



## 'I really enjoy it': Emotional Engagement of University Peer Mentors

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Peer mentoring programs are commonly used to facilitate the transition of new students into higher education settings. Peer mentors' experiences and emotions during mentoring are important but under-researched. We report exploratory work to address this gap in a two-phase study using a grounded theory approach. In Phase 1 mentors in an Australian university responded to online (n=35) or face-to-face (n=10) questions about their emotions during a peer mentor program. Emotions were found to be primarily positive, mentors varied in the extent to which they express emotions, and emotions relating to different time points were evident. In Phase 2, we examined temporal dimensions of emotions in more depth with peer mentors in a German university and added anticipated future emotions to existing categories. Connections between mentors' emotions and their own early experiences at university were explored, with another category of recalled prior emotions being added. Our findings are consistent with previous research regarding the positive and negative emotional aspects of being a peer mentor and further contribute to the understanding of the complexity of emotions in mentoring, specifically peer mentoring in higher education settings.

**Keywords:** peer mentoring, university students, emotions, time points, student transition

First submission 28th March 2019; Accepted for publication 7th October 2019.

### Introduction

Access to tertiary education has increased internationally (OECD, 2014). An issue of on-going importance in many countries is student attrition within the first year of university (Heublein, Hutzsch, Schreiber, Sommer, & Besuch, 2010). This represents a financial loss to governments and a financial and personal cost to those students who leave (Australian Government, 2017). Universities have increasingly implemented peer

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mentoring programs which have been shown to facilitate transition to university (Australian Government, 2017) by buffering the stressful situation (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2016) and improving student retention (Elliott, Beltman, & Lynch, 2011) and academic performance (Sloane & Fuge, 2012). Peer mentors can assist with specific skills (Douglass, Smith, & Smith, 2013; Schneider, Bickel, & Morrison-Shetlar, 2015). Tailored programs provide support to students from disadvantaged groups (Beltman, Samani, & Ala'i, 2017; Myers & Cowie, 2016).

There are limitations in research on mentoring programs (Gershenfeld, 2014). For example, while mentoring is reciprocal (Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008), research related to peer mentors has been less prevalent (Elliott et al., 2011). This paper addresses this gap by presenting research on the emotions of peer mentors in first year university programs. A brief outline of the literature informing the study is presented, then two phases of research are outlined. The aim is to understand the role that emotions play from the perspective of mentors as they engage in university peer mentoring programs.

### *Emotions and peer mentoring in higher education*

Emotions have been examined in various ways with no common definition (Mulligan & Scherer 2012). Grootenboer (2010) classified emotions as part of the affective domain although others suggest that they include “affective, cognitive, motivational, expressive, and peripheral physiological processes” (Pekrun 2006, p. 316). Others contend that they are also socially constructed and part of wider social-historical contexts (Schutz, DeCuir-Gunby, & Williams-Johnson, 2016). Emotions evolve dynamically and typically endure for a limited period (Mulligan & Scherer, 2012). The field of emotions and its associated research is complex and contested, with research occurring in different settings, including higher education institutions.

Students’ achievement-related emotions in higher education can have an impact on their “motivation, learning, performance, identity development and health” (Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfield, & Perry, 2011, p. 36). As outlined by Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, and Perry (2002), emotions, such as hope and anxiety, are prospective in nature, as they are connected to future success and failure. Retrospective emotions, such as pride and shame, are connected to prior success and failure. Emotions may differ according to setting (e.g. learning or testing), and seemingly negative emotions such as anxiety or shame, may lead to extra efforts to avoid failure. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) reported that in education settings, positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction occur when a person progresses toward a goal. In contrast, negative emotions are experienced when goals cannot be achieved.

One strategy found to facilitate university retention is peer mentoring (Bowles & Brindle, 2017). Terrion and Leonard (2007, p. 150) defined this as a:

... helping relationship in which two individuals of similar age and/or experience come together [...] in the pursuit of fulfilling some combination of functions that are career-related (e.g. information sharing, career strategizing) and psychosocial (e.g. confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, friendship).

Peer mentors in higher education experience a range of positive outcomes (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012). Emotional benefits include feelings of enjoyment (Elliott et al., 2011), satisfaction (Riebschleger & Cross, 2011), personal growth and gratification (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012), and pride (Riebschleger & Cross, 2011). Mentoring is not always a positive experience, particularly when mentees do not respond to mentors trying to establish and maintain contact (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012). When mentoring is perceived as time consuming, and interactions with mentees as unsuccessful, mentors may experience disappointment or frustration (Terrion & Pillion, 2008).

