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Meaning in Mentoring: more than meets the eye/'I' through a Lacanian identity lens

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Abstract:	<p>While the literature of mentoring is extensive, the theorization of mentoring is a noted deficiency. In addressing this deficiency, this conceptual paper begins with a brief critical analysis of the extensive corpus of mentoring inquiry and discerns emerging theoretical trajectories as a foundation for the distinct theoretical focus adopted. The social constructionist approach to understanding identity, and Lacanian psychodynamic identity theorizing are critically developed. The conceptualization of identity as a discursive construct, emerging from a balance between conscious identity-work and unconscious identity regulation, is examined. These theoretical tools are then applied to mentoring. The paper demonstrates that for both mentors and protégés, mentoring involves mutually beneficial identity-work, but that this identity-work can readily go awry with both parties potentially succumbing to forces distorting desired identities and negating the good intentions of mentoring. The implications for mentoring practice are detailed and trajectories for empirical inquiry with identity are outlined.</p>

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3 **Meaning in Mentoring: more than meets the eye/'I' through a**
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5 **Lacanian identity lens**
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10 **Abstract**
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12 While the literature of mentoring is extensive, the
13 theorization of mentoring is a noted deficiency. In addressing
14 this deficiency, this conceptual paper begins with a brief
15 critical analysis of the extensive corpus of mentoring inquiry
16 and discerns emerging theoretical trajectories as a foundation
17 for the distinct theoretical focus adopted. The social
18 constructionist approach to understanding identity, and Lacanian
19 psychodynamic identity theorizing are critically developed. The
20 conceptualization of identity as a discursive construct, emerging
21 from a balance between conscious identity-work and unconscious
22 identity regulation, is examined. These theoretical tools are
23 then applied to mentoring. The paper demonstrates that for both
24 mentors and protégés, mentoring involves mutually beneficial
25 identity-work, but that this identity-work can readily go awry
26 with both parties potentially succumbing to forces distorting
27 desired identities and negating the good intentions of mentoring.
28 The implications for mentoring practice are detailed and
29 trajectories for empirical inquiry with identity are outlined.
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Meaning in Mentoring

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For Peer Review

Meaning in Mentoring: more than meets the eye

Introduction

This conceptual paper extends theoretical understanding of the key HRD intervention of mentoring. The paper moves research in a new theoretical direction by introducing and developing a particularly fruitful theoretical perspective to the mentoring literature. By adopting a systematic and critical literature review, we introduce aspects of the identity and psychodynamic literatures into the established canon of mentoring literature. It will be shown that what 'meets the eye' in mentoring, such as knowledge acquisition and skills development, is only part of the story. A significant but as yet neglected part of the story is, the paper argues, the conscious and unconscious meaning-making process occurring within mentoring relationships as both mentors and protégés strive to gain self-understanding and to construct an acceptable sense-of-self, a sense of 'I'. This 'meaning in mentoring' is examined as the key to understanding how mentoring really works. The new theoretical perspective developed from the identity and psychodynamic literatures also serves to unsettle the comfortable *status quo* of mentoring being seen as unquestionably a 'good thing'. It will be seen how mentoring can inadvertently work to constrain rather than enable personal development. The paper concludes by examining the implications

