

PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Mentoring: The View from Both Sides

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"So, what do you say?" Dr. Spears, one of my (Lauren's) undergraduate professors in philosophy, had just asked me to work as his research assistant. Never mind the fact that I did not know how to *do* research, nor did I know anything *about* (or necessarily have interest *in*) his particular area of philosophy. I knew an opportunity when it presented itself. I accepted the position with some trepidation, and only after I was confident that Dr. Spears had accurate expectations of my skill set (namely, low). What developed was a professional and personal relationship that spring-boarded me into the field of psychology. Dr. Spears was my first experience with academic/professional mentoring, but he would not be my last. Dr. Spears' mentoring set me on a journey through which I would benefit from the wisdom and expertise of many other professionals, including Dr. Liz Hall, who was formative in my development as a researcher, a psychologist, and a person.

I (Liz) first encountered Lauren as a junior, in my Experimental Psychology class. Her research team proposed a semester project on gender, a topic in which I had substantial interest, and then proceeded to conceptualize and run a project of much higher quality and with more interesting results than the typical project in that class. Recognizing Lauren as the intellectual leader of the group, I suggested to her that she consider doing independent research, using the project as a starting point. Soon after, I invited her to attend my graduate research team, which led to my being her graduate school advisor and dissertation supervisor, and currently collaborator/collegial mentor. In many ways, we have gone through all possible developmental iterations of the mentoring process. In this paper, I provide the mentor's perspective, and particularly want to highlight the enjoyment and benefits of this role. Our hope is that by sharing some of our experiences with mentoring and being mentored, we can demonstrate to you the importance of mentoring as a

part of your professional practice as Christian psychologists, and in so doing, benefit and bless the next generation.

Johnson (2002) defined mentorship as follows:

... a personal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member or professional acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) graduate student or junior professional. A mentor provides the protégé with knowledge, advice, challenge, counsel, and support in the protégé's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession. (p. 88)

While the focus of research has most often been on the qualities and tasks of the mentor, more recent research emphasizes that both the mentor and the mentee bring important elements to the mentoring relationship. The mentee brings certain qualities, motivations and attitudes to the interactions with the mentor. In other words, mentorship is a two-way street (Padilla, 2005). For example, Lunsford (2011) found that students who had selected a career and who reported career certainty also reported higher quality mentoring relationships. These results suggest that students at more advanced stages of career development may be more motivated to engage in career-related mentoring, and consequently may benefit from it most.

This has certainly been true in my (Lauren's) experience. My mentoring relationships became much more influential in my life the further along I went in my career. Two factors may account for the increased motivation among students at more advanced stages of career development. First, their motivation and drive to engage in their career of choice necessarily spills over into their utilization of resources to help them achieve that career of choice. Secondly, in the nascent stages of career development, after one has chosen a career path but is still just beginning to actualize it, there can be a heightened awareness of professional skill deficits. This awareness may also motivate young professionals to seek out mentoring relationships, some of which may be beneficial, and some of which may be less so.

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The characteristics of the mentee may or may not correspond well to the characteristics and skills of the mentor. Mentoring is most successful when there is a good fit between mentor and mentee. Fit is theorized to be how well the personal attributes, abilities, and needs of both the protégé and mentor match (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008). This issue of fit is perhaps why informal mentoring—where mentoring relationships are initiated outside of formal structures—tends to be more successful than formal mentoring (Chao, 2009; Johnson, 2002). Chao noted that finding a true mentor in a formal program is similar to finding true love on a blind date: “it can happen, but the odds are against it” (p. 315). Lunsford (2011), in a study of mentoring in college students, found that mentoring did not produce positive results when there was no sense of connection between mentor and mentee. In addition, factors such as common scholarly interests, levels of motivation, values, life experiences, and personality may all influence a sense of fit.

I (Liz) have been on the mentoring end of several relationships with students and junior colleagues over the years. Some of these have been formal, in the context of my university's mentoring program. Others have developed more informally and naturally. The most difficult involved a student very different from me in personality, ability, career approach, and the way she approached her faith. In spite of my best dutiful efforts to serve in that role to her, I'm not sure I was as effective as someone else might have been. In contrast, Lauren and I share research interests, are fairly similar in our achievement goals and work ethic, and complement each other in terms of personality. I would say that the “goodness-of-fit” of the relationship has been high, as demonstrated by how easy it has been to transition from the undergraduate-professor relationship, to the collegial relationship we now enjoy. I don't recall that she and I ever had a discussion in which we sat down to define our relationship as a mentoring one; instead, it developed naturally over time. If I were able to go back in time, I would feel much freer to be selective in my mentoring relationships, recognizing that a lack of fit is a disadvantage both to the mentor and to the mentee.

