ABSTRACT

CREATING A QUALITY YOUTH MENTORING RELATIONSHIP:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF COLLEGE STUDENT MENTORS

by Rachel Radina

Youth mentoring in the school setting is a fairly new context for youth mentoring programs to occur; therefore, more research is needed in this context to determine how to make this program type most effective. This qualitative study was designed to explore what mentors’ define as quality within youth mentoring relationships in order to determine what factors promote the formation of a bond between the mentor-mentee pair. During in-depth interviews mentors identified four factors they considered to be components of bond building: (1) consistency; (2) a community-based component (i.e. meeting outside of school); (3) spending more time together; and (4) listening. The main overarching goal of this study was to advance the mentoring literature so that it can be used to improve current programs and help enhance the creation of new, more effective programs.
CREATING A QUALITY YOUTH MENTORING RELATIONSHIP:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF COLLEGE STUDENT MENTORS

A Thesis

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Creating a Quality Youth Mentoring Relationship: The Perspectives of College Student Mentors

**Introduction**

Youth mentoring is a widely used practice with the goal of changing for the better, the lives of those who participate in mentoring programs. Children, for various reasons, often lack the role models needed to reach their full potential, and many times the goals of the family can be supplemented by individuals or institutions (e.g., mentoring programs) outside of the family. The lack of role models, as described by Rhodes, Grossman, and Roffman (2002), can be attributed to the increase in single-parent households and the necessity of both parents to work outside the home in two-parent households. Youth mentoring can help fill the gap, especially for those families with added time constraints and responsibilities. Approximately three million youth participate in some type of mentoring program in the United States (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008), which includes an estimated 4,500 agencies (DuBois & Karcher, 2005), with school-based programs making up 70% of new mentoring programs (Rhodes et al., 2002). There is a great need for more research in the field of youth mentoring, specifically the school-based setting, as practice continues to outpace scientific research (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; DuBois & Rhodes, 2006; Randolph & Johnson, 2008; Rhodes, 2002). Thus, this study focused on exploring the experiences of mentors involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County, a school-based mentoring program.

It is important that mentoring programs help to foster the development of an effective relationship between mentors and mentees, which can have a positive influence on the life of a child or adolescent (DuBois & Rhodes, 2004; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). On the other hand, a poor relationship, or one that ends prematurely, can have a detrimental effect and end up doing more harm than good (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006; Grossman & Rhodes, 200; Rhodes, 2002). The current research literature suggests that the quality of the relationship is one of the major components of an effective mentoring relationship (Herrera, 1999; Rhodes et al., 2002; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Thus, there is a need for a greater understanding of what a good quality mentoring relationship is and how it can be fostered.

One of the limitations of the existing research on mentoring is a lack of focus on the study of the interpersonal relationship between the mentor and mentee (Keller, 2005; Spencer, 2006). Spencer pointed out that research has focused “more on youth outcomes than on mentoring
relationships themselves” (2006, p. 289). To provide more effective mentoring programs, a much better understanding of the mentoring relationship is needed (DuBois, Doolittle, Yates, Silverthorn & Tebes, 2006; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006; Zand, Thompson, Cervantes, Espiritu, Klagholz, LaBlanc, and Taylor, 2009). Researchers have specifically stated the need for more qualitative studies to be conducted on mentoring relationships (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Nakkula & Harris, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer & Rhodes, 2005). Given that a majority of the research has been based on quantitative survey data and outcomes, a rich description that only qualitative research can provide is needed to better understand mentor-mentee relationship quality. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore issues related to relationship quality from the perspective of mentors using a qualitative study design.

**Literature Review**

Mentoring has been defined in the research literature as, “a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé—a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé” (Rhodes, 2002, p.3). Mentoring is used as a tool to improve the lives of the youth who are participating in mentoring programs. Most current youth mentoring programs are also designed specifically to meet the purpose or goals of that specific program. Some of those purposes include: (a) providing a positive role model who cares and encourages the child (Rhodes, 2002); (b) providing friendship; (c) increasing self-esteem, self-worth and confidence (DuBois et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2002); (d) increasing connectedness to schools and parents (Converse & Lignugaris, 2009; Karcher, 2005; Rhodes & Grossman, 2002); (e) improving academics and attendance (Converse & Lignugaris, 2009; Herrera, 1999); and (f) developing employment skills and training (DuBois et al., 2002). A good program is designed in a way so that the purpose and/or goals of the program can be met.

**Does Mentoring Work & Why?**

Mentoring has been found to be an effective intervention, especially if the program can help foster a “quality” relationship between the mentor and mentee (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Herrera, 1999). Specifically, Herrera (1999) and DuBois and colleagues (2002) have found that if a strong relationship develops between mentor and mentee, it can have a
positive impact on a child, while DuBois et al. noted that youth labeled “at-risk” benefited the most from mentoring. Slicker and Palmer (1993) found that only those mentees who were identified as having “quality” mentoring relationships showed improved outcomes in terms of reduced drop-out rates for the next school year and academic improvement. The “quality” of the mentoring was determined by youth reports and logs kept by the mentors themselves.

As described above, research has demonstrated that mentoring programs can have positive outcomes for mentees, and what appears to be key to this success is quality mentoring and relationships between mentors and mentees. Indeed, Bellamy et al. (2006) have stated that “the quality of the mentoring relationship is a key component in effective mentoring interventions” (p. 57). What these studies have failed to fully explore is what makes a quality mentoring relationship. Studies designed to determine the factors necessary to foster a quality relationship between mentor and mentee are needed (Bellamy et al., 2006; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Spencer, 2004). This study explored what components create quality with the goal of expanding upon what is currently known about quality mentoring relationships.

What Factors Increase the Quality of Mentoring Relationships?

Although more research is needed to give a more complete picture of what a quality mentoring relationship entails, several factors have been identified as important to the effectiveness of mentor-mentee relationships. The first is the ability of the pair to form a bond (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2004). Four components that help to create an emotional bond have been identified as: (a) relationship closeness and perceived support (Nakkula & Harris, 2005); (b) trust, without trust other program goals may not be realized (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006); (c) empathy towards mentee (Spencer, 2006); and (d) the joint commitment of the pair (Spencer, 2006). Dosage, or “the quantity of mentoring the youth receives” (Karcher et al., 2006, p. 715), also contributes to the creation of a bond between the mentor-mentee pair and is defined as having three components: (a) the number of hours the mentor spends with the student; (b) the strength of the bond created between the two (i.e., how strong the dose is); and (c) how long the relationship lasts (i.e., duration).

Dosage has been found to have an impact on relationship quality and mentoring outcomes (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Karcher et al., 2006; Whiting & Mallory, 2007).
Specifically, Karcher (2005) found that high school mentors’ attendance (i.e., mentor being present) had a positive impact on their mentees connectedness to school and parents. Using youth self reports, it was found that mentor attendance was positively related to the improvement of self-esteem, behavior and social skills more so than the content of the mentoring program (Karcher et al., 2006). However, the mentors who were less consistent in attendance had a negative effect on the self-esteem, social skills, and behaviors of their mentees. Thus, Karcher concluded that mentor attendance was more important than the content of the mentoring program for positive youth outcomes. Similarly, Spencer (2006) found that consistent and frequent contact (i.e., mentor attendance) was also important in developing relationship quality. Additionally, Whiting and Mallory (2007), after evaluating a mentoring program that matched middle school students with college students, found meeting twice a week was more effective than the typical dosage of once per week. This finding was consistent with findings from a previous study (Karcher et al., 2006) in which the mentoring program design included more frequent contact between the mentor-mentee pair and was found to be effective. Based on the findings of these studies, it appears that the opportunity for the mentor-mentee pair to spend more time together is an effective means of creating quality and a strong bond.