Meaning in Mentoring

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3 of the new insights for mentoring in practice and for future
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5 empirical inquiry.
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10 Mentoring is a perennially popular personal and career
11 development method (Ragins & Kram, 2007) that has recently
12
13 burgeoned as a formal HRD intervention within organizations
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15 (Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Corner, 2014). However, informal mentoring
16
17 has also become important in light of the growth of fluidity of
18
19 work (Petriglieri, 2011) and the associated boundary-less careers
20
21 (Fullick-Jagiela, Verbos & Wiese, 2015). These changes in
22
23 employment patterns have increased the importance of less
24
25 structured and non-formal workplace learning methods (Hamlin &
26
27 Stewart 2011; Mizzi & Rocco, 2013). Concomitantly, all forms of
28
29 mentoring receive a lot of empirical research attention with
30
31 Ragins and Kram (2008, p.4) noting an "explosion of research
32
33 interest that crosses disciplines" and Allen, Eby, O'Brien and
34
35 Lentz (2008, p.343) finding a "tremendous surge" in mentoring
36
37 research. The "sheer volume of literature on mentoring" (Ghosh,
38
39 2013, p.144) has supported several substantial literature
40
41 reviews. So, given that mentoring has been extensively studied,
42
43 why is yet another paper needed? This paper contributes by
44
45 making two distinctive contributions to understanding mentoring
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47 and to informing mentoring practice.
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3 First, the paper contributes by taking a critical
4
5 perspective on workplace mentoring to deepen understanding and
6
7 thereby enable more informed mentoring practice. Certain strands
8
9 of the mainstream mentoring literature show some criticality in,
10
11 for example, recognizing that mentoring can be dysfunctional with
12
13 negative outcomes including overdependence and antagonism (e.g.
14
15 Allen, Lentz & Day, 2006; Young, Cady & Foxon, 2006). However,
16
17 while a more broadly critical take on mentoring has been called
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19 for (Opengart & Bierema, 2015), research is generally
20
21 characterised by a positive, positivistic and performative
22
23 perspective (e.g. Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019). In a comprehensive
24
25 review of over two hundred mentoring studies, Allen et al. (2008)
26
27 found almost universal reports of mentoring having only
28
29 beneficial outcomes. For example, Fullick-Jagiela et al. (2015)
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31 noted the empowerment associated with mentoring, and mentoring
32
33 gurus Ragins and Kram (2007, p.4) reported the "appeal of
34
35 mentoring as a ... transformational relationship". The
36
37 practitioner orientated literature reports in a similar tone, the
38
39 "miracle" of mentoring (Ingleton, 2013) and the "magic" that can
40
41 result (Ramalho, 2014, p.177). While mentoring is less researched
42
43 from the mentor perspective than the protégé perspective, studies
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45 of the mentor perspective similarly emphasize benefits such as
46
47 how the relationship meets mentors' "generative needs" (Kram,
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49 1983, p.610). Such findings align with the general tenor of
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 mainstream HRD research as masculine and performance driven
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5 (Collins, 2012). By contrast, this paper aligns with the
6
7 emerging 'Critical HRD' movement (Bierema and Callahan, 2014;
8
9 Callahan, Rigg & Sambrook, 2015) and particularly examines the
10
11 power imbalance within mentoring. From our Critical HRD
12
13 perspective we respond to Collins' (2012) calls to avoid
14
15 complacency with the *status quo*, to be critical, and to avoid
16
17 hegemonic agency in favour of change agency. We therefore aim to
18
19 surface and to challenge prevailing assumptions, to foreground
20
21 neglected themes, and to advance new and alternative ways of
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23 understanding and practicing mentoring.
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30 Second, we contribute by moving beyond empirical description
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32 towards theoretical explanations. Despite theoretical advances
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34 in the social sciences in general, Ragins, Cotton and Miller's
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36 (2000) observation that mentoring research was predominantly
37
38 empirical remains the case today. In their seminal handbook of
39
40 mentoring, Ragins and Kram (2007, p.4) commented that scholars
41
42 "continue to struggle with understanding ... we know it works [but]
43
44 we are still grappling with why, when and how" (see also Young,
45
46 Cady & Foxon, 2006). More recently, in reviewing the literature
47
48 of informal mentoring, Janssen, Vuuren & Jong, (2015, p.507)
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50 noted that the "literature ... lacks theoretical explanations".
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55 Janssen et al. concluded that while findings were abundant, the
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3 underlying mechanisms remained a 'black box' with theory-based
4 studies being desperately needed (see also, Ehrhardt and Ragins,
5 2019). Ghosh (2013, p.145) similarly remarked that, although
6 mentoring was "an often recognised HRD tool [*this*] does not imply
7 that it is a deeply understood one". Moreover, where theoretical
8 explanations of mentoring have been proposed such as relational
9 mentoring theory (Ragins, Lyness & Winkel, 2010) or, of
10 particular relevance to this paper, professional identity theory
11 (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004), these remain under-
12 developed and have limited explanatory leverage.
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28 Significantly, the paper responds to Ragins and Kram's
29 (2007, p.4) as yet largely unanswered call to "bring new
30 theoretical lenses to the discourse on mentoring". By theory we
31 mean quite simply, in relation to mentoring, a system of concepts
32 that explain how mentoring 'works' or fails to work and that are
33 capable of predicting how and why mentoring might work or might
34 go awry. The particular theoretical contribution made in this
35 paper is to show the relevance of social constructionist identity
36 theorizing and of key facets of Lacanian psychodynamic theorizing
37 for providing a better understanding of mentoring. Such
38 theorizing responds to calls for an ontological shift from the
39 mainstream focus of mentoring inquiry on the outcomes of
40 mentoring towards a focus on the processes, that is, the
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3 dynamics, reciprocity, and mutuality of mentoring interactions
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5 (Janssen et al., 2015).
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10 Traditionally the focus of HRD, and workplace mentoring, has
11 been upon enabling the acquisition of knowledge and fostering the
12 development of skills required for occupational capability.
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14 However, it is increasingly recognized that occupational
15
16 capability needs to be understood in more processual terms, as
17
18 requiring the construction of new ways of understanding the self
19
20 (Bryans & Mavin, 2003), that is, the construction of an effective
21
22 occupational identity (Poulsen, 2013; Cameron & Grant, 2017).
23
24 Muir (2014, p.350) thus noted how the key and generic
25
26 occupational capability of leadership "needs to be focused on
27
28 leaders' sense of identity". Identity theorizing is highly
29
30 developed in the organization studies literature and is also used
31
32 in the adult learning and educational literatures (e.g. Cameron &
33
34 Grant, 2017), and the importance of identity formation in
35
36 mentoring is widely acknowledged (e.g. Mysyk, 2008; Muir, 2014;
37
38 Janssen et al., 2015). However, despite Ragin's (1997)
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40 observation that identity was a fruitful area for further
41
42 mentoring research, nearly twenty years later, Fullick-Jagiela et
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44 al. (2015, p.498) noted "the extent to which mentoring
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46 relationships contribute to a protégé's sense of professional
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48 identity has not been examined thoroughly".
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5 Therefore, the research question guiding this theory
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7 building review is, how can mentoring be understood for both
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9 protégés and mentors in terms of conscious and unconscious
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11 identity development processes? Young et al. (2006) suggested
12
13 that understanding mentoring required multiple theoretical lenses
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15 and we do not claim that the understanding developed here is an
16
17 alternative that can replace established understandings. Indeed,
18
19 our review begins with a critical analysis of established
20
21 research and the associated theoretical understandings and then
22
23 shows how the identity theorizing at the centre of this paper
24
25 builds upon certain strands of established work. However,
26
27 identity theorizing does offer additional important new insights,
28
29 particularly into what are acknowledged to be less understood
30
31 facets of mentoring such as the mutuality of benefits and
32
33 dysfunctional outcomes (Ragins, 1997; Ghosh & Reio, 2013).
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35 Moreover, the theorizing offers leverage in understanding both
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37 formal and informal mentoring relationships.
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46 The paper now proceeds as follows. First the literature
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48 review method is described. Second, a thematic overview of the
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50 corpus of mentoring literature is provided and established ways
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52 of theorizing mentoring are discerned and evaluated. Third, the
53
54 identity literature is analyzed, social constructionist
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 theorizing of identity is developed in detail and this theorizing
4
5 is then applied to understanding mentoring. In particular, the
6
7 identity-work literature is critically reviewed to understand how
8
9 mentoring 'works' for mentors and protégés. Fourth, the emerging
10
11 literature adopting a psychodynamic perspective to understanding
12
13 identity is critically reviewed to provide deeper insights into
14
15 the identity processes invoked within mentoring relationships.
16
17 Fifth, conclusions are drawn, showing how the identity
18
19 literatures reviewed provide a fresh perspective on how mentoring
20
21 relationships work. Implications for the practice of mentoring
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23 in organizations are developed alongside these conclusions.
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25 Finally, the implications for empirical inquiry are outlined.
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Methods

