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**Matching for Diversity: Examining the Effects of Physical and Non-Physical Similarity  
Factors on Mentorship Program Evaluation**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between perceived similarity, the type of diversity promoted in mentorship programs, and evaluations of mentorship programs. It investigates the moderating effect of promoting physical and non-physical diversity on the relationship between perceived similarity and evaluations of the mentorship program. The study aims to fill the gap in understanding the role of perceived similarity in common mentorship outcomes (i.e., intention to engage with the mentorship program, expected effectiveness of the mentorship program, expected mentor quality of the mentorship program, and expected psychological safety within the mentorship program). It hypothesizes a positive relationship between perceived similarity and these outcomes, with non-physical diversity expected to yield more positive results compared to physical diversity. The study also hypothesizes that the type of diversity acts as a moderator, strengthening the relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations when non-physical diversity is promoted. Using a vignette survey design, randomly assigned participants (n=107) evaluated mentorship program descriptions promoting either physical or non-physical diversity. However, the study did not find support for the hypothesized positive relationship between perceived similarity and program evaluations, nor the moderating effect of promoted diversity on this relationship. These findings challenge the assumption of a universally positive impact of perceived similarity on mentorship evaluations, highlighting the importance of contextual factors and relationship dynamics. Limitations include a small sample size, self-report measures, and scale reliability issues. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the complexity of mentorship outcomes and the need for further research to develop comprehensive frameworks.

### **Matching for Diversity: Examining the Effects of Physical and Non-Physical Similarity Factors on Mentorship Program Evaluation**

The business case for diversity, equity and inclusion is stronger than ever (Dixon-Fyle et al.,2020). Diverse and inclusive organizations experience numerous benefits such as increased collaboration, greater creativity, more innovation, and stronger commitment (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022), resulting in a chance of outperforming their concurrent by 35% (Dixon-Fyle et al.,2020). As the benefits of a diverse workforce and inclusive organizational culture become clearer, the number of diversity programs has also expanded. However, most diversity programs have been found to be ineffective in increasing diversity as they primarily focus on reducing bias in hiring methods, job performance ratings, and organizational policies to comply with legislation, rather than promoting on-the-job contact (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). These methods often adopt a top-down approach and neglect the importance of engaging management, fostering increased interaction between managers and employees from minority backgrounds, and promoting social accountability (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

It has been found that it is more effective to focus on management by engaging them in the approach, increasing their contact with employees with a minority background and promoting social accountability (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Therefore, one promising intervention that organizations can implement to address diversity and inclusion goals while involving management is the utilization of formal mentoring programs. In formal mentoring programs with a diversity focus, a senior person (mentor) is assigned to guide a junior person (protégé) from a minority group, aiming to remove barriers and provide career guidance (Bowen, 1985).

The effectiveness of mentorship programs can be enhanced by considering the level of similarity between mentors and protégés (Eby et al., 2013; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Turban

& Jones, 1988). This similarity can be observed in various aspects, with a commonly used distinction between physical factors and non-physical factors (Milikens & Martins; Jackson et al., 1995). Given the prevalence of majority group representation in higher positions, where physical diversity may be limited (Davis, 2018; Siemiatycki, 2019), shifting focus towards non-physical diversity in these senior roles may be beneficial to obtain a level of similarity between the mentors and protégés. Non-physical diversity has the potential to significantly impact mentor-protégé matching by strengthening the positive relationship between perceived similarity and expected mentorship outcomes, thereby contributing to the overall success of mentorship initiatives.

Considering this perspective, the present research aims to investigate the effects of matching mentors and protégés based on physical or non-physical similarity, as well as promoting these factors within the mentorship program. The study specifically focuses on four commonly examined outcomes of mentorship programs. The first evaluation is the intention to engage with the mentorship program, which reflects individuals' attraction and level of involvement. Another important evaluation is the expected effectiveness of the mentorship program, assessing the anticipated level of success. The study also considers the evaluation of the expected mentor quality of the mentorship program, examining the relational processes between mentors and protégés. Lastly, the evaluation of expected psychological safety within the mentorship program is incorporated, reflecting participants' sense of security and comfort as this is crucial in mentoring relationships to foster openness and trust (Kram, 1985; Wu et al., 2008).

For each of these four evaluations, a positive association with perceived similarity to the mentor is expected. Additionally, promoting non-physical diversity is anticipated to yield more positive evaluations of the mentorship program compared to promoting physical diversity. Lastly, it is hypothesized that the type of diversity promoted will act as a moderator

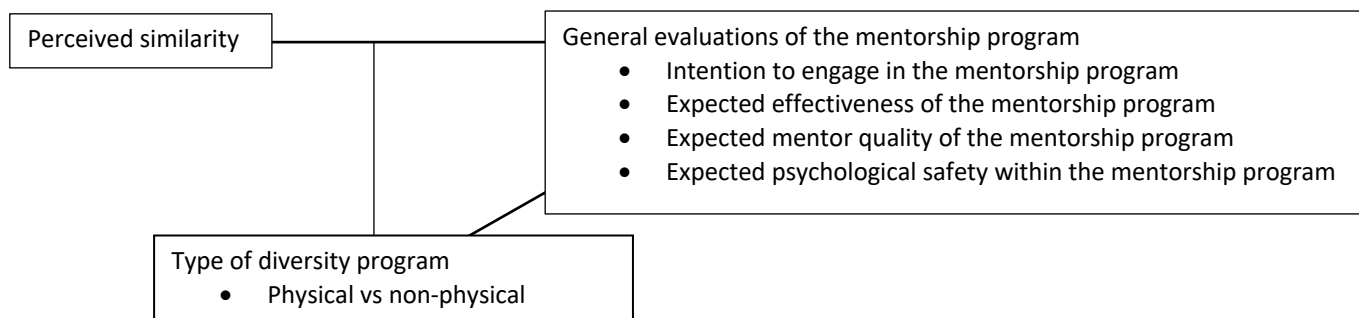
on the positive relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations of the mentorship program, resulting in a stronger relationship when non-physical diversity is promoted.