Another component of dosage shown to increase the quality of the mentoring relationship is the length of the relationship (Bellamy et al., 2006; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). The longer the relationship, provided it is a positive one, the more the mentee stands to benefit from it (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Grossman and Rhodes found that youth in longer relationships (i.e., a year or more) received academic, psycho-social (e.g., self-worth), and behavioral (e.g., attendance, parental relations) benefits. In comparison, youth in relationships lasting three months or less experienced negative outcomes in their perceived self worth and academic abilities.

**Context**

The context in which a mentoring program takes place can be defined simply as where the mentor and mentee meet (Karcher et al., 2006). A community-based mentoring program takes place in the community and the mentoring pair has the freedom to meet in various locations and partake in a variety of activities (e.g., movies, shopping, dinner). Due to an inability to attract the number of volunteers needed for community programs, new mentoring contexts and program
types, such as site-based-mentoring, have been developed (Rhodes et al., 2002). Site-based programs are rapidly increasing and include those based in schools, job-sites, and religious institutions. School-based programs make up 70% of the new growth in these program types (Rhodes, Grossman, & Roffman, 2002). A school-based mentoring program is one in which mentors and mentees spend most of their time at the mentee’s school, typically for one hour per week (Karcher et al., 2006; Portwood & Ayers, 2005).

In a review of the current mentoring research, Randolph and Johnson (2008) found that school-based programs have positive outcomes for at-risk youth. The most likely benefit to youths in this context is a positive effect on school connectedness (Randolph & Johnson, 2008). Another evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk youth found that mentors who perceived the relationship with their mentee to be positive tended to spend more time with them, and those mentees had fewer office referrals and better school attendance (Converse & Lignugaris, 2009). A nation-wide study conducted on Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) school-based programs found that the youth in the BBBS programs showed positive outcomes in academics, had boosts in their confidence levels regarding their own academic abilities, and had better school attendance. However, they found these outcomes were not sustained if mentees left the program, pointing to the need for long-term mentoring relationships (Herrera et al., 2007).

Most of the current research studies on mentoring have been largely focused on community-based mentoring. Given that school-based mentoring is a fairly new context and is growing rapidly compared to community-based, more research needs to be conducted in this specific context (Converse & Lignugaris, 2009; Karcher et al., 2006; Randolph & Johnson, 2008). Portwood and Ayers (2005) suggest that the outcomes of school-based mentoring must further be studied, particularly school connectedness. They also recommend exploring the effects of decreased dosage due to the context of school-based mentoring programs. I argue that it is important to determine what contributes to the formation of quality relationships in this context. Determining why mentoring works, by looking at what creates quality within the relationship, will help to improve current mentoring programs and create better mentoring programs in the future. Thus, mentor-mentee relationships that occur within the school-based setting were chosen as the focus of the study.
**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate mentor-mentee relationships in the context of a school-based mentoring program in order to understand what constitutes a quality mentoring relationship. Specifically, mentors’ perceptions of what components contribute to the creation of quality mentoring relationships. The study is guided by phenomenology in that it places the participant in the position of expert on his/her lived experience. Thus, mentors were interviewed to gauge their “expert” perspectives on the quality of their relationships. By taking a closer look at what mentors’ perceive as impacting the quality of the relationship, the aim of this study was to contribute to the current “best practices” and help to provide insight on how to better train mentors on building quality relationships with their mentees. The main overarching goal of this study was to advance the mentoring literature in this area so that it can be used to improve current programs and help enhance the creation of new, more effective programs. This study was designed specifically to answer two questions: (1) what do mentors perceive as quality (i.e., creation of a bond) within the mentor-mentee relationship within the school-based context of BBBS of Butler County; and (2) how is quality (i.e., a bond) built within this specific context?

When determining the characteristics and processes that contribute to the development of relationship quality, it is important to not only determine what contributes to quality but also what does not. This is important for three reasons. First, often if the relationship ends prematurely or the relationship is not a quality relationship, more harm is done than good (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Second, many studies have failed to look at the negative aspects of mentoring relationships (Baker & Maguire, 2005), which can be a better predictor of outcomes and the duration of the relationship (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Third, in exploring mentoring relationships, previous studies have also deliberately recruited “good” matches so the quality of a “good” mentoring relationship can be studied (e.g., Spencer, 2006). Although this method has been successful in adding to the mentoring literature, the results of such studies are limited in scope in that they do not offer an understanding of relationship quality that is holistic. That is, by not also exploring potentially poor or failed mentoring relationships, it is difficult to gain a clear understanding of what works and what does not for building a quality relationship. Thus, this study was designed to capture participants’ perspectives on both “good” and “bad” relationships.
The intent here was to decipher what contributes and what does not to the perception of a quality relationship from the perspectives of the mentor. In order to do this, participants were asked to provide both negative and positive insight on the mentoring relationship and how they perceive the mentoring program they participated in either helped or hindered the development of a quality mentoring relationship. This qualitative research study was designed to tease out the intimate details of the relationship from the perspective of the mentor, specifically what constitutes relationship quality.

**Theoretical Lens**

Phenomenology and symbolic interaction were used as a guide in the exploration of the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship. These two theoretical perspectives complement one another, because they both help to clarify the experiences and meaning-making process of the mentor. Phenomenology was used to elucidate the lived experiences of the participants, and symbolic interaction was used to describe what those lived experiences actually mean to the participants.

**Phenomenology**

A phenomenological approach was used to guide the method of data collection for this study. “The purpose of a phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experience of one or more individuals in relation to the phenomenon of interest” (Daly, 2007, p. 97). The study intended to explore the lived experiences (i.e. the experience of being a mentor) of mentors in order to better understand the phenomenon of what constitutes quality within the youth mentoring relationship. By asking mentors about their experiences I was able to determine what they perceive as constituting quality as opposed to imposing pre-determined ideas of quality within the relationships merely based on outcomes. It is important to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have lived it in order to accurately depict what is really going on within the complex dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship.

**Symbolic Interaction**

As phenomenology was used to gain the perspectives of mentors from their own experiences, symbolic interaction was used to determine what symbols (i.e. factors) constitute quality in the
mentor-mentee relationship. Many previous studies on mentoring have focused on the outcomes of these programs (e.g., Dubois et al., 2002; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; Whiting & Mallory, 2007; Zand et al., 2008). However, outcomes cannot be fully understood until the meaning making process going on within the mentor-mentee relationship is fully understood and is much more transparent. To determine what mentors perceive as quality within the relationships with their mentees, there is a need to understand their definition of the situation. The definition of the situation, according to symbolic interactionist perspective, “provides a linkage between how we perceive our environment and how we act in it” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 60). By determining how mentors interact with their mentees, the intent was to gain a better understanding of how the mentors create meaning in their relationship. By understanding the meaning making process between mentor and mentee from the mentor’s perspective the intent was to decipher how this meaning may impact relationship quality. More specifically, determining what they see as quality (i.e., symbols) in the relationship is the actual act of meaning making.

Methods

Participants

Current or former mentors who participated in the school-based program of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County were recruited by posting: (a) fliers around the Miami University campus (Appendix A); (b) announcements on various list serves, which are distributed to the Miami students (e.g., list serves for students completing relevant majors) (Appendix B); and (c) recruitment prompts on Facebook. These recruitment methods were used because many students at Miami University have mentored for BBBS of Butler County. Each interested, potential participant contacted me and was screened (Appendix C) to ensure they fit the population being sought for the study.

