

Introduction

Mutual Engagements

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The word itself, *mentor*, triggers a hunger from a time in my life that is now gone, the ache for an attachment to someone who recognized me as worthy of the life I had decided upon.

—Siri Hustvedt, “Mentor Ghosts”

My thought about mentoring is that it is hierarchical, and I want people to be engaged with me so I can engage with them and we’re doing something collaboratively.

—Daná-Ain Davis, “Widening the Way”

“It’s like she wants to be my mentor!” Tess McGill, a go-getting temp from Staten Island with Farah Fawcett hair, gushes to her boyfriend early in the eighties’ workplace comedy *Working Girl*. The would-be mentor is Katharine Parker, a sleek high-powered executive in corporate Manhattan. “Watch me. Learn from me,” she instructs, assuring her new secretary that their office relationship will be “a two-way street” (*Working Girl*). Tess learns so well she ends up toppling Katharine, becoming a boss herself.

If *Working Girl* paints a portrait of female ambition in the universe of urban late twentieth-century capitalism, its crude version of women

mentoring women parodies the classical model of mentorship. Mentoring takes its name from a character in Homer's *Odyssey*. An old companion of Odysseus, Mentor is asked to protect the great hero's son Telemachus. Endowed with the powers of the goddess Athena, who borrows the man's form to swoop down from Olympus, Mentor rescues the boy from dangerous situations and educates him for his future role as ruler.

From the start, mentoring was inscribed in the maw of power relations and as an affair between men. Paternal and patriarchal, it's a structure that, minus the goddess, has nevertheless been replicated in relationships between women as well as those involving other marginalized groups. The legacy of bonds between men, shaped by the vertical architecture of inherited privilege, is familiar to the two of us from our lives in academia. In the modern university, the cutthroat model of competition through individual striving is veiled only by the thin veneer of professionalism, which increasingly has adopted the values of top-down corporate organization.

Until affirmative action forced open the doors of privilege, and for decades after, Homer's legacy prevailed, and it still haunts professional worlds. The situation is yet more complicated for first-generation students as well as students and professors of color for whom, Ashna Ali writes in this volume, "the terms and structures of traditional mentorship in academia have been shaped by white masculinity." Adjuncts and part-time instructors in particular, who are hired on limited contracts and on whom the university more and more relies to staff its classes, typically find themselves like Tess stuck in the typing pool, doing the necessary labor that upholds the academic workforce.

Through comedy and exaggeration, hugely popular movies like *Working Girl* expose the underlying power flows that govern so much of American workplace culture, not least in and around the academy. Why, then, continue to evoke this hierarchical model when it's long been clear that whatever the gender dynamic, this arrangement is not advantageous for many women and minorities, including those who identify outside the traditional gender binary. We, a working mentoring pair, for whom mentorship has been a sustaining intellectual and emotional project, don't believe this history should limit our ideas of what mentorship can do and mean.

Twenty-first-century ethics requires a reset in how we think about the model, notably what happens when we shift the emphasis from the lock of a binary in isolation to a pair or group located within specific social and political contexts. Despite Audre Lorde's oft-cited warning, of

using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, we have chosen to repurpose old methods as we showcase the complexities of new ones.¹ In the first-person stories collected in *Feminists Reclaim Mentorship*, we explore the possibilities of mentorship from a variety of standpoints. Why, for instance, does the desire for mentorship persist—as it does, overwhelmingly—when there are so many mixed, even depressing messages circulating throughout media, the business world, and the halls of academe?²

Our book is an experiment in collaboration between two women of different generations. Although our relationship began with the conventional academic structure of PhD advisor and advisee, after several years of writing on our own we came together for this project to act as a team, sharing our networks and creating a joint style and rhythm. The journey entailed negotiating the boundaries between print and internet cultures (borderline boomer and borderline millennial), and the subway lines between Manhattan and Brooklyn. Online resources like Twitter seemed alien to one of us, familiar and welcoming to the other. Working in tandem was framed by restrictions of family (childcare) and work (heavy teaching load), or the velleities of old age and the anxieties of pandemic life. Somehow, we negotiated our time and timing, making it up as we went along.