### Theoretical Foundation

To examine the effects of matching mentors and protégés based on physical or non-physical similarity and promoting diversity factors accordingly, a comprehensive review of existing literature will be conducted. This review will focus on the expected relationship between perceived similarity, the type of diversity promoted, and the four types of evaluations of mentorship programs.

#### Figure 1.

*Conceptual Model of the Relation Between Perceived Similarity, the General Evaluations, and the Type of Diversity Presented in Mentorship Programs.*



### The Relation Between Perceived Similarity and General Evaluations of the Mentorship Program

According to the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971), individuals are naturally drawn to others who possess similar traits or characteristics that they consider significant. This principle applies to mentorship relationships as well. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that when protégés perceive their mentors as similar to themselves, they tend to report more positive outcomes of the mentor programs, such as higher levels of mentor success (Eby et al., 2013; Gehlbach et al., 2016), higher effectiveness of mentorship

programs (e.g., Turban et al., 2002; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), and satisfaction with the mentorship programs and support received (Ensher et al., 2002)

Literature investigating a similar stream of the mechanisms of liking and attraction to other individuals is studying the well-known social phenomena of homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), which refers to “the tendency to associate with similar others” (Lawrence & Shah, 2020). Research focusing on this phenomenon has found similar positive consequences of homophily in interpersonal interaction, including positive associations with the quality of relationship (Marsden & Campbell, 1984), affective closeness and trust (Ahlf et al., 2019; Oelberger, 2019), leader-member exchange quality (Goodwin et al., 2009) and relationship persistence (Suitor & Keeton, 1997).

Therefore, I assert and extend this line of reasoning to suggest that the positive association between perceived similarity and mentorship program outcomes also applies to the type of evaluations conducted in this research.

**Hypothesis 1.** When proteges perceive a higher level of similarity with their mentors, they evaluate the mentorship program more positively.

Specifically, I hypothesize that those positive evaluations will manifest in greater intention to engage, better expected effectiveness, higher expected mentor quality, and greater expected psychological safety.

### **The Relation Between Physical Versus Non-Physical Diversity and General Evaluations of Mentorship Programs**

In this research, I will differentiate between physical and non-physical diversity factors when promoting the mentorship programs and the matching within the mentorship program. These categories correspond to the concepts of surface-level and deep-level diversity outlined by Jackson and Whitney (1995) and Milliken and Martins (1996) respectively. To maintain simplicity, I have chosen to refer to them as physical and non-

physical diversity factors. Physical similarity refers to observable and measurable characteristics that are generally unchangeable, while non-physical similarity encompasses non-visible attributes communicated through verbal and nonverbal behaviors, learned through individualized interactions, such as attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Both similarity factors play a role in the attraction to others which has been described by the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971) and the social phenomena of homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Initially, individuals' perceptions of similarity are largely influenced by physical factors (Stangor et al., 1992; Turner, 1987). However, as non-physical factors gain prominence, people tend to assign greater importance and focus on them to a higher degree (Brown & Turner, 1981; Liden et al., 1993; Stangor et al., 1992; Turban et al., 2002).

Building upon assigning greater importance and focus on the non-physical similarity factors, research has also indicated that non-physical similarity consistently exhibits a stronger relationship with attraction to others and relationship quality compared to physical similarity (Allen & Eby, 2003; Harrison et al., 1998; Harrison et al., 2002; Turban, et al, 2002). This association between relationship quality and physical and non-physical similarity has also been investigated within the context of the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) indicating as well that non-physical similarity serves as a stronger predictor of relationship quality (Karcmar et al.,2006). Given that formal mentorship relationships also share characteristics of dyadic relationships, I propose that this line of reasoning extends to mentorship programs as well. Research has also indicated that similarity in terms of attitudes and values was positively related to effective mentoring when using electronic mentoring among students with practicing managers, while this effect was not found for demographic similarity (Janasz et al., 2008) indicating a greater importance of non-physical similarity factors for expected mentor success. This positive association between similarity in terms of



attitudes and values has been found for interpersonal trust (Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2006), which may be translated to the expected psychological safety.

Building upon this understanding, I generalize that the same relationship will manifest across all four types of evaluations. Thus, I suggest that emphasizing non-physical similarity factors in mentorship programs will lead to more positive attitudes across all evaluation types compared to promoting physical similarity factors.

**Hypothesis 2.** Mentorship programs promoting non-physical diversity (and matching mentors and protégés based on these factors) will result in more positive evaluations compared to mentorship programs promoting physical diversity and matching mentors and protégés based on these factors).

Specifically, I hypothesize that those positive evaluations will manifest as greater intention to engage, better expected effectiveness, higher expected mentor quality, and greater expected psychological safety when non-physical diversity factors are promoted versus when physical diversity factors are promoted.

### **Moderating Role of the Type of Diversity on the Relation Between Perceived Similarity and the General Evaluations**

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on two key factors that contribute to the overall evaluation of the mentorship program. The level of perceived similarity is examined, as well as the impact of promoting mentorship programs based on physical diversity versus non-physical diversity on these evaluations. However, it is important to note that the physical versus non-physical similarity factors may not only have a direct influence on the evaluations of the mentorship program but also act as a moderator in the relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations.

Prior research has shown inconsistent or weak associations between demographic similarity and perceptions of similarity among protégés (Allen & Eby, 2003; Lankau et al.,

2005; Turban et al., 2002), suggesting that factors other than demographics, such as non-physical similarity factors, may have a stronger influence on shaping perceptions of similarity in mentorship relationships. Studies have demonstrated that individuals are more likely to categorize themselves as part of in-groups when they perceive non-physical similarities rather than physical similarities (Robert, 2016). This aligns with previous research suggesting that the cognitive process of determining similarities is more strongly influenced by perceived similarity in non-physical diversity factors than by physical diversity factors (Harrison et al., 2002; Hobman et al., 2004; Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008). Based on these insights, I propose that the relationship between perceived similarity and evaluations will be stronger when non-physical similarity factors are emphasized compared to when physical similarity factors are promoted.

**Hypothesis 3.** The relationships between perceived similarity and the evaluations of the program will be moderated by the type of diversity presented, whereby it is expected that the relationship is stronger when non-physical diversity factors are promoted and weaker when physical diversity factors are promoted.