Previously, we surveyed the emotions of peer mentors at the end of a one semester program (Beltman & Fischer, 2013). Mentors reported a range of mostly mild, positive emotions, such as enjoyment and satisfaction, and some negative ones such as frustration and disappointment. Collings et al. (2016) suggested that mentor dedication and commitment may change during the course of a program for first-year university students. Mentors' own experiences can shape their role as mentors (Risque & Sanchez-Garcia, 2012; Sambell & Graham, 2014). Therefore, the aims of the research were to explore what emotions peer mentors experience during the mentoring experience, and to gain a greater understanding of their emotional engagement during mentoring.

## **Research Design**

In this phenomenological qualitative study, we investigated the experiences of a specific phenomenon for a group of people (Patton, 1990), in this instance the emotional experiences of peer mentors. Using a grounded theory approach, we searched for categories and processes related to this phenomenon, and included a "visual model that portrays the general explanation" (Creswell, 2005, p. 53). Flexibility and theory testing are features of grounded theory approaches (Punch & Oancea, 2014) and we conducted studies that built upon each other in order to better understand the central phenomenon. We focused our research on university student peer mentors' emotional experiences during their work in two mentoring programs with similar aims and structure in two different national contexts, where we had the opportunity to study these programs in detail. Figure 1 illustrates the progression of the research studies. The specific aim, setting, data collection and analysis, and findings for each phase of the study will be outlined separately.

### **Phase 1: Mentor Emotions during Mentoring**

#### *Aim*

In Phase 1, we explored university peer mentor emotions during a peer mentoring program. This timing should enable peer mentors to share emotions they were currently experiencing and report on their expectations for the rest of the semester, hopefully tapping into current and prospective emotions, rather than recalled, retrospective emotions as examined in previous studies (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012).

**Prior Study (Beltman & Fischer, 2013)**

*Pilot Study:* 74 peer mentors' survey responses; set questions related to emotive experiences; end of semester 2, 2010;

*Main Study:* 342 peer mentors' responses to same questions end of semester 1, 2012;

limits: 'leading' questions; at end of program



**Current Study Phase 1 (Australia):**

*Online:* 35 peer mentors; online survey with open questions during semester 1, 2013; previous codebook used

*Face-to-Face:* 10 peer mentors interviewed during semester 1, 2013; thematic coding; timeline developed



**Current Study Phase 2 (Germany):**

*Face-to-Face:* 10 peer mentors interviewed twice - beginning and end of a semester in 2014-15

**Figure 1: Research Design**

### *Setting*

In a large Australian university every new student (freshman) is offered a peer mentor who has successfully completed at least one year in the same course. New students could decide not to participate in the program and withdraw at any point. Peer mentors need to apply and participate in a centrally-organised one-day training. Mentors meet with their group of 10-15 mentees and help them in organisational, social, and orientation matters, such as showing them around campus. Peer mentors are expected to have contact with their mentees at least weekly by email plus ideally face-to-face, with individuals or groups, throughout the semester. Mentors receive recognition for their participation through their academic transcript and an honorarium payment.

### *Participants and procedure*

Phase 1 participants were recruited during the pre-semester training. From the 87 interested mentors, 10 (female: n=9, male: n=1) were randomly chosen to participate in the face-to-face interviews and were 18-34 years old ( $\bar{x}$ = 25.2 years). The remaining volunteers were invited to submit online responses to the same interview questions, and 35 participants completed these (female: n=27, male: n=8). Online participants were 18-51 years old ( $\bar{x}$ = 23.7 years). Surveys and interviews were completed in the first four weeks of semester to provide an insight into mentors' emotions at the beginning of the program.

### *Instrument*

The same 19 questions were used for both modes of data collection in Phase 1. Open-ended questions were used to avoid restricting or guiding participants' responses (Slavin, 2007). All questions were designed to facilitate the elicitation of responses that would include expressions of emotions. Participants were asked about (a) their current feelings about being a mentor, (b) key words that would describe their experience as a mentor, (c) examples of when they felt they had and had not fulfilled their role as a mentor, and (d) their feelings regarding their role as a mentor for the rest of the semester (see Appendix A). The online survey was set up through Qualtrics. The interviews were conducted by a researcher who was not a staff member at the university or part of the mentoring program, then recorded and transcribed.

### *Data analysis*

The two data sets were analysed separately in order to maximise the use of the interviews which could "obtain in-depth information about participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 207). In the analysis of the online surveys the focus was on identifying the emotions reported. To determine the range of emotions, all 35 online surveys were examined for text segments containing references to emotions. Responses containing multiple emotion references were split and coded separately. The total emotion segments were then coded into positive and negative categories and sub-categories. Building on our prior work, a previously developed codebook was

used (Beltman & Fischer, 2013). Two researchers cross-checked the coding to enhance reliability. Table I presents the codes, descriptions, illustrative examples and frequencies for all categories.