As we prepared the book, we were surprised by how strong many people's reactions were to the idea of mentorship itself, whether because they had been well or poorly mentored, or because they had found themselves searching for something that remained elusive. We hope this collection of writing will inspire readers to reflect on their own histories, and to invest in old/ongoing relationships or imagine new ones. Conversations about mentoring are especially urgent now with attacks on vulnerable populations and rights, including the pernicious overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, making the need for channels of interdependence ever more pronounced.

At the same time, while we don't yet fully understand the complex ways in which COVID-19 will transform the idea of the workplace itself, we know that the pandemic disproportionately continues to threaten whatever job security women, LGBTQ+ people, and service workers have attained. Despite the uneven global effects of the pandemic, we still imagine opportunities for local, positive change.³ We also hope that the stories in the book might catalyze rumination—perhaps even future collaboration—about the limitations and potentials of feminist mentorship as it operates within the institutions of teaching, writing, publishing, and other creative endeavors from which these stories emerge.

The history of feminism has taught us the importance of mutually reimagining our self-definitions, including gender identity itself. Second-wave feminism in large part emerged through, was even propelled into visibility by, anthologies. Best-selling collections like *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Home Girls* brought together voices of critique and calls for social justice. This was also the project of seventies consciousness-raising, thought, at least ideally, to be a site of building solidarity through the sharing of differences and commonalities within safe spaces.

In our anthology, we narrow in on the workplaces we both inhabit and know best. The stories focus on university and literary worlds, zones of publishing and editing, making art and fictions. While these are professions of relative privilege, they are equally dependent on scarce resources, precarious labor, and an inadequately addressed lack of accessibility.

But precisely because we are required to navigate modern versions of the epic universe we've inherited, we're not ready to give up on it. *Feminists Reclaim Mentorship* gathers a range of feminist voices to survey what the desire for mentoring has meant, stories of the good, the bad, and everything in between. Many among us still crave the relationship's best practices, while others have experimented with new forms that combine a push and pull between interdependence and autonomy. The model of two remains entangled with the many: a both/and of intimacy and collectivity. However much we debate the values of the one-on-one mentorship structure, those values persist, multiplied and diversified, within given communities.

In part because we've experimented with the project of intergenerational collaboration—our own two-way street—we've felt moved to figure out how this kind of relationship works for feminists who have been making changes in their lives. Over the years, this connection has expanded to the intersections of friends and colleagues we've introduced each other to and brought together, as we've done here. Our mutual engagement with the topic has also meant that we've continued to trade resources—from the intellectual to the intimate—a system of exchange that marked our relationship from the start. Collaboration, at its most enlivening, can lead to reversibility and renewal, while generative reciprocity thrives alongside a commitment to transparency and accountability. As the collective logic of these stories reflects, we've learned the necessity of moving in alignment with the changing structures of work and relationships within the zeitgeist, notably knowing when it's time to mentor the mentor.

In reclaiming mentorship in this book as a feminist project for new generations, we see possibilities for the emergence of more fluid and innovative interactions over time. Mentor or mentee, mentorship above all is a relationship.



Working Girls' gender and class politics mark a dramatic retreat from another hugely popular late twentieth-century comedy about women in the workplace, *9 to 5*, an earlier fictional film also set in a large city. Its version of female bonding moves from satire to farce. The (handsy) boss is white, male, and evil and the (mostly white) women act in solidarity, and in this case really do learn from each other. In anticipation of what we're calling collaborative mentorship, the women in the office bring each other along, at first through shared fantasy and storytelling, later, through tangible, conspiratorial interventions.

