

How Students Make Sense of Mentorship Experiences During the Transition from High School to College: A Positioning Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship in higher education is widely acknowledged for its positive impact on students. Many institutions have implemented one-on-one guidance systems, such as faculty advising programs and faculty/peer mentorship initiatives. Yet, there remains a gap in understanding how students perceive mentoring, particularly during the transitional period before and early in their time in college. In light of the increasing focus on emerging adulthood within the field of developmental psychology, understanding students' academic development during their transitioning years, particularly the role of mentorship becomes increasingly essential. This qualitative study employs positioning analysis to explore students' evolving sense-making of mentoring relationships during two distinct phases: the final year of high school and the first year of college. This research conducts a comparative analysis to investigate how two students' perceptions of mentorship change during their transition into college and differ from one another. The study aims to illuminate students' sense-making of mentors and mentorship experiences throughout their high school and college transition and explores the unique ways students discuss mentorship as they transition. The findings unveil the contrasting experiences and evolving roles of mentors of each participant through the lens of their lived experiences, providing an insight into students' individual developing conceptions of mentors and mentorship experience. This study offers a nuanced understanding of first-year college students' sense-making activities as they navigate the complexities and academic demands of college. The insights gained from this study not only illuminate how qualitative methods provide yet-to-be-understood processes but also can further contribute to designing mentorship programs in higher education settings tailored to meet students' needs from the moment they step onto campus. As the research landscape continues to evolve, qualitative studies like this contribute to the ever-advancing knowledge and practice of mentorship in higher education, supporting the diverse developmental needs of today's college students.

KEYWORDS: Higher education, meaning-making, mentorship, positioning analysis, process

Research on mentorship in higher education shows that mentoring is beneficial for students in terms of their social, cognitive, and academic development (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). For this reason, many colleges and universities have been providing one-on-one faculty guidance for students (advising systems), and institutions have begun to create peer or faculty mentorship initiatives through diverse programs and activities. Despite the growing sense that mentoring matters for student success, the current understanding and definitions of mentoring differ vastly (Coles, 2011; Jacobi, 1991; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). While previous studies have emphasized the positive impact of mentoring on

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academic outcomes and the importance of students' fostering sustained and meaningful student-faculty relationships (Raposa et al., 2020), there is a need to explore the developmental processes underlying mentorship experiences. This paper will review literature from three key areas: (1) prior research on mentorship in higher education, (2) theoretical frameworks related to developmental processes, and (3) the necessity of considering new methodologies to study mentorship as a developmental process. This will also lead to arguing for the important need to study how mentorship unfolds over time and the ways individual students make meaning of their mentorship experiences during their transition from high school to college.

Prior Research on Mentoring

Recent work in mentorship research for higher education has begun to present and promote academic training programs for clinical, counseling, and health service graduate programs (Mangione et al., 2018; Brown & Sheerin, 2018; Taylor & Neimeyer, 2009). Despite the wealth of research on mentorship and mentoring relationships across various age groups and targeted environments, Jacobi (1991) emphasized persistent challenges related to definitional, theoretical, and methodological deficiencies in mentorship research. More recently, similar claims have been made, including the claim that these deficiencies result in a lack of understanding across fields (Crisp, 2009) and that there is a lack of theoretical guidance and methodological rigor (Law et al., 2021). As the research landscape continues to evolve, it is essential to address these limitations and strive for an understanding of mentorship that can be implemented in diverse educational settings.

As an example, over the course of three decades, higher education mentorship research has broadened and developed such that the definition of mentorship has matched the definition of coaching, which repackages techniques from other disciplines such as counseling and consulting (Passmore et al., 2013). Other work stemming from research in K-12 settings has expanded the notion of mentoring by drawing on Vygotsky's notion of guidance, highlighting the importance of considering the roles of guidance and apprentice through guided instruction and scaffolding processes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Moreover, Roberts (2000) revisited the concepts of mentorship phenomenologically and suggested that "mentoring appears to have the essential attributes of a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process..." and that the contingent attributes of mentoring appear as "coaching, sponsoring, role modeling, assessing, and an informal process" (p. 162). Vast differences exist in how mentorship and mentoring have been understood by distinct researchers over time.

Most work on higher education mentorship has focused on quantitative studies examining causal relationships between mentoring and student outcomes. For instance, Raposa et al.'s study (2020) explores the role of positive mentor and student relationships during college. The study uses a large sample of 5,684 college graduates from the Gallup-Purdue Index, which includes a nationally represented sample of students who graduated from US colleges and universities between the years 2000 and 2015 (Raposa et al., 2020). The study explored various factors that foster or negatively impact the development of positive mentoring relationships, as well as the relationship to student success, by measuring clusters of characteristics, student engagement in extracurricular activities, and institution size. The study concluded that mentors play a crucial role in influencing students' success, facilitating their adjustment to college, and promoting a healthy transition to adulthood. By emphasizing the positive, caring, and meaningful aspects of mentorship, Raposa et al. underscore the significance of fostering strong mentor-student connections for the overall well-being and academic success of college students.

Although prior work on higher education mentorship research has looked causally at how mentoring links to success variables, mentorship has been conceptualized less in terms of

developmental processes and more in terms of research on individual academic outcomes, academic growth, and training, such as making students academically successful, motivated, and engaged with college (Rhodes et al., 2006). In addition, some work has examined the role of fostering and maintaining student-faculty relationships through building personal connections in higher education (Felten & Lambert, 2020). Rhodes et al. (2006) mention that “many questions about what fosters close and enduring mentoring relationships remain unanswered because very little research examined the development of mentoring relationships” (p. 701). Others have presented findings showing that students who have a lack of perception of mentorship and mentoring relationships due to the lack of access, experience, and opportunities also have been found to be less interactive with faculty members and are more likely to a lack of social and academic preparation for college life (Jack, 2019).

Crisp (2009) suggests that further research should examine how different student populations may conceptualize mentoring with the use of qualitative methods to better assess how participants perceived mentoring to understand whether the students perceive mentoring as a single construct or whether they view mentoring as distinct types of support which students did or did not receive. Examining the process and the formation of positive mentor-to-student relationships to provide a healthy transition to adulthood is critical.

Suggested Direction for Higher Education Mentorship Research

Many have argued that the last 25-30 years have been fruitful in drawing attention to culture and cultural differences in behavior and development (i.e., Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Raeff et al., 2020). Gutiérrez & Rogoff (2003) suggest that researchers should view culture as the collective experiences of individuals' and groups' experiences in activities, rather than solely as individual traits. They emphasize the importance of understanding culture as emerging from the lived experiences of people, which are mutually constitutive and shape their cultural context through their engagement in various activities and social interactions. Furthermore, Raeff et al. (2020) express the complexity inherent in defining culture definitely. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the meaning and implications of behavior may vary among individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. Underscoring the dynamic nature of individuals' sense-making over time will contribute to the creation of new cultural meanings. Conceptualizing culture as a meaning-making process whereby people make sense of experiences in terms of shared and debated beliefs, values, and guidelines for behavior (Raeff et al., 2020) is especially important as colleges and universities are putting more emphasis on diversity and inclusion. In this paper, we argue that developmental scientists and psychologists need to emphasize the significance of culture and its meaning-making process in mentorship relations, using methods that elucidate individuals' unique cultural practices.