Interview transcripts were analysed for common themes across questions and participants. Using an iterative constant comparative method (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012), one researcher first generated tentative themes, or core categories (Creswell, 2005) within and across transcripts. Two researchers discussed and refined the emerging themes until consensus was reached.

## **Results**

### *Survey results*

In the online surveys, 240 emotions were recorded and coded as positive or negative. The majority of reported emotions (89%) were positive and included feelings of personal fulfilment, general positive feelings, enjoyment and a feeling of being rewarded (see Table I). The 26 emotions coded as negative were spread across 13 participants and related mainly to feelings of personal failure due to a lack of response from mentees. Overall, mentoring was a mostly positive experience with mentors intending to become a mentor again. Sixteen examples of positive prospective emotions were also identified in the online data – there were no negative examples. Participants were looking forward to continuing as a mentor, and feeling happy and excited about the prospect of the rest of the program.

### *Interview results*

The ten peer mentors were positive with all wanting to become a mentor again and all seeing relevance to their future career. Thematic analysis revealed two major themes. The first theme indicated that individual mentors reflected different degrees of emotional involvement. The second emerging theme was that the emotions expressed covered across multiple time periods, and were not limited to the period of mentoring. These time points could be represented as temporal dimensions of emotions. Each of these themes will be presented.

*Theme 1: Differing emotional involvement.* Although interviewees consistently regarded the peer mentoring experience as positive, the degree of emotional engagement differed between individuals. The following brief narratives illustrate one participant who expressed few emotions about her mentoring (Ashia) and one who reported more emotions (Eunice).

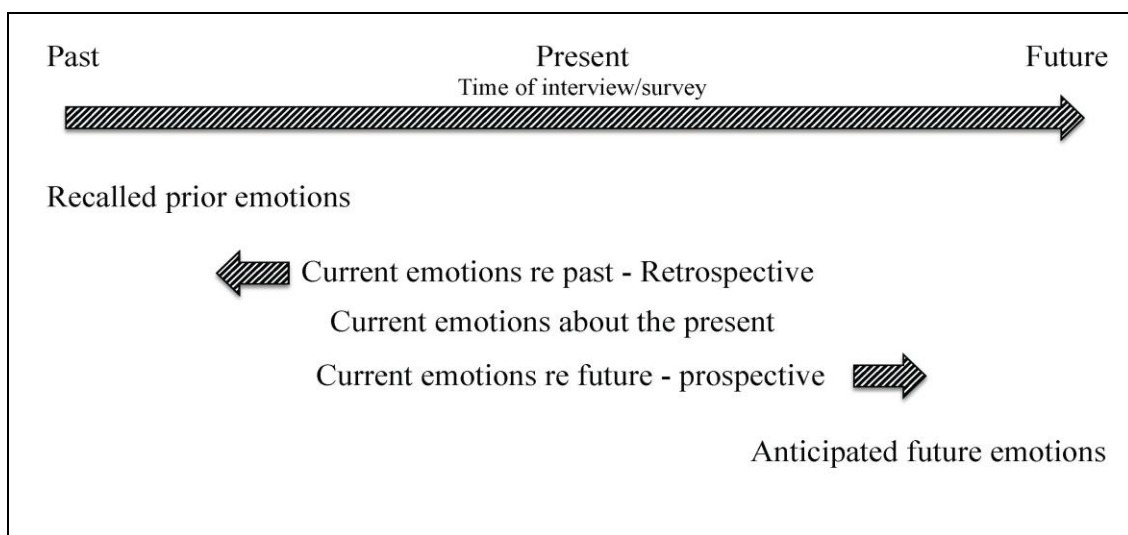
Ashia (23 year old social work student) expressed few emotions regarding her mentoring experience. She started mentoring, because faculty had encouraged her to, and she recalls that she had anticipated that mentoring would be good experience. Her key words describing her current experience as a mentor were “enjoyable”, “informative” and “friendly”, and she reported already meeting with all her mentees and that it seems “pretty easy so far”. Ashia indicated that she valued mentoring’s social aspects as well as networking opportunities for her later career. When asked how she felt about mentoring for the rest of the semester, Ashia did not express emotions but pointed out that she has met the requirements asked of mentors and was well-prepared in her role.

