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Academic Work-Life Spillover: Mentoring Predicts Hedonic and Eudaimonic Wellbeing

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Mentors are often praised for shaping lives– but rarely are they asked how the role reshapes their own. This research addresses that gap by examining how retired academics' perceptions of mentoring effectiveness relate to later-life wellbeing, specifically hedonic (e.g., life satisfaction) and eudaimonic (e.g., ego integrity and generativity) dimensions. This study adopts a developmental lens, positioning mentoring as a catalyst for psychological growth in later life. Noam, Malti, and Karcher (2013) frame mentoring as a psychologically and developmentally meaningful process, a perspective that supports examining its connection to broader indicators of wellbeing in later life, like Erikson's generativity and ego integrity stages of psychosocial development. Huta and Waterman (2014) describe hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing as two distinct but fundamental aspects of wellbeing, grounded in both psychology and philosophy. Miranda-Chan and Nakamura's (2016) work highlights mentoring's potential to enhance later-life development for those in the mentoring role. Participants were 200 retired academics sampled from across the US. Participants were retired an average of 7.7 years. Mentoring effectiveness was assessed as a 3-item composite reflecting perceived impact in the mentoring role (α =.73). Ego integrity and generativity reflected eudaimonic wellbeing, while satisfaction with life reflected hedonic wellbeing. Regression analyses were conducted for each outcome, controlling for age, gender, years retired, and faculty mentoring experience. Results suggest that mentoring effectiveness is a significant contributor to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing in later life. Analyses revealed that mentorship effectiveness predicted higher life satisfaction as an indicator of hedonic wellbeing (β =.23, (SE=.08, p < .001)), along with ego integrity (β =.21, (SE=.14, p < .01)) and generativity (β =.51, (SE=.07, p < .001)) as indicators of eudaimonic wellbeing. These findings reinforce how academic mentoring shapes not only the mentees but also promotes lasting wellbeing in the mentors.

Keywords: Work relationships, retired academics, life satisfaction, ego integrity, generativity

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Introduction

For many academics, mentoring represents more than just a professional responsibility—it is a way to make a lasting contribution to their field and foster a deeper sense of purpose that can extend beyond their academic career. Surveys suggest that mentoring is not only widespread but also deeply valued across institutions. At the University of California, Davis, 74% of faculty reported having served as mentors to colleagues within the past five years (UC Davis Academic Affairs, 2019). Similarly, a faculty survey at Washington State University found that 87% of respondents agreed that mentoring is important at the departmental level, and 82% reported finding the experience fulfilling (Washington State University Office of the Provost, 2022). In academia, mentoring is often understood as a developmental relationship that fosters both professional growth and interpersonal connection. Although definitions vary, many emphasize key components such as emotional support, career guidance, and role modeling (Jacobi, 1991, p. 509). This understanding of mentoring has informed a lot of current research, especially studies examining its effects on protégés.

Literature Review

Much of the existing mentoring literature emphasizes mentee outcomes, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Studies have shown that mentees often report greater career satisfaction and a stronger sense of professional

identity, along with better promotion outcomes compared to non-mentored peers (Allen et al., 2004). In a national survey of clinical psychology graduates, Clark et al. (2000) found that students with faculty mentors were more satisfied with their training and viewed mentoring as an important part of their professional development. Research-focused mentoring has also been linked to increased confidence and more focused academic or career direction (Brown et al., 2009). Additionally, mentored individuals tend to report stronger job satisfaction and higher levels of motivation at work (Eby et al., 2008). While mentee outcomes are well documented, the effects of mentoring on mentors themselves remain less explored.

While a substantial portion of the mentoring research focuses on benefits to mentees, fewer studies have explored how mentoring is experienced from the mentor's perspective. Perceived mentoring effectiveness refers to how mentors assess the quality and impact of the guidance they provided. In one study, mentors reported feeling deep satisfaction from watching their protégés grow and succeed, describing the experience as personally gratifying (Allen et al., 1997). Hamlin and Sage (2011) examined how mentors evaluate the effectiveness of their mentoring practices, highlighting that perceived mentoring effectiveness is shaped by the mentor's own interpretation of what constitutes successful guidance. These findings point to the psychological significance of how mentors evaluate their own contributions.

Hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing are two widely recognized frameworks for understanding how to achieve optimal wellbeing, both rooted in Greek philosophy and increasingly used in psychological research. Hedonic wellbeing emphasizes the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction, often reflected in the present moment. Eudaimonic wellbeing, by contrast, focuses on growth, authenticity, and meaning, grounded in the pursuit of excellence and realization of one's best potentials (Huta & Waterman, 2014). In this study, life satisfaction was treated as a component of hedonic wellbeing, as it reflects individuals' subjective evaluations of their life quality. Generativity and ego integrity were conceptualized as indicators of eudaimonic wellbeing, as both reflect a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

As part of this framework, each outcome variable in the study captures a different facet of psychological wellbeing in later life. Life satisfaction is generally understood as a cognitive evaluation of one's overall life contentment (Fors Connolly & Gärling, 2024). Drawing from Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, generativity can be understood as a productive form of creativity involving improvements to society, both professionally and vocationally (Erikson, 1968). Ego integrity, also rooted in Erikson's psychosocial development framework, involves a reflective acceptance of one's life as a whole (Erikson, 1968). Noam, Malti, and Karcher (2013) conceptualize mentoring as a relational process that supports psychological growth, which can also include broader indicators of wellbeing like life satisfaction, generativity, and ego integrity. Together, these three variables represent distinct yet complementary aspects of psychological wellbeing in later life.

While this study does not specifically examine demographic differences, it is important to note that mentoring experiences are influenced by social and identity-based factors. Prior research has shown that race, gender, and institutional position can influence access to mentoring, growth resulting from mentoring, and how mentoring roles are experienced (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Davis et al.). In academic settings especially, these dynamics may affect how mentors perceive their effectiveness and how meaningful they find the role. Recognizing these broader patterns provides important context for understanding how mentoring functions across individuals and institutions.

Despite the prominence of mentoring in academic life, little is known about how the role is experienced by mentors themselves, especially beyond their active careers. Most research has centered on mentee outcomes or short-term professional gains for mentors, leaving the long-term psychological impacts of mentoring largely unexamined. Even fewer studies have explored how mentors reflect on the effectiveness of their contributions or how those reflections relate to wellbeing in later life (e.g., Chan & Nakamura, 2016).

The present study aimed to examine whether perceived mentoring effectiveness among retired academics predicted three key indicators of later-life wellbeing: life satisfaction, ego integrity, and generativity. It was hypothesized that greater perceived mentoring effectiveness would positively predict both hedonic wellbeing (life satisfaction) and eudaimonic wellbeing (ego integrity and generativity), while controlling for age, gender, years retired, and faculty mentoring experience. Together, these outcomes capture distinct facets of wellbeing that hold particular relevance in the context of later adulthood.

Methods

Participants

This study drew from a national sample of 277 retired academics based in the United States (Table 1). Participants ranged in age from 58 to 96, with a mean age of 73.57, and had been retired for an average of 7.73 years. The majority of the sample identified as male (83.4%) and White/Caucasian (94.2%). Academic backgrounds were diverse; 30.7% were in social sciences, 25.3% in natural sciences, 23.1% in professional and applied sciences, 11.9% in humanities, and 8.7% in formal sciences such as mathematics and computer

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Composite Wellbeing and Mentoring Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	%
Age	274	73.57	6.19	
Yrs Retired Wins	252	7.52	5.76	
Comp Effective	224	5.174	0.854	
Composite SWL	277	5.56	0.96	
New Ego Integrity	250	11.08	1.73	
New Composite GEN	277	5.41	0.966	
Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male)	26			
Female	45			16.3%
Male	231			83.7%
Faculty Mentor YN (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	277			
No	53			19.1%
Yes	224			80.9%

Note. N- Frequency, M- Mean, SD- Standard Deviation, %- valid percent

science. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Measures

Perceived Mentoring Effectiveness.

Perceived mentoring effectiveness was assessed using a composite of three items that captured mentors' reflections on the value and impact of their role. Participants responded to items such as "As a mentor, I was able to effectively pass on skills to my students" and "Looking back, I was effective in mentoring students." Responses were given on a Likert scale, with most items in the survey rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher values indicated greater perceived effectiveness. Internal consistency for this scale was acceptable (α = .73).

Hedonic Wellbeing.

Life satisfaction was measured using a composite of five items assessing participants' global evaluations of their lives. Items included statements such as "In most ways, my life is close to ideal" and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." Higher scores indicated greater satisfaction with life. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = .87).

Eudaimonic Wellbeing-Meaning.

Ego integrity, the life meaning of eudaimonia, was measured using a composite of seven items reflecting participants' acceptance of their life course, comfort with past choices, and ability to find coherence and meaning in their life story. Items included statements such as "All in all, I am comfortable with the choices I made regarding my life's work" and "I feel generally content with what I have accomplished in my life." Higher values indicated greater ego integrity. Internal consistency for the scale was acceptable (α = .79).

