PURM

Perspectives on Undergraduate Research & Mentoring

"I have allowed myself to be bold": Reflections on Relational Mentoring in Undergraduate Research

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In this paper, we, two developmental psychology professors and our undergraduate research (UR) students, explore relational models of mentoring, which acknowledge a broad range of processes and outcomes that are often supported by more than one mentor (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023; Vandermaas-Peeler & Moore, 2023). Characteristics of relational mentoring have been examined in mentoring literature for decades and align with high-quality feminist mentoring approaches by creating a backdrop for mentoring centered on mutual authenticity (including self-knowledge and the freedom to express oneself genuinely), empathy (which involves knowing one's own perspective while attempting to understand the other person's reality), engagement (including involvement, commitment, and attunement to each other), and empowerment (a sense of feeling strengthened, encouraged or inspired in ways that may generate new insights or action; Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Jordan, 1992, 1997; Liang et al., 2002; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Here, we review mentoring literature to examine high-quality practices and share our own and our mentees' recent experiences with relational mentoring in UR contexts.

Relational Mentoring in a Constellation Model

Building multiple supportive relationships is a significant way to improve student experiences in college (Felten & Lambert, 2020). Peeples et al. (2024a) mapped three types of valued relationship spaces in higher education, including mentoring relationships, other meaningful relationships that facilitate students' development, and a supportive context in which there is a broad institutional culture of valuing these relationships and affording opportunities for them to develop. Mentoring relationships have traditionally been defined through their *functions*, such as academic, cultural, and identity support, and more recently, through *qualities* of the relationship, such as reciprocity and mutuality (Crisp et al., 2017; Peeples et al., 2024b). Mentoring relationships support students' learning and development in intentional, sustained, and integrative ways (Moore et al., 2024). Students who have one or more mentors in college are more likely to be successful in their academic and personal development, and to thrive in well-being and be engaged in their jobs after college (Crisp et al., 2017; Gallup, 2014).

In mentoring constellations, students are supported in multiple meaningful relationships, some of which are mentoring. Each relationship takes place within a larger constellation of developmental relationships that all influence the mentee (Allocco et al., 2022; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). In a relational framework, mentors have interpersonal connections they use to shape their mentoring behaviors, and mentees have connections which originate from outside their mentoring relationship or the UR context (e.g., friends, family, other meaningful relationships on campus). When mentees can rely on a mentoring constellation for varying types of support needed in academic work, the

pressure on one mentor to meet all the needs of their mentee is reduced (Vandermaas-Peeler & Moore, 2023). This promotes a more complex but realistic and well-rounded experience of mentoring (Burlew, 1991; Nolinske, 1995; Packard, 2003). Importantly, gaining a sense of empowerment within relational mentoring relationships might involve inward dimensions which affect the relationship itself (e.g., the mentees' perceived value of their mentoring relationship and the extent to which they believe their actions might impact or influence their mentor), and outward dimensions that could lead a mentee to develop new relationships (including the extent to which the mentee believes their ability to network might be influenced by mentoring they receive, and their sense of control or ability to manage their own mentoring relationships within their unique mentoring constellation; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Fullick-Jagiela et al., 2015).

Feminist Origins of Relational Mentoring

Relational models of mentoring have roots in Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), which is an approach first used at the Wellesley College Stone Center to assess women's psychological development and well-being (Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). RCT emphasizes ways humans benefit from growing in connection with others, rather than through separation and individuation from others (e.g., Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Jordan, 2004; Jordan et al., 1991, 2004; Miller, 1976; Miller & Stiver, 1997). In this view, issues of power, oppression, and marginalizations are a main cause of disconnection from others and might cause significant suffering. Furthermore, disconnection from oneself might lead to lack of insight about one's own behaviors, values, needs, and could result in inauthenticity and isolation (Jordan, 2004).