At the movie's end, the boss's superior—a six-foot-tall honcho complete with white suit and Stetson hat—turns up unexpectedly and approves the changes the women have made, unbeknownst to their boss: daycare center, job sharing, wellness programs. But the big guy draws the line at the bottom line: "That equal pay thing, though, that's got to go" (*9 to 5*). Equal pay along with equal rights were among the first demands of feminist strikes and movements throughout the seventies. Notably in New York, the context we know best, recent student strikes at Columbia and union demands across CUNY have continued the struggle for equity through collective action. What can feminist mentoring mean in this context?

Seen through these two cultural touchstones, styles of mentoring relationships, as they relate to women's and minorities' participation in the workplace, have transformed over time in tension with political change and the ever-shifting structures of work. In the documentary *9 to 5: The Story of a Movement*, Jane Fonda explains that the movie in which she starred, along with Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton, emerged directly from the women's organization "9 to 5," which was committed to improving the conditions of secretaries (as they were then more commonly called) and clerical staff.

Fonda's conversations with the real-world "9 to 5" women, not least their "jaw dropping" fantasies about doing in their bosses, she says, "unlocked this idea for the movie," a send-up of course, but one "married to the movement." That vision of women acting together—for shared

rights, in pleasure and in friendship—prefigures the kinds of horizontal mentorships that emerge within, and sometimes beyond, feminist circles. The organization “9 to 5” was one of many affirming the need for collaborative, goal-oriented feminist activism in the seventies, not limited to office culture and in fact still urgently needed in academia and the economy of scarcity that regulates its organization.

The women’s liberation movement hoped to serve as an umbrella for gender-based injustices, but many were not addressed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s introduction to *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* underscores the role played by the women of the collective, formed in 1974, in organizing public protest and centering race, class, and sexuality as feminist issues. These women, Taylor writes, “were not only making a political intervention into the feminist movement, but by doing so, they were also creating new entry points into activism for Black and Brown women who would otherwise have been ignored” (6). Though Combahee was not the only radical offshoot, nor the only group of organizing Black women, it had an outsize effect on the movement, in part for its commitment to working “in a collective style, not in a hierarchical style” (Frazier 126).

In a similar instance of innovative feminist mentorship through collective action, in this case in the publishing world, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York, which emerged from the Combahee River Collective, republished *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in 1983. Personal, often polemical, even, at times, righteously angry, taken together the essays in *This Bridge* created a more complicated and inclusive story of feminist politics. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote in the foreword to the second edition, a manifesto for a renewed feminist project, “We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent” (iv).

Both Combahee and Kitchen Table were formed in urban settings, Boston and New York, which made collective action more possible and inherently plural. They exemplify feminist visions that connect the personal to the political in concrete and symbolic ways, a move that anticipates how feminist mentorship has been reimagined as relationships that move beyond the boundaries of the workplace to enact and respond to social change.



In the years separating *9 to 5* from *Working Girl*, the scenario of women competing with each other, animated by a pseudo-mentorship plot, returned (had it ever really left?). The Hollywood clichés about women’s rivalry, inherited from the ur-incarnation of female envy and ambition, the 1950s’ *All About Eve*, also characterized popular feminist discourse in the 1980s. In the real-life contexts of work, as in the movies, it was difficult for some to resist the lure of ladder-of-success feminism. For example, in the media’s invention of the postfeminist, have-it-all 1990s and 2000s, “Girl Power” (originally a feminist interventionist slogan that was co-opted by, among others, the Spice Girls) masqueraded as a positive collective solution for the problems facing women across all kinds of workspaces, and well into the 2010s Sophia Amoruso and other entrepreneurs popularized the figure of the #Girlboss. In *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), the machinations of trickle-down-feminism captivated audiences with yet another plot about a beautiful, bitchy boss manipulating an ambitious young woman willing to pay the price of admission to her circle of power.