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35 This inquiry adopted an integrative reviewing procedure
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37 influenced by the step-by-step framework for literature reviews
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39 in HRD outlined by Opengart and Bierema (2015). As explained in
40
41 the introduction, the paper critically examines the potential of
42
43 identity and psychodynamic theorizing to extend the understanding
44
45 of mentoring. However, it was initially necessary to overview
46
47 the substantial corpus of mentoring literature built up across
48
49 several disciplines over the past four decades to ascertain and
50
51 evaluate established theorizations. This initial phase of our
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53 work was facilitated by the existence of several systematic
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3 reviews of the corpus of mentoring research. These reviews
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5 include Allen et al. (2008), Ghosh (2013), Fullick-Jagiela et al.
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7 (2015) and Janssen et al. (2015), and the comprehensive handbook
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9 of mentoring research edited by Ragins and Kram (2007).
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14 Using these established reviews as guides, the EBSCOhost and
15
16 ERIC databases were searched within the date range 1980 to 2018
17
18 for sources that theorized mentoring. An analytical matrix was
19
20 produced in which each selected source was allocated a row and
21
22 the adjacent column was then used to identify the type of
23
24 theorization used. The matrix rows were subsequently organized
25
26 so that sources using the same or similar theoretical approaches
27
28 were clustered. In a second column, each researcher, working
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30 independently and based upon her and his personal reading of each
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32 source, commented on the extent of development of these
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34 theoretical strands. A third column was used to record
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36 assertions made by source authors of where theoretical
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38 development was still needed. The two researchers' comments on
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40 the extent of theoretical development were then compared,
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42 anomalies examined and resolved, and judgments reached regarding
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44 the extent of development of particular theoretical strands. An
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46 agreed, verified, meta-matrix was compiled which, as will be
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48 discussed, revealed that while diverse theoretical understandings
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 of mentoring have been proposed, there is limited theoretical
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5 development of any one strand.
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10 A key contribution of our review is, as noted, that it
11 integrates identity and psychodynamic theorizing into the context
12 of mentoring. As Ghosh (2013, p.147) noted, a focused,
13 integrative review "can yield new insights and significant re-
14 conceptualizations". Therefore, the next stage of our reviewing
15 method was to focus on sourcing and reviewing those strands of
16 the identity and psychodynamic literatures providing traction for
17 understanding mentoring. Our searches on EBSCOhost and ERIC
18 using search strings such as "mentor*" AND "identity*" within
19 source titles and abstracts and with no date restrictions
20 revealed just six sources (e.g. Muir, 2014; Mysyk, 2008). A
21 snowball follow-up of references within the six sources yielded
22 four further relevant sources. However, a search using "learn*"
23 AND "identit*" revealed several hundred potential theoretical
24 sources. Searching within these search results for items of
25 relevance to learning within social interaction still left a vast
26 corpus of identity and learning literature. To ensure a more
27 manageable review, we used the insights provided within Black,
28 Warhurst and Corlett (2018). Black et al. (2018) showed how
29 various traditions of identity theorizing deepen understanding of
30 many areas of concern to HRD and pointed to the potential of the
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3 particularly well-developed area of social constructionist
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5 identity theorizing for providing fresh insights into mentoring
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7 roles and relationships. We therefore focused on this specific
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9 strand of identity theorizing, notably, literature
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11 conceptualizing identity-work and identity regulation. We also
12
13 concentrated on emerging studies that offer more critical
14
15 insights deriving from psychodynamic perspectives that can be
16
17 applied in understanding the identity processes invoked within
18
19 mentoring. Sources were independently screened against the key-
20
21 criteria of their potential for understanding learning within
22
23 social interactions. Fifty-three papers, including papers from
24
25 the twelve most cited researchers within this strand of identity
26
27 theorizing and within organizational psychodynamic theorizing,
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29 were selected and form the basis of our contribution.
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37 **Mentoring research: empirical strengths and theoretical**
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39 **limitations**
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41 Empirical research into mentoring is flourishing, as noted in the
42
43 introduction. While this paper makes distinctive contributions,
44
45 to appreciate these contributions it is necessary to understand
46
47 the current and seemingly healthy state of mentoring research.
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49 This process has to begin with defining the construct of
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51 mentoring. Even after three or more decades of systematic
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53 research, a key challenge in examining mentoring lies in the fact
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 that "a definitive answer to the question '*what is mentoring?*'
4 remains elusive" (Short et al. 2014, p.3). How mentoring is
5 defined varies somewhat across the literature (Opengart &
6 Bierema, 2015) and between different fields. Ghosh and Reio
7 (2013) discerned more than forty different definitions noting
8 that mentoring is a multi-dimensional concept. Commonalities in
9 the more established and widely cited definitions depict
10 mentoring as a hierarchical developmental relationship, that is,
11 as a sustained and purposeful one-to-one relationship between a
12 mentor with advanced experience, knowledge and wisdom and a
13 protégé with less experience, for the purposes of professional
14 development and personal growth. However, with the recognition
15 of various distinct types of mentoring including informal
16 mentoring (Ragins & Scandura, 1999), and peer and reverse
17 mentoring (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006; Thurston, D'Abate &
18 Eddy, 2012) there has been a requirement for a broadening of the
19 definition. Moreover, as societal norms have changed (Mysyk,
20 2008), the definition of mentoring has been evolving. Opengart
21 and Bierema (2015) thus discerned three common attributes of
22 contemporary definitions: first, and differing most significantly
23 from traditional definitions, reciprocity or mutuality of
24 exchange; second, regular consistent interaction over time;
25 third, developmental benefits. It is therefore recognised that
26 mentoring is a two-way process, and that "mentoring may not be
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3 publicly recognised or observable" (Ragins, 1997, p.484) but
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5 comprises "critical learning moments" between diverse partners
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7 (Muir, 2014, p.369). Protégés may thus receive mentoring support
8
9 from a network of individuals concurrently.
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14 In parallel with the evolving definition of mentoring,
15
16 research themes have ebbed and flowed. Several broad themes are
17
18 discernable across the empirical literature. Some of these
19
20 themes, such as investigations of mentoring outcomes for
21
22 protégés, have persisted over time while others, such as
23
24 investigations into mentor benefits, have come to the fore more
25
26 recently. As these themes are effectively examined in the
27
28 literature reviews previously mentioned, for example Ghosh
29
30 (2013), we simply note here the significance of certain of the
31
32 themes for the newer identity-focused understanding of mentoring
33
34 that we will develop. In essence, the established literature can
35
36 be characterised by examinations of 'inputs' and 'outcomes' with
37
38 certain works also modelling the relationship between inputs and
39
40 outcomes. Studies with a particular focus on 'inputs' have
41
42 examined: mentoring types, such as informal and peer mentoring
43
44 (e.g. Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006; Thurston et al., 2012);
45
46 mentoring functions, such as career and psycho-social functions
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48 (e.g. Kram & Isabella, 1985; Gosh, 2013); phases or stages of
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50 mentoring (e.g. Kram, 1985); mentor attributes (e.g. Allen et
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 al., 2008; Haggard et al. 2011); mentoring requirements at
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5 particular career stages (e.g. Kram & Isabella, 1985); the
6
7 quality of mentoring relationships (e.g. Ragins & Cotton, 1991).
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12 Studies with a focus on 'outcomes' are found to be
13
14 particularly prevalent (Janssen et al., 2015). Outcomes
15
16 attributable to mentoring that are typically reported to be
17
18 significant from the protégé perspective include: upward career
19
20 mobility; better reward packages; greater career satisfaction;
21
22 enhanced engagement; improved commitment (e.g. Kram, 1985;
23
24 Thurston, D'Abate & Eddy, 2012; Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019).
25
26 Importantly too, in terms of outcomes, a considerable literature
27
28 shows how mentoring serves to redress structural disadvantages
29
30 such as obstacles to career progression experienced by women and
31
32 minorities (e.g. Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Ragins, Cotton & Miller,
33
34 2000; Sahoob & Lenka, 2016). While, traditionally the mentor
35
36 perspective has been neglected (Young, Cady & Foxon, 2006), the
37
38 early work of Kram and Isabella (1985) showed the complementarity
39
40 of mentoring relationships and, as noted, more recently research
41
42 has emphasised the reciprocal and "mutual beneficence of the
43
44 relationship" (Opengart & Bierma, 2015, p.243). Specifically,
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46 Ragins (1997, p.494) found that mentors gained a sense of
47
48 "generativity", that is "the sense of contributing to future
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50 generations" (see also Jones, 2012). Finally, from the
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3 organisational perspective, it is widely reported that, key
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5 outcomes attributable to mentoring include enhanced performance
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7 and productivity (e.g. Emelo, 2010).
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12 It is typical for studies, particularly from the outcomes
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14 perspective, to conceptualize mentoring in terms of a provision -
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16 acquisition nexus. Thus, a widely reported finding is that
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18 mentors provide job-related advice and pass on information along
19
20 with accumulated personal tacit knowledge and wisdom to protégés
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22 (e.g. Allen et al., 2006; Poulsen, 2013), and also enable
23
24 protégés to "acquire critical technical skills" (Kram, 1983,
25
26 p.617). For example, Mysyk (2008, p.212) noted how mentors
27
28 typically have built up a "library of lessons" from their
29
30 experiences to "teach" their protégés. Similarly, in reverse
31
32 mentoring, less experienced colleagues teach more experienced
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34 colleagues, such as their official mentors, how, for example, to
35
36 use new technologies (e.g. Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2006;
37
38 Thurston et al., 2012). While such a provision - acquisition
39
40 conceptualization is limiting, findings such as those that
41
42 mentors provide acceptance and confirmation (e.g. Allen et al.,
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44 2004), access to useful networks (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000)
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46 and "appropriate job attitudes" (Mysyk, 2008, p.212), are
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48 important pointers to the theoretical understanding that we
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50 develop.
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Meaning in Mentoring