**Table I. Positive and Negative Emotions Sub-Category Details**

<b>Code/ Sub-Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Illustrative example</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
<b>Positive</b>			<b>214 (89.0)</b>
Personal fulfilment	Feeling of being appreciated and helpful, positive personal outcomes, pride	<i>'I feel proud...'</i> [ID4; Q12]	69 (32.5)
General positive	Feelings from 'good', to 'glad' and 'love' –plus positive references about the program in general	<i>'I LOVE being a mentor.'</i> [ID12; Q12]	61 (28.5)
Enjoyment	Feeling of enjoyment	<i>'I have really enjoyed...'</i> [ID 33; Q18]	43 (20.0)
Reward	Comments referring to 'rewarding' experiences/ situations/ program	<i>'It is very rewarding...'</i> [ID13; Q15]	26 (12.0)
Belonging	Family, rapport, friends, part of uni	<i>'sociable'</i> [ID29; Q13]	8 (4.0)
Satisfaction	Feeling of satisfaction	<i>'Satisfying because...'</i> [ID2; Q10]	7 (3.0)
<b>Negative</b>			<b>26 (11.0)</b>
Personal failure	Negative feelings referring to not fulfilling a role, not being helpful or appreciated; personal failure included	<i>'I am somewhat disappointed...'</i> [ID9; Q12]	17 (65.5)
Difficult/ Hard	Negative features or attributes of the program, the mentor role etc.	<i>'...boring (when they don't reply)'</i> [ID27; Q13]	3 (11.5)
General negative	Negative references or feelings about the program in general	<i>'...felt bad'</i> [ID4; Q17]	2 (7.5)
Frustration	Comments referring to frustrations	<i>'I was somewhat frustrated...'</i> [ID7; Q17]	2 (7.5)
Anxiety	Feelings referring to anxiety or being worried	<i>'confusion'</i> [ID3; Q13]	2 (7.5)

Eunice (22-year old architecture student) expressed more emotions regarding her peer mentoring experience. She was involved in mentoring at school and had enjoyed leadership courses. When asked to describe her role as a mentor, Eunice used words such as “exciting”, “enjoy”, “like”, “nice”, “love”, and “much fun”. Eunice said she enjoyed “leading a crowd to doing something they enjoy and just getting the most out of what they’re doing”. She recalled that she had been helped with difficulties by her own mentor when she was a first year student and wanted to “transfer my knowledge of things that I would have liked to know in 1st year” and help by “... telling them what I did and they’ll be like ‘it’s okay that I’m struggling, it’s okay that I’m a bit lost at the moment’”. Eunice reported feeling “a little bit frustrated” on the first day when her mentees did not appear interested but felt proud of her achievements since. She said: “I have had more of my mentee kids to contact me than a lot of the other mentors in architecture” and said she gained strong positive emotions from her mentees’ positive feedback.

*Theme 2: Temporal dimensions of emotions.* A second emerging theme was that the emotions expressed related to five time points, not only in the present, but also in the past and the future. In addition to the expected current emotions about current events, and prospective emotions (current emotions about the future), retrospective emotions (current emotions about the past) were also expressed. Interviews enabled a more fine-grained categorisation of the category of current emotions and development of two new categories that we named recalled prior emotions and anticipated future emotions. Figure 2 represents the diagrammatic form of the grounded theory arising from the Phase 1 data, as well as other “sensitizing” constructs from the literature (Patton 1990, p. 390).



**Figure 2. Temporal Dimensions of Emotions**

Figure 2 indicates the temporal dimensions of emotions. Recalled prior emotions are emotions about past events that are no longer currently experienced. For example, mentors recalled how they felt when they began as a new student at the university. Current emotions about the past are retrospective emotions (Pekrun et al., 2002) that are being felt in the present but refer to events in the past. Current emotions about the



present are emotions relating to events happening in the present. Prospective emotions (Pekrun et al., 2002) are current emotions about the future, and refer to an emotion being experienced in the present but about an event that has not yet occurred. Finally, anticipated future emotions are emotions that an individual expects to feel in the future but, unlike prospective emotions, is not currently feeling. For example, a mentor could say he or she is likely to feel a sense of satisfaction when the mentoring experience is completed, even if they do not currently feel satisfied. Table II provides examples from the interviews that illustrate each type of emotions along the timeline.

