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Ethics and Relational Dialectics in Mentoring Relationships

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Training relationships that evolve along the mentoring relationship continuum (MRC) become dynamic, reciprocal, emotionally connected relationships that benefit mentees, mentors, and the profession of psychology. This article examines prominent ethical tensions and obligations in mentoring relationships within professional psychology. The authors frame these ethical issues in terms of relational dialectics theory (RDT), a theory of communication that addresses the tension and struggle between equally desirable relationship goals. We consider each of the 3 salient dialectics proposed by the theory: integration–separation, stability–change, and expression–privacy and offer a training vignette to illustrate each. We highlight the mentorship-relevant ethical quandaries and tensions nested within each relational dialectic and conclude with a discussion of the implications for psychologists in training roles.

Keywords: mentoring, ethics, relationship, dialectics

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In psychology and allied health care professions, professors and supervisors increasingly are expected to mentor trainees (Forehand, 2008). Training relationships that take on the character of mentorship become dynamic, emotionally connected, reciprocal relationships in which the training psychologist shows deliberate and generative concern for the student or supervisee. From the perspective of well-mentored trainees, excellent mentors provide a blend of *career functions* (e.g., coaching, sponsorship, challenge, advice, insider knowledge) and *psychosocial functions* (e.g., acceptance, collegiality, friendship, counsel) in support of a mentee's pursuit of becoming a full member of a profession (Kram, 1985; Ponce, Williams, & Allen, 2005). At its best, "mentoring can be a life-altering relationship that inspires mutual growth . . . mentoring relationships have the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organizations, and communities" (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 3). Davis and colleagues reflected that "The mentor nourishes a dream and sets the student into creative flight, tempering idealism with the wisdom of experience" (Davis, Little, & Thornton, 1997, p. 61). Distinctive elements of mentoring relationships include, an increasingly reciprocal and mutual relationship that may endure long after a training experience is concluded, provision of both career assistance and emotional support, intentional role-modeling, a safe harbor for self-exploration, some measure of positive identity transformation in the mentee, and accrual of significant benefits to the mentee (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & Dubois, 2008; Johnson, 2015).

Meta-analytic reviews of mentoring relationships across professions reveal that strong mentoring is associated with a host of career benefits including more rapid career advancement, higher rates of compensation, greater career and organizational commitment, enhanced professional identity development, and greater satisfaction with both job and career (Eby et al., 2008; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). Strong mentorships are even associated with better physical health, self-esteem, positive work relationships, professional competence, and recognition within one's profession (Eby et al., 2008). Moreover, satisfying mentoring relationships during graduate education are a strong predictor of satisfaction with one's training program (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000) and an increased probability of finishing a doctoral

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program on-time or even early (Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gilner, 2001). Finally, well-mentored psychology trainees are likely to enjoy more career networking, better prospects for initial employment, greater scholarly productivity, and higher ratings of both professional competence and confidence (Johnson, 2014; Kaslow & Mascaro, 2007).

Rather than describe mentorship as a discrete relationship category, it is more useful to understand mentoring as a relationship quality. The mentoring relationship continuum (MRC) approach frames mentorship not in terms of a formal role assignment (e.g., advising, supervising), rather in terms of the degree of support and inspiration provided by the training psychologist, namely the character of the relationship (Johnson, 2014). Any training role or developmental relationship with a psychology trainee may be placed on a continuum defined by degree of involvement, relational reciprocity, emotional connection, and genuine collaboration. As any developmental relationship moves along the continuum from one end (*transactional*: formal, hierarchical, focused primarily on skill development and assessment) to the other end (*transformational*: a rich relational mentorship characterized by greater mutuality), the relationship becomes increasingly reciprocal and the mentor becomes more invested in the mentee's professional and personal success (Johnson, Skinner, & Kaslow, 2014). Transformational training psychologists empower trainees by building self-efficacy and self-confidence and persuading trainees of their potential in a relationship characterized by excitement and positive emotional valence (Bass, 1998). Training relationships that move farthest along the MRC are often described as relational mentorships (Ragins, 2012) and tend to be characterized by increasing vulnerability, trust, working alliance, reciprocity, and a strong sense of fluid expertise or complementarity; the trainee is increasingly viewed as a junior colleague who may at times assume the expert role in those areas in which he or she has more education, training or experience than the trainer.