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5 While empirical research into mentoring is flourishing, the
6 theorization of mentoring is less developed. In their extensive
7 literature review, Janssen et al. (2015, p.507) noted how
8 "mentoring research has been criticised for one shot empirical
9 data" and they highlighted the lack of conceptualization and
10 "clear understandings of underlying mechanisms ... [into] why
11 mentoring processes are effective". The dominant objectivist
12 ontology of mentoring research has undoubtedly hindered the
13 emergence of theory, with the subjectivist, processual
14 ontological assumptions required for the emergence of theory
15 being a distinct blind spot in the literature (Janssen et al.,
16 2015).

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35 The theorization of mentoring clearly requires
36 strengthening, as this paper will shortly turn to do, it has
37 though to be acknowledged that certain theoretical advances have
38 been made in recent years. First, mainstream organizational
39 theorizing has been applied to mentoring. For instance, self-
40 determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) has been used to show
41 how mentoring relationships help both parties fulfil the three
42 basic human needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness
43 (Janssen et al., 2015). Similarly, theories of disadvantage and
44 diversity provide a degree of leverage in understanding the
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3 utility of mentoring for groups who are under-represented in
4 leadership roles (Poulsen, 2013; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016). Second,
5 theories have been developed specifically within mentoring
6 inquiry such as 'relational mentoring theory' that is used to
7 account for the mutuality of mentoring (Ragins et al., 2000).
8 However, certain proposed theories, such as relational mentoring
9 theory itself, fail to meet the defining criteria of theory that
10 were outlined earlier. Criteria used in defining theory when
11 applied to mentoring suggest a need to explain how and why
12 mentoring works, to understand how the relationship between
13 'cause' (mentoring) and 'effect' (e.g. achievements) works and,
14 particularly, to understand how mentoring can go awry. In what
15 follows, we examine theorizing aligned with these defining
16 criteria, in the form of practice-based learning theory, social
17 constructionist identity theory with its associated concepts of
18 identity-work and identity-regulation, and psychodynamic theories
19 to provide deeper insights into 'how mentoring works' in
20 practice.
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46 **Theorizing identity to explain the meaning *in* mentoring**

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48 Although the theorization and conceptualization of identity
49 within the mainstream mentoring literature is still in its early
50 days, that mentoring influences identity development is evident
51 over the history of mentoring research. Therefore, while
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 identity has yet to be effectively theorized in mentoring
4
5 research, the contribution of mentoring to identity development
6
7 is evident in findings that mentoring helps protégés to make
8
9 sense of themselves in their roles (e.g. Chrobot-Mason & Thomas,
10
11 2002), to become accepted, validated and confirmed in their roles
12
13 (e.g. Kram & Isabella, 1985), and to develop self-confidence,
14
15 self-esteem and self-efficacy (e.g. Cameron & Grant, 2017).
16
17 Further evidence that mentoring contributes to protégé identity
18
19 formation comes, for example, in reports of mentors challenging
20
21 and questioning protégés' assumptions, providing feedback and
22
23 guiding their critical reflection so as to examine their values
24
25 and philosophy of practice (Ghosh, 2013). That is, in essence,
26
27 protégés learn lessons about the self from mentors and thereby
28
29 find personal meaning in mentoring (Mysyk, 2008). For example,
30
31 Muir's (2014, p.362) empirical work demonstrated how leadership
32
33 mentoring enabled each protégé to achieve a "deeper awareness of
34
35 self" and thereby "know who one is ... [to] fully realise that he
36
37 or she is a leader". Protégés are also enabled to envision
38
39 themselves in new and future roles (Fullick-Jagiela et al.,
40
41 2015).
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50 While the systematic theorizing of identity outcomes or
51
52 processes associated with mentoring is underdeveloped, several
53
54 theories used in mainstream mentoring inquiry form a useful
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1
2
3 bridge to the systematic social constructionist identity
4
5 theorizing that we develop below. For example, social exchange
6
7 theory has been cited extensively in mentoring studies (Young et
8
9 al., 2006) and explains the mentoring relationship in terms of
10
11 conferring rewards for both parties simultaneously. A further
12
13 area of theorizing cited in established mentoring literature,
14
15 social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), similarly moves towards
16
17 social constructionist identity theorizing. In social learning
18
19 theory, role modelling enables protégés' assimilation of
20
21 particular ways of being in relation to others in specific
22
23 workplace communities (Warhurst, 2011). In particular, mentors
24
25 can enable protégés to enter communities that might not otherwise
26
27 be accessible and position protégés favourably within a nexus of
28
29 relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985). However, such theorizing
30
31 suffers the same, and limiting, provision - acquisition
32
33 explanatory nexus detailed earlier. For example, identity is
34
35 understood as something that can be modelled and copied.
36
37 Therefore, and following an extensive review of the mentoring
38
39 literature, Janssen et al. (2015) called both for much greater
40
41 clarity in the conceptualization of identity in mentoring and for
42
43 more processual understandings. We now turn to this task.
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53 Brown (2017, p.297) noted how the literature on identity is
54
55 increasingly vast and heterogeneous and Corlett, McInnes,
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3 Coupland and Sheep (2017, p.262) remarked on the "diversity of
4 the field of identity scholarship". This growth reflects the
5 increasing desire in neo-liberal societies for individual
6 autonomy (Brown, 2015) whereby identity isn't so much ascribed
7 but, rather, requires an individual struggle to create and
8 sustain a preferred sense-of-self (Mizzi & Rocco, 2013). Such is
9 the diversity of the field that in his seminal review article,
10 Alvesson (2010) discerned seven images of identity in the
11 literature and Brown (2015) noted four key debates. Brown's
12 debates included whether or not identity is stable or dynamic and
13 over or under socialised. These debates provide dimensions upon
14 which a specific identity theory can be positioned. While not
15 mutually exclusive, particular theories give more traction on
16 specific HRD issues than others (Warhurst et al., 2018) and given
17 the sheer vastness of the literature, a tight focus will be
18 needed on the theoretical perspective with most potential for
19 understanding mentoring.
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41 42 43 **Identity and learning through social interaction**