**Table II. Examples of Temporal Dimensions of Emotions**

Time Point	Illustrative Example
Recalled prior emotion	<i>... at first I was a bit nervous.</i>
Current emotion about the past – retrospective	<i>I feel terrible for missing that [meeting].</i>
Current emotion about the present	<i>... it's exciting, I really enjoy it, because I like helping people.</i>
Current emotion about the future – prospective	<i>I feel positive about moving forward for the rest of this semester.</i>
Anticipated future emotions	<i>I would find it a shame if at the end of the semester I felt like I have been talking to myself ....</i>

## **Phase 2: Temporal Dimensions of Peer Mentor Emotions**

### *Aim*

In Phase 2, building on Phase 1, we explicitly examined emotions over multiple time points. We aimed to explore which emotions peer mentors in a first year university peer mentoring program experienced at the beginning (Time 1) and end (Time 2) of the mentoring period. Recollections of mentors' own past as beginning students and their expectations for their mentoring and mentees were included. Although Phase 2 was conducted in a German university, the aim was not a comparison of countries or settings. The choice of sample reflected theoretical sampling, where in grounded theory sampling intentionally selects data that will contribute to the development of theory (Creswell, 2005). In this case we were interested in further exploring emotions over time in a typical university peer mentoring program, in order to test or validate the theory generated from Phase 1, a typical component of grounded theory research (Creswell, 2005).

### *Setting*

With similar aims to the Phase 1 Australian university, a peer-mentoring program was introduced in 2014 at a German technical university. This program was only for 300 new students entering teacher education and was developed by teacher education staff familiar with the Phase 1 program. Students are allocated to the most suitable peer mentors based on their specific subject of study. During the semester, mentors must participate in weekly meetings with the central organisers and are expected to have contact with their

mentees via email or face-to-face. Peer mentors can organise meetings independently with their mentees, but regular workshops on specific relevant themes (e.g., exam preparation) are offered at set points during semester. Peer mentors are paid as student assistants with a small contract to cover expenses. Despite all mentees being allocated to a specific mentor at the beginning of the semester, mentoring is a non-compulsory offering to students to facilitate the transition to university.

Table III describes the two programs examined in Phase 1 and Phase 2 using key components identified by Gershenfeld (2014). It may be seen that the programs are very similar across all components. The main difference is scale, with the Phase 1 program well-established across a whole university, and the Phase 2 program recently developed in one discipline of the university. Mentors in the Phase 2 program could potentially have more mentees, and were compensated to a greater extent with paid employment contracts.

**Table III. Key Program Components of the Phase 1 and 2 Peer Mentoring Programs**

<b>Program component</b>	<b>Phase 1 (Australia)</b>	<b>Phase 2 (Germany)</b>
<i>Mentor-mentee ratio</i>	Up to 1-15	Up to 1-30
<i>Voluntary or mandatory</i>	Voluntary: mentees can opt out	Voluntary: mentees can opt out
<i>Compensation for mentors</i>	Transcript; honorarium	Paid as student assistants
<i>Frequency and duration of meetings and of partnership</i>	Weekly contact over one semester	Weekly contact over one semester; regular workshops
<i>Mentoring support – training, resources, supervision</i>	Trained and supported by staff; online resources during semester	Trained and supported by staff; workshops and weekly meetings

#### *Participants and procedure*

We interviewed ten peer mentors (female: n=7, male: n=3) aged 21-25 years old ( $\bar{x}$ = 22.3 years) at Time 1 (T1) at the very beginning of the semester around the time of first meeting their mentees (T1), and again at Time 2 (T2) at the end of the semester. Participants had experienced mentoring themselves as beginning students only in their first week of university.

#### *Instrument*

The interview protocol was based on that used in Phase 1 (see Appendix B). The open-ended questions were adapted to the time point of the interviews (beginning or end of semester) and to the time points of emotions illustrated in Figure 2. Specific questions were added to explore prior experiences and recalled or current emotions about these. At T1, mentors were asked to report on their first semester as a student and how they currently feel about those experiences. In addition, mentors were asked to describe the role of a mentor, illustrate it with current experiences and comment on their emotions. At T2, participants responded to the

same questions and were also asked about the past semester, their recalled or current emotions regarding the experience, and whether they felt the mentoring had been successful or not in terms of their expectations. Current emotions about the future and anticipated future emotions were tapped into by asking peer mentors about their wish to mentor again and the reasons for their response.

### *Data analysis*

The 10 face-to-face interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Interview segments were coded into five categories representing the identified temporal dimensions. As in Phase 1, multiple researchers cross-checked the coding to enhance reliability. Although the potential categories were derived from analysis of the previous data, coding was also tentative as we were testing the theory developed in Phase 1 and represented visually in Figure 2.

### *Results*

We report the results from Phase 2 for each time point, i.e. beginning and end of the mentoring.