As is shown by this framework, both the engagement and commitment on the part of the mentor and the developmental level of the mentee play a significant part in determining movement along the MRC. Truly relational mentorships as described by Ragins (2012)—those at the far end of the MRC—are most likely to occur after the mentee has completed significant amounts of training, or has obtained a professional status.

As any formally assigned or organically evolving developmental training relationship moves along the mentoring relationship continuum, psychologists will naturally experience distinct ethical tensions and quandaries. In this article, we frame ethical obligations and tensions in mentoring relationships in terms of relational dialectics theory (RDT; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Relational dialectics examine the tension between two desirable but sometimes contradictory values or relational tendencies, particularly in close personal relationships. We begin by examining ethical issues and concerns bearing on mentorship generally, introduce RDT as a useful approach to framing ethics in the context of mentoring and then explore the ethical implications of the three primary relational dialectics in strong relational mentorships. An illustrative case vignette is used to highlight the ethical quandaries and tensions created by each relational dialectic.

Ethical Issues in Mentoring Relationships

It is tempting to adopt an exclusively positive—sometimes maniacally cheery—perspective on mentoring relationships, but mentorships—like all relationships—are sometimes dysfunctional (Johnson & Huwe, 2002). At times, problematic or unsatisfactory mentorships are linked to ethical missteps on the part of faculty and supervisors. A recent survey of clinical psychology doctoral students ($N = 374$) revealed that 32% reported knowledge of unethical faculty behavior (January et al., 2014). The most common transgressions were linked to multiple relationships and boundary issues (22.4%), privacy and confidentiality (12.9%), and harassment or other forms of disrespect (17.2%). A survey of graduate students across disciplines revealed similar patterns of unethical behavior on the part of professors including disrespect, misappropriation of student work, overt harassment, and directed research fraud (Braxton, Proper, & Bayer, 2011). Within clinical psychology, an earlier survey of 700 recent doctorates found that 17% reported negative aspects to their relationship with a primary graduate school mentor (Clark et al., 2000). The most frequent problems included mentor unavailability, difficulty terminating the relationship, feeling unable to meet the mentor's expectations, and exploitation by the mentor. It appears that training relationships defined by the trainee as mentoring in nature can sometimes be fertile ground for ethical tensions and dilemmas.

For seasoned psychologists in training settings, it may come as no surprise that relationships with trainees occasionally evoke ethical dilemmas. What are the distinctive ethical tensions accruing in "good" relationships, those that have taken on a mentoring quality? Perhaps the most common dilemma involves the navigation of multiple roles on the part of those in the mentoring relationship. In a critical-ideological paradigm, individuals' multiple realities and roles are recognized as complex mechanisms that intersect with one another (Morrow, 2007). In most cases, mentors also serve as evaluators, instructors, supervisors, and administrators. These functions all share gatekeeping responsibilities, with care of the public being of utmost importance. These multiple roles can sometimes be in conflict or tension. Examples of such tensions include advocacy in the midst of gatekeeping concerns, or reciprocity and mutuality in the context of a formal hierarchical structure. It is important to keep in mind that while both mentorship and gatekeeping often coexist in training relationships, psychologists may not abdicate the latter for the former. We see gatekeeping as an unavoidable mandate of our roles as supervisor, instructor, or faculty member. Yet, helping our trainees understand how multiple roles of gatekeeper and mentor can coexist in an ethical and forthright manner is an important act of modeling.

Some aspects of the mentoring relationship may serve to create unique ethical dilemmas (Johnson, 2016). Mentors need to be aware that mentorships often are long in duration, gradually more bonded, and many, if not most, mentoring interactions between mentor and mentee tend to occur in private conversations or other informal interactions. Moreover, many mentorships are not formally assigned but begin informally, owing to interpersonal "chemistry" and shared interests. The most highly rated mentorships, from the perspective of mentees, are described as increasingly reciprocal, mutual, and collegial, signaling the need for mentors to be particularly aware of preserving boundaries while simultaneously affirming the mentee's emerging status as a junior

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colleague (Johnson, 2014). As reciprocity and collegiality increase, a mentor can lose sight of their mandate to gate-keep and the undeniable power discrepancy in the mentorship. We would argue that throughout a mentoring relationship, a power discrepancy exists to some degree, even as collegiality increases. One might even make the case that a perceived power differential—at least from the mentee's perspective—often exists in perpetuity.