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46 The potential of identity for comprehending learning, and
47 therefore mentoring, became apparent with the rise of 'practice-
48 based' learning theory in the 1990s associated with Lave and
49 Wenger's (1991) seminal work. This theorizing has since had a
50 "significant impact on the way in which learning is
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2
3 conceptualised" (Christensen, 2016, p.125). To understand the
4
5 contrast with traditional learning theories, Sfard (1998)
6
7 differentiated learning theories as aligning with the metaphor of
8
9 acquisition or of participation. Whereas traditional learning
10
11 theories see occupational learning as involving the 'acquisition'
12
13 of knowledge and cognitive capabilities, newer 'participation'
14
15 learning theories see occupational learning as involving the
16
17 assimilation of particular ways of knowing and doing intertwined
18
19 with the appropriation of particular ways of being within
20
21 specific communities of practice (Nicolini, Scarbrough &
22
23 Gracheva, 2016).
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30 Learning therefore, crucially, involves building identities
31
32 (Lave & Wenger, 1991) with the learned being those who are able
33
34 to identify themselves and be identified by peers as a capable
35
36 person within the community or communities that sustain the
37
38 practice in question (Cameron & Grant, 2017). Learning requires
39
40 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger, 1998) that is, a
41
42 trajectory of gradual but progressive exposure so as to
43
44 assimilate ways of doing, and crucially, to appropriate ways of
45
46 being, within the target communities (Gerken et al., 2016). As
47
48 seen earlier, mentors play an important role in enabling protégés
49
50 to access key individuals and communities, and to gain their
51
52 acceptance. Mentors are, therefore, enablers of legitimate
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1
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3 peripheral participation for identity formation. While important
4
5 in moving the understanding of learning into new and productive
6
7 territory, judging by the significant citation indices achieved
8
9 by such works, situated learning theory has a couple of noted
10
11 limitations. First, whereas learning typically involves a degree
12
13 of conflict as established power balances are destabilized,
14
15 situated learning theory is silent on such matters (Nicolini,
16
17 Scarbrough & Gracheva, 2016). Second, the processes through
18
19 which the assimilation of a particular way of being, in other
20
21 words, identity learning, occurs is inadequately theorized
22
23 (Warhurst, 2006). However, what follows shows how the social-
24
25 constructionist theorization of identity and the associated
26
27 constructs of identity-regulation and identity-work deepen
28
29 understanding of power relations in learning and mentoring, and
30
31 how identity learning occurs both for protégés and for mentors
32
33 themselves.
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41 **Identity: a social constructionist perspective**

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43 Identity can be a slippery concept (Alvesson & Robertson,
44
45 2016; Caza, Vough and Puranik, 2018) and so a definition is
46
47 required of what the concept means in social constructionist
48
49 identity theory. Traditionally, identity was studied from a
50
51 psychological perspective and was seen as developing through
52
53 distinct stages into adulthood to become established and durable
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3 (Hutchins & Rainbolt 2017). By contrast, the more contemporary
4
5 micro-sociological, social-constructionist perspective offers
6
7 more traction in understanding mentoring (Muir, 2014) through
8
9 bridging between psychological and sociological understandings of
10
11 self (Watson, 2009). Specifically, an interpretivist post-
12
13 structuralist approach is useful and this approach "emphasizes
14
15 the constructed and constructing view of identity" (Alvesson &
16
17 Robertson, 2016, p.8-9). The self is understood not as a
18
19 distinct and given psychological entity but, rather, as the way
20
21 people perceive themselves, that is, their self-concept (Muir,
22
23 2014). Identity is an on-going consciously reflexive project
24
25 that involves a constantly constructed narrative (Gill, 2015).
26
27 This narrative involves individuals making subjective claims both
28
29 for themselves and for others regarding who they are (Caza, Moss
30
31 & Vough 2017), and who they want to be with the aim of achieving
32
33 existential coherence, continuity and security. In other words,
34
35 individuals seek meaning about who they are and who they can be.
36
37 Individual 'characteristics' and intentions undoubtedly influence
38
39 who a person is. However, characteristics and intentions cannot
40
41 entirely define the individual as the individual's social and
42
43 cultural contexts and temporal positioning both enable but also
44
45 constrain who the individual is or who he or she can become.
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 Therefore, the social constructionist identity perspective
4 shows how identities are never secure and achieved but always
5 "provisional ... perpetual works in progress" (Clarke, Brown &
6 Hope-Hailey, 2009, p.344) not least because individuals cannot
7 simply claim and assert an identity. Identity is, rather,
8 crafted (Watson, 2008) through interaction with, and for, others
9 at specific times and in specific situations (Thomas et al.,
10 2014). Preferred identities are typically fragile and precarious
11 being under constant scrutiny and threat from the judgment of
12 others (Humphreys & Brown (2002) who challenge, contest, deny or
13 ignore those preferences (Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Brown &
14 Coupland, 2015). Negotiation with others in the community of
15 practice is required to secure acceptance of preferred ways of
16 being (Mizzi & Rocco, 2013). Identity claims are particularly
17 influenced by various social identities or subject positions that
18 might be imposed upon individuals by, for example, their
19 occupational roles (Watson 2008) and the associated expectations
20 of others such as mentors of their protégés, and protégés of
21 their mentors. Identity is thus intersubjective and Caza, Moss
22 and Vough (2017, p.4) noted "we come to know ourselves through
23 our interactions with others" or, as Brown (2015, p.4) remarked
24 "the self is fuelled by the identities it feeds on". In sum,
25 identities are created, defended and shaped within networks of
26 relationship at particular moments of time (Alvesson et al.,
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3 2008). An individual cannot, therefore, simply become or be who
4 she or he wants to be but is, rather, to some extent defined by
5 relations of power within groups.
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10 11 12 **Mentoring and identity-regulation** 13

