"Mentoring," Past and Present

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mentor
noun
1. a wise and trusted counselor or teacher.
2. an influential senior sponsor or supporter.
Synonyms
1. adviser, master, guide, preceptor

Word Origin and History
"wise advisor," 1750, from Greek *Mentor*,
friend of Odysseus and adviser of Telemachus…
causative form of root **men-* "to think" (see mind (n.)).
The general use of the word probably is via later popular romances…
—www.dictionary.com/browse/mentor?s=t
(Accessed November 23, 2017)

What is a mentor's voice?
I don't think Hayden [White] knew my husband's name;
I still don't know if he had a pet.
While he did write a blurb…for my first book…
he didn't write me letters of recommendation;
he didn't read drafts of my writing; and to my knowledge
he didn't serve as an external reviewer
for anything I ever published.
Other people traveled with him, saw him more frequently, worked with him directly.
But Hayden championed work he thought interesting,
and to know this made one want to work better.
…What is a mentor's voice?
…Hayden White moved among the academic elite
but took underdogs and oddballs under his wing.
I was one of them, and I will always be grateful.
—Amy J. Elias (2018)

Presenting my first paper at the Western Political Science Association (WPSA, or "the Western"), I lucked into having the late Professor Rita Mae Kelly as discussant. Her presence proved providential: as the man chairing the panel attempted to cut my presentation time relative to what he had accorded the other presenters, all male, Rita intervened. Hours later, heading out to dinner with a group of colleagues, Rita spotted me and invited me to join them. That and later interactions modeled for me the kind of senior–junior relationship that has been called mentoring. Had it not been for that gesture and all that ensued, I am likely not to have remained in academia, let alone in political science. This and other encounters, with different people, sparked my academic interest in mentoring.

That concept has attracted increasing attention in recent years, especially in a work-related, career context. I find a certain degree of amnesia in the current attention. The concept is not new, as the opening epigraph attests. Its rejuvenation is typically credited to Daniel Levinson's research on male adult development stages (1978), which explored the role and place of mentors and mentoring in men's careers.[1] But Levinson's description of mentoring practices as experienced by men prior to 1978 differs from the concept's current meaning. Comparing earlier forms of what I term "voluntary mentoring" with contemporary practices of assigned or managed mentoring raises some critical issues that should be considered today, especially when a practice developed in business organizations—with very gendered origins that sometimes still color it today—is imported for use in higher educational organizations.

Mentoring comprises a significant segment of the human resource management, career theory, and organizational behavior subfields of organizational and management studies and public administration. Its literature is vast. In lieu of a systematic review, I am autobiographical in situating my assessment of this shift to managed mentoring. The first of two vignettes shows what a more informal, organically developed mentoring relationship can look like. The second illustrates the normative dimension in academic treatments. Practice studies contextualizes my approach to the subject.[2] I conclude with a note on the idea of collective mentoring, which may constitute a feminist version of what originated as a gendered practice.

ORIGINS AND CHANGES

In the mid-twentieth century, mentoring was significant in the US business world in the context of career advancement within a specific organization. "White collar" line ranks (as distinct from "pink collar" staff) were predominantly male. Depending on the location and the industry, white collar businesses were also predominantly White, "Anglo-Saxon," and Protestant, often excluding not only African-, Asian-, Latinx-, and Native Americans, but also Irish, Italians, Jews, and other "hyphenated Americans" who have largely been disappeared into the category "White." "Mentoring" referred to the workplace line relationship between a senior man and a junior one, typically a new hire: "The principal aim of mentoring," according to one textbook that maintains the sex/gender assumptions of earlier generations along with their paternalism, "is to bring together a person with managerial potential and an experienced manager, who is not necessarily that person's direct manager. The senior manager can provide advice and tutoring, serving as a kind of 'uncle' or 'godfather' in the workplace. Thus, mentoring is directed mostly at managerial personnel…" (Baruch 2004, 188). Because it was part of his character and values, because he saw it as an attribute of his position, because he himself had benefited from mentoring, the senior employee would reach out to the junior one, to "show him the ropes."[3] The newcomer would thereby learn members' unspoken, tacit knowledge concerning how to fit into the organization, how to succeed, and so

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forth. Mentoring existed without being institutionalized: there were no mentoring programs, no assigned "mentors" for new hires, no conference or symposia panels on the topic. It was what a senior man did. Indeed, the notion developed a romanticized aspect (signaled in the first epigraph): a newcomer might pine for a senior person to take him under his wing, informally teaching him the workplace ins and outs—or so contemporaneous textbook illustrations imply.

