

Ethical Issues in Mentoring Relationships



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Mentorship is a combination of Strategy and Character

**IF YOU MUST BE
WITHOUT ONE,
BE WITHOUT
STRATEGY**

**(THANK YOU STORM'N
NORMAN)**



Mentoring Relationships are Complex, Fluid, and sometimes, Dysfunctional



***THE MENTOR RELATIONSHIP IS ONE OF THE MOST
COMPLEX AND DEVELOPMENTALLY IMPORTANT A
[PERSON] CAN HAVE IN EARLY ADULTHOOD***

DANIEL LEVINSON ET AL. (1978)

***RELATIONAL LIFE CAN BE NASTY, BRUTISH, AND
SHORT***

STEVE DUCK (1994)

Qualities and Components of Mentorships that Heighten the Risk for Ethical Quandaries

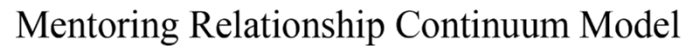


Qualities and Components....



- Long in duration, sometimes, in perpetuity...
- Gradually more reciprocal, bonded, and intimate.
- Informal mentorships driven by “chemistry.”
- Mentor (often) holds power relative to the mentee.
- Involve numerous, overlapping roles.
- Always evolving...

Johnson (2014)



Higher



High Social Support

Does Everyone Deserve or Require a Mentor?



Reflections



**WHAT ARE THE MOST PREVALENT
ETHICAL TENSIONS IN
DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS
WITH MENTEES?**

#1: Level of Relationship Formality

- Formality = variations in *visibility*, *focus*, and *duration*. (chemistry, proximity, frequency)
- Informal/ *Organic* relationships = more robust benefits.
- Informed Consent???
 - Appropriate information about expectations, potential benefits, and potential risks



#2 Competence in the Mentor Role



“The habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and the community served” (Epstein & Hundert, 2002, p. 226).