Specifically, I hypothesize that those positive relationships with perceived similarity will manifest to as greater intention to engage, better expected effectiveness, higher expected mentor quality, and greater expected psychological safety when the non-physical diversity factors are promoted and weaker when the physical diversity factors are promoted.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The research obtained ethical approval from the Ethical Committee of Psychology of Groningen (Research Code: PSY-2223-S-0386), and no significant risks were anticipated for participants, beyond what participants might experience in daily life. Participants were recruited through the researcher's personal network, with the only eligibility criteria being a

minimum age of sixteen years and completion of the questionnaire in full. The recruitment period spanned three weeks. A total of 107 participants (65.4% female,  $M_{age}=29.2$ ,  $SD_{age}=11.4$ ) completed the questionnaire and provided consent to participate. The majority of respondents (88.6%) identified themselves as belonging to the majority group in the Netherlands or their current country of residence.

### **Design and Procedures**

In the research, I conducted an online vignette study in the English language through Qualtrics. After obtaining informed consent and collecting demographic information from the participants, participants were presented an introduction text. The text highlighted that the participant's company was shifting its focus towards increasing diversity at higher organizational levels. As part of this initiative, the company had launched a mentorship program with the goal of fostering more diverse leadership teams. Participants were provided with an explanation of the mentorship program, which emphasized that less experienced employees would be paired with more experienced colleagues who would offer guidance and expand their network.

After providing the initial introduction, the participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the first condition, the focus was on physical similarity, as described by Jackson and Whitney (1995) and Milliken and Martins (1996). In this condition, the invitation emphasized a mentorship program specifically designed to enhance the diversity of employees by actively involving mentors from underrepresented backgrounds, including women and individuals from minority backgrounds. The invitation stated:

“Within Groningen ADL, we value diverse employees throughout the whole company. Therefore, we will launch a mentorship program that is designed to create more diverse leadership teams. The program focuses on enhancing the diversity of our employees, so we have many mentors from under-represented backgrounds (e.g., women and people of minority backgrounds). For this mentorship program, we are looking for motivated applicants who will work with one of our mentors and learn the ropes of the business.”

In the second condition, the emphasis was on non-physical diversity. The invitation highlighted a mentorship program specifically designed to enhance the diversity of thought, ideas, and beliefs. The program aimed to bring together mentors from diverse backgrounds, including different religions, political parties, and philosophies, as outlined by Jackson and Whitney (1995) and Milliken and Martins (1996) in their discussion of non-physical similarity factors. The invitation clearly stated:

“Within Groningen ADL, we value diverse employees throughout the whole company. Therefore, we will launch a mentorship program that is designed to create more diverse leadership teams. The program focuses on enhancing the diversity of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs, so we have many mentors from different religions, political parties, and philosophies. For this mentorship program, we are looking for motivated applicants who will work with one of our mentors and learn the ropes of the business.”

After reading the invitation to the mentorship programs, participants were asked to evaluate the mentorship program based on various aspects and to indicate how similar they perceived themselves to the mentor of the mentorship program.

### **Measures**

Participants evaluated the mentorship program using various indicators that were either adapted from prior research or developed specifically for this study. Several measures were created or modified to assess the participants' general evaluations of the mentorship program, indicating positive trends. These measures included Intention to Engage with the Mentorship Program, Expected Effectiveness, Expected Mentor Quality, and Expected Psychological Safety. Additionally, a single construct was utilized to measure perceived similarity.

#### ***Intention to Engage with the Mentorship Program***

To assess the participant's intention to engage with the mentorship program (intention to engage, they were asked to “Indicate the extent to which you agree that this program is 1) appealing, 2) engaging, and 3) interesting ( $\alpha=0.71$ ). They indicated their agreement on a five-point scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 5=*strongly agree*).

### ***Expected Effectiveness of the Mentorship Program***

To measure the expected effectiveness of the mentorship programs (expected effectiveness), participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*) the extent to which they agreed to three statements ( $\alpha=0.71$ ).<sup>1</sup> Three statements from the subscale Perceived Program Effectiveness of Ragins et al. (2000) were used to determine this with a slight alteration to fit to this research. One example of the items that were used was “I expect the mentor program in the organization will be effective”. Additionally, one reversed-score item was used, specifically denoted as “I expect the mentor program to be a waste of my time”.

### ***Expected Mentor Quality of the Mentorship Program***

To measure the expected mentor quality of the mentorship program (expected mentor quality), I employed a modified version of the items measuring relationship quality by Allen and Eby (2003). This measurement consisted of five items ( $\alpha= 0.75$ ) which were presented to the participants asking them to indicate the extent to which they agreed, using a seven-point scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*.) An example item is: “I expect to effectively utilize the guidance and resources of my mentor”.

### ***Expected Psychological Safety Within the Mentorship Program***

To measure the expected psychological safety within the mentorship program (expected psychological safety) the Edmondson’s Psychological Safety Scale (Edmondson, 1999) was used with slight modifications to align with the context of engaging in a mentorship. Participants were presented six statements ( $\alpha=0.72$ )<sup>2</sup> to which they had to

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, the questionnaire included six statements aimed at measuring Expected Effectiveness. However, after an item analysis, three items were found to exhibit a low-item total. Consequently, the following items were eliminated from the scale: “I expect that the formal mentoring program will allow me access to mentors who otherwise would have been unattainable”, “I expect the mentor program to smooth the way for me to get a mentor”, and “I expect that I would be unable to get a mentor if not for this mentor program”.

<sup>2</sup> Initially, the questionnaire included seven statements aimed at measuring Psychological Safety. However, after an item analysis, one items was found to exhibit a low-item total correlation. Consequently, this item (“If I make a mistake, I expect my mentor to hold it against me”) was eliminated from the scale.

indicate their level of agreement using a seven-points scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). One example of the items used was: “I expect it to be safe to take a risk with my mentor”. Two items were reverse coded, of which an example is: “If expect my mentor to sometimes reject others for being different”.