Developmental theorists have moved away from individual, causal, and mechanistic explanations of human development (Cartesian-split-mechanistic paradigm) and instead focused on the interplay between levels of individual meaning-making and cultural context (Relational-developmental systems paradigm) (Budwig & Alexander, 2021). This shift acknowledges the significant role that culture and meaning-making play in development (Kritt & Budwig, 2022; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Raeff et al., 2020). In line with this perspective, a relational-developmental framework offers valuable insights into the complex meaning-making processes influencing human development (Budwig & Alexander, 2021).

To exemplify how a relational-developmental framework can contribute to developmental inquiry, it is important to consider ways to extend the use of a relational-developmental framework with a process-relational approach (Budwig, 2021). A process-relational paradigm for human development is rooted in the assumption that individuals are active constructors of knowledge through engaged participation with others and embedded within sociocultural practices (Budwig & Alexander, 2021; Kritt & Budwig, 2022). Adopting a

process approach to mentoring allows us to give voice to the meaning students make in and through activities with their mentors as they transition from high school to college.

Mentors can play a crucial role in facilitating students' development of the epistemic understanding necessary for college success. Baxter Magolda (1999) suggests that gathering participants' stories about learning can uncover and connect to students' experiences and their experience of knowing, which can then promote students' various ways and styles of meaning-making. For instance, Baxter Magolda presents a case of two students who enrolled in the same course taught by the same college professor. However, the students adopted different perspectives based on their experiences of the goals and challenges presented by their college professors. Consequently, these students endorsed similar knowledge claims but arrived at them through distinct underlying experiences. Baxter Magolda's work challenges developmental scholars to further deepen their understanding of higher education mentorship by considering the perspective of the recipients—the students (or mentees).

Previous studies like Baxter Magolda's (1999) on mentoring, learning, and student development underscore the importance of future research on the significance of mentoring from the students' standpoint rather than solely from the mentor's perspective. Furthermore, Crisp (2009) emphasizes the need for exploration into the idea that various components of mentoring should be provided by more than one individual. Such investigation can bridge the gap between students' learning experiences and relationships, shedding light on the changes in mentoring practices that align with students' epistemological views of learning.

Methodological Implications

One implication of the review above is that in order to study developmental processes, qualitative methods are critical as they have been found useful in highlighting findings to develop initial understandings in a less explored area (Levitt et al., 2018). Moreover, a prior qualitative study by Arnesson and Albinsson (2017) demonstrated how mentorship can serve as a pedagogical tool to integrate theory and practice at a Swedish University. In this study, mentees emphasize the importance of understanding what mentorship is and how it can contribute to both personal and professional development. One framework that can capture such a meaning-making process is positioning theory (Bamberg, 2020, 2021). Positioning theory can contribute to a deeper understanding of the mentorship process by providing a powerful method to understand students' meaning-making in an interview and highlighting ways students come to understand the changing dynamics of cultural practices in educational institutions.

Discursive approaches highlight how situational and interactional phenomena contribute to meaning-making, examining how experiences change across time and open up possibilities for change (Bamberg & Dege, 2021; La Pointe, 2010). Bamberg's contributions to positioning theory provide a clear methodological process for the analysis of narrative structure and performance and have catalyzed a line of research in studies that address narrative positioning analysis (McVee et al., 2018). Positioning analysis (see Table 1) expands the focus from what is represented in stories in terms of content to the relational function of the use of narratives to achieve a deeper understanding of users' relational context and experiences and provide access to changes in the process of development (Bamberg, 2020). Positioning analysis can (1) allow for inductive (non-hypothesis testing) methodologies, (2) allow subjectivity and experience into research, (3) interrogate the outside perspective and allow a blurred (although reflective) stance on the researcher-researched divide, (4) aim for insights or finding that have "real-life implications," allowing for civic or social engagement of researchers, and (5) take language seriously—as intentional and cultural practices (Bamberg, 2021). Positioning analysis provides a clear methodological process for the analysis of narrative structure and performance (McVee et al., 2018) and can reveal *how* students navigate mentoring relationships across developmental time.

Table 1*Bamberg's Three Level Positioning Analysis (Bamberg, 2020; Bamberg, 2021)*

Level 1	How are the narrator and others positioned in the story? <i>Identity Navigation</i> 1. <i>Sameness vs. Differences</i> 2. <i>Agency vs. Passivity</i> 3. <i>Constancy vs. Change</i>
Level 2	How does the narrator position themselves with respect to the researcher and the audience?
Level 3	How does the narrator position themselves with the broader master narrative?

Positioning analysis expands the focus of narrative in qualitative research from what is represented in stories in terms of content to the relational function of the use of narratives in interpersonal relationships to achieve a deeper understanding of users' relational context and experiences and provide access to changes in processes of development. Prior work on related college populations has shown this to be useful in understanding the transition from college to the workforce (La Pointe, 2010; Wolontis, 2022) and exemplified how positioning analysis can elucidate students' meaning-making in higher education (Lee & Budwig, 2022).

The Current Study

Prior work has highlighted the important role of mentors in the success of college students. The current study augments this existing knowledge by examining how students revise their theories about mentoring through ongoing discourse as they transition from one cultural institution, high school, to another, college. Additionally, while there is a growing focus on process-oriented approaches to human development, it is noteworthy that the study of mentoring in higher education has not yet employed these approaches to explore the distinctive ways in which students position and construct meaning in relation to mentors and their mentorship experiences. By braiding together the three literatures— mentoring in higher education, process approaches to human development, and the significance of individual narratives—the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these transitions by examining how students construct similar or different positionings of self in relation to their mentors and others (e.g., peers) over time. This study has the following aims:

1. Illuminate students' sense-making of mentors and mentorship experiences during their transition from high school to college,
2. Explore how students' meaning-making of mentors and others (such as peers) is a unique process based on the lived experiences of individual students.

The study's first aim will be explored by examining whether students' meaning-making about mentorship and the role mentors play in college differs from their discourse about their experiences in high school. It examines whether and how students revise their notions of mentorship, differentiating what types of support mentors can provide versus what types of support others, like peers, can provide in high school and college. The study's second aim focuses on capturing students' unique perspectives on how to make sense of mentors as they transition into educational spaces.

Instead of generalizing individual behaviors and aggregating across multiple participants (Demuth, 2018), the study's focus is to understand processes of individual development, not looking for an average but for the construction of unique identities through narratives. Furthermore, this study not only highlights the conceptualization of mentorship and hearing students' perspectives but also adopts a new qualitative measure to the field of

mentoring research. The positioning analysis demonstration of the individual construal of meaning-making based on unique experiences will shed light on the ways individual experiences matter to the process of developing learner identities as students transition from high school to college.

Method

Method of Analysis

In the first analysis phase, all transcripts were reviewed for small stories about mentoring. These segments were further examined using Bamberg's (2020, 2021) level-one positioning analysis (see Table 1). Within level one of positioning analysis (Bamberg, 2020, 2021), the three navigation spaces are used for character construal. The first space is sameness vs. differences, where the narrator integrates and differentiates a sense of who they are vis-à-vis others as they take place in moment-by-moment navigations. The second space is agency vs. passivity, where the narrator forms a navigation process between two opposing directions of fit: one coming from world to person, the other from person to world. The third and last space is used in the matter of time—constancy vs. change—when relating from past to present, narrators can highlight the constancy of personas or institutions or contrastively construct them as having undergone change, resulting in a different, new persona or identity. This study focuses on talk excerpts that describe mentoring experiences during high school and mentoring experiences during college, as well as any comparisons participants make about mentoring in high school and college.