JONNY
HAWKINS

Case Vignette



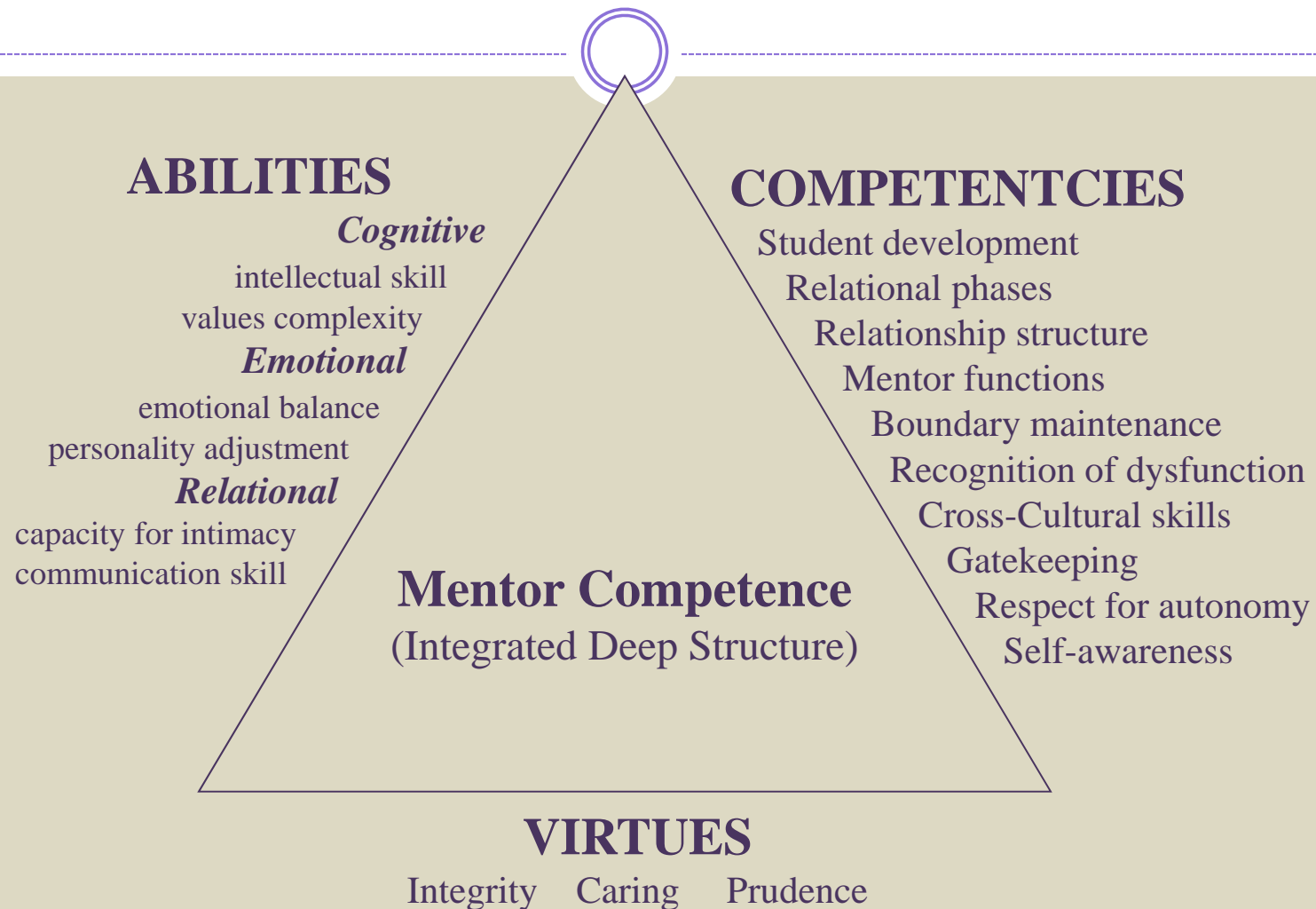
- A graduate student in her fifth year of doctoral training files an ethics complaint with a university ethics committee claiming that her dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Porous, abandoned her, leaving her emotionally distressed. It appears the two developed an unusual level of attachment due to frequent socializing and development of a personal relationship that many at the university described as “intense.” The student had several life crises and emotional problems during her training and Dr. Porous would frequently provide what amounted to “psychotherapy sessions” that were as frequent as three to four times a week. He encouraged her to contact him by phone after hours and often invited her along to events with his family. The student became quite distressed when, on her graduation, Dr. Porous attempted to terminate the mentorship.

#2 Competence in the Mentor Role



- APA (2010): Only “practice” within the clear boundaries of competence.
- Few Mentors “trained.”
- Some people lack key virtues, traits, & skills
- Some people manifest low E.Q. or toxic personality features.

Triangular Model (Johnson, 2003)



Why Competence is Perishable

- ▶ Competence IS:
 - Fluid
 - Contextual
 - Vulnerable
- ▶ Half-Life of Education
- ▶ Compassion Fatigue
- ▶ Vicarious Trauma
- ▶ Burnout
- ▶ Life's Tribulations
- ▶ Illness
- ▶ Cognitive Decline

FRAGILE

HANDLE
WITH CARE



Case Vignette



- An clinical supervisor for a generation of interns, Dr. Midlife began to notice a concerning trend in his relationships with trainees. Specifically, he noted that during the past year, two female supervisees had switched to other supervisors. Dr. Midlife was concerned both by the trend and by the fact that neither supervisee had spoken to him about any problems. Dr. Midlife had gone through a divorce 2 years prior, had lost interest in his own scholarship and clinical work, had begun to abuse alcohol and spend less time at work, and truth be told, had begun to rely on his female supervisees to meet some powerful needs for affirmation. Although he had not noticed the incremental decline in his professionalism with trainees, he now admitted that he was both lonely and depressed. Excruciatingly aware of the signs of his own aging, he was desperate not to be regarded as a “has-been” either personally or professionally.