Eudaimonic Wellbeing-Contributions.

Generativity, the 'contributions to others' aspect of eudaimonia, was measured using a composite of 14 items that assessed participants' sense of productivity, legacy, and social contribution. Items reflected a variety of generative themes, such as passing on knowledge, making a difference in the

community, and teaching others. Sample items included "I feel as though my contributions will survive after I die" and "I have a responsibility to improve the neighborhood in which I live." Higher values indicated greater generativity. Internal consistency for the scale was strong (α = .85).

Procedure

The study was conducted online through Qualtrics, a secure survey platform. Participants were invited via email through retired faculty associations and university websites across different regions of the United States. They completed a series of measures assessing demographics, mentoring experiences, and psychological wellbeing. To reduce bias, questions related to mentoring were positioned after initial items about participants' life and career reflections.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analyses to examine the relationship between perceived mentoring effectiveness and psychological wellbeing outcomes, including life satisfaction, generativity, and ego integrity. Perceived mentoring effectiveness served as the primary predictor, and age, gender, years retired, and faculty mentoring experience were included as control variables. All analyses were conducted using SPSS.

Results

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether perceived mentoring effectiveness predicted three indicators of wellbeing in later life: life satisfaction, ego integrity, and generativity. All models included age, gender, years retired, and faculty mentoring experience as control variables (Table 2).

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis for predicting Hedonic and Education Wellbeing from Mentoring

Dependent Variable	β (Standardized)	SE
Life Satisfaction	0.227***	0.080
Ego Integrity	0.213**	0.142
Generativity	0.508***	0.065

Note. Models are adjusted for age, gender, years retired, and faculty mentor statistics.
P-value- significance, SE- Standard errors based on unstandardized coefficients, β-standardized regression coefficient, ***- p value <0.001, **- p-value <0.01

Life Satisfaction

Perceived mentoring effectiveness significantly predicted life satisfaction; β = .23, SE = .08, p < .001. This indicates that higher perceptions of mentoring success were associated with greater life satisfaction in retirement, even when accounting for demographic and career-related factors. Results suggest that those who reflected more favorably on their mentoring contributions also tended to evaluate their lives more positively overall.