### ***Overall Perceived Similarity to the Mentor within the Mentorship Program***

To assess the participant’s overall perceived similarity to their mentors within the mentorship program (perceived similarity), they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with four statements ( $\alpha=0.68$ ). Participants were asked to indicate on five points scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 5= *strongly agree*) their level of agreement to the following statements: “After reading the description of this program, to which extent do you expect to be similar to your mentor in the mentorship program in terms of the following: 1) background, 2) values, 3) interests, and 4) personality.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the reliability coefficient of this scale has been below 0.7. Despite efforts to identify items that could be removed to improve reliability, no suitable items were found. Therefore, I will continue using this scale while acknowledging its limitations in the research.

### ***Control Variables***

Two crucial factors extensively studied in the context of mentorship are age and gender. Existing research has demonstrated that gender plays a significant role in individuals' perceptions and experiences of mentoring. Gender is closely tied to personal identity, with women tending to evaluate mentoring more positively (Welton, 2015). Similarly, age has been identified as an influential factor in mentor-protégé relationships (Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997), suggesting that younger individuals tend to evaluate mentoring more favourably.

Additionally, to account for the potential influence of belonging to a minority group on mentorship outcomes, it is incorporated as a control variable. Studies have shown that

individuals from minority groups often have distinct perspectives on diversity and inclusion compared to those from the majority (Otten & Jansen, 2014), whereby individuals from minority groups tend to be more critical on diversity and inclusion-related topics. To ensure a robust research design and respect participants' autonomy in self-identifying as belonging to a minority group, we incorporated these variables as control variables due to limited knowledge about the underlying reasons behind their self-identification. Participants were asked to indicate if they identified as belonging to a minority group in the Netherlands or their current country of residence.

Following established approaches in mentoring literature (Allen & Eby, 2003; Ragins & Cotton, 1999), only control variables with significant relationships with the dependent variables and low intercorrelations with each other were selected. As presented in Table 1, both belonging to a minority group and age were identified as covariates that should be included as a covariate when investigating the intention to engage in mentorship programs. Additionally, years of work experience showed a significant correlation with the intention to engage. However, due to its high correlation with age, it was not included as a separate covariate in the analysis.

## **Results**

To examine the hypotheses, SPSS version 28 (IBM Corp, 2021) was used, and several statistical tests were employed. Firstly, a correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations of the mentorship programs. Additionally, an independent t-test was performed to assess whether the type of diversity (physical versus non-physical) influenced the evaluations. These initial analyses provided a clearer overview of means, standard deviations, and other descriptive statistics. Following the basic analyses of correlations and independent t-tests, a moderation analysis using the PROCESS procedure (Hayes, 2013) will be conducted. This analysis aims to examine the

potential moderating effect of diversity type on the association between perceived similarity and the general evaluations of the mentorship program.

**Descriptive Data**

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the characteristics of the variables and to assess the relationships among the predictor variables. Correlation analysis was performed to determine the degree of association between the predictor variables. Although several predictor variables showed significant correlations, none of them exhibited a correlation exceeding 0.80. As a result, each predictor variable was retained for individual analysis.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations with Confidence Intervals for the Physical Diversity Condition and the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*

Variable	Condition	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	Physical	54	1.67	0.48	-							
	Non-Physical	52	1.65	0.48	-							
2. Age	Physical	54	30.33	13.23	<b>-.35**</b>	-						
	Non-Physical	54	26.61	9.06	.14	-						
3. Work Experience	Physical	53	11.45	12.54	<b>-.38**</b>	<b>.96**</b>	-					
	Non-Physical	53	6.74	7.90	.06	<b>0.90**</b>	-					
4. Member Minority	Physical	53	1.91	0.35	-.07	-.03	.03	-				
	Non-Physical	52	1.88	0.32	-.14	0.15	.19	-				
5. Perceived similarity	Physical	53	3.20	0.57	.23	<b>-.29*</b>	<b>-.28*</b>	-.12	-			
	Non-Physical	53	3.45	0.68	-.13	-.24	-.13	-.01	-			
6. Intention to Engage	Physical	54	4.09	0.58	.15	-.07	-.03	<b>-.39**</b>	<b>.36*</b>	-		
	Non-Physical	53	3.96	0.81	0.08	<b>-.28*</b>	<b>-.27*</b>	-.13	.13	-		
7. Expected Effectiveness	Physical	54	5.47	0.81	.23	-.15	-.10	-.20	.18	<b>.52**</b>	-	
	Non-Physical	53	5.34	0.87	0.14	-.27	-.25	-.00	.11	<b>.70**</b>	-	
8. Expected Mentor Quality	Physical	54	5.61	0.65	-.16	-.16	-.19	-.16	<b>.32*</b>	<b>.54**</b>	<b>.62**</b>	-
	Non-Physical	52	5.46	0.77	0.08	-.02	-.05	-.24	.17	<b>.53**</b>	<b>.63**</b>	-
9. Expected Psychological Safety	Physical	54	5.68	0.70	.11	-.00	-.11	-.16	.21	<b>.32*</b>	<b>.30*</b>	<b>.46**</b>
	Non-Physical	47	5.55	0.80	0.15	0.09	.07	-.09	.05	<b>.33*</b>	<b>.53**</b>	<b>.50**</b>

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. \* indicates  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$



## **Hypothesis 1 Testing: Examining the Relationship Between Perceived Similarity and General Evaluations**

To assess the association between perceived similarity and various evaluations (i.e., intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected psychological safety), a correlation analysis (Table 1) was performed. I will report the results by each condition for clarity. The results of the moderation analysis in which the condition presented is considered will be given in the analysis of *Hypothesis 3*.

### ***Assumption Checks Hypothesis 1***

Before conducting the correlation analysis to examine the relationship between perceived similarity and mentorship program evaluations, the assumptions of linearity, normality, and independence were assessed. Scatterplots were generated (see Appendix 1; Figure 1A through Figure 1H) to examine the assumptions of linearity. These plots revealed no significant violations of this assumption for all variables in both conditions.

Normality assumption was evaluated for all variables in both conditions using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Some slight violations were observed in the non-physical diversity condition for perceived similarity and mentor quality. In the physical similarity condition, slight violations were found for expected effectiveness and psychological safety. However, upon closer examination of the boxplots (see Appendix 1; Figure 2A through 2D), it was determined that these violations were minimal and could be considered negligible. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume normality for the variables in both scenarios.