#3 Advocacy vs Evaluation



Case Vignette



- A much-admired advocate for her students, Dr. Avoid had a strong track record of getting her graduate students through to graduation and on to good jobs in the field. Unflinching when called on to protect and promote her mentees, she had garnered a reputation as a formidable champion for those she mentored. When one of her students, Allison, began to show signs of both serious personality disturbance and unethical behavior, Dr. Avoid downplayed concerns expressed by colleagues and even some external clinical supervisors. Although she mentioned the concerns to Allison, she colluded with her student in construing the complaints as misunderstanding and hostility. Dr. Avoid successfully fought efforts by the clinical training director to have Allison placed on probation and wrote her stellar letters of recommendation for internships—entirely neglecting mention of the complaints made about her behavior over the years.

#3 Advocacy vs Evaluation



- Good mentorships become more mutual, reciprocal, relational, and intimate over time.
- Mentors feel compelled to offer more advocacy, protection, and collegial friendship over time.
- **But....**
- Mentors must sometimes provide high-stakes summative assessments of performance (graduation, tenure, promotion) (APA, 2010)
- Some mentors must simultaneously screen trainees on behalf of a profession and the public.

Letters of Recommendation?

- Thin line between advocacy and dishonesty
- Many of us admit routinely inflating letters (and omitting negatives) for well-liked trainees [Tabachnick et al., 1991]
- Internship & Residency supervisors report little correlation between letters and performance [Grote et al., 2001]



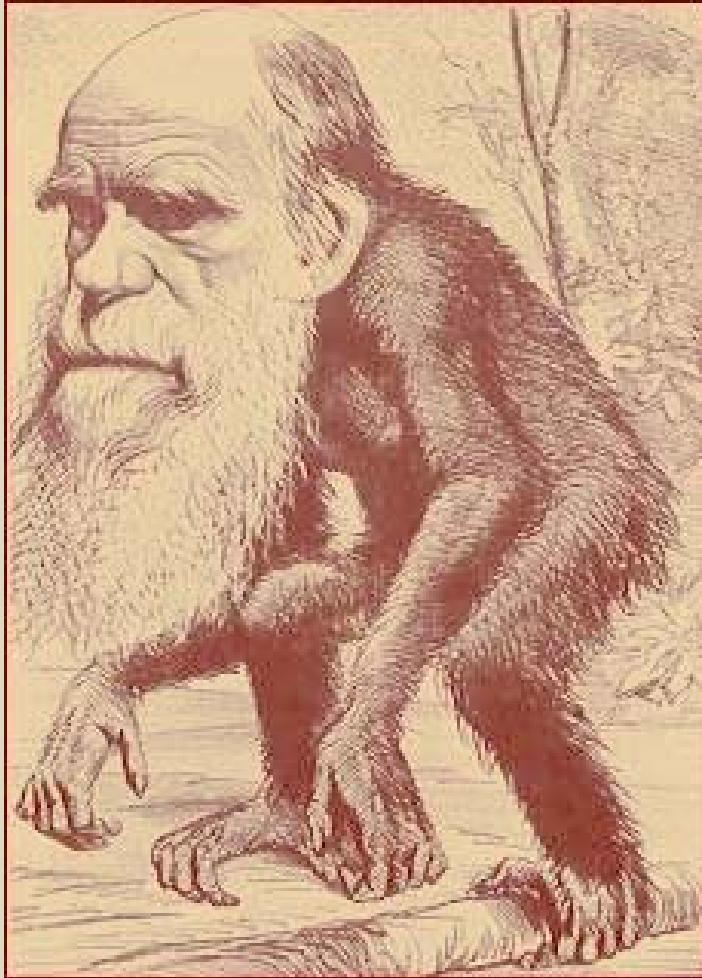
#4 Confidentiality? Privacy?

- **Confidentiality?**
 - Central to professionalism
 - Linked to trust & respect
 - An Ethical Standard
- If mentorship is a *Safe Space*, mentees share personal concerns.
- **Privacy**: A commitment to protecting mentee disclosures as a way of promoting mentee best interests.