Although psychologists most often link fiduciary obligations to practitioner–client relationships, mentorships with students and supervisees also come with fiduciary responsibilities. A fiduciary relationship is a special relationship in which a professional accepts the trust and confidence of another to act in that person's best interest (Plaut, 1993). In training contexts, the fiduciary (e.g., advisor, supervisor, mentor) must recognize that psychologists and trainees do not deal on equal terms, and a competent mentor must act with utmost good faith of the mentee without losing sight of simultaneous obligations to the public, and ultimately, the profession. There are at least two compelling reasons for training psychologists to frame developmental relationships with trainees as fiduciary in nature.

First, as a training relationship progresses across the MRC, trainees report greater emotional bonds and psychological attachment to their mentors (Gunn & Pistole, 2012; Huber et al., 2010). With this increased attachment and stronger working alliance, the mentee's trust in the wisdom and good will of the mentor also grows stronger. There is evidence that this bonding and attachment naturally increase implicit psychological contracts in the relationship (Haggard & Turban, 2012). Psychological contracts reflect the mentee's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of the relationship, including obligations owed to the mentor in exchange for his or her support and guidance. Naturally, such implicit, unspoken contracts leave the mentee vulnerable to exploitation if the mentor lacks vigilance to fiduciary obligations. Explicit discussions at the outset of formal training relationships help clarify expectations and perceptions. Yet, psychologists must be more vigilant to implicit contracts when mentorships begin informally and organically.

A second rationale for framing mentorships as fiduciary in nature is the profound importance of trainer–trainee relationships as a primary avenue for transmitting professional values and practices across generations (Johnson, 2016). Even if a mentor is unaware or unintentional in this regard, he or she will be a salient role model—for better or worse—of psychology's fundamental moral, ethical, and collegial mores; the person and behavior of the mentor will communicate volumes about how to be an ethical professional (Nakamura & Shernoff, 2009). Put another way, Ragins (2012) observed that for better or worse, mentorships instill "mental maps" for not only how mentorships work, but also for what professionals do and how they behave. These maps are mentoring schemas that shape a mentee's expectations about what mentorships should look like and, ideally, how a mentor carefully honors fiduciary obligations.

Recently, Johnson (2016) offered a set of ethical principles for mentors to consider as an important first step in conceptualizing an ethical commitment to those they mentor. These principles can serve as guideposts for mentor decision making and behavior.

Beneficence. Mentors strive to facilitate the growth and contribute to the welfare of their mentees. Mentors are obligated to promote mentees' best interests and to understand the unique developmental needs of each mentee.

Nonmaleficence. Mentors work to avoid intentional or unintended harm to those they mentor. Mentors endeavor to avoid neglect, abandonment, or exploitation of mentees and are cautious to prevent boundary violations.

Autonomy. Mentors endeavor to strengthen mentees' knowledge, maturity, and independence. They work against both intellectual and relational dependency in their mentorships and instead they promote a mentee's creativity, independence, and sense of self in the profession.

Justice. Mentors ensure fair and equitable treatment of mentees regardless of variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Mentors try to ensure equal access by prospective mentees representing the full range of diversity present in the institution or training program.

Transparency. Mentors are open and transparent about all of their mentorships; they avoid even the appearance of hiding the nature of a relationship with a mentee and they encourage open communication with mentees about mutual expectations in the relationship.

Boundaries and multiple relationships. Mentors are careful to honor boundaries in their relationships with mentees and cautious about entering any new relationship with a mentee that could compromise the value of the mentorship or harm the mentee.

Privacy. Mentors protect information shared with them in confidence by mentees. If a disclosure is necessary such as to keep a mentee safe or prevent harm to others, the mentor attempts to discuss this exception to privacy with the mentee in advance of the disclosure.