Participants

Drawing on prior work that illustrates and employs positioning analysis and small sample sizes to delve into the intricate nuances and complexity of individuals' experiences (i.e. Bamberg, 1997; Barkhuizen, 2009; Wolontis, 2022), we selected two participants. These participants were drawn from a larger national longitudinal study—reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)—that looks at the transition from high school to college, examining students' developing sense of learning and mentorship (Budwig, 2023). For the purpose of this study, two participants ($N=2$), both over the age of 18 during their initial interviews and coming from different educational backgrounds, were chosen to ensure a diverse representation of identities (institutional, gender, domestic vs. international status). Furthermore, the decision to use a small sample of participants enables a close examination of the local contexts and particularities of each participant. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities. The first participant, Jerry, is an international male student who attended a small private high school in Ohio and is currently enrolled at a larger private university in California. The second participant, Marie, is a domestic female student who attended a large public high school in California and is now attending a smaller liberal arts institution in New York. By deliberately selecting Jerry and Marie for their diverse backgrounds and educational trajectories, we aim to illuminate the nuanced dynamics of mentorship across diverse dynamics of mentorship across developmental times as students participate in different institutions (i.e., high school and college) and offer valuable insights into mentorship processes from distinct vantage points, enriching the depth of our study.

Procedure

Ethical considerations guided the collection of interview data in accordance with IRB guidelines. This involved informing participants from the outset about the documentation

process during interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants could refrain from answering any questions. We further informed the participants that the conversations that would emerge from the interviews would be treated with confidentiality. Participants participated in two interviews—one after graduating high school and one after finishing their first semester of college. These interviews were held via Zoom and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The first interview focused on what learning and mentorship were like in high school, what was anticipated for college, and how the students expected the two to compare. The second interview followed up with the first interview and further asked what learning and mentorship have been like in college, how it was retrospectively in high school, and how the two compare. In addition, each participant was asked questions about their insights into high school and college mentors based on their experiences. The interviews were recorded with consent, and transcriptions were completed via Rev.com, a service that provides audio and video transcriptions with 99% accurate text. The transcripts on mentorship were reviewed by the authors for accuracy. Importantly, our study did not encounter any ethical dilemmas, as there were no conflicts of interest, and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage, ensuring their rights and well-being were upheld throughout the research process.

Two Exemplars of Talk about Mentorship During the Transition from High School to College

In the following section, the analysis focuses on how two participants, Jerry and Marie, position themselves as they navigate the three identity dilemmatic spaces— agency vs. passivity, sameness vs. difference, and constancy vs. change— with respect to their mentorship experiences before entering college and after their first semester. In particular, we examine the two participants’ discourse regarding who they talk about as mentors, what each relationship provides the student, and how they position themselves within the context of the three identity dilemmas.

Analysis of Excerpts from Jerry’s Narratives about Mentorship

Wave 1: Positioning of Mentors in High School

Jerry’s High School English Teacher.

Wave 1 | Excerpt 1 (22:51 – 23:22)

001 Jerry When I talked with her [English teacher]
 002 the difference between two different kinds of concepts,
 003 moral objectivism and moral subjectivism
 004 and she was,
 005 actually explained to me for a long time.
 006 Every time when I have trouble with the essays
 007 and I went to see her,
 008 I should show her my outlines
 009 and she modified outlines every time,
 010 feedback and stuff like that
 011 for me.

In this narrative, Jerry indicates that he received strong academic support as he talked “with her” (line 1). In describing his experiences, the play of language has a good mix of Jerry agentively seeking help (line 7) but working collaboratively “with” his English teacher (line 1) to understand what moral objectivism and moral subjectivism are. Jerry reveals that he received strong academic support, where “she (English teacher)” explained “to me” (line 5) and “she (English teacher)” modified outlines “for me [him]” (line 11). In lines 5 and 11, Jerry gradually downgrades his agency and positions his teacher agentively as the English teacher, modifying

his outlines every time and giving him feedback for him. In this excerpt, Jerry positions himself as passive and positions his English teacher as an active agent as he describes his experience of receiving help from his English teacher. Jerry describes his English teacher as someone who helps him scaffold and provides help that is adaptable to his needs (line 9), providing feedback on his outlines (line 10), and being available for extra help sessions without time constraints (line 5). In this story, positioning analysis helps emphasize the role of social interaction in establishing identity construction, as Jerry positions his English teacher as someone who can provide valuable feedback and guidance to help him succeed academically.

Wave 1 | Excerpt 2 (22:03 – 22:26), (22:47 – 22:50)

001 Jerry I actually thought that my English teacher,
 002 She was a really responsible
 003 and care about what student learn
 004 and how they pay attention or not in class.
 005 She was actually care about students
 ((...))
 006 She was actually putting her heart at work.

In lines 1-4, Jerry characterizes his English teacher as caring and responsible, and in lines 1 and 5, Jerry uses the word “actually,” a discourse marker to signal a contrast or emphasis (Oh, 2000). In this story, Jerry positions his English teacher differently from other teachers he had experienced in the past, as the word “actually” further suggests that his English teacher was exceptional in her care and responsibility.

Jerry’s High School College Counselor.

However, Jerry positions his college counselor differently from his English teacher, though both are positive and critical to his success.

Wave 1 | Excerpt 3_ (43:54 – 44:13), (45:49 – 45:53)

001 Jerry She was really caring,
 002 talk to me when I have trouble or a problem,
 003 ask me my problems,
 004 solve,
 005 think about solutions
 ((...))
 006 So she also my advisor in senior year.

In lines 1-5, Jerry positions himself as a recipient (“talk to me,” “ask me”) of the college counselor’s care, therefore, positioning his college counselor as an agent who assisted him. Furthermore, Jerry mentions that the college counselor was his advisor in his senior year, which further emphasizes her constant role as his guiding mentor.

Summary of Jerry’s High School Mentorship Experiences.

Although Jerry selects and positions his English teacher and his college counselor differently when describing the different types of “care” and support he received from them, Jerry generalizes this by sharing constant accounts of his high school experiences as positive and “that all the teachers are really helpful and [they] gave me a lot of suggestions and how to improve and solve my [his] problems” (Wave 1, 19:31 - 19:42). In addition, Jerry describes his relationship and experience with his high school teacher and his college counselor as positive

and helpful, with the English teacher positioned as a mentor who is responsible for their students' learning and passionate about influencing students' holistic identity ("I feel like she was trying to make students better human beings" [Wave 1, 22:38 - 22:45]), and the college counselor positioned as a mentor who is caring on a personal level and supportive when it came to problem-solving ("she had helped me solve these problems very peacefully...she talked to me and then in a bit helping me solve these problem, finalize my assets" [Wave 1, 45:17 - 45:44]).