*Time 1.* In the first interview, mentors reflected on their own emotions when they began university (recalled prior emotions). Mentors recalled their own start of university as “overwhelming” (#1, #3, #7, #8), “awful” (#5), and “like you’ll never make it” (#5), because of the new environment and information overload. Only one person stated that her own first semester had been positive - saying: “I was happy” (#6). She and other interviewees mentioned their own mentors who for some provided a negative experience, for example, “One of my mentors left the impression that he is not enjoying this [his studies] very much. That was demotivating” (#4). Others had recalled emotions of how mentors contributed to their first semester that were positive, stating for example: “I did not feel left alone” (#7). Looking back on their own experiences as first-year students, all mentors however expressed positive current emotions about the past: “I am proud to have made it.” (#4).

These recalled prior emotions and current emotions about the past (retrospective) played a role in the students deciding to become mentors. In the interviews, most mentors related their own, both positive and negative, experiences as first year students to their reasons for being a mentor today: “These were quite good mentors and that is why I decided to become a mentor myself.” (#2); or “My mentors were not good. That is why I thought I’d rather do it myself, than the new students get someone like this and start to panic” (#9).

Mentors’ current emotions about the present were varied and represented the majority of emotions at T1. Some mentors expressed enjoyment regarding the program with comments such as: “I am passionate about it. Yes, this is in fact an ideal job for me” (#10); and “I feel good doing it (...) and it is fun” (#5). On the other hand, mentors found the fact that only a few first-year students responded to be frustrating (e.g., “It is a bit frustrating for me but I think for the others as well. I feel sorry for all of us” (#8)). In coping with these negative current emotions, most mentors were able to create balance between regretting the low response rate, but enjoying the feedback they received: “You sometimes feel unnecessary somehow. But for the twelve people who respond ..., I enjoy that” (#6).

When thinking about their future as a mentor for the rest of semester (current emotions about the future - prospective), most peer mentors expressed the prospective emotion of hope that more students would participate in the program and find it useful: “My aim is that those, who participated, say that it was useful” (#7). An example of an anticipated future emotion was one student’s hope that things would change and she would then feel satisfied: “I hope they use the project more, come back to it and at the end of the semester say ‘Wow, thanks for being there, you helped a lot.’ Then I would also be satisfied” (#6). Another mentor also anticipated a possible future negative emotion saying: “I would find it a shame if at the end of the semester I felt like I have been talking to myself ...” (#1).

*Time 2.* In the second interview mentors reflected on their emotions during the semester (recalled prior emotions). Most commented on how much they had enjoyed interacting with the mentees, saying for example: “I enjoyed the work with the first-years” (#3), and “It was fun helping people” (#5). They also recalled frustration over the low response rate: “It was a bit unsatisfactory ... I thought we would have more people coming” (#1). Some mentors got more responses over the time than others: “It was a bit bad to see that it went better for the others – that made me feel a bit jealous” (#8). Looking back at their experiences over the past semester (current emotion about the past - retrospective), mentors described the same emotions of being disappointed by the minimal feedback: “I often ask myself what’s the reason – I tend to take things personally and for a while I was asking myself whether it’s to do with me that they do not want to meet up.” (#5).

At T2 most mentors were feeling positive (current emotions about the present). The interconnection between the different time phases was evident as past and present emotions merged: “I feel good, really good to be honest. The last semester was really good fun for me” (#8). Regarding the things that did not go well, mentors expressed different emotions that were not necessarily negative: “I find it funny. I don’t find it bad if something’s chaotic” (#2). Those who had already decided to mentor again in the coming semester expressed positive emotions about this (current emotions about the future), saying for example: “I am glad to be able to continue but I hope it will be better than last semester. That is important to me” (#5). One mentor said he would not be mentoring again and although his actual emotion was not expressed there was an unspoken element of frustration and feeling of wasting time: “... I won’t be mentoring next semester because there will be only a few new students and I don’t want to sit around in meetings” (#4).

There were no direct examples of anticipated future emotions about mentoring at T2 which was when the program concluded. One mentor said: “Yes, I would be a mentor again, if only because I enjoy working with groups” (#6). This could be interpreted as meaning that her current and recalled emotion of enjoyment was also an anticipated future emotion as she expected that she would enjoy the experience again.