Demographic information was also collected from the participants at the time of the interviews (Appendix D). A total of ten mentors (female = 9) ranging in age from 19-22 years took part in this study (Table 1). All but one of the participants, who was a mentor in high school, were college students during the time they were mentors. Nine of the participants were currently attending college, one was a recent college graduate. The class status of those who were attending college included four seniors, two juniors, two sophomores, and one freshman.
Table 1: Participant Chart

* The names have been changed to maintain confidentiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mentee</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Bond</th>
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<tr>
<td>Julie, 22, Senior, Female</td>
<td>Michelle, 10, 5th grade, Female</td>
<td>A little over a year. Mentoring relationship still exists between the pair</td>
<td>Started out as after school mentoring program. Is currently doing school-based program at lunchtime and also does community based once a month.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily, 21, Junior, Female</td>
<td>Stephanie, between 11 and 13 (mentor not sure), 6th grade, Female</td>
<td>1 Year. The mentoring relationship ended and the pair do not keep in contact</td>
<td>School-based program that took place after school, did have some community-based components</td>
<td>Not very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, 22, Senior, Male</td>
<td>Chris, no age given, 5th grade, Male</td>
<td>1.5 years. Mentoring relationship still exists between the pair</td>
<td>School-based program that takes place after school</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin, 22, Senior, Female</td>
<td>Sheila, 13, 8th grade, Female</td>
<td>2 years in mentoring program, but the relationship still continues outside of the program</td>
<td>First year was a school-based after school program and the second year was community-based and they now get together outside of the program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer, 22, Senior, Female</td>
<td>Did not have a consistent mentee. She had 4 over the duration of the time she spent in the program</td>
<td>2 years total, had 4 different mentees during that time</td>
<td>School-based after school mentoring program; however, this participant was in high school when she was a mentor. This was the only participant who was not a college student during the time she was a mentor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah, 22, college graduate, Female</td>
<td>Joe, (no age or grade given), Male</td>
<td>1 semester (3-4 months). She did not continue because she thought the program was unorganized and did not feel like she had created a bond with mentee</td>
<td>School-based after school program</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa, 20, Sophomore, Female</td>
<td>Jessica, 9, Female</td>
<td>2 semesters (about 9 months). She did not continue because she could no longer fit the school-based program into her schedule. She had wanted to do the community-based, but was unable to due to too many points on her license</td>
<td>School-based after school program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber, 19, Freshmen, Female</td>
<td>Carla, 8, 2nd grade, Female</td>
<td>Just started the program and at the time of the interview had been with mentee for about 3 months; she said she plans to stay in the program all 4 years of college</td>
<td>School-based after school program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve, 20, Sophomore, Female</td>
<td>David, 9, Male</td>
<td>About a year. Relationship is still ongoing and she wants to continue; she said she cannot imagine life without him</td>
<td>School-based program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen, 20, Junior, Female</td>
<td>Amy, (did not specify age)</td>
<td>2 years. Ended relationship so she could focus on her major</td>
<td>1st year in the school-based program, 2nd year in the community-based</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Procedures

I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix E). Interviews took place via telephone in the hopes that participants would be more candid in their conversation about mentoring than if the meetings had been face-to-face (Daly, 2007). This method was also utilized to save time and possibly ease recruitment. The participants received a $10 gift card in return for their time. The interviews were approximately 30-45 minutes in length and were recorded using a digital recorder. Mentors were asked questions regarding: (a) whether or not a bond was formed between the pair; (b) what created the bond or hindered it; (c) overall feelings about the relationship; (d) what they liked most and least about the relationship; and (e) what improvements could be made to create a better relationship. In-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection due to the phenomenological approach of the study. Specifically, this method has been shown to provide much more detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Daly, 2007) and is also used as a means to try and, “see the world through the participant’s eyes” (Daly, 2007, p. 219).

Protection of Human Subjects

The study participants were protected in several ways. First, I read the consent form (Appendix F), which outlines their rights as a participant in the study, verbatim before the start of the interview. The participants also received a copy of the consent form via email, which provided my contact information, the contact information of my faculty advisor, and the contact information for the Miami University Institutional Review Board in case the participant had any further questions or concerns. I was responsible for all participant recruitment and was the only researcher to have access to the participants’ identifying information. The participants were all assigned a number and a pseudonym upon completion of their interview and from that time forward were only identified by their assigned numbers or pseudonyms. In addition, the participants’ mentees were also given a pseudonym in order to protect their identities as well. In instances where the participants used the real names of themselves, their mentees, or program staff during the interview, a pseudonym or other form of de-identification was used when transcribing the interview.
Data Analysis

I transcribed each interview and initially analyzed the data independently. The first step in this process involved reading each interview transcript numerous times so that I could become familiar with each participant’s experience. This was followed by the use of grounded theory techniques for coding the transcripts. This inductive approach was used in order to give voice to the participants in regards to their own lived experiences. This began with open coding of the data by going through and coding each transcript line-by-line. Daly (2007) states that “line-by-line analysis does not necessarily mean giving a label to every single line of text, but rather providing labels to those data segments that can be marked off in a meaningful way” (p. 230). I applied Daly’s logic for “line-by-line” coding by labeling chunks of the data as opposed to each individual line. This method of open coding was used to create a general set of codes (e.g., themes around relationship quality, the challenges and rewards of mentoring) from which to continue more focused coding. The general themes were then recoded to create more focused themes and sub-themes. For example a general category, Themes Around Relationship Quality was created during open coding. During focused coding the theme Components of bond building was discovered within the general code of Themes Around relationship Quality and the following sub-themes were then derived from the data: (a) consistency; (b) community-based component; (c) spending more time together; and (d) listening.

After the themes and sub-themes were determined and the coding completed, my thesis chair reviewed a portion of the coding, evidence, and themes that I created during the analysis process. This was to ensure that I had elucidated relevant and meaningful themes from the data set to provide a rich description of the phenomenon of interest, as well as organized and presented the data in a clear and logical manner.

Findings

This study was designed specifically to answer two questions: (1) what do mentors perceive as quality (i.e., creation of a bond) within the mentor-mentee relationship within the school-based context of BBBS of Butler County; and (2) how is quality (i.e., a bond) built within this specific context? Two overarching themes, each with their own sub-themes, were identified during data analysis, which answer the two guiding research questions of this study. In addition,
two cases provided insight into what does not create quality in youth mentoring relationships and four themes were created from the experiences of those participants.

**Proof of Bond**

The first overarching theme, *Proof of Bond*, reflects what mentors in this study described as quality in the relationships with their mentees or proof that a bond was formed between the pair. Eight of the ten mentors stated that they had created a bond with their mentees. Out of the remaining two who stated that they had not bonded with their mentees, one said specifically that there was not a bond between the two and the other said that the relationship was not very strong. There were five major sub-themes derived from the overarching theme of *Proof of Bond* that were identified during data analysis: (a) strong relationship; (b) trust, opening up to mentor; (c) looks forward to time together; (d) friends; and (e) communication outside of the program.

**Strong Relationship**

The first sub-theme, strong relationship, was discussed by five of the mentors who described the relationship between themselves and their mentee as strong or as a very close relationship. It would seem that the description of a relationship as strong or close does provide evidence of a bond or quality relationship. Julie said, “I think it’s really strong. We have a really, really strong trusting relationship,” when discussing how she felt about the relationship between the pair. Similarly, Erin said, “I think it’s a pretty strong relationship just one of friendship.” Lisa and Eve both talked about being very close with their mentees. Lisa said, “we were really close,” and Eve said, “We’re really close, we’re really good friends.” Ellen talked about how she felt about her mentee and she expressed feeling very surprised by the effect the relationship had on her:

Especially the second year that I did it because we were so close at that point… I didn’t stop thinking about her after I left the program. My friends all knew her and talked about her all the time and I didn’t think that she would have as much of an affect on my life, I guess.

Ellen describes her relationship as close or strong by discussing how she was affected by the relationship and this seems to provide proof of a bond between the two.