Wave 2: Positioning of Mentors in College

In Wave 2, Jerry's narrative sheds light on the contrasting accessibility of teachers in high school versus college. This led him to rely more on peer support for problem-solving in college, where he reported that professors were less accessible due to larger class sizes and time conflicts. Jerry positions himself as a more autonomous learner, as he expresses that he is no longer a recipient of a teacher or a mentor's care, highlighting a departure from his previous reliance on mentors for guidance and care. Nonetheless, Jerry recognizes the value of fostering connections with his college professors and teaching assistants. Throughout Jerry's narrative, he positions himself agentively, signaling a shift in his mentorship experiences compared to his high school experiences and underscoring the importance of proactive navigation in the independent college environment. Jerry's talk about college illuminates the necessity of adaptation to thrive in this new academic environment.

Jerry's College Peers (Friends and "Other Students").

Wave 2 | Excerpt 4 (27:42 – 27:49), (34:12 – 34:30)

001 Jerry When I have questions,
 002 I talk to friends
 003 and I try to work out a solution with them
 ((...))
 004 Because in high school,
 005 I got help from friends and teachers, when I have questions.
 006 And in college,
 007 I do the same thing.
 008 I get help from friends in college.
 009 The difference is in college,
 010 I get less help from teachers,
 010 and more help from friends.

In this narrative, Jerry positions himself as an active agent, frequently using the pronoun "I." In particular, in lines 2, 3, 5, and 8, Jerry seeks help ("I talk to friends," "I try to work out a solution," "I get help from friends"), whereas in high school, he was on the receiving end ("she talked to me when I have a trouble or a problem"). In line 7, Jerry highlights that help looks the "same" as it does in college but identifies his source of help differently in high school, he "got help" from friends and teachers, but he "get(s) help from friends in college"). However, Jerry also highlights a change by mentioning that he "get(s) less help from teachers, and more help from friends" (lines 10-11). In lines 8 and 11, Jerry highlights that in college, his main source of help is his peers and that he relies on his friends for help rather than solely seeking out teachers or professors. Therefore, he positions his friends as a valuable resource when working out solutions to questions he may have in college.

Wave 2 | Excerpt 5 (27:50 – 28:00), (34:44 – 35:38)

001 Jerry But like, I barely go to the office hours in the first semester,

002 because I usually think it's more convenient to talk to other students
 about things
 ((...))
 003 Because in college,
 004 the teachers have office hours.
 005 I have to always go.
 006 I have to travel a small distance to go there.
 007 In high school,
 008 every day after school,
 009 there's extra help session.
 010 There's a certain time that I can ask questions to teachers.
 011 So, I think it's more convenient.
 012 The teachers aren't more accessible in college,
 013 so I have to arrange my schedule.
 014 For example, I have classes at this time,
 015 but I can't go to the office hour.
 016 And also, after class,
 017 the teachers,
 018 they always have things to do
 019 and there's a lot of students lining up by this.
 020 I have to solve the problem later,
 021 so I just reach out to my friends.
 022 It's a more convenient way to solve a problem.

In line 2, Jerry inserts “usually” but leaves the potential to give the audience and himself the space to hold other actions and opinions. In lines 3-6, Jerry constantly uses “I have to...” explaining his “usual” thoughts about why talking to other students about things is more convenient. In lines 7-13, Jerry experiences some discontinuity— a change— in terms of the accessibility of teachers in college compared to his high school experiences, in which he had to adjust his behaviors accordingly. Jerry highlights the differences between high school and college regarding the level of guidance, availability, and student support. In line 19, Jerry positions himself differently from other students (“a lot of students”) who choose to attend office hours and line up after class and instead seek help from his peers (line 21), who are also referred to as “other students” mentioned in line 2. Jerry suggests that college teachers are less accessible due to their schedules and the number of students who need the professor’s help and attention. This suggests that Jerry may be experiencing some tension between his previous identity as someone who received and sought help from teachers and his current identity as someone who relies more on peer support. This identity shift from high school to college is also prevalent when Jerry positions himself as an active agent who takes control of his learning process and finds alternative ways to solve problems.

Summary of Jerry’s College Mentorship Experiences.

Wave 2 / Excerpt 6 (39:03) – (39:34)

001 Jerry Because in college,
 002 it's a more independent thing.
 003 I have to arrange my schedule.
 004 Classes are at different times,
 005 not like fixed in high school.
 006 I have to figure out...
 007 I have to do exercise at what time, every day.
 008 I didn't have to do other things.

009 I have to arrange my time efficiently to successfully finish every task every day.

With Jerry's use of "I" pronouns, consistent with his small stories within his college narrative, he positions himself agentively ("I have to figure out," "I have to do exercise," "I have to arrange my time") and describes his college experience to be a "more independent thing" (line 2). In lines 4 and 5, Jerry also positions himself as navigating a shift from a more fixed, predictable schedule in high school to a more flexible and dynamic one in college, indicating a change he had to adjust when transitioning from high school to college. Jerry positions high school as a more structured environment, where classes are fixed, and there is less need for independent and autonomous learning. However, in college, Jerry positions himself as a more autonomous learner, recognizing the differences between high school and college (line 5) and navigating the changes independently (line 2) required to succeed in the college environment (line 9). This implies that Jerry views college as an environment that requires students to be more self-directed and self-motivated, which are qualities that he practices, moving away from external help, guidance, and structure that mentors can provide. Throughout his college narrative, Jerry notes that he needs to take active control of his time and manage his schedule by arranging his schedule efficiently and completing tasks rather than depending on mentors (line 6).

A Comparative Analysis of Jerry's Talk About High School and College Mentoring Relationships

Jerry's narratives in high school and college show a shift in his talk about the mentor-mentee relationship during high school and after one semester of college. In particular, he suggests that during high school, teachers played the role of mentors, but in college, others, such as peers, took over this role. Jerry also notes a change in the type of help he received from high school teachers versus peers in college. Unlike his high school experience, where he describes building close relationships with high school teachers, learning academically, and growing personally as a recipient of his high school teacher and college counselor's guidance, Jerry's college experiences were described as more goal- and task-driven. In this context, Jerry positions his peers as playing a supportive role by providing solutions for problems he himself has identified as needing solving.

Moreover, although Jerry describes himself as becoming more academically autonomous in college, he discusses how he goes to his peers for convenience when he has questions about "things." Jerry's discussion of his experiences shows that problem-solving is a common area where he believes he received help in both high school and college, but who he received help from and what type of problems he had are something he describes as different. In high school, he identified receiving help academically and personally, but in college, Jerry generalized his problems to "things." Jerry mentions that students in college are more responsible for themselves and mentions less about adult mentor guidance compared to high school, where he notes a culture of close relationships with adult mentors like his English teacher and college counselor.

Furthermore, Jerry views his college professors as "teachers" and deliberates the potential roles they can play in college, such as providing help during office hours, and he considers their role alongside that of Teaching Assistants (TAs).

But I felt for this semester, I probably have to go to the office hours more because I want to form a more connection with teachers and professors. I also have TAs. Yeah. I feel like I did pretty good, but I think I should have to interact more with the teachers (Wave 2, 28:02 – 28:24).

Jerry’s desire to form connections with teachers and professors and to interact with them more to improve his learning experience suggests that he may be considering alternative approaches to learning and seeking help in college. Jerry recognizes the importance of interacting with adult mentors in a close-knit setting (office hours) to improve his understanding of course content. He also feels that he bears some responsibility for forming these connections. Note, for instance, that he places the responsibility for fostering those connections with himself (I should have to interact more with the teachers) rather than something like “they should interact more with me”).

