, 2022; Grills et al., 2016). Foundational Africentric cultural values (i.e., communalism, spirituality, collectivism, fairness, and social justice) facilitate the implementation of protective factors such as building a social network, which can strengthen youth social ties to caregivers, peers, mentors (Grills et al., 2016).

These contrasting forces could help explain the unexpected curvilinear pattern found in this study. In particular, chronic stressors associated with poverty have been shown consistently to negatively affect parent – child relationships (Grant et al., 2003). But African American cultural strengths combat this negative force through extended family relationships, kinship, faith communities, and natural mentoring. Because mentoring (e.g., natural, formal) has been a longstanding tradition in the African American community, youth are receptive to the benefits that come from relationships with non-parental adults (i.e., social capital, racial socialization, bonding over shared identity and/or experiences, navigating culturally focused barriers) (Sanchez, 2017). Therefore, to first to explain the unexpected finding that youth with weaker parent-child relationships were more connected with their mentors than youth with moderate parent-child relationship, it could be that African American cultural strengths have prepared even youth who do not have strong parent-child relationships to benefit from mentoring relationships. And these youth (due to the weaker parent-child relationship) may be particularly motivated to engage in the mentoring relationship.

Second, to explain the unexpected finding that youth with stronger parent-child relationships were more connected with their mentors than youth with moderate parent-child

relationship, it could be that systemic stressors of racism and poverty are sufficiently powerful that even those youth with the strongest parent-child relationships can benefit from additional mentoring support. And those youth with stronger parent-child relationship are better equipped to engage in the mentoring relationship than those youth who are only moderately connected with their parents.

***Evidence for a Linear Relationship between Parent – Child Relationship Quality (T1) and Satisfaction with the Mentoring Relationship Quality (T3)***

The linear model examining the relationship between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the MRQ at time point three (T3) approached significance. This finding suggests reported high levels of parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) had a positive association with reported high levels of satisfaction with the MRQ at time point three (T3). Interpretation of this relationship should be done with caution, however, due to the fact that it only approaching significance.

**Fit with Prior Literature.** Although this finding was not significant, the trend is consistent with the findings presented above for mentoring relationship assessed at time point two (T2). Together these findings fit with prior literature suggesting that mentoring relationship quality is heavily influenced by pre-existing youth characteristics including relational skills, expectations, vulnerabilities (Spencer, 2012) and that youth relationship history is a contributing factor to engagement and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship (Raposa et al., 2016).

***Evidence for a Quadratic Relationship between Parent – Child Relationship Quality (T1) and Satisfaction with the Mentoring Relationship Quality (T3)***

For the hypothesized curvilinear relationship between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the MRQ at time point three (T3), mixed findings

were revealed. The three criteria for establishing evidence for a quadratic effect revealed mixed and insignificant evidence of a curvilinear relationship: 1) the quadratic model did not approach significance, 2) the quadratic model explained slightly more variance than the linear model, but the change in standard error value was insignificant, suggesting no substantial improvement in model fit, yet 3) visual examination of the plot revealed an inverted U-shaped curve. More mixed findings emerged, indicating negligible improvement in fit from the linear model to the curvilinear model, where only the linear model approached significance and the quadratic model did not approach significance. Contrastingly, inspection of the curve revealed that the pattern was that hypothesized: moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality predicted higher levels of satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality.

**Fit with Prior Literature.** Taken together, the findings for the association between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship at time point three (T3) were weaker than the association between parent – child relationship quality at time point one (T1) and the mentoring relationship at time point two (T2). This could reflect the fact that, with greater passage of time, additional intervening variables are more likely to influence the outcome. Despite the fact that neither the linear nor the quadratic relationship emerged victorious at time point three (T3), results at this time point still provide some evidence that prior relational history influences mentoring satisfaction, which is consistent with the broader pattern of findings in this study and the prior literature.

**Limitations and Methodological Explanations for Lack of Fit with Prior Literature.** The most glaring limitation of this study is its small sample size. Small samples reduce the reliability of findings and, as result, require larger effect sizes to establish significance, limiting power to detect true effects. For these reasons, it is somewhat surprising that as many findings

achieved (or approached) significance as they did. This pattern could indicate that the findings in this study are particularly strong. But, given that small samples also reduce reliability, additional research with larger samples is needed to determine whether the findings that emerged in this study are replicable.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to addressing sample size concerns, more research is needed to examine the influence youth relational history, and moreover relational capacity has on satisfaction in the quality of the mentoring relationship. Findings from this study revealed an unfamiliar curvilinear pattern in which moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality negatively related to satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. Systemic stressors are most prevalent in predominantly Black communities such as this sample, yet cultural values emphasized in these same communities uphold cultural strengths that help withstand oppression and disadvantages. Therefore, one cannot be looked at without the other when examining youth relational history affecting satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality. Continued research on how environmental risks and protective factors interact with a mentee’s engagement and guide their willingness to build a relationship with their mentor is necessary in the development of mentoring programs.