In *Late Night* (2019), however, Mindy Kaling attempted to reinvent the stereotypical models of hyper-ambitious women and their competitive relationships with other women. The conventional script represents intergenerational mentorship as simultaneously coveted and punitive: both boss and mentee suffer public and private, not to say sexual, humiliations as their narratives unfold. In the film, a young comedy fan, Molly Patel (played by Kaling), is an Indian American woman adrift in a sea of white male writers, suspecting correctly that she has been given this opportunity only as a “diversity hire.” The show, one of the few hosted by a woman—Katherine Newbury—has fallen in the ratings. Katherine (played by Emma Thompson, for whom Kaling had written the part), known by her employees as a woman who “hates women,” is desperate not to be replaced.

Late Night tries to counter the clichés of competition between powerful older women and untried younger women and moves cautiously past the template of traditional Hollywood scenarios. It no doubt took creator and producer Kaling to push that plot to its slightly redemptive ending: the brittle, narcissistic, middle-aged boss recognizes, in a moment of panic, that she needs her employee as much as her twenty-something, feisty employee might need her.

If the hint of dual reciprocity signals a more porous model, it remains all the same entrenched in that fundamental dynamic. While the drama

circles around the two women, it's in fact the television moguls who call the shots. The film may aim to celebrate women's bonds, or at least the elevation of women in spaces otherwise hostile to their independence and success. But, as in academia, ultimately we're left with an unfinished amelioration of inherited workplace structures.



In the culture at large, mentorship scenarios, often intergenerational, continue to take center stage, obscuring the broader picture. Examples of the classic male mentorship model crop up in mainstream media almost daily, from breaking political news to professional advice podcasts and celebrity profiles. These accounts portray mentorship both in its idealized form and at its most narcissistic and debased. In tributes to cultural icons Virgil Abloh and Stephen Sondheim after their deaths, the portraits of male-to-male mentorship emerge as artistic collaborations born out of supportive recognition and a desire to allow individuals to fully express themselves. On the other hand, what could felon Jeffrey Epstein have meant when he referred to financier Leslie Wexner as his mentor, or Donald Trump, when he longed in public for help from his early mentor, the infamous Roy Cohn? Indeed, the classic model of bonds between men accommodates a wide range of performances on a variety of platforms.

Men, of course, have always mentored women, though what mentoring means in these cases depends on one's perspective. Perhaps the gold standard in the matter of men mentoring women is that of the world-famous anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas mentored Zora Neale Hurston when she was a graduate student at Columbia in the early decades of the twentieth century. He failed to persuade the young scholar to write a dissertation (she had other plans) but helped launch her brilliant career as writer and anthropologist. This story of felicitous mentorship, however, was not typical at Columbia. In her memoir *When Men Were the Only Models We Had* (2002), feminist critic and detective story writer Carolyn Heilbrun describes her unfulfilled longing, when she was a junior faculty member of the English Department, to have the celebrated master of literary criticism, Lionel Trilling, as mentor. He distinctly preferred his male "disciples," she recalls, several of whom later became, as she thought of them, her "adversaries" (66–67).

As these two New York stories suggest, gender paradigms offer variations on a theme: when men mentor women, it's not a simple story.

For example, Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh touts himself as a supporter of women's careers. "Kavanaugh is a Mentor to Women," reads the title of an op-ed by Yale Law School professor Amy Chua in the *Wall Street Journal*, citing his many female law clerks. Her piece did not go without its own critique.⁴ The presumed support of women through mentorship runs counter not only to the individual harm Kavanaugh was accused of by Christine Blasey Ford, who, during a Senate hearing for his confirmation, charged Kavanaugh with sexually assaulting her when they were young. But it also contradicts, one might even say potentially masks, the conservative positions that Kavanaugh upholds that unduly affect women and minorities. Whether concealing misogyny under the mantra of female empowerment or simply refusing to mentor women because it's too dangerous in the age of #MeToo (famously, former vice president Mike Pence refused even to have lunch in public with a woman alone, except for his wife), the mentorship formula is never as straightforward as it might appear.