The analysis of Jerry’s narratives shows that Jerry talks about mentorship as playing an essential and active role in the success of Jerry’s college experience. Jerry’s small stories on mentorship and learning suggest that he is considering ways students need to adapt to the more independent environment of college and find what works best for them during their first year of college. Additionally, Jerry’s narrative shows that he is considering that there are different approaches to learning and seeking help in college and that, as a student, he may need to take the initiative to seek out resources that will improve their learning experience.

Analysis of Excerpts from Marie’s Narratives about Mentorship

We turn next to consider how Marie positions herself and mentors in high school and then college.

Wave 1: Positioning of Mentors in High School

Marie’s High School English Teacher.

Wave 1 | Excerpt 7 (45:15 – 45:40), (44:43 – 45:02)

- 001 Marie I feel like in my English class,
- 002 my teacher would give us a lot of articles about current events and stuff like that
- 003 that she knew that we were talking about.
- 004 And also, when the Texas abortion ban first came out,
- 005 that’s when we read the Handmaid’s Tale.
- 006 And so kind of relating things that are prevalent in our lives to the material that we’re discussing in class,
- 007 I feel like it makes it a lot more interesting
- ((...))
- 008 I feel like, again, the teacher is discussing with the students
- 009 and giving a variety of information to the students
- 010 so that there’s something that everybody’s interested in.
- 011 And also allowing the students to discuss and ask questions
- 012 and then have their questions answered.

In lines 2 and 3, Marie positions her teacher as one who actively engages with the students in class (“my teacher would give us,” “she knew that we were talking about”). In line 8, Marie positions herself passively and similarly to her peers (“teacher is discussing with the students”) in the English class by categorizing herself and her peers with the collective noun “students.” Marie notes that her English teacher is discussing with “the students” (line 8) and giving a variety of information (line 9), suggesting that the teacher is taking an active role in facilitating learning. Although much of Marie’s story is oriented towards learning, she indicates the value she places on the teacher’s ability to select (line 5) and present materials (line 9) that are relevant to current events. Marie expresses that she sees this as an effective way to engage students, including her, in the material (line 7). Marie positions her English teacher as someone who creates a space where everyone’s interests and questions are respected and addressed by

“allowing the students to discuss and ask questions.” In this excerpt, Marie sees her English teacher as knowledgeable and supportive in a classroom environment and values the opportunities for discussion and engagement in the classroom.

Marie’s High School Environmental Science Teacher.

When Marie identifies how helpful mentors in high school are, she points out that “one was an English teacher, and one was an environmental science teacher.” Marie further mentioned that “both of them were able to do that, but none of my other teachers were able to do that.” For context, “that” referred to a particular experience Marie had with her environmental science teacher shared in the excerpt below.

Wave 1 / Excerpt 8 (11:16 – 11:33), (11:42 – 11:59), (12:08 – 12:14)

001 Marie My environmental science teacher, she spent a long time one day just
discussing.
002 So, I went on a research trip to Colorado,
003 and so she spent a lot of time discussing that experience with me
004 and then how that related to some of the stuff that we were talking about
in class

((...))
005 We spent probably a half hour after class.
006 It was during COVID,
007 so it was on Zoom,
008 but just engaging in the discussion about that.
009 And that really made me more interested in learning about watersheds
010 and the impacts that water has on the environment and on humans

((...))
011 But then I was able to pull that into the class,
012 and then she was really excited to engage
013 and talk with me about that.

Similarly, and constantly with her small story about her experience with her English teacher in high school, in lines 1, 3, 4, and 12, Marie positions her environmental science teacher as an agent, showing the teacher’s active involvement, and in lines 8 and 9, Marie positions her and her peers as passive, until Marie positions herself as an agent in line 11, when she began to share her knowledge in class. Marie positions her environmental science teacher as someone who is effective at engaging students (line 8) and helping them develop a deeper understanding of the material for application (lines 9-13). Marie also emphasizes the impact that the discussion had on her own learning, indicating that it made her more interested in the topic (“that really made me more interested in learning about...”) and helped her connect it to real-world issues (“impacts that water has on the environment and on humans”). While sharing this experience with her environmental science teacher, Marie positions herself as someone who is interested in learning and eager to share her newfound knowledge with the class (“able to pull that into the class”).

Furthermore, Marie notes that despite that this particular experience happened over Zoom during COVID-19, it was a memorable and helpful experience for her (lines 7-8). Marie discusses how her environmental science teacher was willing to engage with her on a personal level (line 3), discussing her research trip (“with me”) and connecting it to class topics (“how that related to some of the stuff...”). This positions her environmental science teacher as someone who is interested in her students’ experiences and wants to help them make connections between their personal experiences and materials being taught in class. Marie also

points out that her environmental science teacher was someone who is willing to spend time outside of the classroom (line 5) discussing on and beyond course materials and willing to adapt to the current circumstances of the pandemic and engaging in discussions via Zoom.

However, these two experiences particularly stood out in her recollection, as Marie deemed that most teachers in her high school did not demonstrate such proactive engagement and care for their students.

Marie’s Other High School Teachers (“Most of them”).

Wave 1 / Excerpt 9 (8:58 – 9:21), (16:08 – 16:25)

001 Marie I feel like definitely some of my teachers who were willing to talk to me
 002 and answer a lot of my questions were definitely influential.
 003 And teachers that were willing to stay after class and talk with me.
 004 And even if they didn’t know the answer,
 005 then they would either point me in the direction of where I could find the
 answer,
 006 or they would get back to me on it.
 ((...))
 007 Most of them didn’t really care if we got off task.
 008 Or if they did at the beginning of the year,
 009 by the end of the year,
 010 I don’t think that they cared as much,
 011 because also, the classes were 30 to 35 kids.
 012 And so I think at some points,
 013 it was hard to try and manage.
 014 and make sure every single kid was on task.

In line 1, Marie chooses to use the word “some” to describe the very few teachers who were willing to help by “willing to talk to me and answer a lot of my questions,” “willing to stay after class and talk with me,” “point me in the direction of where I could find the answer” or “get back to me on it” (lines 1-6). As Marie notes in her two experiences, the environmental science teacher was more similar and constant to her immediate needs by meeting all three expectations that she describes. On the other hand, Marie’s English teacher was also “willing to talk to me and answer a lot of my questions” (line 1) but in Marie’s small story, there were no signs of the English teacher spending time outside of the classroom, which positions her English teacher differently from her environmental science teacher. However, for both her English teacher and environmental science teacher, the class size did not seem to cause any issues in their students’ learning. In this small story, Marie categorizes “most of them [teachers]” as similar, with a collective pronoun (“them”), and expresses that they show short-term care (lines 8-11) in students’ learning due to the difficulty of making sure that “every single kid was on task” (lines 13-14).

Summary of Marie’s High School Mentorship Experiences.

Marie talks about her English teacher and environmental science teacher as helpful but in different ways. Marie positions her English teacher as helpful in academic settings by incorporating relevant materials outside of course content and creating an engaging classroom dynamic through small and large group discussions. In contrast, Marie positions her environmental science teacher as helpful on a personalized level, sparking Marie’s interest in environmental sciences outside of course materials by discussing together beyond class time and scaffolding Marie to apply her research experiences from summer into the discussions taking place in class. Outside of these two experiences, Marie reveals that most of the teachers

were either not caring as much, or caring long enough, but makes sense of this in light of the bigger class size, which she suggests may play a role in building lasting and caring connections with potential mentors.