### ***Results Hypothesis 1***

The correlation analysis performed to test the relation between perceived similarity and the general evaluations (i.e., intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, expected psychological safety) reported mixed results (Table 1) in both conditions.

Only in the physical diversity condition, significant results were found for two general evaluations, namely intention to engage and expected mentor quality.

In summary, the hypothesized positive relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluated variables was not generally supported. However, evidence was found supporting a positive relation between perceived similarity, intention to engage, and expected mentor quality in the physical diversity condition.

Notably, controlling for age and belonging to a minority group using a for the intention to engage revealed a significant regression model for the intention to engage (( $R = .31$ ,  $R\text{-sq} = .01$ ,  $MSE = .68$ ,  $F(3, 99)=5.57$ ,  $p=.02$ ), whereby belonging to a minority group proved to be a significant predictor of intention to engage as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Regression Model Coefficients: Predictors of Intention to Engage

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	4.46	.60		7.48	<.00*
Perceived Similarity	.18	.11	.16	1.59	.11
Age	-.00	.00	-.08	-.81	.42
Member Minority	-.47	.20	-.23	-2.0	.02*

\* indicates  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$

### **Hypothesis 2 Testing: Examining the Relationship Between Physical Versus Non-Physical Diversity and General Evaluations**

To test Hypotheses 2, independent t-tests were conducted to compare the promotion of physical level diversity factors and non-physical diversity factors on the general evaluations of the mentorship program (i.e., intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected psychological safety).

#### ***Assumption Checks Hypothesis 2***

The assumptions of independence and normality for performing an independent t-test were previously checked and no violations were found. To check for the assumption of equal

variance Levene's test for Equality of Variances was used. The results of Levene's test indicated no significant differences, thus allowing us to assume equal variances for the independent t-test.

### **Results t-test**

**Table 3**

*t-test Results Comparing Physical and Non-Physical Diversity on the Evaluations of the*

*Mentorship Program*

Variable	Condition	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>M diff</i>	<i>SE diff</i>	Lower	Upper
Intention to Engage	Physical	53	3.96	.81	-.96	105	.34	-.13	.13	-.40	.14
	Non-physical	54	4.08	.58							
Expected Effectiveness	Physical	53	5.34	.87	-.76	105	.45	-.12	.16	-.44	.20
	Non-physical	54	5.47	.81							
Expected Mentor Quality	Physical	52	5.46	.77	-1.08	104	.28	-.15	.14	-.42	.12
	Non-Physical	54	5.61	.65							
Expected Psychological Safety	Physical	47	5.55	.80	-.88	99	.38	-.13	.15	-.43	.16
	Non-physical	54	5.68	.70							

\* indicates  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$

In this study, all four evaluations (intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected psychological safety) were assessed in both the physical and non-physical diversity conditions. No significant results were found and therefore the proposed relationship between the type of diversity and the general evaluations was not supported as shown in Table 3.

Additionally, for the intention to engage an additional analysis was performed using ANCOVA to include age and belonging to a minority group as covariates. As shown in Table 4, the corrected model has been found to be significant, indicating a difference between the physical and non-physical diversity condition for the intention to engage when controlling for age and belonging to a minority group, whereby belonging to a minority group is a significant predictor.

**Table 4.**

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Table: Effect of the Type of Diversity on the Intention to Engage Controlling for Age and Membership of Minority.

	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Corrected Model	4.93 <sup>a</sup>	3	1.64	3.61	0.16
Intercept	74.45	1	74.45	163.23	<.00
Age	1.11	1	1.11	2.44	.12
Minority Member Condition	2.90	1	2.90	6.36	.01
Error	1.21	1	1.21	2.65	.11
Total	45.6	100	.46		
Corrected total	1722.56	104			
	50.55	103			

a. R Squared = .10 (Adjusted R Squared = .07)

### Hypothesis 3 Testing: Physical Versus Non-Physical Diversity as Moderator of Perceived Similarity and General Evaluations.

To test the proposed moderation effect of the type of diversity presented on the relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations of the mentorship program the PROCESS procedure (Hayes, 2013) was performed. The evaluations of the mentorship programs served as the dependent variable, perceived similarity as the independent variable, and the type of diversity model as the moderator. This approach allowed the testing of all hypotheses simultaneously. Prior to the moderation analysis, correlation analysis and t-tests were conducted to explore the relationships between variables. No additional assumption checks were necessary as previous checks of linearity, normality, and equal variance indicated no violations to perform a moderation effect.

**Table 5**

#### *Model Summary of the Moderation Model*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <i>Square</i>	<i>MSE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
1. Intention to Engage	.25	.06	.48	2.35	3	102	.08
2. Expected Effectiveness	.17	.03	.71	.97	3	102	.41
3. Expected Mentor Quality	.26	.07	.47	2.41	3	101	.07
4. Expected Psychological Safety	.17	.03	.56	.91	3	96	.44

**Table 6***Moderation Model Coefficients and Interactions*

Model	Model 1. Intention to Engage				Model 2. Expected Effectiveness				Model 3. Expected Mentor Quality				Model 4. Expected Psychological Safety			
	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.41 [2.42, 4.39]	.50	6.85	.00	4.83 [3.63, 6.04]	.61	7.94	.00	4.81 [3.83, 5.79]	.49	9.73	.00	5.36 [4.21, 6.61]	.58	9.27	.00
Perceived Similarity	.16 [-.12, .44]	.12	1.12	.26	.15 [-.19, .49]	.17	.86	.39	.19 [-.07, .49]	.14	1.34	.18	.05 [-.27, .38]	.17	.33	.74
Condition (Physical vs non-physical)	-.52 [-1.98, .95]	.74	-.70	.48	-.22 [-2.01, 1.58]	.90	-.24	.81	-.37 [-1.83, 1.09]	.73	-.50	.61	-.53 [-2.17, 1.11]	.83	-.64	.52
Perceived similarity x Physical vs non-physical diversity	.21 [-.22, .65]	.22	.97	.33	.12 [-.42, .65]	.27	.43	.66	.17 [-.26, .60]	.22	.77	.44	.20 [-.28, .69]	.25	.83	.41

Note. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each coefficient. \* indicate  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$

As Table 6 shows, no evidence was found for the main effect of perceived similarity on the four types of evaluations (i.e., intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected psychological safety). This aligns with the findings from the initial correlation analysis (Table 1) conducted. While the correlation analysis showed a significant effect of perceived similarity on intention to engage and expected mentor quality in the physical diversity condition, this effect was not supported in the moderation analysis. Therefore, the hypothesized positive relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations of the mentorship program was not supported by the results.