RCT can be applied to all human relationships and is relevant for many struggles people with identities other than cis males face while encountering patriarchal or otherwise oppressive systems within the academy. Indeed, mentoring theories commonly used in the professional world originated from perspectives focused predominately on the experiences of White men, and they may not reflect the attributes, values, life experiences, or role expectations of people of different genders or from diverse backgrounds (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Mentoring programs may not be beneficial and can even be harmful to women, especially if they mimic dysfunctional societal expectations of women, such expecting women mentees to help "parent" newer mentees (e.g., Harris, 2022). When applied to mentoring relationships in higher education, RCT could minimize disconnection and foster relationship growth in participants from diverse backgrounds. Thus, relational mentoring might emerge in mentoring relationships that involve deeper interpersonal connections spanning longer lengths of time, through all parties' mutual authenticity, empathy, engagement, and empowerment (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Jordan, 1992, 1997; Liang et al., 2002; Miller & Stiver, 1997). By incorporating components of relational mentoring, women and marginalized communities may be more equipped to successfully navigate academic environments.

Relational UR Mentoring

In reflecting on what the field has learned about mentoring UR over the last few decades, it is clear that characteristics of relational mentoring are often mentioned in the literature as important qualities of strong mentoring relationships, even if they are not connected to relational mentoring directly. For example, the mentee must be involved in the mentoring relationship in order for it to be successful (Eller et al. 2014; Hudson, 2013). Mentors and mentees both stand to gain something from their mentoring relationship (e.g., Terrion & Leonard 2007; Fitzgerald & McNamara, 2021). Mutual authenticity also contributes to the emotional climate within mentoring relationships (e.g., Evans et al., 2022; Nahmad-Williams & Taylor, 2015). And, mentoring literature often describes ways mentees might become empowered by their mentors through direct training, encouragement, role-modeling, or sponsorship (e.g., Ahmed et al. 2021; Carpi et al., 2017; Mondisa & Main, 2021; Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023).

Similar to traditional mentoring relationships, relational mentoring within UR contexts certainly involves instrumental and psychosocial support, as mentors using these approaches are still concerned with supporting their mentees' professional skills and competencies and boosting career success while giving attention to emotional and personal support (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram, 1988; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). However, relational support extends beyond traditional models in that mentors might also endeavor to help build their mentee's professional identity, resilience in the face of challenge, and personal-professional harmony (Johnson et al., 2013; Ragins, 2012). Feminist, relational approaches to mentoring can be contrasted with traditional mentoring models with more formal hierarchical structures emphasizing that a mentor has more to offer than a mentee (Allen et al., 2006; Ehrich et al., 2004; Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Relational mentoring is an anchoring relationship that involves a strong bond between mentors and mentees, as it involves acknowledging the other person's work and nonwork concerns, and relies heavily on mentor-mentee reciprocity, complementarity, and vulnerability (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Johnson et al., 2013; Ragins, 2012). Furthermore, relational mentoring involves reciprocity at a fundamental level, such that both mentee and mentor share common interests and influence and assist each other in bidirectional ways in different areas. They may gain different benefits from the relationship by flexibly shifting between teaching and learning roles, as both parties offer complementary skills, knowledge, and ideas (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Johnson et al., 2013; Ragins, 2012). As their mentoring bond improves, they might experience increasing emotional vulnerability, which could lead to sharing their past mistakes, failures, or developmental needs more openly, and having what they share recognized in a nonjudgmental way (Johnson et al., 2013; Ragins, 2012).