However, when there is a good fit, the benefits to the mentee can be profound. One of my (Lauren's) most clinically significant mentors, Dr. Shelby, is an example of this. Similar to my relationship with Dr. Hall, there is a good fit between myself

and Dr. Shelby. It feels easy for us to work together, and because of this, it felt easier for me to seek out additional support from her while working under her supervision. Dr. Shelby introduced me to the world of child maltreatment, which changed the entire direction of my clinical career as it has since become my clinical specialty. She modeled appropriate self-care and worked with me to help me internalize these same skills, something I try to use in my own supervision of student therapists now. To this day I can hear her voice in my head at the end of a long and difficult day encouraging me to take the steps necessary to sustain my practice long-term (i.e., self-care).

While the benefits of mentoring may be more obviously about the mentee, I (Liz) have also benefitted from mentoring Lauren. Her enthusiasm for research and strong work ethic have resulted in co-authored publications and presentations (including this one!). When a reviewer requested a statistical analysis with which I was not familiar, confident in Lauren's statistical ability and desiring to push her, I handed off the task of learning about this statistic to her; she later taught me how to run it. Putting experiences and implicit knowledge into words for the sake of communicating them to her extended my professional and self-knowledge. Talking through some of her experiences helped me to understand better some of the experiences and values of her generation, enhancing my ability to be relevant. Perhaps most importantly, I also feel a great deal of satisfaction at Lauren's accomplishments, knowing that I played a role in her development. This contributes to my well-being, as I feel myself a part of something meaningful and larger than myself.

In the remainder of this short paper, we will be looking at mentoring primarily through a developmental lens, but will also note some aspects of mentoring that have to do with gender and with our religious and spiritual commitments.

Mentoring and Development

Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee (1978) saw mentoring as a crucial developmental relationship for the young adult; in fact, it is not an overstatement to say that mentoring is, at its core, a developmental relationship (Chao, 2009). Kram (1983) similarly saw the mentoring relationship as a vehicle for accomplishing the primary developmental tasks of adulthood, including career and psychosocial aspects. Individuals experience mentoring differently across

different stages of development, and it is common for individuals to experience several significant mentoring relationships across time. My (Lauren's) own experiences with mentoring illustrate this process. In one of my earliest mentoring relationships, Dr. Spears taught me the concrete details of identifying and organizing academic literature. Without the skills Dr. Spears gave me, or his encouragement, I would never have met Dr. Hill. Dr. Hill supervised my undergraduate thesis, and at his encouragement, we presented and published the paper. As I began to develop as a graduate student and became capable of taking on new challenges, Dr. Hill encouraged me to propose a new class to the undergraduate psychology department which I later taught. This teaching experience greatly expanded my professional repertoire and marked an important transition in my career from exclusively "student" to "student and teacher." This transition was important for me personally as I began to develop a self-concept that included "psychologist." Each of these mentoring relationships met different developmental needs, including the need for concrete skills and instructions in my early academic life, to joining the larger academic community of psychology via publication/presentations, and finally to learning to create the opportunities in which I wanted to partake. Each relationship offered me something unique at each stage of my development.

As noted above, mentoring behaviors fall broadly into two categories: career skills and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). Career support behaviors include sponsorship, coaching, providing challenging assignments, exposure, visibility, direction, and the transmission of professional ethics and protection (Johnson, 2002; Kram, 1985). Psychosocial support behaviors include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, identity, empathizing, and friendship. Johnson (2002) notes that the theoretical and empirical support for both of these functions is well-established, and that successful mentors transition easily between these two roles. However, these two functions of mentoring do not always occur together; at times, different mentors may fulfill different functions (Kram, 1985). In addition, each of these functions may increase or decrease in prominence over the course of a mentoring relationship.

However, there are also benefits to maintaining a mentoring relationship across development, if

that relationship can change to accommodate new skills and roles. My relationship with Dr. Liz Hall has been just such a relationship for me. As Liz described, we began our mentoring relationship during my undergraduate years, and it has continued to evolve throughout my graduate studies and now into my early career as a professional psychologist. The constancy of the relationship, along with its ability to change and adapt in response to my professional and personal development, has contributed to a sense of continuity of self in my professional life despite the frequent changes in type and place of practice common in clinical graduate work.