**Trust, Opening up to Mentor**

Six of the participants described their mentee as trusting them or learning to trust and open up to them. Many times this was a process that happened over time and required the mentor to
be patient and consistent within the relationship to gain that trust. Julie said this to describe the trust they had in their relationship:

We have a really, really strong trusting relationship, she feels like especially recently, she’s felt like she can tell me pretty much anything and even if it’s bad and she really, really trusts me…she tells me all about her family and I tell her about my family and we have a really, really good relationship.

Two of the other mentors also talked about their mentees confiding in them about family or friends. Ellen said:

We both have very similar personalities and similar interests and stuff so we would talk about that a lot and also she actually felt really comfortable talking to me about everything and she would tell me about her family, about her you know her boyfriend status and all that stuff and so I mean we, she was just very comfortable with me. I of course wouldn’t share anything like really with her but that’s fine in the mind of a fifth and sixth grader so I mean it was just very comfortable you know she didn’t hold back at all, she didn’t feel like that she couldn’t tell me anything so.

Eve talked about how her little, David, had been shy at first and that it had taken time to get to the point where he trusted her enough to talk about his problems:

He is very quiet and I had a hard time kind of getting him to open up to me and finally at the beginning of fall 2009 he started telling me more about his home life and how more about his hard times at school with friends and kind of being an outcast and so really this year I felt like I’ve been doing more with David in terms of like getting to know him and kind of helping him with personal issues, where as last year we just would do homework and play games and we had fun but this year I really feel like I’m actually helping him, so that’s been really nice.

This case specifically speaks to the idea of consistency and the reality that building trust within a relationship takes time. It seems that once trust is created between the mentor and mentee it may be easier to share and feel rewarded. Eve talked about what she finds rewarding about the trust she has gained with David, “I like most that I feel like I’m actually helping out my little and that he’s able, he feels comfortable talking to me about his friends and his family.”

Sarah talked about building trust with her mentee as well, even though she said they did not form a bond. She said this about her mentee in regards to opening up, “by the end he started to open up a little bit more and I think he actually learned my name.” This particular relationship only lasted one semester and then the mentor decided not to come back. It may be possible that Sarah was making progress and the relationship could have continued improving over time if it had been longer in duration.
Friends

Five of the participants described the relationship with their mentee as one of friendship. Being friends would seem to be important in any relationship and mentoring seems to mimic other relationships in this regard. John said this about the friendship between he and his mentee, "well I would say that we're friends. We'll joke around with each other or he'll joke around with me." Erin had this to say about her relationship with her mentee:

I think it's a pretty strong relationship just one of friendship, you know she texts me and you know she'll write on my wall on face book you know it's just I feel like she's more of you know a friend than anything else, but I don't know I always have fun with her, I always think like you know we always laugh and I think that it's more of a friendship, it's a mutual thing, we both like each other, it's not a burden at all.

Erin also hopes that the relationship will continue after they complete the mentoring program. She sees it as a more permanent relationship in her life and it seems that her desire to continue the relationship supports the idea of a quality relationship and the formation of a bond between the pair:

I think that we'll continue to be friends even after I graduate and I'm hoping that this is something that she can always feel like she has me to talk to and that I'll be there for her.

Ellen also talked about her mentee as seeing her as more of a friend than a mentor:

She felt like I was more of a friend than someone who was trying to give her rules and everything because I never really had to give her any rules, I never had to set any guidelines, so I liked that.

In this case the mentor talked about one way in which the relationship was more like a friendship and she liked the fact that she could be more of a friend to her mentee. Being friends, or perceiving a friendship existed, seemed to provide evidence of quality.

Communication Outside of Program

Six of the participants talked about keeping in contact with their mentee outside of the context of the mentoring program. The need to contact each other outside of the program was typically due to illness, summer break, or just to keep in touch between weekly meetings. This type of contact seems to suggest that the relationship has spilled over into the everyday lives of either the mentor, mentee, or both, blurring the boundaries of the mentor-mentee relationship. This was something that most of the mentors viewed positively. There was only one mentor who seemed
to view this as a negative consequence of being a mentor. Communication outside of the program seemed to be another indicator of the formation of a bond between the mentor-mentee pair. Three of the mentors talked about summer and how they kept in touch or were planning to keep in touch with their mentees. Lisa talked about the things her mentee told her over the phone and she even sent her mentee care packages:

Then we had summer and she would call me and tell me the most random stuff and was able to sit there and talk to me about you know she got a new pet frog and you know stuff like that, stuff that you call and tell your friend about and so I mean that was pretty awesome and sending her care packages.

Amber said this about how she might keep in touch over the summer, “I can mail her stuff and I can like over the summer I’ll probably get her phone number so I can call.” Eve said this about keeping in touch with her little when he is sick and unable to attend the weekly meetings and also keeping in touch over the summer, “he’s been sick the past couple weeks so I haven’t been able to see him but we’ve been emailing and I email him over the summer and so I really love spending time with him.” She also talked about how much she missed her mentee over the summer, “I talk about him all the time so I feel like we’ve become really close now I really miss him over the summer and everything so.” Emily, the mentor who said she did not have a very strong bond with her mentee, did talk about her mentee contacting her outside of the program, possibly providing evidence that there was some type of connection between the two, “she would text me sometimes which I feel like said something because she obviously cared to say something to me I guess.”

Ellen talked about her mentee messaging her between meetings and said she never responded, because she was not really sure if it was appropriate for them to talk outside of the program. The two did share a bond, but it seems the mentor may have been resistant to letting the relationship spill over into her personal life:

She had my phone number and stuff and so sometimes she would call me you know just to say hi or message me when we, when I was still in the program and so I mean it makes me feel kind of mean, but it makes me feel I don’t know like maybe I should have tried harder and not been so rude about it but you know I never really responded when she would text me or call me because I wasn’t sure if that was appropriate so that was my least favorite.

Contact outside of the program context seemed to be an indication of quality within the youth mentoring relationships; however, this could also be part of what created a quality relationship in the first place.
**Looks Forward to Time Together**

Four out of the ten mentors talked about their mentees looking forward to the time they spent together. One of the mentors even talked about how she looked forward to the weekly meetings with her mentee. When mentees begin looking forward to the weekly meetings it seems to suggest the formation of a bond with their mentor, which also points to the need for consistency. If mentors do not show up and mentees are attached this can cause more harm than good. Julie said that her mentee asks her every week when they will see each other next:

She really looks forward to when we meet together like she asks me every time I go see her when’s the next time you’re coming to see me and she tells me all about her family and I tell her about my family and we have a really, really good relationship.

Amber says she looks forward to the time she spends with her mentee each week and she can tell that her mentee really enjoys it as well:

Just the way she acts around me and you can tell each week she’s more and more excited and she’ll hug me now, I look forward to going there it’s not like stupid volunteer work that I don’t enjoy, so I think that’s nice.

Eve and John said their mentees expressed that they really like Thursdays because of the mentoring program. Eve’s mentee David told her, “he always says Thursday’s his favorite day because that’s the day he has Big Brothers,” and John’s mentee also told him, “he’s like, ‘John, I really like coming on Thursdays, like I have a lot of fun’.” It seems the mentors also appreciate the fact that their mentees look forward to seeing them and this may also keep the mentor invested in the relationship.

**Components of Bond Building**

The next overarching theme, components of bond building, includes what mentors either discussed as being important or described perceiving as components of bond building and thus relationship quality. The sub-themes for this overarching theme are: (a) consistency, (b) community-based component, (c) spending more time together, and (d) listening.