Our Application of Relational Mentoring

As developmental psychologists who study early childhood development *and* mentoring in higher education, we value the importance of social and cultural contexts for human learning and development. Our institutional context is highly relational and student-centered, focuses primarily on undergraduate education through engaged and experiential learning, and offers significant supports for professional development, including mentoring UR (Allocco et al., 2022; Thurman &. Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023; Vandermaas-Peeler & Moore, 2023; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2023). We often work with two to five UR students over the course of two or three years, and we find it enriching and generative to meet regularly to discuss our mentoring relationships and how best to support our students. One of us is a senior faculty member, the other was recently tenured and promoted, and we both identify as women with European ancestry. One of us identifies as a cis-gendered White woman who is half Dutch and who was raised in a home environment that supported her development as a feminist academic and a global learner. She acknowledges the privileges this background has afforded her and engages in critical self-reflective practices to foster inclusive teaching and mentoring. The other is gender-nonconforming and queer. She also is a first-generation college student from a low-income background, and has different personal values from the environment in which she was raised. This combination of our unique backgrounds and experiences affords each of us opportunities to contribute differently to our relationship and learn from each other. We initially connected at Elon University due to overlapping disciplinary interests in developmental psychology. Since the time we began working together eight years ago, the scope of our relationship has expanded. We have developed a mutually beneficial and reciprocal mentoring relationship, bringing our unique and sometimes divergent talents and experiences into our ongoing work of critically examining and augmenting our mentoring practices. Adopting relational perspectives with our students also means that we include them in some of our discussions that extend beyond our UR work. We offer reflections on these engaged discussions from developmental and relational mentoring perspectives (see Fletcher & Ragins, 2007), as well as literature focused on high quality undergraduate research mentoring.

Several times each semester, we bring our developmental psychology UR students together for joint lab meetings, which are often centered around topics related to UR (e.g., research ethics, considerations around diversity in developmental science, building mentoring relationships with other mentors outside of UR, etc.). To enhance our relational mentoring practices, we also transcend routine developmental topics and address more broad experiences. A few years ago, we decided to theme a few joint lab meetings around topics related to well-being in academia. This topic was inspired by a recent publication about common professional struggles in academia many people do not talk about (e.g., perfectionism, imposter syndrome, burnout, etc.; Jaremka et al., 2020). We discussed the article together and reflected on our experiences as faculty members. Then, we considered how these topics applied to student experiences and selected a more accessible reading on imposter syndrome from the American Psychological Association's magazine, *Monitor on Psychology* (Palmer, 2021). For our discussion, we also selected the book *The Gifts of Imperfection* by vulnerability researcher Brené Brown (2022). Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston and has over two decades of experience critically examining courage, vulnerability, and shame. Brown and her research team conducted over 1200 interviews, collected over 3500 pieces of secondary data, and analyzed them using grounded-theory methodology. Brown has a knack for translating her scholarly research for popular audiences, authoring six #1 New York Times best sellers, and her books have been translated into more than 30 languages.

In the book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brown outlines 10 guideposts for wholehearted living, which are designed to help readers recognize their own worthiness through embracing authenticity and vulnerability in their self-talk and relationships (see Table 1; Brown, 2022). Brown's team also created a brief Wholehearted Inventory survey instrument designed to assess readers' strengths and opportunities for growth using subscales that align with the 10 guideposts in the book. This is designed to help readers know where they already have skills and where they can be developed more. While written for a broad audience, the book connects to many common struggles in academia. We planned this book discussion with our UR students to facilitate our goal of building stronger relationships with our mentees and ultimately enhancing their overall experience with mentored UR.

Table 1. *10 Guideposts for Wholehearted Living*

Letting go of...	Cultivating...
1. What people think	Authenticity
2. Perfectionism	Self-compassion
3. Numbing and powerlessness	A resilient spirit
4. Scarcity and fear of the dark	Gratitude and joy
5. Need for certainty	Intuition and faith
6. Comparison	Creativity
7. Exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth	Rest and play
8. Anxiety as a lifestyle	Calm and stillness
9. Self-doubt and "supposed to"	Meaningful work
10. Cool and always in control	Laughter, song, and dance

Note. From "The Gifts of Imperfection," by Brené Brown, 2022. Copyright 2022 by Simon and Schuster.