14 While power relations are not ignored in established
15 understandings of mentoring, the treatment typically sees power,
16 as with knowledge or skills, as an entity conferred by the mentor
17 and acquired by the protégé. For example, Ragins (1997) reported
18 that mentors help protégés develop their power resources through
19 providing reflected power and improving protégés' visibility, and
20 their influencing capabilities. However, from the current social
21 constructionist identity perspective, power can be seen as more
22 pervasive in mentoring relationships. Not only are identities
23 socially influenced and possibly constrained by the behaviors and
24 actions of others upon whom a particular way of being depends as
25 just discussed, identities are also subject to social power
26 relations in a more profound manner. Identity is dialogically
27 constructed through internal soliloquy and with conversational
28 partners (Brown & Toyoki, 2013) using the social resource of
29 language. Following the 'linguistic turn' in social sciences,
30 language is seen as not merely representational but as
31 constitutive (Reedy, 2008), which means, in the case of identity,
32 that language does not mirror identity but creates or reveals
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In other words, people
4
5 think and talk themselves into existence. As noted, a person's
6
7 identity lies in her or his "capacity to keep a particular
8
9 narrative going" (Giddens, 1991, p.54) and we are, quite simply,
10
11 a story (Watson, 2009). Applying this insight to mentoring, it
12
13 can be seen, for instance, that through narrating stories
14
15 emphasising their development of others, mentors form and evolve
16
17 a satisfying sense-of-self (Mysyk, 2008). Through supporting
18
19 such stories, protégés acquire a sense of being 'learners' and of
20
21 being secure in this learner identity, avoiding the excessive
22
23 exposure that typifies many contemporary work roles.
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31 However, many workers are found to be reliant for their
32
33 sense-of-self on narrating only occupational stories
34
35 (Petriglieri, 2011) and are thereby vulnerable to managerial
36
37 control. Such stories draw upon discourses that are imbued with
38
39 power that can limit, distort or regulate the individual's sense-
40
41 of-self. For instance, Reedy, King and Coupland (2016) found
42
43 that "work organizations are ... sites of determination rather than
44
45 autonomy" where dominant identities are promoted, even imposed,
46
47 and discourse is the primary medium of such control and power
48
49 (Brown and Lewis, 2011; Collins, 2012). These discourses rule in
50
51 and rule out certain ways of talking and of being, constructing
52
53 individuals as certain kinds of people (Huber & Brown, 2017). In
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1
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3 this way, discourses act as "technologies of the self" (Brown &
4 Toyoki, 2013, p.888), colonising individuals from the inside in
5
6 creating normalized, engineered selves (Clarke et al., 2009).
7
8 Individuals succumb readily to social influences (Reedy, King &
9
10 Coupland, 2016) and are subjected unconsciously to the managerial
11
12 control of subjectivity (Driver, 2009a; 2009b). Moreover,
13
14 individuals might even be consciously complicit in their own
15
16 subjugation if the identities on offer appear alluringly
17
18 advantageous (Elsbach, 1999). Within high power-distance
19
20 cultures (Hofstede, 2002), protégés may be particularly
21
22 susceptible to such shaping or distortion. Such compliant ways
23
24 of being may constrain more authentic ways of being that would be
25
26 healthier for both individuals and organizations. To illustrate,
27
28 an HR Developer who has graduated from a School of Education may
29
30 work to see herself and be seen by others as an 'educator' first
31
32 and foremost with a mission to enable employees to achieve their
33
34 true potential. However, this idea and ideal of self may be
35
36 challenged and constrained by the senior management of her firm
37
38 who may define her as a 'trainer' who is no more than someone who
39
40 ensures that employees can meet tightly defined performance
41
42 standards. The Developer may be complicit in accepting this
43
44 limiting self-definition on the basis that it gives her
45
46 managerial status.
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 Through propagating and inculcating such dominant and
4
5 defining discourses that serve to create individuals who are mere
6
7 stencils (Alvesson, 2010) of managerially approved work
8
9 identities, mentoring may serve to reinforce the regulation of
10
11 protégés' identities. The manipulative behaviour discerned in
12
13 certain mentoring relationships (Young et al., 2006) might amount
14
15 to the suppression of autonomous and authentic desired ways of
16
17 being in favor of more docile, managerially acceptable ways of
18
19 being (Cameron & Grant, 2017). Moreover, mentors are likely to
20
21 be complicit in shaping protégés to be the sort of person they
22
23 are themselves, that is, someone who fits harmoniously within the
24
25 established organizational community. Mentors also typically
26
27 enable access to networks and communities and in doing so they
28
29 may be contributing further to identity regulation. Networks and
30
31 communities offer their own specific set of readily available
32
33 discourses as resources for individuals' identity construction
34
35 (Alvesson & Robertson, 2016). Although the vast field of social
36
37 identity theorizing (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and the related
38
39 self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher &
40
41 Wetherell, 1987), and positioning theory (Harre 1998) were
42
43 developed from a contrasting identity perspective, these theories
44
45 add to our understanding of how individuals have a proclivity to
46
47 draw on discourses from particular communities in defining
48
49 themselves. A tendency is noted for individuals to "locate the
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3 self [with]in socially recognizable categories" (Mizzi & Rocco,
4
5 2013, p.378) and to align with favored groups and disassociate
6
7 from those deemed undesirable (Nazar & van der Heijden 2012). In
8
9 the example above, while the Developer might adopt a limiting
10
11 sense-of-self through re-defining herself as a mere trainer, she
12
13 may nonetheless gain a sense of security from identifying with
14
15 her organization's senior-management. These related identity
16
17 theories show the propensity of individuals to construct a sense-
18
19 of-self in alignment with or positioned towards favored groups
20
21 and then once accepted within such groups to exchange a private
22
23 identity for one provided by the group (Brown, 2017). This
24
25 process of individuals identifying with, and deriving their
26
27 sense-of-self from a group, is particularly likely where the
28
29 target group is perceived as having high social status (Gill,
30
31 2015).
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39 **Mentoring enabling protégés' identity-work**

40
41 Within social constructionist identity theorizing, the
42
43 concept of identity-work explains how individuals are able both
44
45 to resist regulating forces and to overcome, or at least cover-
46
47 over, insecurities and to thereby construct preferred identities
48
49 (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Gill, 2015). This identity-work concept
50
51 provides a particularly strong explanation of how mentoring
52
53 works. As noted, contemporary identities are subject to both
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 challenge and denial by others and are dependent upon affirmation
4
5 from others. Moreover, at any one point in time identity is
6
7 fragmented (Garcia & Hardy 2007) and kaleidoscopic (Humphreys &
8
9 Brown 2002). Therefore, while individuals might attempt to
10
11 present themselves as confident and coherent, it is widely
12
13 reported that identities are insecure, precarious and fragile
14
15 with vulnerability, anxiety and inner-conflict being widespread
16
17 (Collinson, 2003; Hoedemaekers, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll 2013;
18
19 Brown, 2015; Reedy, King & Coupland, 2016). While mentors can,
20
21 as will be seen, assuage protégés' insecurities, mentors can be
22
23 vulnerable themselves. For instance, Kram (1983, p.622) found
24
25 that mentors "may feel threatened" by a protégé's "continued
26
27 success or opportunity for advancement". Therefore identity-work
28
29 is also important for mentors themselves.
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37 A widely cited definition of identity-work is that provided
38
39 by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p.1165) who defined the
40
41 process as one whereby people are "engaged in forming, repairing,
42
43 maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are
44
45 productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness". Through
46
47 identity-work people "create, adapt, signify, claim and reject
48
49 identities from available resources" (Brown, 2017, p.298) and
50
51 attempt to "influence the various social identities which pertain
52
53 to them" (Watson, 2009, p.431) in attempting to secure a degree
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2
3 of "existential continuity and security" (Alvesson & Willmott,
4 2002, p.622). Given the precarity of identities, identity-work
5 is continually needed and is typically seen as a perpetual
6 struggle (Clarke et al., 2009; Driver, 2018). A considerable
7 literature has emerged demonstrating the utility of identity-work
8 in understanding a broad range of individual and organizational
9 phenomena, and in a recent comprehensive review of the identity-
10 work literature, Brown (2017) discerned five distinct approaches
11 to understanding identity-work (see also, Caza, Vough and
12 Puranik, 2018). While, the concept has yet to be systematically
13 applied in understanding mentoring, within the discursive and
14 psychoanalytical approaches to identity-work discerned by Brown
15 (2017) certain types of identity-work (e.g. McInnes & Corlett,
16 2012) would seem to have particular traction. In particular, and
17 reflecting the contemporary rise of individualism,
18 'differentiating identity-work' (Huber & Brown, 2017) and
19 'aspirational identity-work' (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) seem
20 germane. Such identity-work types reflect individuals' craving
21 for authenticity, distinctiveness and a sense-of-achievement.
22 Individuals see certain identities as prestigious, attractive and
23 therefore preferred, representing an ideal version of the self to
24 be aspired to and worked for (Brown & Toyoki, 2013). Certain
25 occupations or organizations that are perceived as prestigious,
26 attractive or distinctive provide forums for such identity-work
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012). In facilitating acceptance within
4 these occupations or organizations, mentors contribute to
5 protégés' differentiating and aspirational identity-work.
6
7 Mentors might particularly contribute to protégés' progression
8 within such occupations and organizations through enabling the
9 trialling of possible and provisional selves (Coupland & Brown
10 2012).