**Consistency**

Eight of the mentors talked about consistency while either discussing the relationships with their mentees or when discussing what they think is important in trying to forge a meaningful, quality relationship with mentees. Consistency is a component of quality that is supported in the literature (DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher, 2005). A bond cannot form between the pair if either
mentor or mentee is not showing up every week. Some of the mentors talked about their mentee needing someone they could depend on, because they had no one else in their lives to fill this role. Consistency can also help to foster trust within the relationship, which was found to be both proof of a bond and a component that was mentioned by three of the participants. Julie talked about why she thinks consistency is important and how she modeled it to her mentee:

I made sure I was on time whenever I went to pick her up like I’ve just known from previous experiences working with kids that it’s just really important to be on time wherever you go because they need to know that you’re there for them cause a lot of them come from homes where you know their families aren’t really trusting, they’re not really reliable and they’ll say that they’re going to be somewhere and then they don’t show up.

One of the mentors talked about consistency not only in coming every week, but doing the same things or having a routine. Having a routine may also be an important component of family life at home and this may be important within the mentoring relationship as well. Lisa described the importance of consistency, the weekly routine, and just being a consistent person in her mentee’s life:

I definitely think it was being able to see each other consistently once a week and we had certain things that we always did, like we’d always do our homework so that was kind of consistency and then we’d always get to play together and then she got to be creative with the arts and crafts and just like really goofy or whatever and so I really just think it was the consistent time we spent together and that we had a common thing, I helped her with her Monday homework and we always made something that she could take home to her parents and I was just someone to talk to I think like a consistent person in her life.

Amber also talked about weekly consistency and being a consistent person in her mentee’s life. She also spoke about being consistent as a way to build trust:

I think that it’s a consistency where every week I’m there for an hour and a half, it’s not sporadic and I don’t ditch out, I don’t miss weeks so I think just having that consistency in their life when everything else is so messed up is nice to have and it allows for a trusting relationship.

Three mentors mentioned the negative impact that a lack of consistency could have on the mentoring relationship and the mentee themselves. Jennifer discussed being aware how awful it could make the mentee feel if she didn’t show up each week, “I remember how horrible it would be if I were to miss one of those days and how awful my mentee would feel, so you knew never to miss a day.” Amber described a situation where a mentor didn’t show up and the mentee was emotionally distraught over the absence of the mentor:
I know last week a girl couldn’t make it and I don’t know why, but the girl was sobbing the entire time saying no one wanted her and you can’t have volunteers who aren’t committed and who can’t be there every week it just, it doesn’t really work out well for the kids and the point is to make the kids have more confidence and more security and when people don’t show up it kind of has detrimental effects more so than adventitious ones.

Additionally, Sarah talked about the domino effect that a lack of consistency can have on the mentor-mentee dynamic. The mentor is absent and so then the mentee stops showing up:

Definitely consistency from the beginning and knowing who your, who your mentee is and not letting it be so kind of loosey goosey as our site was, because some I mean some of the kids didn’t even know who their mentor was, I think that also some mentors as I said didn’t come every week and then so then their littles would be either without a mentor that week or, or their littles didn’t come cause then their mentors weren’t coming and they didn’t come.

Based on the comments of these mentors, it appears important that both the mentor and mentee attend the weekly meetings on a consistent basis so the relationship has the opportunity to grow and the pair has a better chance of forming a lasting bond.

**Community-Based Component**

Seven of the mentors talked about a community-based component as a potential positive addition to the school-based setting. This was an interesting finding because the study was designed to interview mentors who had participated in the school-based setting where the community-based component would not have been included in the program. Some of the mentors had actually participated in both a community and school-based setting and were able to compare and contrast the two program contexts from a place of experience. One of the mentors, Erin, said being in the community setting was what really brought her and her mentee together:

And this was actually the time that me and Sheila got a lot closer [during community-based] and began talking and she opened up a little more personally to me and I still get together with Sheila now. It’s not formal through Big Brothers Big Sisters anymore but we sometimes I just go hang out with her.

Five of the mentors suggested that doing activities outside of the school context would improve the program and/or relationship with their mentee. Lisa had this to say about meeting outside of the school and she also talked about the potential benefit of a non-structured environment:

Definitely if we were allowed to see them outside of the program, I mean I wouldn’t have been able to see her all the time but if one day I took her out for ice cream if it was nice weather and something like that I mean that would just be something cool, again to make it
more like a friendship that you know you can go out and do cute little things that you know might have made it a little different to be able to hang out with her in a different like non-structured environment.

Eve also talked about meeting outside of the school walls:

I would like to meet outside of just the school program, I know that the big can pick up the little, I think that’d be fun, I don’t have a car or anything but maybe if they do a weekend thing where it’s all the bigs and littles can meet out at a park or something, just cause I know a lot of people don’t have time to do the community based program.

John thought that meeting out in the community might help to foster a bond:

It’s hard just for that hour that you’re there at the site-based program, so I suppose I could take him out or something, like go to the movies or something outside of the program. That would probably foster the bond as well.

Ellen talked about the school setting as being claustrophobic, especially for the mentors:

Well I really didn’t like the fact that everyone, that like in the claustrophobic school or maybe that was just me but I feel like for the kids it was fine but for the mentors I think that they you know didn’t get much out of that because it’s kind of boring so, maybe expanding it outside of the walls of the school.

From the responses of the mentors, it seems the mentors did not always view the school setting as an ideal place to spend time with their mentee and some even thought the community setting helped create a stronger bond between them.

**Spending More Time Together**

When asked how mentors could have improved the relationship four of them brought up the idea of spending more time with their mentees. One of the constraints of the school-based program is that the mentor-mentee pair have a set amount of time to spend together on a weekly basis. Julie discussed the time constraints she faced, but also acknowledged that the time that was allocated for the program could not be expanded in this context:

Yeah I think it would be easier like the after school program that I did last year I think we had a little longer and it was more homework help, arts and crafts, and then we played kick ball and stuff, but since I have classes during that time I can’t do that and so that’s why I’m going during school and we can’t really have more time which I understand because she has to get back to class cause she’s essentially missing her recess that day so that we can hang out in the art room.
Erin talked about the fact that she was no longer in the program and so she and her mentee only met infrequently. She thought she could improve the relationship by making an effort to spend more time with Sheila:

I definitely think I could spend more time with Sheila. You know since we’re not part of the program anymore you know I don’t make a huge effort to do something with her every week. So I could definitely try harder to have a more consistent relationship with Sheila.

One of the mentors, Amber, who just recently began mentoring Carla, talked about improving the relationship by spending more time with her mentee and doing things outside of the school context:

I think just more time and I think if I do it all 4 years it’ll definitely be, I’ll probably try and do off site so I’m not just at the school so we can do other stuff, like actually go places. But I think time will make it a better relationship.

Mentors seemed to understand time as an important component to bond building. Many felt constrained by the school setting due to the inability to spend more time together and so meeting out in the community context could also address this issue.

**Listening**

Four of the mentors talked about the importance of listening to their mentees and some expressed this as something that was missing in the lives of their mentees and a gap that perhaps mentoring could fill. Jennifer expressed the importance of listening to your mentee and did so by saying, “I think that’s basically the key to mentoring is if you’re there to listen to them.” She then went on to explain why she thought it was so important to listen:

I just like knowing that there was someone that would listen to them, because you would hear what they would say about their family members and how rejected they would be at home or even in school sometimes and then they knew that there was no rejection, that you were there for them and I think that was a really strong part about Big Brother Big Sister.

Two of the mentors talked about listening in regards to just letting them talk. Julie said, “So they really need somebody that’s going to show them that they’re, they’re on time and that they’re willing to listen to them, they don’t interrupt them.” Eve expressed the importance of consistency and listening:

I think coming every week, I know his big before me didn’t come a lot and so I think after being there awhile and coming each week was important to him and just letting him talk and not, I know his one good friend in the program and he always wants to do the sports and just being able to, to draw with someone and do what he wants, it’s been nice for him.
Listening may also help to foster trust and thus a friendship, which were both indicators that a bond was created in this particular study. Much more insight on the impact of the mentor’s ability to be a good listener could be gained by interviewing mentees.