This book discussion involved our seven UR students we were mentoring at that time (all of whom are now alumni). All identified as female and ranged from sophomores to seniors during the discussions. The students had between one and three semesters of research experience with us. Some students identified with groups which have been historically marginalized or excluded from higher education, but we did not report on this to protect students' anonymity.

We asked URs to read the *Monitor on Psychology* article on imposter syndrome (Palmer, 2021), take the Wholehearted Inventory survey instrument, and read the introduction to the book for our first meeting. In our second meeting, we discussed all 10 guideposts from the book. We began each discussion with one or two framing questions about our own identities, but then remained open to the topics students raised and allowed the conversation to flow organically. We took opportunities to share our own personal vulnerabilities and challenges when appropriate in the conversation. We made the decision to do this intentionally, based on prior research showing that this feminist, relational mentoring strategy can help build trust by eliminating hierarchies, especially for scholars from marginalized or historically excluded backgrounds (e.g., Mullings & Mukherjee, 2018).

We held these focused well-being-themed discussions with prior knowledge of the "Ten Salient Practices Framework," which outlines high-quality mentoring approaches and techniques to support UR (see Table 2; Shanahan et al., 2015). This framework was a result of an extensive literature review on mentoring UR conducted by a multi-year, multi-institutional research seminar from the Center for Engaged Learning on Excellence in Mentoring in UR. The salient practices begin with pre-planning research projects and end with sharing findings publicly, but they do not have to be completed in order. They involve instrumental mentoring practices such as teaching mentees skills and knowledge related to the discipline, and also elevate psychosocial aspects of mentoring such as providing students with appropriate emotional support. Below, we discuss our former mentees' recent reflections about the book discussions we had in our joint lab meetings a few years prior, highlighting connections to decades of research on high-quality mentoring of UR and the salient practices framework.

Table 2. *10 Salient Practices of Undergraduate Research Mentoring*

1	Strategic pre-planning to support students' varying needs and abilities during research process.
2	Setting clear and well-scaffolded expectations.
3	Teaching the technical skills, methods, and techniques of conducting research in the discipline.
4	Balancing rigorous expectations with appropriate emotional support.
5	Building community among groups of students or a research team.
6	Dedicating time to one-on-one mentoring.
7	Increasing student ownership over time.
8	Supporting students' professional development.
9	Creating intentional, laddered opportunities for peers/near-peers to learn mentoring skills.
10	Encouraging students to disseminate their findings.

Please see https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/salientpractices/ for more information about the framework.

Student Experiences of Relational Mentoring
We asked our students how our discussions about the 10 guideposts influenced their experience of UR and associated mentoring at Elon. As they reflected on their earliest UR experiences, our students shared their initial overwhelming feelings of incompetence, inadequacy, and self-doubt. A few commented that this led them to feel intimidated by more experienced peers in the lab, and even sometimes sparked feelings of competitiveness with each other. This negative feeling, like one

cannot trust others and must compete for opportunities or resources, may be linked to a scarcity mindset, which leads people to feel unsatisfied with their current state due to real or perceived scarcity (e.g., Covey, 1989; Roux et al., 2015; Shah et al. 2012). Many academicians might acknowledge common feelings of competition. Indeed, neoliberal transformations of feminism have trickled into many mentoring programs, even those designed with women and diversity initiatives in mind. This has resulted in women being coached on how best to compete for resources and opportunities rather than focusing attention on dismantling structural barriers they face (Harris, 2020). For many students, our discussion of the 10 guideposts changed lab dynamics by helping them to learn about each others' and their mentors' personal vulnerability. This helped to reframe our lab communities as sources of support and worked to promote our students' sense of belonging, which connects to Salient Practice #5 on building community (Shanahan et al., 2015). This more collaboration-based perspective change helped support a shift towards abundance mindsets, which enhances one's sense of self-worth and confidence, helps people feel genuinely delighted in other people's success, and emphasizes there are plenty of resources and opportunities for everyone (Covey, 1989).