Wave 2: Positioning of Mentors in College

In contrast to her high school experiences where most teachers did not care, Marie generally expressed positive experiences with her college professors, with one negative experience with a professor. Marie discusses that the reason why she's been doing well in college is because she is at a liberal arts school, where "everybody wants you to succeed and there's just so many resources that you can take advantage of" (Wave 2, 13:09 - 13:15).

Marie's College Professors.

Wave 2 | Excerpt 10 (9:33 – 10:00)

001 Marie I really like the fact that the classes are smaller
002 and that if I want to go to a professor's office hours,
003 they're super, super accessible.
004 I spent quite a bit of time in office hours last semester,
005 not only just trying to get help on the content,
006 but just engaging with my professors which was really cool,
007 and learning about their research and what they're interested in.
008 I really, really enjoyed that.

Marie's description of her college experience differs from her high school experiences in terms of her active participation in her education experiences. One aspect that she particularly enjoys is the accessibility and approachability of her professors. In line with this, Marie positions herself as an agent with the frequent use of "I" statements, rather than describing the world coming to her, which provides an empowered sense of her taking an active role in her education. In college, Marie discusses how she is actively seeking out and participating in office hours (lines 2-4) and engaging with professors on a personal level (lines 6-7). In line 7, Marie positions her professors collectively with the pronoun "they" and noun "professors" while also positioning them as accessible (line 3), approachable (line 2), with the ability to provide both academic help and personal engagement with students (lines 6-7). In line 1, Marie also highlights the benefit of smaller class sizes by sharing her positive experience of engaging with her professors beyond just seeking help on the course content and learning more about her professors' research interests (line 7).

Marie's College Education Professor.

When Marie gives a specific example of help, she received from a professor and visiting their office hours, Marie recalls an encounter she had with her education professor.

Wave 2 | Excerpt 11 (27:09 – 27:38)

001 Marie I had already interviewed my person,
002 and so, I just floated a few ideas about ways that I could format it,
003 and he was like, "You can do it. You're on the right track. You just have
to spend a little bit more time thinking about it,"
004 but he basically gave the go ahead to the paper that I was doing,
005 and he was able to give me ideas for three body paragraphs,
006 but it was ideas that I already had.
007 He just made it more concise in how I should organize it.

In this small story, Marie positions herself as a passive agent, both seeking and receiving guidance and feedback (“he was able to give me ideas”), while the teacher is positioned as someone who provides suggestions for how she could organize her paper (“he just made it more concise in how I should organize it”). Though Marie defers to her teacher’s advice and experience, it can’t go unnoticed that Marie took an active role in visiting the professor’s office hours and initiating the conversation with her teacher and proposing the paper. In line 3, Marie expresses a power dynamic, positioning her professor as an authority figure who has the power to approve or disapprove of her work (line 4). In lines 5-7, Marie positions herself differently from her professor, with the teacher having more knowledge and expertise. In this narrative, Marie positions herself as a student looking for guidance and approval from her teacher. However, Marie and her professor are shown to share a common goal of producing a successful paper but have different roles in achieving that goal (lines 4-6). Through this story, Marie makes sense of a new way to navigate the student-teacher dynamic in a college setting.

Marie’s College Religion Professor.

During the interview, Marie expresses her challenges of attending college, one of which occurred in her experience of taking a religion class and proactively asking the professor for help. Marie shares that she struggled with three big papers, which her grades were comprised of, and she had “never written a paper over two pages” and “all of a sudden, I had to write an eight-page research paper” (Wave 2, 10:10 – 10:20).

Wave 2 / Excerpt 12 (28:12 – 29:07)

001 Marie I spent one day,
002 I spent an hour in his office hours,
003 and I basically told him the same thing.
004 I was like, “I am so overwhelmed and so lost because I’ve never written
a paper remotely close to this,”
005 and he just was like, “Think about what you’re interested in,”
006 and I would throw an idea out
007 and he’d be like, “Not exactly,”
008 and he just said no to a lot of things,
009 but didn’t really propose an alternate or a solution to the ideas that I was
throwing out
010 We had to write three papers for that class,
011 and that happened with the first and the second paper, and then the third
paper,
012 I threw some ideas out,
013 but then I ultimately just went ahead with one of the ideas that I was
interested in,
014 and I still did well on the paper.
015 He was a little bit frustrating to work with
016 because he would just shoot down a lot of ideas,
017 but he wouldn’t offer solutions or help me organize my thoughts.

Marie’s interaction with her religion professor during office hours reveals that office hours are solely not enough support, as the professor shoots down Marie’s ideas during her visits to his office hours. The religion professor is positioned as someone who does not offer solutions or guidance that Marie needs, positioning the professor as unhelpful in navigating the demands of her college-level writing experiences. By seeking out her professor during office hours (lines 1-2), Marie positions herself as someone who is proactive in seeking help and

willing to work through her challenges (“I spent one day, I spent an hour,” “I basically told him,” “I would throw an idea,” “I ultimately just went ahead”). The use of “I” pronouns in this small story positions Marie as an active agent who takes responsibility for seeking help and attempting to come up with ideas. In lines 6-9, Marie emphasizes the lack of cooperation and communication between her and her professor by the repetition of “he wouldn’t” and “he just said no” which creates a sense of frustration and powerlessness on the part of Marie. In line 13, Marie also positions herself differently from her professor by expressing that she gave the paper a go with the ideas she (“I”) was interested in. In lines 7-8, the professor’s rejection of Marie’s ideas positions her and her professor as different in terms of their perspectives. This is evident in Marie’s attempt to find common ground with her professor by expressing her interest in the topic of the paper (line 9). Marie expresses that she felt feeling overwhelmed and lost in writing a paper that is very different from what she had experienced in high school—mentors giving directions to her inquiry (line 4).

Summary of Marie’s College Mentorship Experiences.

In excerpt 12, Marie positions her professor for her religion class differently from her education professor (excerpt 11), as the religion professor is portrayed as someone who is not particularly helpful in providing solutions or guidance, but rather is quick to shoot down ideas that the student proposes. Marie’s struggle to adapt to the new demands of college-level writing required a different approach than the prompts she received in high school. Marie does not seem to feel particularly supported or guided by the religion professor, but rather reported finding her own way in navigating the writing assignment.

In Wave 2, Marie discusses her experiences in college as particularly positive when interacting with her professors and the abundance of resources available to her. Marie’s level one positioning of her adult mentor figures creates a dynamic that allows her to learn and grow from her mentor’s guidance and feedback. When Marie’s narratives highlight the importance of teachers in navigating academic challenges, she further reinforces her own needs in mentorship experiences.

A Comparative Analysis of Marie’s Talk About High School and College Mentoring Relationships

Marie attended a large public high school in Northern California with approximately 460 graduating students in her class. Marie describes her high school experience as “figuring out what each teacher wanted from a class, rather than learning the materials... it was just more like in order to get a good grade.” However, when identifying helpful experiences with a mentor, Marie identifies her English teacher and environmental science teacher. The type of influence that her English teacher and environmental science teacher had on Marie looked differently, with her English teacher sparking interest in her learning and her environmental science teacher being available to discuss with her topics beyond course materials.