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21 Whereas, as seen, the individual might to some extent
22 limited, even determined, by the discursive resources that
23 society and their organizations in particular make available to
24 them, through identity-work, there is some scope for discursive
25 manoeuvring and of resistance. Discourses can be creatively
26 exploited or transformed (Watson, 2009). Professionals and
27 managers specifically might be particularly capable of
28 reflexively appropriating and exploiting organizational
29 discourses in constructing favored ways of being (Brown & Lewis,
30 2011). Importantly too, individuals draw upon discursive
31 resources from beyond the workplace in their self-authorship
32 (Driver, 2009b). Thus, whereas, contemporary work is typically
33 an important source of identity (Alvesson, 2010) with occupations
34 and organizations providing resources for identity construction,
35 individuals have a wealth of alternative resources for identity
36 construction. Occupations may, therefore, be by-passed in
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3 individuals' identity stories (Alvesson & Robertson, 2016).
4
5 Mentors with a degree of reflexive awareness can assist protégés
6
7 in resisting the power of managerially imposed discourses and
8
9 enable protégés to discover alternative discourses in shaping the
10
11 self through agentic identity-work.
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17 Making sense of the self is a key element of all types of
18
19 identity-work (Corlett & Mavin, 2018) and mentoring interactions
20
21 have been found to be invaluable identity-workspaces for such
22
23 meaning making (Muir, 2014). Identity-work for developing self-
24
25 understanding is particularly needed in just those situations
26
27 where mentoring is most likely to occur such as when a protégé is
28
29 in a new or evolving situation and is therefore likely to have
30
31 suffered a loss of meaning. For instance, extending the example
32
33 of the HR Developer working to achieve her desired educator
34
35 identity: rather than simply passively absorbing the firm's
36
37 management discourse of 'performance' and identifying herself as
38
39 a trainer, the Developer might, with the help of a mentor,
40
41 actively adapt the management discourse of 'performance' in
42
43 constructing the desired educator sense-of-self. The mentor
44
45 might enable the Developer to recognize that employee
46
47 'performance' is more likely to be secured if employees are not
48
49 merely compliant but are creative and enterprising, and that
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3 these latter capabilities are far more likely to be cultivated by
4
5 an 'educator' than by a 'trainer'.
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10 **Mentoring enabling mentors' identity-work**

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12 Ghosh and Reio (2013, p.113) posed the question "what might
13
14 prompt individuals to volunteer their time for mentoring?" This
15
16 question can be answered in terms of mentoring contributing to
17
18 mentors' own differentiating or aspirational identity-work.
19
20 Being a mentor might in itself represent an aspired identity and
21
22 certainly an identity carrying prestige and offering
23
24 differentiation perhaps at a time when the mentor's own career is
25
26 plateaued or in decline (Black & Warhurst, 2018). Within the
27
28 mainstream mentoring literature, one of the key "expected
29
30 benefits of being a mentor" is found to be "recognition by
31
32 others" (Allen, Lentz & Day, 2006, p.274). Through mentoring and
33
34 developing new talent within the organization, the mentor gains
35
36 status (Ragins, 1997), recognition and respect, and receives
37
38 self-confirmation (Kram, 1983). Moreover, being a mentor
39
40 provides personal satisfaction (Young et al., 2006), feelings of
41
42 fulfilment (Ragins, 1997) and "a sense of generativity" (Ragins
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44 et al., 2000, p.1179).
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53 Mentors thus gain personal meaning in mentoring through
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55 constructing a positive sense-of-self as a worthwhile and
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3 significant person. However, such an identity might not be
4 particularly secure; mentors can, as noted earlier, feel
5 displaced by their protégés (Ragins & Scandura, 1999) and
6 threatened by protégés' advancement (Kram, 1983). Therefore,
7 mentors may respond by forever taking on further protégés in the
8 hollow hope of compensating for their weakened sense-of-self.
9 Moreover, mentors might themselves, be prone to passively absorb
10 dominant discourses in organizations, defining themselves using
11 readily available language that serves to regulate who they are
12 and that restricts who they might become.
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28 Therefore, mentors might need to bolster their sense-of-self
29 by undertaking agentic remedial, repairing or restorative
30 identity-work (Knights & Clarke 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008).
31 Such identity-work processes will require critical self-
32 examination of whose interests are ultimately being served by
33 adopting, by default, prevailing ways of being (Alvesson &
34 Willmott, 2002). Mentors might seek and evaluate different
35 discourses for themselves and explore alternative, personally
36 valued ways of being. In sum, identities are, for both mentors
37 and protégés, "a continued dialectic of 'structure' and 'agency'"
38 (Brown, 2015, p.7). However, further explanation is needed as to
39 why, in the increasingly individualistic cultures characterizing
40 developed societies and with reflexively aware mentors, agency
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3 does not simply trump structure in identity development. The
4
5 second, and related, area of theorizing with particular utility
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7 for understanding mentoring, the psychodynamic approach to
8
9 identity, provides a fuller explanation of the structural
10
11 constraints and limits on agency.
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16 **Mentoring, identity-work and the unconscious**