**Reasons for Poor Relationship Quality**

Although there were only two mentors who did not create a strong bond with their mentees, there were still some insights gained into why their relationships may not have been quality. It was important to include these findings because the purpose of this study was not only to gain insight into what creates quality, but what does not. The following four sub-themes were found in both cases where quality was lacking: (1) shyness; (2) lacking in confidence; (3) matching; and (4) program organization.

**Shyness**

Both of the mentors who had issues with their mentees that lead to a decreased ability to form a bond talked about shyness as something that may have been a barrier. Emily discussed how she herself is shy and that it made the first meeting hard:

> It was a little bit awkward. I’m kind of shy and obviously she’s probably expecting me to be the one to talk mostly and I knew that so I tried to ask her questions and stuff, but I think she was a little shy too so she gave a couple words for her answers, so it wasn’t very good conversation, but I mean I asked her about, just like what do you like to do in your spare time, do you play any sports type of thing, so we got to know each other a little bit but it wasn’t very relaxed I guess.”

Sarah talked about her mentee’s shyness and had also discussed how she felt more training would have alleviated some of the stress around dealing with a shy child. Sarah said, “I didn’t really know how to communicate with a child who was really shy.” Both of the mentors seemed to have issues with shyness in someway and seemed to be left to deal with it on their own.

**Confidence**

These two mentors also seemed to be lacking in confidence and so this seemed to hinder their ability to form a real connection with their mentees. Emily talked about the fact that they did not have a strong bond and that sometimes her mentee would ignore her during the time they were supposed to be spending together. It seems Emily might have been better off is she had tried to join her mentee instead of waiting for her to come to her:

> It wasn’t too, too strong. I mean it was probably better than some people’s, I’d say it was
in the middle range. Sometimes I would be there and she would just go sit with her friends and eventually she’d come over but sometimes she would complain about having to do certain things that the program required us to do, and I felt kind of awkward being there when I felt like I wasn’t helping her so but it wasn’t horrible. It just wasn’t as good as it could have been I guess.

Sarah spoke candidly about her lack of confidence and how it really hindered her ability to have a meaningful relationship with her mentee, Joe. You could tell by Sarah’s statement that she really had some regrets about not making a connection:

I think that I also was really nervous and not very confident to work with him, but I think that if I had just kind of gone for it and not been so reserved about what I could do and what I couldn’t do, the thing that was most important was the time together but I felt really nervous around new situations and especially because I had no clue what was happening I was really confused most of the time, I think our relationship could have been better if I just kind of went for it but I didn’t know at the time that I could, I was kind of waiting for instruction most of the time and then it didn’t come and then that was kind of how it was left.

Perhaps in the case of these two mentors, training could have provided the confidence they were lacking and helped to alleviate the stress of not really knowing how to interact with their mentees.

**Matching**

There also seemed to be issues with matching in both cases. Matching in an important component of creating quality in youth mentoring relationships (Bellamy et al., 2006) and it seems this may have been ignored in both cases. Emily discusses how she and her mentee did not have as much in common as she had first thought:

I guess we weren’t as, we did have things in common but it wasn’t as in common as I had first thought. That was a little bit hard I guess because I’m really into sports and being active and stuff and she just sometimes didn’t want to do those things, which is fine but it was harder to relate to each other that way.

Sarah expressed similar frustrations with her match:

I thought that it would be, we’d be paired up right away with somebody based on compatibility and also you know cause we had done an interview and things like that and then that wasn’t the case at all it was kind of just like well now that you’ve gotten to know some of the kids just pick who you would like to work with and I didn’t know, I didn’t know who would be a good fit for me because I had seen a ton of different kids and it just felt kind of impersonal. Kind of like we were all lumped in together and hopefully some, some good would come out of it.
Sarah’s situation seemed to be much more severe than Emily’s. Sarah was not only paired with a little boy, but she also had no help in finding a match. She had this to say about the gender issue, “I know that that was a frustration at our site, most of the volunteers were women and that’s how I got paired up with a little boy who didn’t always feel very comfortable.” Even more frustrating was that the two just didn’t share common interests at all:

I would end up kind of tagging along behind him doing whatever he ended up gravitating towards but I was not very good at the things that we did, so he ended up just kind of going to the other mentors, like if we were playing basketball that was pretty hopeless for me so he would go and be with other mentors at that point and that you know affects the connection that you have with that person.

Sarah’s experience is not typical of the program, as typically the match is made before the mentor ever comes to the site. The disorganization at this particular site caused Sarah a lot of stress and also helped solidify her decision not to come back the following semester.

*Program organization*

Both Emily and Sarah discussed issues with program organization. This led to a rocky start for both and it seems likely that it may have played a part in the inability of the mentor-mentee pairs to form a lasting bond. The lack of program organization also came to light in the matching issues the two mentors faced. Here is what Emily had to say about the program:

It started off I believe they had just switched coordinators so it was a little bit rocky at first with the new coordinator trying to figure out the ins and the outs of the program and everything and get used to it. And then I was first paired with a girl who was there the first day and then didn’t show up after that so I didn’t really get into the groove of things I guess until a few weeks into it. I did get a new little sister and then after that it was fine.

Sarah who had much more to say about the lack of organization at her particular site really seemed to have a hard time figuring out what she was supposed to be doing:

It was just kind of really scattered, I didn’t know what was coming next and I also didn’t know who I was supposed to, what was I supposed to be doing, was I supposed to be finding the, my mentee or was I supposed to let them find me, I didn’t know how, I just did not know what was happening and then that was pretty much the case for four weeks.

Sarah also said that at the time she was a mentor, she thought the program had just started at her particular site. This seemed like a very unorganized site when compared to the picture the other mentors provided when describing the sites where they had been mentors.
Discussion

This study was designed to determine what factors contribute to the quality of youth mentoring relationships. Phenomenology was used to guide this study, as it was important to determine what mentors perceived as quality from their own lived experiences. Since eight of the ten mentors who were interviewed said they did form a bond with their mentees, I was able to pull out many themes that the mentors perceive as contributing to quality. Symbolic interaction was used to further determine what mentors’ perceived as quality within the mentor-mentee relationship by providing a lens to look at the actual meaning making process going on between the pair. This study was also designed with the intent of determining what does not contribute to quality; of the two participants who did not form a strong bond, one participant stated that a bond was not created, and the other mentor said that it was not very strong. These two cases provide some insight into what may hinder quality within the youth mentoring relationship.

In attempting to answer the research question, what do mentors perceive as quality within the mentor-mentee relationship within the school-based context of BBBS of Butler County?, mentors were asked questions regarding their relationships with their mentees. Those mentors who said there was a bond between the pair as well as those mentors who said there was not a bond, discussed “the proof” that a bond was or was not created. Using symbolic interactionist perspective, this meaning making process helped to determine what mentors symbolized as proof that a bond was created. The first overarching theme, Proof of a Bond, was further broken down into sub-themes: (1) having a strong or close relationship; (2) trust; (3) friendship; (4) communication outside of program; and (5) looking forward to time together. Half of the mentors talked about having a strong or close relationship with their mentees. In order to have a strong or close relationship, the pair must have first formed a bond of some sort, which could be interpreted as a quality relationship. In this study, when analyzing the data, it was determined that a quality relationship and the existence of a bond could be interpreted to have the same meaning. Therefore, where there is a bond there is quality and vice versa.

Trust was another component that was provided as evidence of the formation of a bond. Trust was also a component that has been discussed in the current mentoring literature as one component of building a bond and has even been specified to be more important than other factors in the relationship (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer, 2006). Trust is
an important component in any relationship and it would seem that mentoring should be no exception. Trust may be especially important in the case of those mentees who have been let down by other people in their lives. Even Sarah, the mentor who said she and her mentee did not form a bond, discussed how her mentee was beginning to open up to her more. This provides some support that trust may be more important than other relationship components and as stated previously also supports the need for consistency. Had Sarah decided to stick it out in the mentoring program despite all of the issues she encountered, maybe she and her mentee Joe would have forged a bond.