During high school, Marie reported mixed experiences with mentorship, as only a handful of teachers offered her the support and guidance she required. Marie found that teachers who were willing to talk to her, answer her questions, and provide external help beyond the classroom setting were most helpful. These types of practices were influential in her high school mentorship experiences and shaped her expectations of what mentorship should look like.

In college, Marie’s experiences with mentorship were abundant and generally positive, with one challenging experience with her religion professor. She found that her college professors were accessible and willing to provide guidance and feedback during office hours, which was critical in her academic development. Marie’s description of positive experiences with college mentors, in comparison to her more negative overall appraisal of high school,

suggests that mentorship can undergo development and evolve during the transition from high school to college. Nonetheless, Marie's reports of a frustrating experience with a religion professor illustrates how an adult authority who is perceived as not supportive or fails to provide her adequate guidance can leave students feeling unsupported and grappling with challenges to navigate the demands of college-level coursework. This suggests that not all teachers can be identified or labeled as mentors, and students like Marie might be actively seeking academic mentorship to revise her conceptions of learning through inspiration and assistance. Marie's experiences highlighted the importance of quality mentorship in academic and personal development, as well as the impact it can have on a student's transition to college.

Examining Unique Understandings of Mentorship During the Transition from High School to College

Having examined the narratives of two students before and after their first semester of college, we will now analyze the unique process through which students like Jerry and Marie construct meaning in relation to their mentors and others based on their lived experiences. The narratives shared by these two participants underscore the unique developmental pathways of mentorship for each individual. Students position themselves as having different experiences with mentorship across high school and college, with variations in the types of teachers, peers, or mentors they encountered and the forms of assistance they received at these two distinct time points.

Jerry found that in high school, teachers played an active role in providing mentorship, where their support was accessible and directly aimed at aiding his academic progress. However, as he transitioned into college, Jerry's reliance shifted towards his peers for problem-solving and support, indicating a significant change in his perception of who can serve as mentors and the nature of mentorship. This evolution in Jerry's mentorship experience highlights the increasing importance of peer interactions and the development of agency as he adapts to the college environment.

Conversely, Marie's experiences with mentorship in high school and college reveal a different trajectory. In high school, she identified only a few teachers who were able to provide meaningful academic help and personal support. Her narrative highlights a sense of limited engagement with most high school teachers, contrasting sharply with her college experience, where she found her professors more involved and influential in advancing her academic and personal interests. Marie's narrative suggests that how mentors show long-term care can have a significant impact on learning experiences.

Additionally, both Jerry and Marie emphasized the importance of quality mentorship in academic and personal development. They recognized the impact that mentors could have on their success in college and the importance of seeking out supportive and accessible mentors. However, their unique positions revealed how they differently identify and engage with mentors over time. Jerry's narrative underscores the importance of having a mentor who provides valuable academic and personal guidance, whereas Marie's experiences suggest that long-term care, time spent with, and consistent support from mentors significantly enhance her learning experience.

These varied experiences demonstrate that the developmental process of mentorship is a unique and personalized journey for each student, influenced by the individuals and institutional settings they encounter and the type of support they receive at different educational stages. The positioning analysis of Jerry and Marie's narratives underscores the pivotal role of mentorship in guiding students through a successful transition to college and facilitating their academic advancement. The findings also reveal how mentorship experiences differ among individuals and institutions, highlighting the diversity in students' navigational pathways during the transitioning period. As students navigate and adapt to the distinctive culture of their

learning environment, recognizing the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each student's developmental process and tailoring their approach accordingly is paramount. These insights underscore the necessity for institutions, mentorship programs, and policy makers to be flexible and responsive to the evolving needs and perspectives of students at each stage of their educational journey.

Discussion

While prior mentorship research has long been associated with academic success (Rhodes et al., 2006), sustaining meaningful and close mentorship relationships (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Raposa et al., 2020), and exploring what mentorship is conceptually and operationally (Jacobi, 1999; Roberts, 2000), this study goes beyond linking mentorship as a variable, and opens up inquiry into the unique developmental processes involved in what mentorship means to students as they transition from high school to college. Furthermore, this study presents the nuanced and evolving nature of mentorship experiences for individual students over developmental time by illuminating students' sense-making of mentors and mentorship experiences during the transition from high school to college and exploring the unique developmental processes of mentorship through the lived experiences of individual students. This process required a qualitative methodology, specifically positioning analysis, which has been previously employed to comprehend students' meaning making of their learner identity within learning environments during the transition from high school to college (Budwig et al., 2023). However, it has not yet been applied to uncover students' evolving sense-making of mentors and mentorship experiences.

The findings of our first aim show that the narratives of Jerry and Marie provide valuable insights into students' evolving perspectives on mentors and mentorship. Jerry's narrative reveals that education is viewed as a pathway to success and personal development, with seeking help from mentors being a key component of that journey. Notably, Jerry highlights the contrasting accessibility of teachers in high school versus college, emphasizing the personalized and accessible support available in high school compared to the increased responsibility for learning and need for independent resource-seeking in college. Jerry's notion of mentorship undergoes a transformation from high school to college, as he distinguishes between the support provided by his high school teachers and his college professors and peers, and transitions from adult mentors to peer mentors. This shift from high school to college is evident as Jerry increasingly positions himself as an active agent in his learning process, seeking alternative ways, such as peers, to solve problems and seek help.

Similarly, Marie's narratives offer insights into her distinct experiences with adult mentors in high school and college. In high school, she highlights two specific teachers, her English and environmental science teacher, who played instrumental roles in her academic journey. Marie positions her English teacher as someone who engaged the class through relevant materials and discussions, while her environmental science teacher provided personal support by discussing topics beyond class time and helping her apply her experiences to class discussions. However, Marie emphasizes that these experiences were not typical of her other experiences with teachers, noting that most teachers in her high school did not demonstrate the same level of care. In contrast, Marie generally expresses positive experiences with her professors in college and appreciates the resources available to support her learning. Marie highlights the importance of access to resources and support systems for academic success.

Taken together, the findings of the second aim shed light on the unique and evolving nature of the developmental processes of mentorship across individual students during the transition from high school to college. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of students' different styles and ways of meaning making of mentors and mentorship experiences, going beyond knowing that mentorship is important to examining the "why." Such analyses

can inform the improvement of adult and peer mentorship programs, enhancing support and guidance for students during this critical phase. Both students believe mentors are critical, but what that means to them individually differs in light of both their past experiences and the culture of learning of the institutions of which they are a part.

While our study provides valuable insights into the developmental processes of mentorship during the transition from high school to college, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and their impact on the study's contributions. First, our research challenges existing paradigms by adopting a process-oriented approach to studying mentorship, which unveils the evolving meaning of mentorship over time. However, as prior mentorship work has predominantly focused on individual sense-making processes at one time point, rather than the approach we have utilized that has examined the evolving perspective on mentorship individuals have in the high school to college transition, we caution against broad generalizations. Instead, our findings give voice to the nuanced experiences of students as they navigate this critical transition period, emphasizing the significance of local contexts and individual sense-making in early college experiences (LaPointe, 2010; Wolontis, 2022).