Competence. Mentors consistently work at establishing, developing, and sharpening competence in the mentor role.

Mentoring and Relational Dialectics

Too often, conversations and conventions related to ethics in professional relationships frame relationships as purely hierarchical, static, and predictable. In the case of long-term developmental training relationships, such a rigid and transactional perspective can oversimplify discussions of ethical concerns and obligations. As an alternative viewpoint, some communication theorists have recommended that professionals frame relational life, "with a goal of understanding its fundamental messiness" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3). In their pioneering work on RDT, Baxter and Montgomery offered a perspective on social life that frames relationships as, "a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary and opposing tendencies" (p. 3). RDT is a theory of the meaning making between relational parties that emerges through ongoing tension and struggle between competing and even contradictory, although equally "good" or desirable, goals or values (Baxter, 1988, 2004; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Griffin, 2009). Opposing wants and needs create contradictions

that are inherent to relationships and result in internal dialectical tensions experienced by members of a dyad (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Far from evidence of failure in any person or relationship, contradictions and dialectical tensions drive change, growth, meaning, and positive intimacy. For instance, independence and interdependence are both necessary for relational bonding and growth; one without the other diminishes a relationship (Griffin, 2009). It is not a question of either independence or interdependence but both/and. According to RDT, it is crucial to acknowledge that internal dialectical tensions can actually bring people together if managed well. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) reflected, “Relationships become close and personal to us because they celebrate the ongoing creation of ourselves with those who have been most crucial in inviting our potential” (p. 151). Thus, in an evolving real-life mentorship between a mentor and mentee, internal dialectical tensions may facilitate the development of new relational selves in both parties as they continue to find the right both/and balance between several ongoing and competing discourses.

In the balance of this article, we frame ethical tensions in training mentorships in light of the three foundational relational dialectics proposed by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). These fundamental relational tensions include the following: *integration* (connection) and *separation* (autonomy); *stability* (predictability) and *change* (growth/redefinition); and *expression* (openness) and *privacy* (closedness). Although previous authors have described relational tensions in training relationships (e.g., Veilleux, Sandeen, & Levensky, 2014), this is the first effort to discuss ethical issues in mentoring relationships within the original framework of RDT. We lead off discussion of each dialectic with a brief description followed by a fictional vignette drawn from our experiences in training relationships. We also believe it is important to understand mentoring within a multicultural context; thus, we highlight cultural dynamics within the relational dyads. Next, we consider the more common mentoring ethical quandaries and tensions most likely to be nested within each dialectic while recognizing that many ethical concerns overlap and interact with the three primary relational dialectics as mentors’ and mentees’ complex individual differences intersect with one another. We offer this with respect to the importance of cultural competence that is nested within ethical fiduciary responsivities.

Integration–Separation

According to RDT, the first core relational dialectic is *integration–separation*, which can be defined as the tension any dyad experiences between the need for emotional/relational *connection* (togetherness, closeness) and the need for *autonomy* (independence). Relationships exist only when parties sacrifice some personal autonomy, yet too much connection can destroy a relationship if individual identities are lost (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Likewise, an individual’s autonomy can only be appreciated in terms of separation from others, but too much autonomy might paradoxically undermine individual identity. Maintaining both of these apparent opposites (connection and autonomy) contributes to the wellbeing of any close personal relationship.

> Vignette 1. A first-year African American doctoral student became excited to see that, in his program, there was a well-established and respected African American male professor. The student sought mentorship from this faculty member with a sense of euphoria and strong identification—perhaps even overidentification—on the basis of their shared racial background. Although the faculty member willingly accepted the student as an advisee, he recognized his advisee’s strong need for attachment and identification with him as a psychologist and as a Black man. The faculty advisor also honored the student’s strong passion and singular focus on African American identity and racial disparities in their conversations; the student reminded the faculty of himself as a graduate student. Although he was often tempted to disclose some of his own experiences with prejudicial attitudes and discrimination at the university, the faculty was cautious about balancing connection and identification around matters of race with good boundaries. In particular, the faculty recognized the inherent hierarchy of their relationship in the midst of its closeness. To disclose his own experiences and thus overly join the mentee, the faculty might jeopardize his ability to navigate the evaluative functions required of his role. As their relationship became more committed and mutual, taking on more of the features of mentorship, the mentor was transparent and nondefensive in helping the mentee to understand why he devoted equal time to mentoring White students and how he was broadly committed to honoring diverse cultures and identities. The mentor championed his mentee’s pursuit of a research focus that was uniquely his own and although their relationship remained close, he often encouraged his mentee to build a larger network of collegial mentorships with diverse and respected colleagues.