This kind of voluntary mentoring began to change toward the end of the 1970s as those hitherto excluded from the corporate workforce entered in increasing numbers. Personnel Offices (later renamed Human Resource Management [HR or HRM]) adopted "mentoring" to solve perceived problems of employee retention and promotion emerging from the growing presence of people from "cultural" backgrounds deemed different from those of the population (and "culture") that dominated most organizations' middle and upper ranks. The "misfit" between newcomers and established organizational cultures led to a revolving door of hiring and quitting or firing. "Mentoring" was proposed as a solution: something that would enhance newcomers' abilities and contributions, leading to their career success as measured by retention, promotion, and/or compensation (see, e.g., Fagenson 1989). Proponents of mentoring programs also sought to link them to employee job satisfaction, organizational behavior theories' Holy Grail, thought to tie, causally, to worker retention and loyalty (see, e.g., Allen et al. 2004). Personnel/HR or the newcomer's direct manager designated a "mentor" for each new hire.

Contemporary sources suggest the extent to which this idea of assigned or managed mentoring has caught on—as well as the romanticism it promises. A Google search (May 24, 2018) of "mentoring in the workplace" produced the following quotes (emphases added), in order, which I believe—based on prior research reading HRM magazines and journals—to be typical of the field:

> Successful companies large and small *use mentoring to tackle complex human resource challenges*.... [W]orkplace mentoring is on the rise with 71 percent of Fortune 500 companies offering formal mentoring programs to their employees.... [M]ore and more companies are *relying on formal workplace mentoring programs to engage, develop, and retain their top talent.* (Chronus LLC 2018, an online organization whose logo includes "unleash the power of mentoring")

> *...the benefits of having a sage, trusted mentor can be...extremely valuable for success and advancement.* A mentor can teach about the responsibilities specific to a job role or the state of an entire industry. He [sic!] can also teach about the ins-and-outs of a company's organizational chart, policies, practices and business methodologies. If a young person is willing to be *a sponge for a mentor's knowledge*, he can set out on a long, successful career path. (Emma 2018, a media and business writer, editor, and "digital marketing professional")

> A mentor in the workplace is someone who is capable of providing guidance to a less-experienced employee.... T]he mentor assumes a role model position...to share their knowledge, skill and expertise...for the *long-term benefit of the mentee, and the entire company*.... A mentorship arrangement can also help a gifted but quiet employee feel less isolated at work and encourage them to interact more openly with their peers. (Leadership Management Australasia N.d., a consulting company specializing in "leadership and training" and related HRM tools and techniques)

This new form of mentoring often worked to smooth the entry and advancement of women and minority group members in corporate workplaces. The popular business press claimed that, on their own, "racial minorities, especially blacks, do not find mentors in organizations" (D. Thomas and Alderfer 1989, 141)—meaning that volunteers were not stepping forward. Not having a mentor was seen as a drawback: for example, the "lack of mentoring...may also cause women to have lower aspirations for themselves and thus they may be hesitant to attempt that first step onto the academic ladder" (Bronstein et al. 1989, 113).

Still, criticism of managed mentoring developed, noting, for instance, that the relationship required "the time and mutual interest of both the superior and subordinate. Such relationships are difficult to establish and maintain, especially if the mentor already holds a position of influence" (Barney and Lawrence 1989, 427). Additionally, in shifting to managed mentoring, which veteran employees may feel obligated to perform to earn merit themselves (e.g., for promotion), something of the earlier form—with its more organic, interpersonal, relational base, entailing emergent ties between people sharing a certain affinity—has been lost. Although newcomers may feel relieved at having a dedicated address for questions and concerns, they typically have no say in who that person will be. Moreover, assigned mentors are often disproportionately drawn from the ranks of underrepresented groups (Kanter 1993/1977; Matthew 2016), overburdening them in the process.

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This assessment rests partially on understanding mentoring as a type of nonformal education (an educational studies concept that refers to teaching/learning other than via formal instruction). As Paulo Freire's methods for teaching reading and writing to nonliterate people demonstrated (1970; 1973), certain kinds of nonformal educational programs can also be "activist" in their intentions and implementation. Beyond a relational critique of managed mentorship in workplaces, I suggest we not lose sight of a

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more collective, more activist form of mentoring, which may be particularly suited to a professional association.