Findings from this study also revealed that with more time passed, the relationship between parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with mentoring relationship quality grew weaker. Perhaps, extrinsic variables interfered with mentoring satisfaction, preventing the relationship from growing stronger as the year progressed. Additional research is needed to test this hypothesized explanation. If it proves valid, additional interfering variables should be taken into consideration when examining youth relational history influencing mentoring satisfaction.

Research on how these elements influence the relationship at varying time points is key to identifying mentoring outcome determinants.

Building on mentee self-reports, assessments on relationship quality from the caregiver, mentor, and other non-parental adult perspectives can strengthen the understanding of mentee relational capacity in other contexts and help determine how the MRQ influences a mentee's supportive relationships over time. Continued assessment of these mechanisms will contribute to the evaluation of mentoring interventions created to address youth exposure to environmental risks generated by living in highly concentrated impoverished communities.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

This study has several implications, with the most important being the existing relationship between the parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the MRQ is significant and positive. Youth entering into the mentoring program with the strongest and weakest parent – child relationships were more connected to their mentors than youth with moderate parent – child relationship. Perhaps, youth utilize more than just their relational capacity and skills to nurture their mentoring relationship. Communities highly populated with Black families employ cultural values (i.e., collectivism, kinship, and natural mentoring) as strengths to combat oppression and poverty-related stressors. Though influential, these protective factors may not stand against the impact systemic racism has on communities, truncating even the most impenetrable parent – child relationships. It is important to understand how these two forces interact with a youth's relational history—potentially leaving them better equipped or overly motivated to build a relationship with a non-parental adult. If this is the case, youth mentoring interventions should approach development of programs for predominantly Black youth with a strengths-based mindset and sensitivity to environmental risk predictors. Doing so

will help strengthen overall program components and address gaps in programming that leave youth with moderate parent – child relationships dissatisfied with their mentoring relationship.

Youth demographics (i.e., gender, race) play a pivotal role for mentees as they enter a mentoring relationship. With girls perhaps feeling more receptive to expanding their social networks due to being more connected to their parent, boy mentees may experience apprehension and uncertainty about forming newer relationships. Past research suggests male mentees benefit from mentoring more than female mentees, further supporting continued efforts in understanding how demographics of youth mentees influence mentoring trajectory. Mentoring programs should consider this pre-existing characteristic when establishing mentor – mentee pairs and facilitating connection in the mentoring relationship.

Often, mentors do not share the same identity as their mentee, leaving Black youth to pull from their own cultural strengths to nurture their mentor relationship. While youth may approach this with eagerness, it also places cultural responsibility on youth to make connections based on their experiences and interests. Mentoring programs should implement cultural competence and sensitivity into training components to ensure mentors are adequately prepared to understand and engage with cultural values Black youth possess.

To build on existing research, we plan to continue exploring the relational histories of youth. It is our hope that this study and future findings will contribute guidance to mentoring interventions on meeting at-risk youth where they are relationally and provide the necessary supports to increase positive development.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Few studies have examined the relational history of youth exposed to chronic poverty-related stressors. Moreso, little is known about the influence relational history has on a youth's

capacity to connect and engage with non-parental adults in contexts such as a mentoring program. The results of this study contribute to the literature by examining the relationship between parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship and demonstrating a significantly positive association. It is evident that a substantial amount of youth mentees reporting high levels of parent – child relationship quality experience the highest levels of satisfaction in their mentoring relationship, which may reflect greater willingness and capacity to engage with a mentor. Gender also can influence parent – child relationship quality, such that girls are more likely to report higher quality relationships with their parent.

Existing mixed research has argued for and against a curvilinear relationship between relational risk and youth mentoring outcomes. Some literature suggests youth with moderate risk relational profiles demonstrate the greatest improvements from mentoring while others argue relational risk does not emerge as a significant predictor for mentoring outcomes or MRQ. In line with this, mixed evidence from the current study emerged in support of a curvilinear relationship, with one peculiar pattern suggesting a negative relationship between moderate levels of parent – child relationship quality and satisfaction with the MRQ. We argue that to close in on a potential curvilinear relationship, more research should be done to 1) increase sample size for generalizability and 2) expand on additional factors impacting relational capacity including cultural strengths of African American youth. In all, the current study is contributing to the literature by building on existing findings and proposing new pathways to explore the relationship between mentee relational risk and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship quality. Continued research on this relationship will inform the development of mentoring program components that increase outcome benefits for youth of all relational histories.



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