For the mentor, balancing the integration–separation dialectic may be most challenging at the two ends of the MRC. First, in the early relational stage, the mentee may idealize and overidentify with the mentor. The effective mentor understands and honors the new mentee’s need for closeness and approval and for greater hierarchy and structure. He or she offers copious doses of affirmation and acceptance, provides direction that lowers anxiety, and begins the slow work of nurturing autonomy so that enmeshment is averted. Second, as a mentorship moves to the more mutual and reciprocal end of the MRC, the mentor must balance mutual feelings of closeness and collegiality with the reality of leave-taking and the need for both members of the dyad to renegotiate the terms of their relationship as the mentee moves on and launches a career. Here, the mentor must avoid undermining a mentee’s growing independence while simultaneously creating a new space for an ongoing collegial connection.

In Vignette 1, the mentor demonstrates awareness of his mentee’s stage of racial identity development and how this might influence his need for connection versus autonomy. Cross’s (1971) model of racial identity development among African American/Black American persons proposed five stages; preencounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. The mentee in this vignette is strongly identified with the immersion/emersion stage and is clearly energized by new information about his racial identity, perhaps angry at his new awareness of White privilege and racial disparity, and concerned about ways to unlearn internalized oppressions (Tatum, 2003). He is focused on immersion in African American culture while reject-

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ing White culture (Cross, 1971). The African American mentor, on the other hand, has arrived at the final stage of Cross's model, internalization-commitment, which is characterized by ideological and cognitive flexibility and openness that is deeply rooted in one's commitment to social justice and acknowledgment of cultural experiences beyond African American/Black culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The mentor in this case appreciated the mentee's racial pride and sense of heritage, his racial identity development process, and how both of these factors might impact an evolving mentorship. Although the mentor and the mentee shared a racial background, their experiences of identity formation as well as how they experienced self, others, and world were vastly different. From a relational dialectics perspective, the mentor was sensitive and tolerant of the mentee's need to identify strongly with him as an African American man early in their relationship. As the relationship evolved, the mentor initiated delicate and respectful conversations about some of the differences in how they experienced racial identity. Promoting mentee autonomy within the context of a caring mentorship requires even same-culture mentors to strive toward cultural humility in their developmental relationships. As Hook and colleagues (2013) explain, *cultural humility* is "defined as having an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect and lack of superiority toward an individual's cultural background and experience" (p. 353).

One manifestation of cultural humility within the integration–separation dialectic occurs when an adviser or supervisor refuses to label a trainee as a mentee (e.g., "this is my protégé," "I am your mentor"). There is evidence that such presumption may inadvertently imply ownership of a mentee or credit for the mentee's achieved statuses and accomplishments. Avoiding the imposition of mentoring labels is particularly important in light of the greater power and privilege that the mentor holds. Brown and Ostrove (2013) discuss how this is portrayed in their research on allies and advocates and conclude that it is harmful in an ally relationship for the ally from a dominant culture to self-proclaim their positionality as advocates and allies without first being recognized as such by individuals from a subordinate culture. The ethical mandate to promote autonomy and the evidence regarding cultural humility imply that it is quite appropriate to avoid such claims and wait for the mentee to introduce you as "my mentor" or describe the relationship as "mentoring."