Our students described how the ways they initially compared themselves to each other may have stemmed from a sense of imposter syndrome. Our discussions helped them realize their feelings were "not uncommon." For one student, understanding that she was experiencing imposter syndrome helped her identify the problem and "redirect my thoughts." Feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome are often exacerbated in racialized scholars when they internalize societal messages of racial or ethnic inferiority (e.g., Mullings & Mukherjee, 2018; Palmer, 2021). By naming and normalizing these uncertainties, our students realized they were not alone (Bravata, 2020; Palmer, 2021). One of the greatest benefits of learning about Brown's guideposts was the freedom this gave us to voice our fears and doubts (mentors and students alike). The honest conversations helped humanize their research experiences, build trust, and helped foster a sense of belonging within our lab communities, as expressed in the following student's reflection.

> "Imposter syndrome was significantly prominent during the beginning of working on research as well as throughout my undergraduate career. I internalized most of my feelings of self-doubt, however, discussions in our joint-lab meeting focusing on these guideposts allowed a space where I was able to voice my experience with these negative thoughts/ feelings. These group discussions helped me feel less alone …"

Another student articulated the ways reading and discussing the guideposts with peers and mentors helped her cope with persistent feelings of imposter syndrome.

> "While working on an independent research project in a lab, I felt confident as I learned new things and felt myself becoming an expert on the topics that I was immersing myself in. However, I was still tolerating the little voice in the back of my mind that told me "you're not good enough." At times the voice of imposter syndrome was deafening, causing me to feel paralyzed by my own negativity. The 10 guideposts helped me to label my feelings and visualize ways for me to spin the narrative so that it embodied that of a cheerleader rather than a Debbie Downer. Talking through the guideposts with peers helped me to feel supported and encouraged that I was not alone in this overwhelming feeling of imposter syndrome. While the goal was to overcome that negative, gnat-like voice, my mentors were there to share that even they still face anxiety, doubt, and perfectionism. As the discussions faded to the rearview mirror, this reminder that progress is not linear was helpful reassurance as I grew confidence and a strong sense of self throughout my undergraduate experience."

Hearing from both peers and mentors was an empowering experience for our students and enabled them to gain confidence, which could even carry over into other areas of a students' mentoring constellation. One student shared, "success in the lab helped build my confidence in other areas of my life," and this growth helped her feel more comfortable to "speak freely about academic worries with other mentors." As mentors, we may fail to remember our own entrée into academic research and the fears and uncertainties we carried with us in our earliest experiences. Gaining experience in UR is wrought with challenges for beginners. One student shared, "it was helpful to reframe my thoughts when research got difficult, coding got tedious, and when I had writer's block, to then say, 'this is tough, but I can do it'." Our students' reflections remind us of the importance of relational mentoring strategies in which we make space early in the research process for students to voice their concerns alongside peers who can help normalize self-doubts. This relational approach aligns with Salient Practice #4, balancing rigorous expectations with appropriate emotional support.

As noted in the quotes above, having a shared set of readings related to embracing vulnerability and imperfections was a tool that supported our personal development. In addition to building trust in our research communities and confidence in ourselves, some students remarked that our discussions of fear of failure fostered resilience and a willingness to embrace mistakes as part of life. As one student wrote, "[I] have allowed myself to be bold."

Another prominent theme in the students' reflections was "letting go of perfectionism." It was important for us to be reminded about our students' concerns with making mistakes, particularly as they embarked on their research journeys. As experienced scholars, we understand the potential for failure and the inevitability of change as part of the normal progression of the research process. Research is inherently an uncertain process and most of the projects we work on have never been done before. However, this is not necessarily clear to our students, and they may be afraid to share their fears with faculty mentors. As one of our students noted,

> "… to make a mistake means holding up progress or even potentially being the reason a study fails. We hold ourselves to incredibly high standards because we have the privilege of working with and learning from respected professors and members of academia. Our discussion helped me realize that not only was it okay to make mistakes, but that I wasn't the only one with those fears. My peers began to seem less like competition and … it became a little easier to learn things together."