**PRIVATE &
CONFIDENTIAL**

#5 Intimacy, Attraction, Sexual Feelings



- **Relational Mentoring** = increasing levels of mutuality, intimacy, emotional depth.
- Sternberg's **Triangular Theory of Love**: Intimacy + Commitment = *Companionate Love*?
- 93% of Male and 64% of Female Professors admit sexual feelings re. students
 - Tabachnick et al. (1991)

#6 To Disclose or Not to Disclose



- Bolsters role modeling, builds confidence, alleviates anxiety, provides poignant teaching, strengthens mutuality, communicates caring.
- Demands prudence, judgement, and boundaries.
- In the hands of a seasoned and judicious mentor = priceless



#7 Multiple Roles



- In general: Avoid MRs if they could diminish your objectivity, or the competent performance of your job.
- In many mentorships, MRs are ubiquitous!
 - Teacher, research supervisor, advisor, evaluator, friend.
- Is this a boundary violation? (exploitation)



Trainees Prefer Mutuality/Collegiality



- Empirical evidence suggests that students are most satisfied with training relationships characterized by:
 - Emotional support
 - Mutuality
 - Collegial friendship
 - Some degree of reciprocal disclosure



Something New



- When a mentee “friends”....



#8 Equal Access by Diverse Mentees



- Do all prospective mentees in your work context have equal access to you as a mentor?
- Do your mentees all look the same? Why???
- How's your cultural humility?



Cultural Considerations



- Do Cross-Race, Cross-Ethnicity, Cross-Gender, Cross-Sexual Orientation relationships work?
- Can majority trainers mentor minority-group trainees?
- Discuss differences? (Thomas, 1993)
 - Direct engagement?
 - Denial and Suppression?

Cultural Humility



Cultural Competence

- Focus on achieving culture-specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills
 - Assumes competence is achievable.
 - Frames culture as monolithic.

Cultural Humility

- maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented; sensitive to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [mentee]
 - Emphasis on self-humility, reflection, and learning

Should You Call Yourself a Mentor??



- Claiming mentor status with a mentee from a non-dominant group may invoke power, privilege, even ownership
- Always let your trainee label the relationship
- Brown & Ostrove (2013)
 - Genuine allies are committed to (1) expressing as little prejudice as possible and (2) addressing social inequality



#9 The Temptation to Clone



A Mentoring Code of Ethics



Guiding Ethical Principles



- **Beneficence:**
 - Promote mentees' best interests whenever possible.
- **Nonmaleficence:**
 - Avoid harm to mentees (neglect, abandonment, exploitation, boundary violations)
- **Autonomy:**
 - Work to strengthen mentee independence and maturity.

Guiding Ethical Principles



- **Fidelity:**
 - Keep promises and remain loyal to those you mentor.
- **Justice:**
 - Ensure fair and equitable treatment of all mentees (regardless of cultural differences)
- **Transparency:**
 - Encourage transparency and open communication regarding expectations

Guiding Ethical Principles



- **Boundaries:**
 - Avoid potentially harmful multiple roles with mentees and discuss overlapping roles to minimize risk for exploitation or bad outcomes.
- **Privacy:**
 - Protect information shared in confidence by a mentee. Discuss all exceptions to Privacy.
- **Competence:**
 - Establish and continue developing competence.

Manage Endings Well...



- A new assistant professor, William was delighted when a mentorship developed between himself and Dr. Reason, a senior professor in the philosophy department. Their relationship was productive and effective for 2 years. At that point, William published an article in the top journal in the field, an article that challenged and refuted some of Dr. Reason's earlier work. Dr. Reason became enraged—feeling betrayed by her mentee and perhaps more than a little jealous (she had never had a piece accepted in this journal). Dr. Reason became cool, aloof, and withdrawn. William was both surprised and angered by this reaction. The mentorship ended suddenly and was never discussed further by either party.

FINAL QUESTIONS? PARTING THOUGHTS?