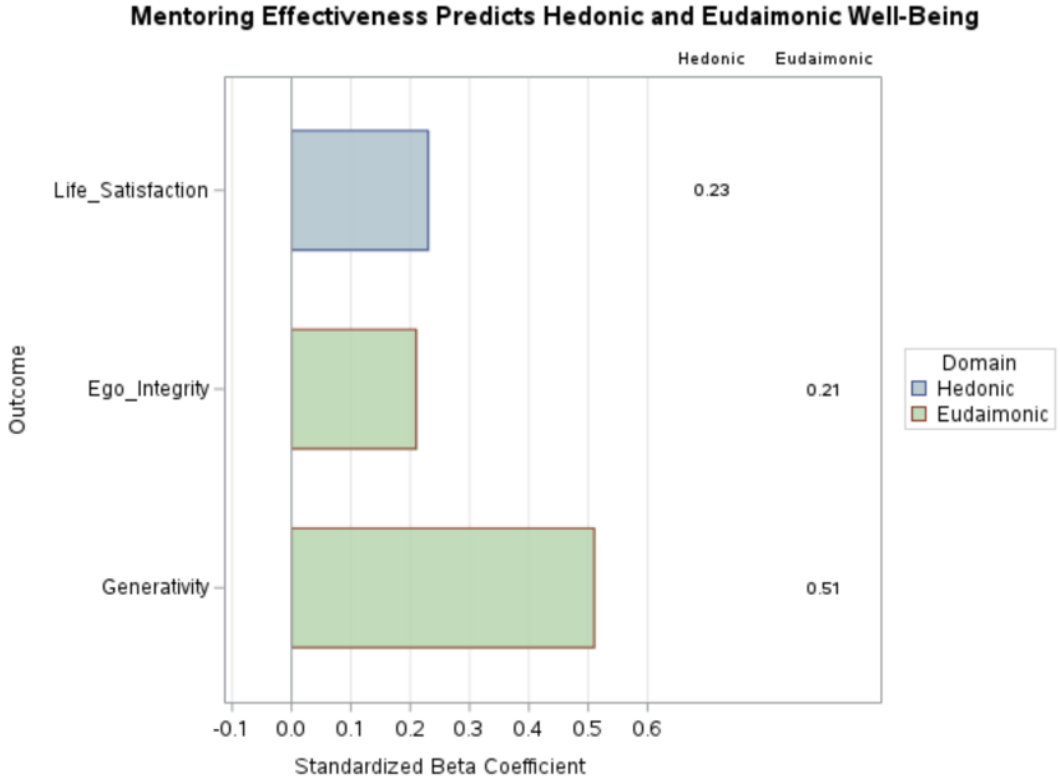
Ego Integrity

Mentoring effectiveness was also a significant predictor of ego integrity, β = .21, SE = .14, p < .01. Mentors who viewed their mentoring as effective were more likely to report feelings of coherence, fulfillment, and acceptance regarding their life choices. Although the effect size was moderate, the result highlights a meaningful link between mentoring reflections and broader psychological integration in later adulthood.

Generativity

The strongest effect emerged for generativity, where perceived mentoring effectiveness predicted higher generativity scores, β = .51, SE = .07, p < .001. This large effect suggests that those who viewed their mentoring as impactful also felt a stronger sense of contribution to future generations and society more broadly. This finding aligns with the theoretical view of mentoring as a generative act and underscores its long-term developmental relevance for mentors.

Figure 1
Mentoring Effectiveness



Note. This figure illustrates how perceived mentoring effectiveness is linked to each wellbeing outcome, with the largest effect seen for generativity.

Discussion

This study examined whether perceived mentoring effectiveness predicted later-life hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing among retired academics. Multiple regression results showed that mentors who viewed their contributions as more effective reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction, ego integrity, and generativity. These findings support the idea that mentoring at work does not just benefit those on the receiving end [in this case, students]; it can also have a lasting psychological link on those who give.

Consistent with the study's predictions, the results align with prior research showing that mentoring plays a significant and positive role in promoting generativity, ego integrity, and life satisfaction in later life (Nakamura et al., 2009; Chan & Nakamura, 2016). They also reinforce the developmental framework of Erikson's psychosocial theory which emphasizes generativity and ego integrity as key components and frames mentoring as a meaningful role that promotes wellbeing in retirement.

The strongest association was found between perceived mentoring effectiveness and generativity. This aligns with the idea that mentoring is often a generative act, especially in academic settings where mentors pass down their knowledge, skills, and lineage (e.g., traditions) to their mentees (Nakamura et al., 2009). The fact that mentors who viewed themselves as effective also reported greater generativity suggests that reflecting positively on one's mentoring role may reinforce a sense of purpose in retirement (Chan & Nakamura, 2016). Similarly, the associations with ego integrity and life satisfaction suggest that mentoring may have lasting, reciprocal effects on both protégés' and mentors' hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Given that so much of life is spent on work or work-related activities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024), the implications are that work mentoring can play a role in how mentors come to understand and feel about their lives more broadly, both in terms of meaning and overall contentment.

These findings also point to broader

implications. If mentoring supports wellbeing in retirement, institutions may benefit from supporting mentoring not only as a professional responsibility, but also as a developmental opportunity for faculty themselves. Encouraging faculty to reflect on their mentoring contributions, like through programs for retirement transition (e.g., phase retirement), could promote wellbeing in ways that extend far beyond professional outcomes.

However, there are limitations to the study that should be addressed. The study is cross-sectional, which means claims cannot be made about causality. The sample was also predominantly white and male, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Finally, mentoring effectiveness was assessed through self-report, which may be influenced by memory or personal biases.

Future research could build upon this work by using longitudinal designs and including more diverse samples in terms of gender, ethnicity, and cultural background. Incorporating mentee feedback alongside mentor reflections would also enhance understanding. Furthermore, exploring whether certain types of mentoring, or mentoring within specific academic contexts, are more likely to shape later-life wellbeing highlights important directions for future research.

Overall, this study suggests that mentoring may offer lasting psychological benefits for those who provide it, especially when it is experienced effectively. For retired academics, that sense of impact may continue to matter long after their careers have ended.

Conclusion

Mentoring is often seen as something faculty do for others, but this study highlights how it can shape mentors themselves long after their careers have ended, both hedonically and eudaimonically. By showing that perceived mentoring effectiveness predicts life satisfaction, generativity, and ego integrity in retirement, these findings point to the lasting psychological relevance of mentoring for those in the mentor role. As institutions continue to support mentoring programs, it may be just as important to consider how mentoring supports the wellbeing of faculty, not only during their careers, but in the years that follow.

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