For the proposed relation between the conditions (physical diversity vs non-physical diversity) and the general evaluations, whereby it was argued that promoting non-physical diversity yields more positive outcomes than promoting physical diversity factors, no significant support was found. This is in line with the results of the  $t$ -test performed for the four types of evaluations.

Lastly, no significant results were found for the proposed moderation effect of the condition on the relationship between perceived similarity and all the general evaluations (i.e. intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected

psychological safety) as Table 5 shows. In other words, greater perceived similarity was not associated with significant differences in the evaluations of the mentorship program, regardless of the type of diversity promoted. An additional analysis was conducted to examine the intention to engage, incorporating age and minority group membership as covariates. The results demonstrated that the model accounted for a significant amount of variance in the outcome ( $R = .36$ ,  $R\text{-sq} = .13$ ,  $MSE = .45$ ,  $F(5, 97) = 2.97$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ).

However, when considering the individual effects of the predictor variables on the intention to engage, none of them were found to be statistically significant, except for membership in a minority group, as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Moderation Model Coefficients with Covariates (Age and Member of Minority) for Intention to Engage*

Model	Model 1. Intention to Engage			
	<i>Coeff</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	4.48 [3.18, 5.77]	.65	6.84	.00
Perceived Similarity	.14 [-.14, .42]	.14	.99	.32
Condition (Physical vs non-physical)	-.27 [-1.73, 1.18]	.74	-.38	.71
Perceived similarity x Physical vs non-physical diversity	.16 [-.27, .59]	.22	.73	.47
Age	-.00 [-.02, .01]	.01	-.95	.34
Member of a Minority Group	-.47[-.86, -.08]	.20	-2.40	.02*

Note. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each coefficient. \* indicate  $p < 0.05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$

## Discussion

In summary, this study investigated the main effects of perceived similarity and the type of diversity on general evaluations, as well as the potential moderation effect of diversity type on the relationship between perceived similarity and evaluations. Separate analyses were conducted to assess the main effects of the conditions and perceived similarity on general evaluations. Additionally, a moderation analysis was performed to examine the proposed model.

The separate analysis examining the effect of the promoted diversity type on general evaluations did not provide support for the proposed relationship. This finding was further confirmed by the moderation analysis, indicating that the type of diversity did not significantly influence general evaluations. Regarding the proposed positive relationship between perceived similarity and general evaluations, the separate analysis yielded mixed results. While there was a significant positive relationship found in the physical diversity condition between perceived similarity and intention to engage with the mentorship program, as well as the expected mentor quality of the mentorship program using a correlation analysis, this effect was not supported in the subsequent moderation analysis.

Overall, the moderation analysis revealed non-significant moderation effects for all types of evaluations, suggesting that the relationship between perceived similarity and general evaluations was not significantly influenced by diversity type. In summary, none of the proposed relationships in this research have been statistically supported, resulting in inherently limited conclusions due to low confidence of the findings.

### **Theoretical Implications**

As none of the proposed relationships in this research have been statistically supported, the conclusions drawn from the findings are inherently limited due to the low confidence in the results. While I will explore the implications of the findings, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the limitations that will be discussed later. Therefore, it is necessary to approach these theoretical implications with caution, as obtaining definitive conclusions may present a challenge.

In this research, one of the main effects that was hypothesized and expected to be significant was the effect of perceived similarity on the evaluations of mentorship experiences. Perceived similarity has been extensively studied and has consistently emerged as a robust predictor in various domains, such as relationship quality (Goodwin et al., 2009;

Marsden & Campbell, 1984), attractiveness (Byrne, 1971), and mentor success (Eby et al., 2013; Ensher & Murphy, 1997). However, the non-significant results obtained in this research suggest that other factors, beyond perceived similarity alone, may play a role in individuals' assessments of mentorship program. It is important to note that the reliability of the scale used to measure perceived similarity was low, which may have contributed to the lack of significant findings in this study.

The other main effect of the type of diversity on the general evaluations also deviates from existing literature that revealed a preference for similarity based on non-physical similarity factors when these are revealed then for physical similarity factors. This could indicate that the type of diversity promoted does not affect expected evaluations as thought or that other factors contribute to individuals' assessments of the mentorship programs. However, alternative explanations for these contradictory findings could also be considered. For example, literature suggests that individuals receive a preference for non-physical factors if these factors become more salient over time. This research immediately makes the non-physical factors salient in one condition, while time might be an essential aspect to consider (Harrison et al., 1998; Ensher & Murphy, 1997).

Moreover, the non-significant moderation effect of diversity type on the relationship between perceived similarity and the general evaluations suggests that the type of diversity (physical or non-physical) may not significantly moderate this relationship. It implies the existence of other potentially influential factors that merit investigation. This underscores the complexity of mentorship outcomes (Ensher et al., 2002) and emphasized the importance of considering the unique characteristics and dynamics of the mentoring relationship when investigating the impacts of perceived similarity.



### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The present study is characterized by both strengths and limitations that should be acknowledged. One notable strength is the inclusion of an experimental component within the vignette study, allowing for precise control over the manipulation of experimental variables. The adoption of a simplified research model and design facilitated a clear and concise analysis. By conducting separate analyses of the main effects, the aim was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the variables in the study.

However, there are certain limitations to consider regarding the study design. The first limitation to consider is the nature of a master's thesis, resulting in constraints in terms of available resources and time, which may have resulted in a limited scope, a single-time assessment, and sample size. Consequently, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Furthermore, relying on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response biases and subjective perceptions that may not accurately reflect actual behaviours or experiences.

The third limitation of this study is the reliability of the scales used. Despite efforts to ensure reliability and adapt from the existing measures possible, some scales exhibited inadequate internal consistency, resulting in the deletion of certain items from the analysis. The scale measuring perceived similarity had a reliability coefficient below the recommended threshold of 0.7, raising concerns about measurement consistency and precision. Including a scale with suboptimal reliability may introduce measurement error and compromise the validity of the findings.