The integration–separation dialectic also requires mentors to acknowledge how seductive it can feel to be idealized and blindly respected by a mentee, a common phenomenon early in any developmental training relationship. It is important for mentors to maintain a high level of self-reflection and awareness when this phenomenon occurs. In so doing, mentors can position the mentoring relationship to meet the needs of the mentee, as opposed to the needs of the mentor. Autonomy can be threatened if a mentor allows a mentee's unrealistic overidentification to persist unaddressed beyond the earliest stages of a mentorship. Autonomy may also be undermined if, consciously or unconsciously, the mentor endeavors to "clone" the mentee in the mentor's own image (Johnson & Ridley, 2008). The challenge here is to enjoy shared professional interests and collaborations while honoring and celebrating distinct and differentiating interests and identities.

Finally, the mentor in Vignette 1 was willing to serve as a key element of the mentee's evolving competence constellation (Johnson et al., 2013). As a primary mentor, it would be natural for the mentor to be identified by the mentee as a key member of the mentee's inner core of personal and professional support, encouragement, and advocacy. At the same time, the mentor was careful to avoid the cloning process mentioned above by encouraging the mentee to expand the scope of his colleagues, role models, and peers who might also provide additional sources of role modeling and support, both instrumental and emotional.

Stability–Change

The second relational dialectic in RDT is stability–change (Baxter, 1988). Tensions in this dialectic center on certainty–uncertainty, conventionality–uniqueness, predictability–surprise, and routine–novelty (Griffin, 2009). Honoring mentoring relationships requires an appreciation for both fluidity and formality, given particular contexts and relational seasons which ideally transition from transactional/hierarchical to more collegial/mutual/transformational in nature. Although predictability and structure can provide a sense of solidity and direction for novice and anxious trainees, a psychologist who keeps a relationship frozen at the transactional and hierarchical end of the MRC may prevent the development of a mutual and highly relational mentorship most preferred by trainees (Johnson, 2007; Tenenbaum et al., 2001). Some mentoring dyads negotiate these relationship changes informally without having any ritual or informed consent process signal a mutually agreeable change to the relationship. Others require mentors and mentees to come to an agreement that a significant change to the structure of the relationship—including reciprocal expectations—is about to take place. Poignant examples of stability–change tensions in mentorships are sometimes nested in strict cultural expectations.

> Vignette 2. A first generation counseling psychology doctoral student from South Korea and her White American female doctoral dissertation chair began the student's 2-year dissertation project. Beyond superficial interactions within the department, the two had no prior working relationship. Their initial meetings were focused on research methodology and literature review; the student's main objective was to receive competent guidance on research designs and complete a publishable project that would launch her career. Given the intensity and rigor associated with the dissertation experience, the chair often tried to establish a collegial, relational, and informal working relationship with her students. Yet, when she attempted to make the relationship with this student less structured and more collegial/casual, she sensed genuine discomfort, and when she suggested to her student that the two address one another by first names, the student quickly declined her invitation, explaining that it was culturally disrespectful to call one's academic superior by his or her first name. For 2 years, until the project was completed, the student addressed her dissertation chair as "Doctor." Although the dissertation chair understood her student's culturally bound resistance to loosening relational boundaries with her, she nevertheless found herself disengaging from the relationship emotionally. Work on the student's dissertation began to feel onerous. This experience helped the dissertation chair clarify her own need for steadily increasing reciprocity and mutuality

with her doctoral students and the pleasure she often experienced in the process of creating a new colleague. Recognizing her own need for change and increasing collegiality in her mentorships and appreciating her student's cultural preference for stability and predictability in her professional relationships, the dissertation chair did her best to remain respectful and supportive. After the student graduated, she shared with her dissertation chair that the commencement ceremony marked a clear point of intentional "status" change and that she now felt comfortable addressing her dissertation chair by her first name.