Mentoring and Gender

Gender appears to add another dimension to mentoring. Existing research on gender and mentoring suggests that mentoring of women by women may provide some benefits that cross-gender mentoring does not. For example, Gilbert and Rossman (1992) found that mentoring of women by women was characterized by confirmation and support, resulting in empowerment for the mentee. However, given that a majority of senior positions in our discipline continue to be filled by men, much mentoring that occurs will be cross-gender. Johnson (2002) cautioned mentors to be aware of gender differences in the formation of a professional identity, since research has demonstrated that women in mentoring relationships prefer a more relational focus and a mentor who models egalitarian values and blends personal and professional roles.

As noted above, mentoring is most successful when there is a good fit between mentor and mentee. Part of this fit may reflect shared gendered experiences. In a professional context such as that of psychology, women share the experience of working in an environment in which they often encounter gender-specific obstacles (Maltby, Hall, & Anderson, 2009). My (Lauren's) relationship with Dr. Liz Hall is an excellent example of this. Although our mentorship began in the context of professional and academic research, it expanded to involve more personal aspects such as experiences of gender discrimination and the unique challenges of being a working mother. I feel privileged to have gotten a first-hand look into the way Dr. Hall has woven her personal life of a well-rounded, Christian psychologist and clearly modeled balancing motherhood and professional lives together. Because of this, I feel confident that I too can

navigate both personal and professional demands without assuming I will have to sacrifice one domain for the other.

Mentoring and Christianity

Mentoring has a long history in the Christian tradition, often under the rubric of discipleship or spiritual direction. When Christians mentor Christians, the concern for the spiritual well-being of the mentee is often important, along with the more traditional concern with career and psychosocial functions. In a qualitative study of academic women in Christian institutions, Deweese (2004) found that faith intertwined with other dimensions of mentoring, including career choices, handling the challenges of multiple roles, and developing a sense of vocation. In this group, a common faith was also identified as a facilitator of a sense of intimacy and growth in the mentoring relationship—a finding echoed by Fallow and Johnson (2000) in their comparison of secular and religiously-affiliated programs. Fallow and Johnson found that mentees in religious programs reported being drawn to faculty members who were religiously and spiritually mature, and were more likely than mentees in secular programs to rate their mentor as warm and caring, and to report higher rates of friendship and socializing. Deweese also noted that mentoring in a Christian context brought with it the assumption that all aspects of the mentee's life would be included in the mentoring relationship, expanding the scope and breadth of what was discussed.

My (Lauren) mentoring relationship with Dr. Todd Hall illustrates this dynamic. Dr. Todd Hall began supervising me later in my graduate studies, and although we spent the necessary time on clinical supervision, we both noticed that we frequently found ourselves scheduling additional time to discuss more personal development issues, particularly spirituality. In my experience, many students find that their clinical work has unique implications for their own personal and spiritual lives. The question of evil becomes particularly salient for those working with trauma survivors, and the power of restorative relationships can seem so great that spiritual healing can seem (at times) irrelevant in comparison. Dr. Todd Hall provided consistent mentorship through my navigation of these issues, in large part through sharing his own spiritual story. In doing so, he demonstrated the integration of spirituality and psychology on a personal level. This kind of mentoring, which includes sharing one's own story with the

mentee, would likely not have been beneficial to me in earlier years, but was very powerful when I experienced it toward the end of graduate school. This yet again emphasizes that the ability of mentoring relationships to change shape or form in response to developmental needs is of the utmost importance in making the relationship beneficial to both mentor and mentee.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Why mentor? In a nutshell, because mentoring works. It provides concrete benefits, clearly documented in the research literature, to both the mentee and the mentor (Chao, 2009; Johnson, 2002). We encourage individuals in the formative years of career development to be proactive about seeking out mentorship. Likewise, faculty and clinicians need not wait until they are approached in order to mentor; sometimes mentoring relationships begin when psychologists in senior positions recognize potential in their students or junior colleagues. Having said this, we also encourage mentors to be selective in establishing mentoring relationships. Time and resources are finite. In addition, an initial formal or informal trial period may be beneficial to see if there is a match between the interests, objectives, and personality of the mentor and mentee. Finally, be attuned to the developmental needs of mentees. Provide enough scaffolding to maximize success, and provide enough challenge to maximize growth and self-confidence. Mentoring is a powerful investment in the future of our profession and in the development of the next generation. We hope you choose to invest!

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