The last limitation of this study is the representativeness and generalizability of the participants. The study included participants with varying levels of English proficiency, which may have influenced their understanding of the survey questions and potentially introduced response biases or difficulties in accurately conveying their thoughts or

experiences. Moreover, only a few participants identified themselves as belonging to a minority group in the Netherlands or their current country of residence, despite the focus of the research on mentorship programs targeting minority group members. This limited representation of minority participants may impact the findings and restrict the broader applicability of the results.

### **Future directions**

In summary, this study underscores the significance of understanding the factors influencing mentorship evaluations. It emphasizes the importance of considering contextual factors, exploring additional determinants beyond perceived similarity, and investigating alternative variables that may exert a more substantial influence. Furthermore, this research might serve as a valuable lesson by discussing the potential limitations and suggesting future directions for further exploration, thereby highlighting potential pitfalls to be avoided in future studies.

One notable limitation of this study was the constraint of resources and time, which is often inherent in the context of a master's thesis. To address this limitation, future research could benefit from increasing the sample size. A larger sample size would result in more robust and reliable results, enhancing the generalizability of findings and increasing statistical power. Moreover, increasing the sample size may yield a greater number of participants who identify as belonging to a minority group. This would provide an opportunity to further investigate the effects of diversity, as research has indicated that individuals from minority and majority groups may have different perspectives on topics of diversity and inclusion (Otten & Jansen, 2014) and this has also been found to be a significant predictor in this study. By including a more diverse sample, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of diversity in the context of mentorship programs.

Another suggestion for future research with regard to the participants and potential sample size is to include a maximum age to participate or a maximum year of experience at a current job function. This way, research will target potential protégés that are fulfilling more junior positions within an organization. This way the findings of the research are more generalised to the targeted group of protégés within a mentorship program.

Another suggestion for future research is specifically measuring the duration or frequency of contact between mentors and protégés over time. Previous research (Harrison et al., 1998; Ensher & Murphy, 1997) emphasizes the importance of contact in fostering shared attitudes and values, which contributes to the quality of the mentor-protégé relationship. By not capturing this aspect and focusing solely on a one-time assessment, the study may overlook vital information regarding the impact of contact duration and frequency on the unfolding of similarities and the overall quality of mentorship. Lastly, considering the low reliability and internal consistencies observed in the perceived similarity scale, further investigation is warranted to examine the effectiveness of measuring the four dimensions of perceived similarity independently

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we examined how perceived similarity and the type of diversity promoted (physical diversity vs. non-physical diversity) influence evaluations of mentorship programs, including intention to engage, expected effectiveness, expected mentor quality, and expected psychological safety. However, our findings did not support the hypothesized positive relationship between perceived similarity and the evaluations of mentorship programs. Furthermore, we did not find a significant effect of the type of diversity (physical diversity vs. non-physical diversity) promoted in the mentorship program on the evaluations. Additionally, the proposed moderation effects of the type of diversity promoted on the relationship between perceived similarity and all types of evaluation were found to be

insignificant. This study highlights the importance of developing a nuanced understanding of the factors that shape mentorship evaluations. The results suggest that commonly considered determinants may not consistently predict positive outcomes, emphasizing the need to consider contextual factors and explore alternative variables that may have a more substantial impact.

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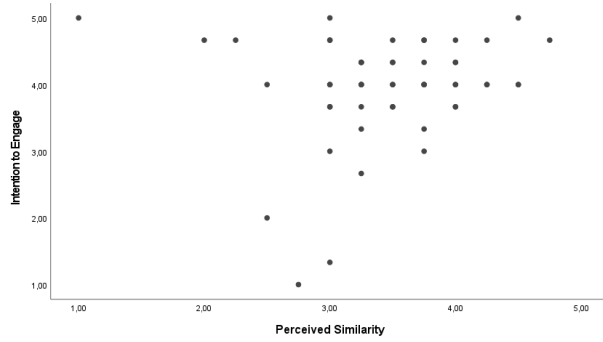
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**Appendix 1**

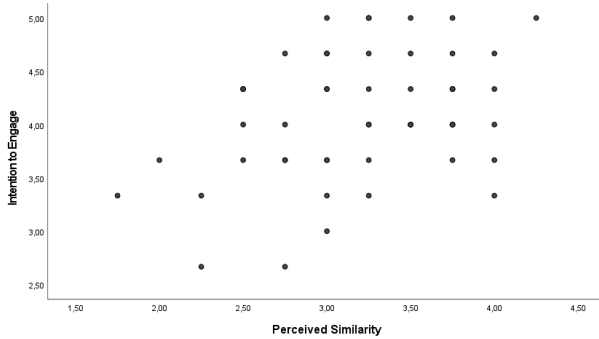
**Figure 1A**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Intention to Engage with the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity Condition*



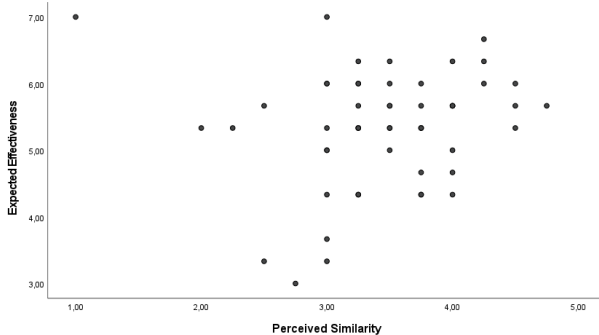
**Figure 1B**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Intention to Engage with the Mentorship Program in the Non-Physical Diversity*



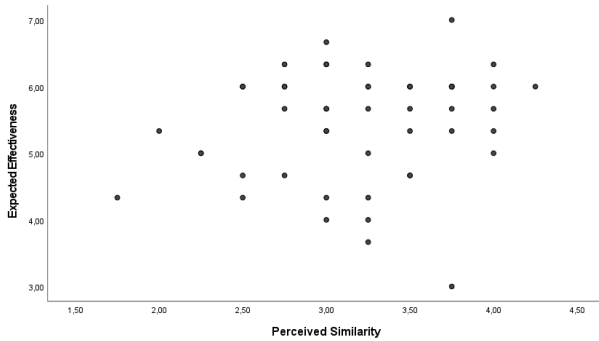
**Figure 1C**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Effectiveness of the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity*