Inevitably, psychologists serving in training roles will experience the relational dialectic of stability–change, the simultaneous desire for predictability/stability and the wish for change and growth, so that the relationship does not become stagnant, monotonous, and ultimately, less helpful for the mentee. High-quality mentorships are always evolving with concomitant changes to relational dynamics such as perceived intimacy, trust, implicit expectations, and degree of mutuality (Johnson, 2016). It is often the case that as a mentoring relationship moves further along the MRC, and as the mentor begins to offer a range of both career and psychosocial functions, the relationship becomes more dynamic, synergistic, friendly, and reciprocal. This is particularly true as both members of the dyad begin to offer various kinds of social support (e.g., emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental: Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

In Vignette 2, a South Korean mentee's culturally linked preference for hierarchy and predictability came into direct tension with her White American mentor's wish for growth, role flexibility, and collegiality. Given the opportunity, the student might have conveyed that there are four vertical classes of people in South Korean culture; scholars, farmers, manufacturers, and merchants. The highest class, the *Sa*, represents the literate class which demands the most respect (Schweitzer & Alexander, 2015). To call her mentor by her first name violated her sense of respect. Despite the challenges it presented for her, the mentor in this case had the wisdom to let the mentee participate fully in setting the pace of relational growth and change.

Another tension nested within the stability–change dialectic is the ubiquitous tension between advocacy, mutuality, and friendship on one hand and the professional obligation to evaluate on the other. Over time, and across the MRC, the strongest and most meaningful mentorships from the perspective of both mentors and mentees (Johnson, 2014) become defined by several features that Ragins (2012) calls *relational mentoring*. Relational mentorships are fundamentally reciprocal, defined by fluidity in expertise and complementarity, increasingly transparent and open, and include a holistic focus in the sense of impacting a mentee's development broadly. Yet, as a relationship changes to become more reciprocal and defined by greater advocacy and investment on the part of the mentor, his or her ethical obligation to render honest and objective evaluations and screen mentees as a gatekeeper for the profession may create relational conflict. Excellent mentors manage this ethical tension, walking the line between advocacy and careful evaluation. It is often helpful for mentors to share these competing professional obligations openly with trainees at the outset of any developmental relationship. Other ethical tensions linked to the stability–change dialectic may include boundaries, multiple relationships, and the salience of ensuring ongoing informed consent discussions as the relationship grows and changes over time.

Expression–Privacy

The final relational dialectic within RDT is that of *expression–privacy*. Over time, as a mentoring relationship moves along the MRC, becoming more emotionally connected, reciprocal, and committed, dyads will face a recurring dilemma between self-disclosure-privacy, openness-closedness, and revelation-concealment at different times and with different intensities (Griffin, 2009). Baxter (1988) framed the relational dialectic of expression–privacy as follows:

> Open disclosure between the relationship parties is a necessary condition of intimacy, but openness creates vulnerabilities that necessitate closedness. This dilemma not only occurs in the private communication between the relationship parties but surfaces as well in the public presentation of the relationship to others. On one hand the parties require privacy or information closedness from others to establish intimacy. On the other hand, the relationship requires public recognition which necessitates information openness. (p. 260)

Although transparency and perceived privacy are necessary qualities for the development of trust, intimacy, and a strong working alliance in mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2012), excessive self-disclosure and openness between mentoring dyad members may increase the risk for ethical tensions, boundary crossings, and negative perceptions or gossip within the local training community.

> Vignette 3. During her second year in a highly selective clinical science doctoral program, a female graduate student pursued an advising relationship—to include dissertation sponsorship—with a highly regarded male faculty member known for both his research excellence, record of getting student research fully funded, and his ability to launch students into faculty positions at top universities. Thrilled when he agreed to serve as her program adviser, the student began spending long hours in his lab, collaborating with him on papers and grants, and developing a working relationship that both seemed to find synergistic and exciting. It soon became apparent that they shared many professional and personal interests. When she shared with him that she felt like an imposter in graduate school at times, he was empathic and normalized her insecurities while offering affirmation that she was capable and competent. When she eventually shared that her marriage was on the rocks and that she was contemplating a separation, her adviser responded with understanding and disclosed that he had gone through a divorce several years earlier. With each progressive disclosure, both members of the mentoring dyad began to feel more connected and committed to the relationship. Though they never discussed it, both had begun to have sexual feelings and even thoughts about a more intimate relationship down the road. It was not until both began to hear from peers that the two seemed to be spending an inordinate amount of time alone together that they realized how their deepening disclosures were making it difficult to abide by professional boundaries.