Comparing Time 1 and 2 results. Mentors experienced more positive than negative emotions at T2, while emotions at T1 were more balanced. Mentors in both interviews talked about having become used to low response rates from mentees. All participants found the poor response frustrating and disappointing, but understood that the program has to grow and become more popular with students. Peer mentors also stated that their experience had been a learning process: “I grew with it during the semester. At the beginning it was

disappointing, because I am somebody, if I offer help, I am happy if it is taken .... I got an email last week ... they know I am there and I liked this, although I had not heard from them during the semester” (#1). Interviews at T2 showed further links between the different time points. For example, two mentors commented on their own start of university when talking about their current emotions: “Well, I find it great. If I had been in their position, I would have been over the moon. I find the program just great” (#3). The positive emotions also motivated mentors to continue: “The feedback that came makes me want to go on” (#6).

## **Discussion**

Taking a qualitative, grounded theory approach to studying peer mentors’ emotions in first-year university student mentoring programs, Phase 1 showed that mentors experienced different degrees of emotional involvement and we identified specific time frames of mentors’ emotions. In Phase 2, we built on these findings by exploring the temporal dimensions of mentors’ emotions over the course of a one semester mentoring program – asking about mentors’ own past experiences as beginning students as well their current and future mentoring experiences. In the following, some key findings from the research are discussed.

### *Peer Mentoring is Largely a Positive Experience*

Overall, our findings were consistent with literature that indicates the variety of positive emotions experienced by mentors (e.g., Beltman & Schaeben, 2012). Mentors enjoyed interacting with their mentees and sharing their expertise (Heirdsfield et al., 2008), and found “pleasure in their relationship” with their mentees (Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 284). Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004), also reported that mentors derive “personal satisfaction, reward, or growth” (p. 523) from their participation in a mentoring program and Riebschleger and Cross (2011) that mentors were satisfied by being a part of their mentees’ development. It could be that mentors who agreed to participate in the research felt a stronger alignment with the programs’ aims as suggested by Collings et al. (2016) and so were more positive than other mentors might have been.

### *Sources of Negative Emotions*

Findings were also consistent with research about negative emotions. Terrion and Phillion (2008) said that mentors’ negative emotions, such as disappointment and frustration occur, for example, when they had not met agreed upon goals. Mentee success or failure can be taken personally and mentors reported that poor mentee response evoked feelings of frustration and feelings that they had not fulfilled their role (Bullough & Draper, 2004). Despite similar negative emotions, most of the mentors in the current studies said they would be a mentor again. When ongoing support and training for mentors are available, the outcomes are more beneficial (Martin & Sifers, 2012). Training needs to ensure that mentors have realistic expectations for, and know the boundaries of, their role, and that mentors know how to access support. It seems likely that the

positive emotions experienced by mentors in the current programs were linked to the programs' initial training and ongoing support.

### *Mentors' Prior Experiences*

The Phase 2 interviews showed the importance of peer mentors' own experiences and recalled emotions in their motivation to become a mentor and in shaping their emotional responses to their mentees. For example, some peer mentors recalled negative prior experiences of their own beginning university experiences when they would have appreciated assistance. Levine, Lench, and Safer (2009) suggested that recalled emotions can be exaggerated as individuals remember a peak emotional intensity. Mentors in this study did tend to think that other first years were in the same position and would appreciate and use assistance offered, and so it was difficult to understand when they did not appear to be needed. Pekrun et al. (2011) discussed the importance of the value placed on an activity and its controllability. Peer mentors in the programs examined certainly seemed to value the activity of mentoring, and were also able to understand that they did not have control over the mentee actions. The reciprocal perceptions of mentees would be a useful focus of future research as, for example, there could have been other mentors who were less involved and motivated and perhaps experienced more negative emotions, impacting negatively on the mentees.

### *Theorising Temporal Dimensions of Emotions*

Phase 2 explored the multiple time points indicated in Figure 2. The dimensions contain similar concepts to those discussed by Pekrun et al. (2011). Specifically, current emotions about the present are similar to activity emotions, current emotions about the future are similar to prospective outcome emotions, and current emotions about the past are similar to retrospective outcome emotions. The theoretical contribution of this paper is the inclusion of recalled prior emotions and anticipated future emotions into this time frame. The interviews showed that recalled prior emotions played a crucial part in the peer mentors' motivation for, and expectations about, the role. Previous work points to the importance of expectations in mentoring (e.g., Collings et al., 2016) and pre-mentoring experiences play a part. Anticipated future emotions were also related to beliefs about future experiences and a desire to be a mentor again. These additional concepts align with the reciprocal connections between emotions and their antecedents and outcomes (Pekrun et al., 2011). These insights are potentially useful for program managers in understanding initial and repeat mentor motivations and the value of recruiting mentors returning for the experience.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

In the reported research, interviews and on-line questions relied on self-reports of a relatively small sample of peer mentors. As indicated by Saldaña (2009), participants may experience difficulties in labelling and expressing their emotions. Interview participants could have felt restricted in their responses as they were asked to reveal their feelings. Participants may have concealed or euphemised certain emotions. Furthermore, participants would have "different response styles" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 159) with

the result that the same feelings may not have been linked to a specific emotion so labelling could be variable. Issues with labelling could occur also in the translation from German to English. Similar findings across the multiple data collection points, however, increase the credibility of the findings.