Concerns and fear of working with faculty mentors, disappointing them or failing to live up to perceived or real high standards, were also echoed in a recent study of undergraduates' perceptions of mentoring and mentoring constellations (Moore et al., 2024). When asked about the challenges they faced in identifying mentors, many undergraduates interviewed in Moore and colleagues' work identified communicating with faculty as a significant challenge. Especially early in their college careers, students voiced uncertainties about how to approach faculty members, as in this comment:

> "You don't really feel comfortable reaching out to professors. Now as a senior, I will cold email, I will bump into someone's office and ask … but when you're an earlier student and you're like, "I'm just 18 and this person writes books," you're like, "Is it appropriate to reach out to someone?"

In the following response, the student acknowledges the struggle to create relationships with faculty, citing intimidation as a primary reason, and differentiating the faculty-student dynamic from their other mentoring relationships.

"I think that a lot of the times, for me, it was difficult to … create that relationship because I saw them as a professor and my idea of professor was very, very narrowed. I've never had that one-on-one relationship with them. And though they are vulnerable in their spaces, they're pretty intimidating individuals to go and talk to. And I didn't find my other mentors to be intimidating people, even though they commanded that respect … but that professor-student dynamic has always been one that I've struggled to create those personal bonds with."

It is noteworthy that this student from Moore and colleagues' study reports having a mentoring constellation but does not (yet) have faculty members within it. Similarly, another participant reported feeling intimidated by faculty and identified high school as the origin of this feeling, noting that teachers warned the students that college professors would be extremely displeased with their work, which in their minds translated to "mean." For faculty, then, it is particularly important to cultivate relationships characterized by empowerment and empathy through open and honest dialogues with students early in their college careers.

In trying to meet so many expectations, our UR students described sometimes overcommitting themselves in ways that strained them. One student shared, "it is a common mentality to want to take on as much as you can" and another said she "was involved in too much on campus and was constantly overwhelmed" with her work, which made her feel like a letdown in the lab. She shared, "I wanted to seem like I was smart enough and self-sufficient. When I had too much work, I was afraid to say I needed less. I would be frustrated with myself for not having the confidence to be honest." These two students also shared how the discussions centered on wellbeing helped them gain perspective about the performative nature of taking on so much work. Our discussions helped them realize they were valued members of the lab regardless of whether they needed help, and they recognized the importance of "taking a step back" and being ok with not always being the best at everything. Indeed, this is a major goal of Elon University's recent implementation of an Act-Belong-Commit framework (e.g., Donovan et al., 2006), in which students are encouraged to make early connections to well-being supports across campus and dedicate themselves to specific opportunities or causes of interest.

Building identities as researchers is often cited as a benefit of participation in UR (e.g., Hunter et al., 2007; Thiry et al., 2012), and we saw this reflected in our students' growth over their time in our labs. One of our students attributed discussion of the guideposts to playing "a substantial role in stimulating my thinking surrounding my positionality as a researcher." Through our conversations, she was able to learn about "diverse perspectives on being an emerging professional in the field of my research." Another reflected that the label "researcher" sounded too official and important to apply to her, but the discussions challenged her to see herself as a researcher. Cultivating an identity as a researcher can also lead to an enhanced sense of belonging, not only to the lab, but also a wider professional community. One of the earliest opportunities for students to engage with professional communities is by presenting at a conference, incorporated into Salient Practice #10 (Shanahan et al., 2015). One student talked about her worries before her first conference presentation, that she did not belong or deserve to be there. After presenting, she felt a strong sense of accomplishment stemming from her ability to answer questions about her research. She found meaning and validation through this experience, and it sparked a passion for research that led to her becoming a research associate, another step along her career journey.