Despite the attention paid to bad actors and the publicized abuses of one-to-one relationships, mentoring has become a rallying cry for social change. From Billie Jean King to Shonda Rhimes, Ruth Bader Ginsberg to Florynce ("Flo") Kennedy, Janet Mock to Margaret Cho, many of the most visible American feminist figures have publicly acknowledged the ways that active mentorship, particularly of people from marginalized communities, can help level the playing field. In a recent interview about her career, Kaling was asked to describe her approach as a boss. "When you're a woman of color, who is also an employer," she replied, "you can't just be someone who employs people, you also have to be a mentor. It's sort of your responsibility because there are so few of us" (Marchese). Or as writer and academic Roxane Gay puts it in *Bad Feminist*, describing the burnout associated with being a Black faculty member in a majority-white profession: "When it comes to mentoring and being there to support students, I feel it's everyone's job (regardless of ethnicity)" (7).

Questions of education and professional advancement and access to it by younger generations often dominate conversations about why and how mentorship matters. For instance, in *The Lived Experiences of African American Mentors*, Wyletta Gamble-Lomax underscores the importance for young African American women of being surrounded by "community pedagogues"—a group that includes mentors as well as coaches and other leadership figures outside of schools (xx). Gamble-Lomax argues that if

young African American women are to succeed, they need “African American female mentors” and to be privy to “intellectual insights exclusive to the Black female experience” (xviii). In Gamble-Lomax’s view, vulnerability ideally should characterize both sides of the pair, mentor and mentee, a relationship situated within the goals of collective action.

Mentee. The term dates from the twentieth century and lacks Mentor’s legendary pedigree. Girls Write Now, for example, a pioneering arts organization based in New York City devoted to mentoring teens from underserved communities, embraces the language of the mentor/mentee model as the bedrock of their mission of preparing these young writers for college and after. The pairings are designed both to create reciprocal relations and build community.⁵ Individual relationships flourish within the collective space of intergenerational bonding and shared creation, embodied by the publication of the GWN annual anthology.

But even the most well-intended pairing within ostensibly progressive communities can result in unintended consequences. Meg Wolitzer’s best-selling novel *The Female Persuasion* (2018) tells the story of female mentorship between an eager young woman and a dazzling veteran feminist, Faith Frank, who runs a foundation devoted to helping women. The novel charts the ups and downs of their ambivalent mentor–mentee relationship but also sharply mocks the foundation’s project to promote their brand by mentoring poor women in Ecuador while forgetting the women they set out to help.

Indexing that same toxic spirit of white saviorhood, American sociologist and writer Tressie McMillan Cottom tweeted in 2020: “Let me tell you about white women’s incessant need to mentor black women who know more than they do: they are dangerous.” (Introducing a longer thread, the tweet has received thousands of likes and hundreds of retweets.) Though lauded, at times, as a panacea, mentorship often comes at the price of an individual’s sense of her own value and agency—forms of violence and erasure antithetical to what mentorship, in its best configurations, can do.



Often the writers in our collection look back at the mentoring experiences that influenced them starting out, and, in many cases, their own subsequent experiences as mentors. From either position, the essays show, it’s not easy to escape the effects of hierarchy that organize the academic and publishing worlds, even as card-carrying feminists. The so-called

ivory tower tends to mistake itself for Olympus and mere mortals—the ever-increasing numbers of those who do not land the scarce and fetishized tenure-track positions—find themselves stuck at the bottom, ignored or punished by the would-be gods.

When these writers share their experiences of mentorship from within, a striking number of common themes emerge: a mentor's failure to recognize their achievements or their vulnerabilities, the thwarting of ambition, the sense of something missing, a lack of reciprocity, crossed signals, and, of course, rigid assumptions about identity positions. These anxieties punctuate the individual narratives, even when mentorship proves successful. For many of the positive models, what a great mentor does is what psychotherapist Esther Perel, in her paean to mentorship relationships, describes as opening “the door to a different world than the one we come from” (“How a Great Mentor”).⁶

The stories here take us inside experiences that travel to new places, meld the intellectual and the affective, the confessional and the manifesto, worst- and best-case scenarios. They offer lessons for variations on these themes for the future, especially a recognition that the way forward for feminists rethinking mentorship requires establishing channels for transparency and inclusion.