Mentors also discussed the relationships with their mentees as being more like friends. A relationship that is more like a friendship, where mentees would likely be given more agency as to what activities they will partake in with their mentor, would more likely be developmental (i.e., youth-centered) than prescriptive and is supported by the literature as being much more conducive to building quality (Bellamy et al., 2006; Morrow & Styles 1995 as cited in Langhout et al., 2003). It seems it may also be easier for mentees to build trust with someone they view as a friend as opposed to an authority figure. The pair may also be more likely to communicate outside of the mentoring program if they are friends.

Some of the mentors discussed communication with their mentees outside of the program and some specifically cited this as a factor in determining that they and their mentee had formed a bond. In some instances where mentors discussed missing their mentees over summer break it could be interpreted that these relationships are indeed quality as the lives of the mentors have been impacted by the relationship as well. Many of the mentors did not want to cease communicating just because they were on a break or were no longer in the program. Erin still has a relationship with her mentee outside of the program and one would assume this relationship would not have continued if the pair did not have a bond and thus a quality relationship.

Most of the mentors that talked about communication outside of the program actually liked having the ability to communicate outside of the program context. However, one mentor was not comfortable with communication outside of the program and so it cannot be assumed that all mentors in a quality relationship will automatically like this form of communication. One important thing to note here is that the mentor who did not like the outside communication decided to stop participating in the program because she wanted to focus on her major. This
mentor did not wish to continue the relationship outside of the program and therefore although
the pair did have a quality relationship while she was in the program, her decision to leave may
have had some kind of negative impact on the mentee. This would seem to be especially true
because the pair had formed a close bond. Furthermore, a mentor’s positive or negative reaction
to outside communication may be an indicator of relationship duration, which is also a
component of quality. One may postulate that if mentors are uncomfortable with outside
communication they may be more hesitant to continue the relationship or keep in contact after
the program ends.

The second overarching theme, components of bond building, describes what the mentors
perceive as contributing to a bond. The sub-themes discussed were: (1) consistency; (2)
community-based component; (3) spending more time together; and (4) listening. Consistency
was discussed by eight of the mentors and is also supported as key to building a quality
relationship in the youth mentoring literature (Karcher, 2005 & Spencer 2006). Consistency
includes being on time and coming every week. Consistency may also include having a routine
or just being a consistent person in the mentee’s life. Being consistent is important in any
relationship and can also help to build trust. It seems without consistency it would be nearly
impossible to build trust within the relationship and as discussed earlier trust is also key in
building a quality relationship.

Another component of bond building that was discussed frequently during the interviews was
having a community-based component to supplement the school context. This was interesting
because the mentors chose to be in the school-based program and the community component is
not typically something that is a part of the school context. However, once they were in the
school setting many determined that it may not be the most conducive setting to create a bond
with their mentees. Some of the mentors actually switched to community-based due to schedule
constraints and seemed to be much more content with the community setting because of the
freedom it afforded the pair. Some of the mentors were perfectly happy in the school context;
however, they thought being able to do activities outside of the school would be beneficial as
well. It is interesting that most of the mentors seemed to support a hybrid program that included
both the school and community context. These increased meetings outside of the school context
would also serve to increase the dosage and is supported by the literature as a good way to
increase the quality of the relationship (Karcher et al., 2006 & Whiting & Mallory, 2007).
would be interesting to explore how mentees’ feel about the different contexts in which mentoring takes place to determine if mentee’s support a hybrid-type mentoring program as well.

Spending more time together was also a theme that emerged as a component of quality. Since it is hard to create a bigger window of time in the school based setting and has been cited as a disadvantage in the school-based context (Rhodes, 2002), it seems the best solution is to spend time in the community context as well. One way to improve upon the school-based setting may be to plan monthly events outside of the school walls to provide more opportunities and time for the pair to bond. Meaning making takes time, specifically in new relationships (White & Klein, 2002), which leads one to believe the dosage of the relationship is indeed key to the meaning making process. Again this is supporting the idea of a hybrid program that would provide activities in both contexts, thus providing more time together and increasing dosage. An evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk youth found that mentors who perceived the relationship with their mentee to be positive spent more time with their mentees (Converse & Lignugaris 2009). Thus this suggests that mentors who are happy with the relationships with their mentees may increase the quality of the relationship by opting to spend more time with their mentees. This also seems to suggest that mentors’ satisfaction can also impact quality; therefore, more research is needed to specifically address mentor relationship satisfaction.

In addition, the intent was to explore what does not create quality within the mentor-mentee relationship. Shyness on the part of either the mentor or the mentee and lack of confidence on the part of the mentor, commonalities that were found in the two cases lacking in quality, could both be viewed as the responsibility of the mentor to overcome. Although, through training one could argue that the mentoring program could help with these issues as well. Either way, these characteristics seem to get in the way of creating a quality bond within the youth mentoring relationship and should be addressed in order to provide a better opportunity for the mentor-mentee relationship to flourish. On the other hand, inept matching and lax program organization, which were also identified as potential barriers to quality, are the responsibility of the program staff. Mentors and mentees both put their faith in the staff when they join the program and assume they will be matched with someone who will be similar to themselves. In a study by Bellamy and colleagues (2006), having shared interests impacted the quality of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, and mentees disclosed on a questionnaire the importance for the
mentor to share similar interests with them.

One would also assume the pair would expect that the program would be organized and well put together. Most of the feedback provided throughout the interviews about the program and the mentoring staff was positive, there just seemed to be a couple of cases where something went wrong. As stated in the literature, there is knowledge to be gained from our failures (Baker & Maguire, 2005; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009) as well as our successes, and mentoring programs can make improvements based on these findings.

**Implications for practice**

There are several ways that this study can be applied to youth mentoring in practice. As was found to be the case in this study, mentors believe that relationship quality can be increased if the pair has the ability to participate in activities outside of the school context. The possibility of the creation of a hybrid-mentoring program that includes both school and community contexts may be an easy way to increase the quality of mentoring relationships and thus the effectiveness of the program. The creation of a hybrid-mentoring program could be accomplished by offering a monthly activity outside of the community context and/or giving the mentor-mentee pair the agency to meet outside of the program on their own time.

Consistency was also found to be a major component of quality; thus, mentoring programs must increase their efforts in: (1) recruitment; (2) successfully matching mentors and mentees; and (3) retaining quality, consistent mentors in the program for as long as possible. This is no easy task and future studies are needed to determine the best strategies to recruit and retain quality mentors. In addition, consistency can help to create trust and friendship within the youth mentoring relationship and thus quality. Mentors must also be sure to listen to their mentees’ and may have more success if they communicate outside of the program with their mentees’.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Three of the main limitations of this study included: (1) a small sample size; (2) only providing the perspectives of the mentors; and (3) the sample only included college students, most of whom attended an affluent college. It would have also been beneficial to recruit more mentors who had “bad” experiences to provide a better picture of what mentors see as barriers to creating quality relationships. Although some insight was gained about what creates quality in the school-based context, due to the small sample size I was limited in my ability to capture the
complete picture. In addition, had there been a larger sample size, one might assume there would also be more mentors who had “bad” experiences and thus provide more insight into what hinders the creation of a quality relationship. Having a larger sample might have also lead to the recruitment of more male mentors, as there was only one in this study. The ability to compare and contrast what male versus female mentors said might provide further insight into the phenomenon of interest.