The intention was not to examine cultural or institutional differences but this is an area for further research. The two programs in this research were similar in structure and aims, but it would be interesting to examine mentors' emotions with programs that, for example, focused on academic matters as opposed to those more concerned with personal growth. The main limitation of the present study was that the reciprocal views of the mentees were not obtained. It would also make sense to simultaneously study mentee and mentor experiences in different countries with the same measures, in order to understand national and university similarities and differences.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this exploratory research are consistent with recent research that mentoring is beneficial for mentors, with their experience being a positive emotional one. The findings highlight the role of program developers in providing specific training and support to prepare intrinsically motivated mentors for the potential factors associated with negative emotions. The findings also point to the complexity and reciprocity of emotions over a range of time points. Additionally, these findings have contributed to a relatively sparse area of research and provided some suggestions for future research.

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Vera Faust, Judith Fränken, and Carolin Schultz for their support in the development and realisation of the German study phase.

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## **Appendix A. Phase 1 Interview/Survey Questions**

### Demographic information:

- 1.) Which course are you enrolled in?
- 2.) Which faculty are you enrolled in?
- 3.) What is your gender?
- 4.) Student Type? Domestic or international
- 5.) May I ask how old you are?
- 6.) Have you been a mentor before? If this applies: How many times?

### Role of a mentor in general

- 7.) How would you describe your role as a mentor?
- 8.) Why did you want to become a mentor?
- 9.) How do you feel about being a mentor at the moment?
- 10.) What key words would you use to describe your experience as a mentor?
- 11.) How is the experience of being a mentor related to your current study and/or your future desired profession?

### Examples of your role as a mentor

- 12.) To what extent do you feel you have fulfilled your role as a mentor on a scale from one, meaning to no extent to five, meaning to a great extent?
- 13.) Have you experienced situations when you felt you have fulfilled your role as a mentor? Can you give an example?
- 14.) Have you experienced situations when you felt you have not fulfilled your role as a mentor? Can you give an example?
- 15.) How do you feel regarding your work as a mentor for the rest of the semester?  
Would you apply to be a mentor in the future? Why?
- 16.) Please comment on the best aspects of the Mentor Program. (The program in general)  
Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

## **Appendix B. Phase 2 Questions Time 1**

### Demographic information:

- 1.) Which course are you enrolled in?
- 2.) Which faculty are you enrolled in?
- 3.) May I ask how old you are?
- 4.) Have you been a mentor before? If this applies: How many times?

### General characteristics of group

- 5.) How many mentees are assigned to you?
- 6.) How many show up for meetings?

### Role of a mentor in general

- 7.) How would you describe your role as a mentor?
- 8.) Why did you become a mentor?
- 9.) How do you feel about being a mentor at the moment?
- 10.) How is the experience of being a mentor related to your current study and/or your future desired profession?

### Own past experiences

- 11.) Please tell us about your first semesters at uni
- 12.) Looking back, how do you feel about that today?
- 13.) Have you been mentored during school or uni? (if yes please report)
- 14.) What have you experienced during your first semesters that you would (not)\_want your mentees to experience?

### Work with mentees

- 15.) How do you communicate with your mentees?
- 16.) How do you feel regarding your work as a mentor for the rest of the semester?
- 17.) What would have to happen for you to say at the end that the mentoring has been successful?
- 18.) Please comment on the best aspects of the Mentor Program. (The program in general)

## **Phase 2 Questions Time 2**

- 1.) How would you describe your role as a mentor today?
- 2.) How do you feel about being a mentor today?
- 3.) Is mentoring important to you?
- 4.) Is this mentoring program important for your personal goals?

### Recalling the semester

- 5.) How was the semester? Please tell me about the communication with mentees, meetings, situations you could provide help in etc.
- 6.) Looking back on the mentoring, would you say that the mentoring was (un)successful? Please give reasons
- 7.) Please name three positive aspects of the mentoring program and explain why they are positive.  
(may relate to mentees, your own actions, the organisation of the program etc.)
- 8.) Please name three negative aspects of the mentoring program and explain why they are negative.

### Future

- 9.) Would you apply to be a mentor in the future? Why?
- 10.) Would you do something differently to what you have done this semester?  
Do you have any further comments you would like to make?