VIGNETTE I: BACK TO GRADUATE SCHOOL, MID-1970S

After working for several years post-BA, I returned to school for a master's degree, taking a seminar on national urban development policy with the graduate school dean, Paul N. Ylvisaker. As Philadelphia Mayor Joe Clark's executive secretary, at the Ford Foundation's Public Affairs Program (1955–1967), and then as New Jersey's first Commissioner for Community Affairs, Paul had become a major figure in urban policy, creating Ford's Gray Areas programs (the forerunner of the federal Office of Economic Opportunity; see, e.g., Rosenfield and Wimpee 2015, 13ff.; Steen 2001). He had a vast network of colleagues, contacts, and friends involved in the housing and community development policy world, and they spoke, *seriatim*, at the seminar sessions. Following each session, seminar participants were invited to schmooze with that week's guest, which opened doors to various research and work opportunities. I came later to see this as Paul's understanding of mentoring. Without making a point of it, he "mentored" several of us both during the semester and subsequently, modeling administrative leadership and collaborative deliberation. After I graduated, he asked me to come work for him. The stream of visitors continued as people from policy, foundation, university leadership, and other arenas came calling. I was often invited to sit in on these meetings. Sometimes Paul delivered a straight "lesson" afterwards: "Dvora, here's what's going on; these are the behind-the-scenes personal, political, and organizational relationships; here's why So-and-So wanted to talk to me," and so on. These encounters offered implicit instruction in politics and power.

From later organizational studies conference panels, I learned that these invitations could be designated "mentoring." There was no explicit naming of roles; no one assigned Paul to any of us. He practiced an understanding of mentoring common in the workaday world of that time—fostering the advancement of people he perceived as promising, which for him included women and minorities—which he brought into the university from his nonprofit and public sector organizational experiences. He exemplified the career theory idea that practitioners—teachers, doctors, clergy, and so on—shape their practices following their personal ways of being in the world. Paul's interpretation of mentoring practice entailed putting his own "positional capital" to the service of students and junior colleagues, without saying so explicitly. This was part of the tacit knowledge that his mentoring entailed, communicated tacitly through deeds.

VIGNETTE II: PHD AND BEYOND, 1980S–1990S

A year after finishing the EdM, I started my PhD, eventually taking a degree in Planning, Policy, and Organizational Studies. The latter interest led me to Academy of Management conferences, the associational center for organizational studies. I found a home initially in the Women in Management Division (now Gender and Diversity in Organizations), where I first encountered "mentors" and "mentoring" as analytic terms. Divisional colleagues in organizational behavior (an application of social psychology, including adult development and career theories, workplace socialization and learning, and HRM) researched the role and use of mentors and mentoring in retaining and promoting newcomers. These researchers included Kathy Kram, the key theorist on mentoring relationships then and now (see, e.g., Kram 1983; 1985; 1988; Murphy and Kram 2014). Signaling an important theoretical change, for example, Kram (1983) wrote, "The mentor relationship can significantly enhance development in early adulthood *and also in the midcareer stage of the more experienced individual*" (emphasis added).

At that time, much of the research on mentoring had a normative—or even "activist"—bent. For instance, researchers observed that newcomers misunderstood what was beginning to be called the "culture" of the organization; that such lack of understanding led them not to thrive or even survive in the workplace; and that research-based interventions might improve such situations.[4] Arguments were often framed, strategically, to emphasize anticipated benefits to the company. These concerns paralleled and sometimes overlapped with the burgeoning field of workplace (cultural) diversity.[5] Increasingly, as researchers and HR practitioners drew on mentoring to address the problems they perceived as accompanying new types of employees, the kind of mentoring that my classmates and I had experienced with Paul shifted to a different form of activity: a formalized, institutionalized, nonvoluntary, assigned and managed role.[6]

COLLECTIVE MENTORING

Some years ago, the American Political Science Association (APSA) instituted a faculty-to-faculty "mentoring program," and I signed up to "pay forward" the grace that Rita Mae Kelly had granted me years before. I experienced striking differences between APSA's managed mentoring and the voluntary mentoring I had known. The former can feel artificial, even when the "recipient" selects a mentor from a list of volunteers. Even in the context of a professional association, rather than a workplace, the match can feel forced: for example, have prospective mentors signed up altruistically or are they seeking a line for their CV or departmental review?

But another, conference-based model exists, albeit less recognized as mentoring. Whether voluntary or managed, much of the thinking about mentoring treats it as a one-on-one, senior–junior interaction. Yet mentoring can also take on a collective character, such as enacted by the WPSA's and other Women's Caucuses in Political Science. At the Western, the Caucus' annual 7:00 a.m. Saturday breakfast meetings included reports—tallied by Martin Gruber (e.g., Gruber 1979)—of the numbers of women chairing panels, presenting their research, and serving as discussants. This census of women's conference activities pushed back, *avant la lettre*, against "manels" (see Whaley 2017). The Western's Caucus also demonstrated a model of activist engagement in the politics of science, leading to interventions in associational routines as those reports were presented at the Saturday afternoon business meetings and to changes that reverberated beyond the WPSA, including at APSA. Caucus breakfasts also included other forms of collective

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mentoring: agendas specifically included announcements of job openings; individuals' searches; and publishing, conference, and other upcoming opportunities, often leading to subsequent follow-up conversations.