Additionally, as the first study of its kind to apply positioning analysis to investigate mentorship dynamics and experiences, our research is limited to examining only two time points in participants' trajectories. While this approach provides valuable insights into the early stages of the high school to college transition, future research could benefit significantly from a longitudinal approach. Longitudinal studies would enable researchers to capture the evolving nature of mentorship experiences over an extended period, offering deeper insights into how mentorship dynamics unfold throughout students' entire college journeys. By incorporating multiple time points, researchers can explore how mentorship relationships develop and adapt in response to evolving academic, social, and personal challenges faced by students over time.

Furthermore, our study's focus on a small sample size and specific institutional context may limit the generalizability of our findings. Positioning analysis, while excellent for highlighting the nuances of individuals' sense making of a common experience, is not without limitations. Future research should aim to replicate and expand upon our findings with larger and more diverse samples to explore variations in mentorship dynamics across various demographic groups, academic disciplines, and institutional contexts. Specifically, future research could explore alternative methodological approaches to complement positioning analysis, such as mixed-methods designs that integrate quantitative measures of mentorship outcomes with qualitative insights into relational dynamics. Moreover, comparative studies across different stages of educational transitions (e.g., middle school to high school, college to workforce) could provide a broader understanding of mentorship's role in fostering academic and personal development across diverse educational contexts.

Despite these limitations, our study lays a foundation for future research endeavors by highlighting the complexities of mentorship dynamics during the high school to college transition. Further research can build upon our findings and address the identified limitations. By critically examining these limitations and proposing avenues for future research, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on mentorship and inform the development of more effective mentorship programs in educational settings. By doing so, we can enhance our understanding of mentorship dynamics and contribute to the enhancement of educational practices aimed at supporting students' transition from high school to college.

As we look ahead, it is important to consider the implications of our findings in shaping educational policy and practice, particularly in the context of designing and refining mentorship programs. Theoretical frameworks play a crucial role in designing mentor training and evaluating the mentoring process. Notably, a prevalent challenge encountered by mentoring program initiatives is the lack of a clear theoretical framework delineating how the program will influence the mentee (Colley, 2003). Kritt and Budwig (2022) highlight that practitioners have adhered to a stagnant model that fails to recognize learners as active constructors of

knowledge through their participation in culturally mediated activities with others. The theoretical grounding of this study underscores the importance of qualitatively studying mentorship with a process-oriented and constructivist approach, enabling a comprehensive understanding of students' meaning-making about mentorship over developmental time.

Our research highlights several critical areas where mentorship practices can be enhanced to better support students during their transition from high school to college. First, the narratives of Jerry and Marie underscore the importance of understanding how students' perspectives on mentorship evolve as they transition from high school to college. For instance, Jerry's shift from relying on high school teachers to seeking support from college peers and professors highlights the need for mentorship programs to be adaptable and responsive to students' changing needs. Mentorship training should emphasize the development of skills to support students at different stages of their educational journey, recognizing the distinct forms of mentorship (adult vs. peer) that may become more or less relevant over time. While individuals may differ in the specifics, mentorship interventions should be designed to help students unpack their evolving conceptions of mentorship and enhance their capacity to be open to alternatives as they proceed.

Marie's experiences with specific high school and college mentors, contrasted with her less engaging interactions with other teachers, underscore the value of personalized mentorship approaches. While programs should aim to facilitate meaningful connections between mentors and mentees by fostering environments where mentors are trained to provide support tailored to the unique academic and personal development needs of each student, this approach must also be scalable. Creating mentorship frameworks that allow for flexible mentor-mentee matching based on students' evolving needs is ideal but may be challenging to implement on a larger scale. To address this, mentorship training can focus on helping mentors reflect on their own views of mentorship and communicate their expectations clearly to mentees. Recognizing that students' perceptions and needs evolve over time, training should include active and adaptive communication techniques, enabling mentors to engage in regular check-ins and feedback loops. This approach reduces the burden on mentors to tailor support individually while still providing scalable and sustainable support for students' development, learning, and overall experience in higher education.

Moreover, both Jerry and Marie highlighted the importance of access to resources and support systems in their academic success. Mentorship programs should ensure that students are well-informed about the resources available to them and how to effectively utilize these resources. Policies could advocate for the integration of resource navigation training within mentorship programs, equipping mentors to guide students in accessing and leveraging institutional support services effectively.

Our findings also suggest that mentorship cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, programs should adopt dynamic models that cater to the diverse experiences and needs of students. For example, Jerry's transition from adult mentors to peer mentors suggests a need for mentorship programs that facilitate peer-to-peer support as well as traditional mentor-mentee relationships. This could be particularly beneficial in fostering a sense of community and shared learning among students.

Furthermore, the unique developmental processes highlighted in our study emphasize the importance of a longitudinal approach to mentorship. Educational policies should support the establishment of mentorship programs that track and adapt to students' needs over time, from high school through their entire college journey. This would allow for ongoing assessment and adjustment of mentorship strategies to better align with students' developmental stages and changing contexts.

At the policy level, our findings can inform the creation of guidelines and standards for mentorship programs within educational institutions. Policies could mandate the inclusion of mentorship components in college readiness programs and advocate for institutional support

structures that facilitate continuous mentorship throughout a student's educational journey. This could involve policy recommendations for funding, training, and resources dedicated to developing robust mentorship frameworks that are integrated into the broader educational mission of institutions. The use of positioning analysis in our study provides valuable insights into the complexities of mentorship dynamics. Educational policies could support the adoption of such qualitative methodologies in evaluating and refining mentorship programs. By analyzing how mentors and mentees position themselves and each other within the mentorship relationship, institutions can gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of their programs and make informed adjustments to better meet students' needs.

In conclusion, our study not only contributes to the ongoing discourse on mentorship by emphasizing the process-oriented and individualistic nature of mentorship experiences but also provides actionable insights for designing more effective mentorship programs. By recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students and adopting flexible, context-sensitive approaches, educational institutions can enhance the support provided to students during their critical transition from high school to college. Our research lays the groundwork for tailored mentorship training and programming aimed at better supporting students in higher education, focusing on issues central to their sense-making processes during this crucial transition period.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge seed funding provided by the Hiatt Center for Urban Education, Clark University for supporting the initial phases of the broader project. We also thank Dr. Michael Bamberg and members of the Higher Education Research (HER) group at Clark University for feedback and discussions of versions of this manuscript.

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Notes on Contributors

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Dr. Nancy Budwig is Professor of Psychology at Clark University in Worcester, MA. She also has served as Associate Provost at Clark University where she integrated her knowledge of developmental and learning science into undergraduate curricular reform. From 2016-2020, Nancy Budwig also served as a Senior Fellow at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). She is a past-President of the Jean Piaget Society for the Study of Knowledge and Development and currently serves as the society's publication editor, as a consulting editor to Karger's journal *Human Development*.

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Appendix

Transcription notation

Each line in the excerpts from the narrative interviews was meticulously numbered in order to facilitate specific point referencing during the analysis. The Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem (GAT) transcription notation (Selting et al., 1998), a discourse and conversation-analytic transcription system, was utilized while transcribing these excerpts from the narrative interviews shared in this manuscript.

The GAT transcript symbol ((...)) was employed when specific portions of the conversation were omitted. These omissions were made when the discussed topic was not pertinent to the subject of mentorship experiences, ensuring a streamlined focus on the relevant content. Furthermore, other transcript symbols from both the GAT 1 and 2 transcription notation were omitted as they were not referenced or utilized in the analysis of these excerpts.