Another of our students went on to pursue a degree in clinical mental health counseling. She incorporates the 10 guideposts into her personal and professional development, as she reflects below.

"I firmly believe that all clinicians must understand the power of human connection, be introspective and self-aware of their own strengths and shortcomings before they can truly be an active listener and advocate for other people. This book and the discussions we had were the start of that journey for me. Dr. Brown succinctly defined common emotions that individuals experience to provide a more cohesive sense of self. This introduced me to a common language that helped me to understand human nature and the power of embracing your authentic self. Which, of course, all therapists should encourage for their clients."

As mentors, we hope that our students' UR experiences will help prepare them for whatever career they pursue after graduation. Indeed, many UR skills promote career readiness and are transferable to a variety of contexts (Hall et al., 2018, 2021). In addition, Brown's research on vulnerability is applicable to a wide range of audiences, including in academics, business, and technology. One student highlighted how our discussion of Brown's 10 guideposts helped her persist through challenges while in the process of applying to graduate schools. Through a mentoring constellation model, supporting students as they find their purpose and identify next steps after graduation is not only the work of their UR mentors but also can include career development staff, alumni from the same major or with similar interests, and community members within a wider professional network (Thurman & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023; Vandermaas-Peeler, 2021).

A potential challenge for UR students is the perception or reality that mentors want them to follow in their footsteps. Indeed, sometimes mentors select students to work with who are very similar to themselves, a pattern known in academic mentoring as "cloning" (Johnson, 2007, p. 28). The degree of similarity between mentors and mentees is a predictor of relationship quality, as assessed by mentors (Allen & Eby, 2003; Johnson, 2007). Through cloning, we may also validate our own career choices. As one of our students noted, she felt "pressure to impress [her mentor] and continue a path into research." Through open discussions with her mentor emphasizing authenticity from the 10 guideposts, the student reflected, "I realized you were supportive and helpful no matter the career I leaned towards." Another student noted that even though she'd experienced a series of setbacks and rejections in the post-graduate job search process, she was "letting go of control and feelings of fear and uncertainty" and working on enjoying her time in the interim. She is applying skills developed in the research lab to her post-graduate life, something we hope all our students will accomplish through authorship of their own personal and professional development.

Conclusion

In sum, our experiences have shown that adopting relational mentoring strategies enriched our students' and our own mentoring experiences in bigger ways than we initially imagined. What initially began as a faculty development relationship has led us to more intentionally adopting mentoring approaches that can ultimately enhance our mentees' overall experiences in UR, while also boosting research engagement and productivity. Our relationship with each other has continued to provide professional and personal rewards, and we intend to keep pursuing opportunities to enrich our mentoring with feminist, relational strategies. For example, we conducted these well-being focused joint lab discussions again this term with an all-new group of current URs. Building from instrumental and psychosocial support provided in traditional mentoring approaches, relational mentoring creates a different backdrop centered on mutual authenticity, empathy, engagement, and empowerment, concepts that have been characterized in the literature on high-quality UR. When it comes to next steps for UR mentoring and practice, we are strong advocates for mentoring constellations that, like ours, enhance faculty development and support the mentors' developmental relationships. Indeed, mentoring collaborations like ours can challenge even award-winning mentors to become more reflective about their mentoring practices, allow them to share their expertise, learn new ideas from each other, and open opportunities for related collaborations such as university service leadership, writing publications, and organizing conferences (e.g., Hall et al., 2018). In addition, implementing

feminist, relational strategies in mentoring can actively combat problematic notions from neoliberal feminism such as individual competition and instead shift attention towards identifying barriers, creating spaces of support, and moving towards collective action (Harris, 2022). All these efforts are especially important given the ultimate effect of the mentors' professional development on the mentees' overall experience (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Ragins & Verbos, 2017). Helping mentees and mentors learn to seek and develop relational mentoring relationships can positively impact UR experiences for all involved.

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