We initially divided our book into two parts, a neat binary between vertical and horizontal mentorship scenarios. But as readers will find, stories that initially seem to fit easily into one category or the other often blur the lines. A few pieces introduce a question of temporality—the haunting of mentors, real or imagined. For these we designed a third interstitial section, a holding place but also an implicit invitation to put the three sections into dialogue.

Part I. Two-Way Streets: Finding Mentors/Becoming Mentors

This group of stories reflects the writers' one-on-one mentorship experiences. Finding the right mentor, if and when it happens, is a process. Sometimes it's a long journey to find a match. A number of our writers find themselves lovingly recalling mentors who supported them and offered what seem to be two key elements of positive outcomes: recognition and reciprocity. Others remember instead a feeling of not being seen, even at times disappointment and harm.⁷ For some, being well mentored or even

poorly mentored leads people to become mentors themselves, however reluctantly or imperfectly.

The section opens with essays focused on mentoring within academia. Many of these stories have a happy ending, one of mutual recognition between a pair, and a turn toward assuming the mentor position—but often only after a trial by fire and a redefinition of the terms of mentorship itself. Unsurprisingly, experienced mentors tend to view themselves in a rather different light from that of their students; often the mentees rewrite history in a way that reminds us just how difficult it is to gauge the degree of reciprocity the relationship entails from one position or the other. For the lucky few, looking back inspires gratitude toward the individuals who recognized their abilities and potential, and helped them navigate the gender and racialized hierarchies inherent to academia.

From these stories, we turn to narratives of professional trajectories in the no less white- and male-dominated industries such as publishing, journalism, and creative writing that operate alongside and often overlap with academia. Without the structural arrangement of the PhD-to-tenure-track progression, which relies on a conventional mentorship model, these contributors had to hustle. Some found role models—people they aspired to be like who did not necessarily offer concrete forms of mentorship. Others were accidentally mentored by those within their orbit, whether family members or those from their cohorts.

For individuals bridging not just the usual professional obstacles but also the changes that flow from immigration and geographical inflections—Australia, India, Ireland, and Israel—the mentorship process is still more complicated. These stories expose the innovations and resistances unique to specific locations. Composed almost (in one case explicitly) as love letters, these contributions mark the ways in which mentorship, at its best a form of inspiration, offers not guidance or advice so much as permission, Aoibheann Sweeney suggests, permission to trust in oneself.

Part II. Rearview Mirror: Mentoring at a Distance

Three pieces—two essays and a poem—in this section describe a posthumous or otherworldly expression of the one-to-one mentorship experience. They recall a relationship that continues in a form difficult to define, almost, as two of the titles suggest, ghostly, or reconstructed in belated, loving, distant, sometimes readerly homage.

We want to recognize the engagements with mentors who have died but with whom, in some sense, we continue to live.

Part III. The Traffic in Mentors: Horizontal Scripts

Many contributors in this third section expose the problems in two-way mentoring that led them to seek alternate paths. They focus on more complicated structures of mentorship, what we have come to think of as horizontal modes, which describe communal ways of connecting even if they begin with one-to-one relationships. The work here, mostly essays but also an interview, deploys a range of rich metaphors to describe new, nonhierarchical ways of relating, from Melissa Coss Aquino's "the mentoring mirror" to Daná-Ain Davis's "widening the way." These alternative forms of supportive mentorship typically emerge in response to problems of situational miscommunication and differences in background and identity. The mentors self-described in these pieces are committed to engaging with all the possibilities their mentees bring to the table.