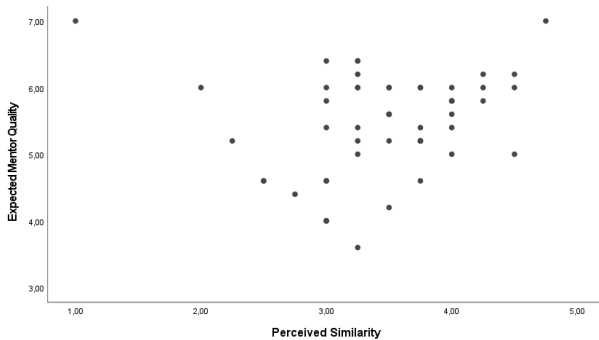
**Figure 1D**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Effectiveness of the Mentorship Program in the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*



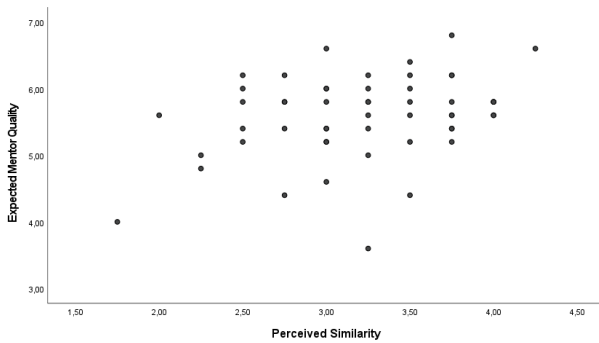
**Figure 1E**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Mentor Quality of the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity Condition*



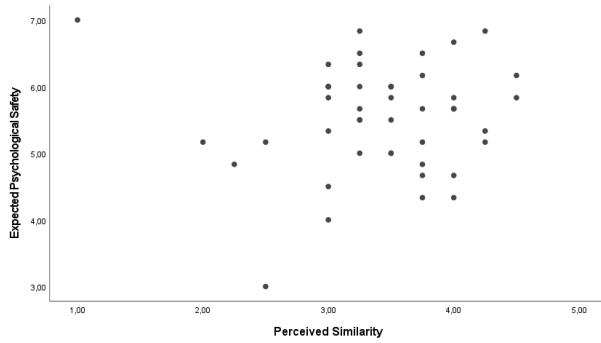
**Figure 1F**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Mentor Quality of the Mentorship Program in the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*



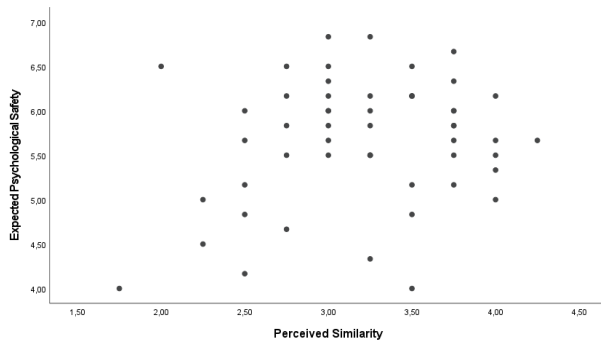
**Figure 1G**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Psychological Safety Within the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity Condition*



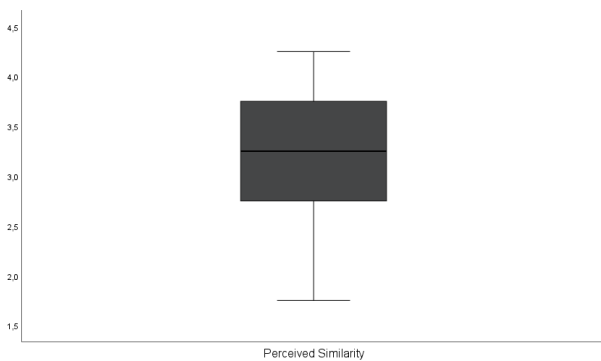
**Figure 1H**

*Scatterplot Depicting the Correlation Between Perceived Similarity and Expected Psychological Safety within the Mentorship Program in the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*



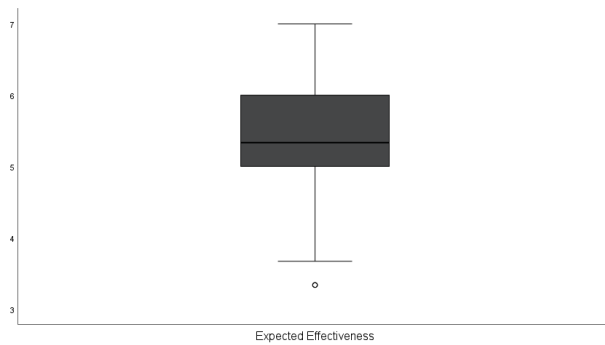
**Figure 2A**

*Distribution of the Perceived Similarity in the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*



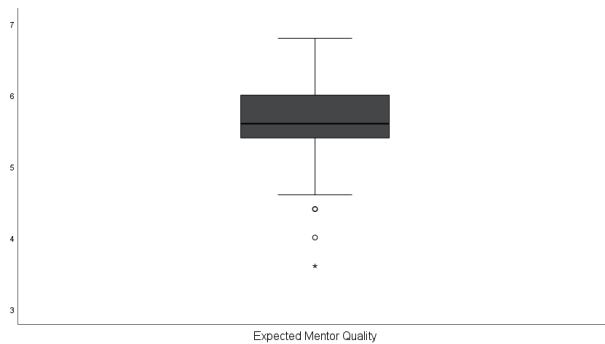
**Figure 2B**

*Distribution of the Expected Effectiveness of the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity Condition*



**Figure 2C**

*Distribution of the Expected Mentor Quality of the Mentorship Program in the Non-Physical Diversity Condition*



**Figure 2D**

*Distribution of the Expected Psychological Safety Within the Mentorship Program in the Physical Diversity Condition*