Today, the Women Also Know Stuff group (Beaulieu et al. 2017) also puts collective mentoring into action. Its operational definition harks to traditional, voluntary mentoring, and the group is very clear about the rewards (Beaulieu et al., 782, emphases added):

> The work also has brought us personal rewards…, nurtur[ing] our souls, providing us with support and inspiration…. *We have formed bonds with one another* as well as with other women in the discipline…. We are building our networks and feeling more connected—*building a community* that makes us personally happier and more fulfilled.

Such collective mentoring models what academic work—including political science practices—can look like. It is collaborative, rather than one-on-one, and lateral and relational, rather than top-down and supervisory (something Kram discussed in her later work; e.g., 1985). Collective mentoring can also occur when participants share personal dimensions of professional practices in conferences and in print, as when seven senior qualitative researchers at a 2016 American Sociology Association panel explored the meaning of retiring (subsequently published as Ellis et al. 2017).

These examples point to an idea discussed in the literature—that rewards can accrue to those offering mentoring, not only those receiving it, and that it can have worth not only for newcomers but also for those at mid-career levels and later (Kram 1985). What is different is its communal character—a group engagement advancing the informal education of participants concerning aspects of academic practice. Shifting away from mentoring as an individual, hierarchical relationship can be generative for revisioning its possibilities in new organizational settings.

SUMMING UP

To be clear, I am not arguing for "originalism"—that only the earlier, voluntary models of mentoring practices are worthwhile. Although I am partial to that form, I recognize that ideas and theories travel and that, as Edward Said noted, "the original formulation of a theory is not always the most radical, subversive, transformative" (quoted in Davis and Zarkov 2017, 319). But I do wish to suggest that as "mentoring" has traveled, something significant has been lost. Managed mentoring succeeded in making available to some who lacked it the organizational cultural knowledge needed to become an accepted member of a specific workplace. Yet those gains have not fully realized mentoring's promise: witness the continued existence of "glass ceilings," including in positions and journal publications. The question remains: "What can 'mentoring' mean in academic (and other) workplaces?" It would seem to be time for a more critically reflective, explicit engagement with the concept and its practices.

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NOTES

1. He also introduced there the concept of midlife crisis. For the "social class," "racial-ethnic-religious," and other variations in his sample, see Levinson (1978, 7–19). Compare his book on women's lives (Levinson 1996).
2. Practice studies, too, is a vast terrain, ranging from workplace studies to international relations treatments. My work lies in the former, in a pragmatist-phenomenological vein (Yanow 2015, esp. 272–89).
3. For an amusing yet utterly serious take on what "learning the ropes" meant at the time, see Ritti and Levy (2010/1977), which was widely used in organizational studies courses through the 1990s, at least.
4. See, for example, Blackwell (1989) and Ragins (1989). See D. Thomas (2001) on minorities' "revolving door" in the business workplace.
5. "Workplace diversity," "cultural diversity," and their management emerged in the 1980s–1990s in the United States as more and more women and "race-ethnic minority" group members were hired to organizational positions that had hitherto largely been held by White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men. Demographic and organizational cultural differences often led to interpersonal or intra-organizational misunderstandings. "Diversity"—a code word for women and minorities—had to be "managed" to minimize miscommunications and clashes. Academic researchers and HR professionals alike sought to persuade CEOs and company boards that hiring women and "minorities" (the contemporary term) would be less of "a drawback interfering with productivity and efficiency" and more of a benefit to the bottom line by, among other things, "adding new ideas and creativity" (Yanow 2003, 156). HR magazines, in particular, translated "managing diversity" into organizing cultural awareness days, encouraging employees to wear "native" dress and bring "native" foods. Other articles sought more critically reflective stances concerning "otherness" and "difference," their causes, and interventions (see, e.g., Alpert 2018; Fine, Johnson, and Ryan 1990; R. Thomas (1991–1992).
6. Some theorists have also been critical of the implementation of this shift to assigned/managed mentoring. Kram (1988, abstract), for example, wrote about discouraging "the 'search for the right mentor,'" one of its pitfalls.

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