Two essays consider mentorship in the time of #MeToo, showing how a single abusive mentor and the lack of a community of care undermine individual agency. These stories fall on a spectrum of abuse and point to the ways in which mentorship can be used as a screen for extremes of negative behavior, including sexual assault and violence. From poster boy Harvey Weinstein to former governor Andrew Cuomo and Harvard anthropologist John Comaroff, men (and sometimes women) in power have finally been exposed, too often to disappointing outcomes, thanks to those who have gone public with their stories in order to create new outlets for solidarity and justice.

Some, not liking its connotations of hierarchy and whiteness, resist the word *mentor* itself. They have turned, instead, to relationships that emphasize collaboration, commonality, and a move to plural arrangements. While horizontal mentorship can happen at the individual level—with those in positions of power ethically minding their status and working to support rather than lead—some of our contributors have found it more comfortable to dwell instead in community. Their discomfort with conventional mentorship paradigms, including the personal/professional divide, prompts a turn instead to other, communal supports. From backyard gatherings of intimate friendships to running clubs and group texts, these writers prefer to collapse binaries, choosing instead connection and

acknowledging that work problems and successes are just two of many important components of a fulfilling life.

At the same time, we give full recognition to the reality that instances of bad or inadequate mentorship are entrenched in macro-level inequities and injustices that cannot be solved by reshaping the model. As Angela Veronica Wong argues, echoing Audre Lorde on the master's tools, "Too often, professional mentorship replicates the logic of investment, not the logic of dismantling." Wong underlines the importance of moving beyond individual stories to establish sites of collective creativity and action. This means acknowledging the economies of racial capitalism underlying our social interactions in the workplace—and beyond.

The mentorship model continues to loom large in stories about work and personal lives, in unexpected settings, with unanticipated transformations, including bitter disappointment. Taken together, the essays, interviews, and poem in *Feminists Reclaim Mentorship* challenge the foundational assumptions that drive tried-and-true patterns, the obstacles that make it so hard to connect meaningfully and ethically. Will the practice of mentoring, even in a creative or collaborative form, fully serve those it's aimed at helping? Does affinity—often assumed to be the ground for creating mentorship pairs or cohorts—require sameness? How might we find different ways to connect with one another?

What has worked for the two of us—intense professional collaboration interspersed with breakdowns and rescue missions—is not meant as a model or prescription. The writers offer a range of novel solutions to effects of disparities and other potential obstacles to reciprocity. At best, they strive for relationships that acknowledge the full recognition of differences and interdependence alongside the necessity of forging common bonds.

Mentorship is complicated. Nonetheless, for many of us it's impossible to imagine the shapes of our lives without the mentors who've inspired us.

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Notes

1. At the 1979 “Second Sex” conference, Lorde protested the absence of “poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians” in the program. Her talk, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” was eventually collected in the literary anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*.

2. In the business world, Sylvia Ann Hewlett’s 2013 book on the subject, published by Harvard Business Review Press, announces its thesis in the title: *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career*.

3. In her 2021 *Work Won’t Love You Back*, Sarah Jaffe addresses labor activism, past and present, and discusses a variety of related movements, including in academia. See chapter 8, “Proletarian Professionals: Academia,” pp. 231–62.

4. A follow-up article in *The Guardian* described the practice of Yale Law professors—including Chua—vetting clerks who wanted to work for him and suggesting

that Kavanaugh hires women with a certain “look.” See <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/20/brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court-yale-amy-chua>.

5. Many mentorship organizations for young people exist, like the Posse Foundation (<https://www.possefoundation.org/>) and Scholarship Plus (<https://www.scholarshipplus.org/>).

6. Perel, best known as a relationship guru, recently turned to the subject of workplace relations in her podcast, *How's Work*. Roxane Gay has written about the subject, too, in her *New York Times* column, *Work Friend*.

7. On the complex feelings mentorship can elicit, see Bonnie D. Oglensky's *Ambivalence in Mentorship: An Exploration of Emotional Complexities*.

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