Ethical tensions related to the expression–privacy relational dialectic are ubiquitous to developmental relationships in training

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programs. We hypothesize that tensions within this dialectic will be most pressing in graduate programs that are of longer duration and involve closer working relationships between trainees and their professors or supervisors. The MRC predicts that developmental relationships of longer duration and those characterized by greater interaction and relational development will move farther along the relational continuum into a space defined by relational mentoring (Johnson, 2014; Ragins, 2012). As a mentorship evolves along the continuum toward greater reciprocity, closeness, and collegiality, increasing levels of self-disclosure help to strengthen a working alliance. In fact, strategic self-disclosure is considered a salient mentoring function (Johnson, 2016; Johnson & Ridley, 2008). Sharing a relevant personal or professional experience can bolster a mentee's confidence, alleviate anxiety, and model professional problem-solving. In the hands of a seasoned and judicious mentor, the technique of self-disclosure may offer poignant life and career lessons while normalizing a mentee's current struggles. Here is the tension: self-disclosure in a mentorship also enhances intimacy. It is incumbent on a mentor to remain aware and thoughtful about how increasing mutuality and friendship in a training relationship, including reciprocal disclosures, might inadvertently diminish the value of the mentorship, particularly if sexual attraction, romantic focus, or boundary crossings enter in.

In Vignette 3, the evolving cross-gender mentorship between two heterosexual adults sharing significant interests and frequent interaction provide the backdrop for dialectical tensions surrounding self-disclosure, intimacy, and feelings of attraction. On one hand, the mentor responds to the mentee's self-revelations with the sort of empathy and care that define excellent mentoring. He might even reveal some of his own struggles as a trainee as a way to bolster this mentoring function. Yet, as their disclosures become increasingly personal and reciprocal, their strong mentorship becomes more vulnerable to multiple roles, blurred boundaries, and eventually, an ethical transgression in a power-unequal relationship; the outcome may be confusing and harmful to the relationship and to both parties involved. In Vignette 3, the mentor might well have been professionally supportive to his mentee when she mentioned her marriage difficulties without crossing a boundary in disclosing his own marital status and relational history.

Here is a final ethical tension provoked by the expression–privacy dialectic: to what extent are mentee disclosures in a training program mentorship private or confidential? Behnke (2014) recently called into question the validity of applying traditional conceptions of confidentiality—best understood in the context of professional-client relationships—to other varieties of relationships such as mentorships. Although mentorships stemming from assigned supervisory relationships may begin with discussions of informed consent—including expectations regarding confidentiality—this is less likely to be true in other training relationships that evolve along the MRC. In these cases, it is often more ethically astute to speak in terms of a mentor's ethical obligation to protect privacy. Privacy is inextricably linked to respect and trust. It helps to foster the sense of safety that allows mentees to share information a mentor requires to address concerns, anxieties, and developmental needs. Although it is nearly always in a mentee's best interests for a mentor to safeguard information shared by the mentee with the assumption of privacy, mentors must balance the principle of privacy with those of honesty and openness. This is most salient and dialectically difficult when a mentee presents with serious problems of professional competence. A mentor's actions should address the mentee's competency problems while continuing to place a high value on the preservation of privacy.

Conclusion

Conceptualized through the Greek origin of *mentor*, we have examined various fiduciary responsibilities that are attached to mentoring relationships. Illustrations of actual scenarios, all driven by complex intersectionality of multicultural elements, describe the rewarding yet challenging nature of mentorship. In the Japanese language, there are clear differences between "a teacher/*sensei*" and "a mentor/*onshi*." Whereas the direct translation of the former implies "those who have lived before us" the latter, a mentor, is translated as "those who give blessings." This distinction bears relevance to professionals in psychology training and education. Being a mentor (giving blessings) implies much more in both nuance and complexity than the traditional role of teacher/instructor/professor/supervisor (*sensei,* those who have lived before us). Giving blessings to mentees involves many specific functions and varieties of support. Many have been outlined in this article. However, it is not enough that mentors are supportive; rather, competence in the mentor role requires appreciation for the relational dialectic tensions that are inherent to mentoring relationships. Maintaining awareness and responsiveness to these tensions will maximize the likelihood that the blessings our mentees may find in our mentoring relationships are developmentally and culturally appropriate and relevant.

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