Another limitation is that only mentors were interviewed in this study. Originally I had sought to interview both mentors and mentees about their experiences and perspectives about what creates quality. I was unable to recruit and interview mentees due to a barrier created by the inability to access potential recruitment sites (i.e. high schools). More time was needed to create trusting relationships with possible recruitment sites and hopefully those relationships can be nurtured for future studies. As identified in the mentoring literature more studies need to be designed to get at the perspectives of the mentees themselves (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; DuBois & Neville, 1997; DuBois & Rhodes, 2004; Spencer & Rhodes, 2005). Mentees could offer a unique perspective and provide insight into the phenomenon of what creates quality in mentoring relationships as well as what does not. A three phase qualitative study would be ideal to capture this information. Ideally interviewing a mentor-mentee pair at the start of a program, six months later, and after the completion of a year could provide a better picture of how quality relationships are created. Specifically in the school-based context, a picture of what creates quality is needed to determine how to make this context most effective.

Another limitation is that the sample only included college students from an affluent University setting. These students may have access to privileges and resources that other college students at less affluent colleges may not have access to. On the other hand, college students who have had more struggles (likely from less-affluent colleges) may have the ability to better connect with those mentees who may be struggling themselves. The age of the participants is also a factor that can impact quality. There are unique complications that can arise when college students are mentors and this may itself impact quality. These issues include: (1) time constraints, schedules changing; (2) transportation; (3) transience of mentors; (4) lack of responsibility, inconsistency in attendance; and (5) self-interest (e.g. something to put on resume), could decrease the duration of relationship. Future research should further explore how these factors specific to college students have an impact on the mentor-mentee relationship and
mentee outcomes. It would have also been helpful to have older mentors in the sample as well to be able to compare older adults with younger college student mentors. Unfortunately this was not a possibility in this study once again due to barriers that were encountered during the recruitment process. Initially I had intended to recruit through the mentoring program itself, but that did not come to fruition and so recruitment locations had to be changed in order to complete the study. Again the ability to build and foster trusting relationships with a mentoring program will help provide a wider more diverse sample population for future studies.

Future studies must also determine how to better recruit and retain mentors, since there is always a shortage of mentors and mentees on waiting lists. There is a specific need for male mentors (Herrera 1999; Wandersman et al., 2006) and figuring out creative ways to attract male mentors is an important component of youth mentoring to study. College campuses may be the perfect location to expand youth mentoring recruitment; however, more insight must be gained regarding the unique issues with this particular population of mentors.

Youth mentoring may provide a consistent, caring, friend for those youths who really need some guidance and support in their lives. It is important to determine if these programs are actually beneficial and if they are, why this is the case. By adding to the knowledge base of what creates quality and the formation of a bond in youth mentoring relationships, it is hoped that more mentoring relationships can be improved upon and maintained. Furthermore, it is hoped that studies on youth mentoring will have a lasting, positive impact on the lives on those youths who need mentoring.
References


evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34, 709-725.


Appendix A  
Recruitment Flier

Were you a mentor who participated in a school-based mentoring program with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County?

Tell us about your experience and earn a $10 Gift Card!

• Easy - Simple phone interview.

• Fast - An hour or less of your time!

• Confidential - Your answers are kept strictly confidential.

We are looking for male or female participants to take part in a study about the quality of youth mentoring relationships. We are looking for mentors (Bigs) who participated in a school-based mentoring program with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County. Taking part in the study entails a 45-60 minute phone interview about your experience as a mentor. Participants will receive a $10 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Interested? Please contact Rachel Radina at coffeyr@muohio.edu to schedule an interview.

This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board, Protocol # 09-341

PLEASE TAKE ONE!
Attention Miami Students:

We are looking for male or female students to participate in a study about the quality of youth mentoring relationships. We are looking for mentors who participated in a school-based mentoring program with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County. Taking part in the study entails a 45-60 minute phone interview about your experience as a mentor. Participants will receive a $10 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Interested? Please contact Rachel Radina at coffeyr@muohio.edu to schedule an interview.

Please tell your friends!
Appendix C
Screening Form

1. Did you take part in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Butler County school-based mentoring program?

2. Where did the meetings with your mentee take place? (this question is being asked to ensure they did indeed take part in the school-based program and not the community-based)

3. How old are you?

If they qualify participants will be invited to participate in the study. At this time the PI will collect contact information and set-up a time to do the interview at the participant’s convenience.
Appendix D
Quality of Youth Mentoring Demographic Sheet

1. How old are you? _______

2. What gender do you identify with? Male Female Other _______

3. Participant Type: Mentor Mentee

4. Are you currently involved in a mentoring program? _____Yes _____No

4. How many years of formal education do you have (for high school students-what grade are you in)? ______

5. Marital Status (only ask those 18 years of age or older):
   Single Living with domestic partner Married Divorced Widowed

6. What is your race/ethnicity?
   White/Caucasian Black/African American Asian/Pacific Islander
   Native American Latino Other: _________________

8. What is your current socioeconomic status?
   Lower Lower-middle Middle Upper-middle Upper
Appendix E
Interview Guide for Mentor

1. Tell me about your experience working as a mentor in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Mentoring Program?

   • What did you do in the program?
   • Did you find it rewarding, challenging, etc.? Why or why not?
   • How would you describe your relationship or interactions with the mentoring staff?
   • Was there an initial orientation?
   • What took place during the orientation?
   • What kind of training was provided throughout your experience as a mentor? Do you feel like it was enough? Why or why not?

2. What motivated you to get involved in the mentoring program?

   • How did you find out about it?
   • Do you have any thoughts on better ways to recruit mentors?
   • There is specifically a need for male mentors, how do you think more males could be recruited?

3. How many people have you mentored within the BBBS school-based mentoring program? (if they have mentored more than one, mentors will be asked to think about their best and worst experience thus far. Questions will then be asked about both relationships)

4. What were your expectations going into the program? What was the first meeting like?

5. How would you describe the relationship between you and your mentee?

   • How often did you meet and for how long?
   • What did you like most about it? Least about it?
   • What kinds of activities did you do together?
   • Where those activities something you planned on your own or did you receive input from mentoring staff or your mentee?
   • Do you feel like you created a bond? Why or why not?
   • How could your mentee or you have made the relationship better?

6. How long did the relationship last and why did it end?

7. Overall how do you feel about the relationship?

8. Where the parents of your mentee involved in the program at all? Were there opportunities to be involved?
9. Do you think the mentoring program had an impact on your life in anyway?
   • Do you think the relationship with your mentee had an impact on your life in anyway?
   • Do you think your life would be different today had you not been a mentor in the program?

10. Would you recommend being a mentor to others? Why or why not?

11. Thinking about the mentoring program you were a mentor in, how can mentoring programs be improved?

12. Was there anything that you would like to share with me that we didn’t talk about today? Any topic that we didn’t cover that you think would be important to include?
Appendix F
Consent Form

Mentor’s Perceptions of Quality Mentoring Relationships

You have been invited to participate in a research project conducted through Miami University. The University requires that you give assent (acknowledge your willingness) to participate. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to give your assent. We are interested in exploring mentor’s thoughts on the quality of mentoring relationships within the Big Brothers Big Sisters school based mentoring program in Butler County. In order to do this, you will be asked questions about your own experiences within the mentoring relationship.

This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher will retain these recordings and transcriptions until data analysis is completed. Information obtained during this study will be kept strictly confidential. Any information provided in the demographic questionnaire or in the interview will be linked to a code number rather than your name or other identifying information. Your real name or other identifying information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team conducting this study. The information generated from this research project may be published in academic journals or presented at scholarly conferences at which time your data will be identified using either your assigned code number or a pseudonym. Your participation is completely voluntary. Some participants may experience discomfort in discussing mentor-mentee relationship experiences. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not participate at all, and by doing so, will not be penalized or lose benefits. You will receive a $10 gift card as a token of our appreciation for taking the time to help us with this study.

If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future please contact:

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For questions concerning your rights as a research participant contact:

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This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board, Protocol # 09-34