17
18 Identity comprises both conscious and unconscious elements
19
20 (Hoedemaekers, 2010), and individuals are subjects of the
21
22 unconscious such that conscious constructions can never totally
23
24 define them (Driver, 2009a). Brown (2017, p.305) thus noted "our
25
26 inability to know ourselves". The psychodynamic approach to
27
28 identity emphasises the extent to which people are constrained by
29
30 forces operating unconsciously that they might work to recognize
31
32 and live with, but are incapable of controlling (Corlett,
33
34 McInnes, Coupland & Sheep, 2017). The role of the unconscious is
35
36 touched upon in the established mentoring literature (e.g. Young
37
38 et al., 2006) but understanding such facets of identity in
39
40 mentoring has not received systematic attention. The
41
42 psychodynamic tradition enables understanding of such unconscious
43
44 facets of identity and is a useful supplement to the discursive
45
46 identity tradition. Within the psychodynamic tradition, facets
47
48 of Lacan's extensive corpus of work (e.g. Lacan & Fink, 2002),
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50 and, particularly Driver's (2009a; 2009b; 2017, 2018)
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3 interpretations of Lacan's work provide a basis for understanding
4
5 mentoring relationships in terms of identity-work.
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10 Lacan's work shows how the conscious narration of identity
11 can never quite capture how identity is experienced. Driver
12 (2009a, p.56) thus noted, "we cannot say who we are". In
13
14 Lacanian terms this is explained through a distinction being
15
16 drawn between the 'symbolic order' and the 'real'. The symbolic
17
18 order is the domain of language through which identity is
19
20 discursively constructed but such discursive constructions are
21
22 not the 'real'. A real, or pre-linguistic, primordial 'I' exists
23
24 only outside of language. Knowing the self only through language
25
26 locates existence outside of the self as in the child's
27
28 experience of the mirror image of itself (Roberts, 2005). The
29
30 self is both constructed but also constrained within the symbolic
31
32 order, within this limited and flawed medium for self-expression,
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34 and is thereby alienated from itself, never able to fully realize
35
36 its desires (Driver, 2009b). That a real 'I' cannot be expressed
37
38 in the symbolic order, that is, in the words of others, results
39
40 in an unconscious desire for an imaginary 'I' that is for an 'I'
41
42 that is more real. For both mentors and protégés, discursive
43
44 aspirational identity-work may contribute to the construction of
45
46 an imaginary 'I'.
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 This imaginary I, or self, is though both alluring and
4 entrapping. The imaginary self is a self-disciplined and
5 controlled self that is, thereby, ultimately a subjugated self.
6 Contemporary individualistic discourses of supposedly boundless
7 possibilities fuel the belief that with sufficient striving and
8 using, perhaps, alluring and prevalent symbolic resources from
9 the corporate world such as those of leadership (Roberts, 2005),
10 a satisfying imaginary self can be secured. Control of
11 individuals thereby becomes, conveniently for those in power,
12 subsumed within the self. Moreover, the conscious, desiring, 'I'
13 that strives to construct an imaginary self is typically
14 disrupted by the unconscious 'I' (Driver, 2009a) thereby
15 exacerbating a sense of inauthenticity and of failure to realise
16 who we truly are (Driver, 2009b). Given the enormity of desire,
17 identity-work to achieve an imaginary 'I' is never finished. The
18 individual is therefore, forever prone to never quite conscious
19 feelings of failure or of lack. Mentors typically 'raise the
20 bar' for protégés, encouraging their aspirations (Megginson &
21 Clutterbuck, 2006). However, in the absence of understanding
22 from psychodynamic approach, such actions may merely be fuelling
23 insecurity and lack.

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53 'Lack' is a key concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis and has
54 particular relevance for understanding mentoring. Primal
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3 fulfilment, the original pre-linguistic sense of being whole,
4 complete and 'real' is inexpressible in the symbolic order of
5 language. Therefore, the self is never adequately fulfilled,
6
7 imaginary identity constructions necessarily fail and "that which
8 truly and uniquely marks the person is a loss or lack" (Driver,
9
10 2009a, p.58). Individuals engage in relentless but fruitless
11
12 attempts to 'gloss over' this "irreducible kernel of lack"
13
14 (Driver, 2017, p.719). Indeed, Roberts (2005, p.639) cautioned
15
16 of the "deathly desire to fix and stabilize identity" on the
17
18 grounds that all there is in life is lack and the only way to a
19
20 worthwhile life is to live with lack. Might mentors in
21
22 supporting and guiding protégés' pursuit of desired identities,
23
24 be unknowingly complicit in fueling the delusion that the
25
26 "deathly desire" to find wholeness and fulfilment can be
27
28 conquered and that lack can be overcome?
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39 Identity is, as noted, socially constructed, often contested
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41 and thereby fragile. The psychodynamic perspective further
42
43 elucidates this interdependency, showing how identity
44
45 "desperately needs ... and depends upon others" (Hoedemaekers,
46
47 2010, p.381). The perspective thereby offers further insight
48
49 into how mentoring relationships unfold. Individuals seek to
50
51 compensate for lack through gaining others' recognition and
52
53 become rivals for recognition with actual or imaginary others
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 (Roberts, 2005). Rivalry for recognition results in comparisons
4
5 not only with others but also with old 'versions' of the self.
6
7 The individual may exaggerate differences with others, and with
8
9 an old self. Perceived inadequacies are then unconsciously
10
11 displaced into others or into past versions of the self in
12
13 attempting to compensate for the unresolvable lack in life
14
15 (Driver, 2018). However, an un-reflected need for recognition in
16
17 the eyes of others, or in comparison to previous selves, merely
18
19 fuels fragility and anxiety. The important implication of this
20
21 understanding is that unconsciously, mentors can be seen to
22
23 'need' protégés as much as protégés 'need' mentors for conquering
24
25 lack and securing a seemingly satisfactory sense-of-self.
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27 However, 'need' is not a sound basis for security. Attempts to
28
29 cover over or to defeat unresolvable lack and to secure a desired
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31 and stable sense-of-self are precarious, and self-defeating
32
33 resulting merely in fantasies of wholeness, and the replacement
34
35 of one desired, but elusive, imaginary way of being with another
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37 (Driver, 2017). By contrast, the only sustainable way forward is
38
39 adopting a reflexive stance involving an acceptance and creative
40
41 engagement with lack. The individual can then cease to strive to
42
43 'become' someone and then someone else and so on but can, rather,
44
45 find enjoyment in the liminal state of just 'being' who they are
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47 (Driver, 2017). But what does this mean for mentoring? In
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49 turning now to draw conclusions we address this question.
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Conclusions and Implications for HRD Practice

Mentoring in various forms is, as we have shown, widespread and is regarded as one of the most effective HRD interventions. Not surprisingly therefore, the literature of mentoring is extensive. However, while it is clear that both protégés and mentors themselves derive tangible benefits from mentoring, it was seen how numerous scholars have been concerned by the absence of systematic theorization in the area. Moreover, the theorization of mentoring that does exist is typically descriptive and the need for theorization that can contribute both to explaining how mentoring works and to predicting its outcomes is widely acknowledged (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019). We also found that the mentoring literature is overwhelmingly positivistic, performative and, suspiciously, positive. For instance, empirical research typically seeks a simple cause-effect relationship and purports to discern straightforward enhancements to both individual and organizational performance (the 'miracles' and 'magic') that are attributable to mentoring.

Our research question arose from these concerns and our suspicions and this question was; how can mentoring be understood for both protégés and mentors in terms of conscious and

Meaning in Mentoring

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2
3 unconscious identity development processes? In answering this
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5 question, we avoided replicating the numerous, and perfectly
6
7 satisfactory, reviews of the mentoring literature that have
8
9 analyzed and mapped the corpus in various ways (e.g. Allen et
10
11 al., 2008; Janssen et al., 2015). Instead, we completed a
12
13 focused and selective review and adopted the new perspective of
14
15 Critical HRD. Our review integrated key strands of the
16
17 mentoring, identity and psychodynamic literatures in responding
18
19 to calls for the theorization of mentoring. We now highlight
20
21 three key theoretical contributions that enhance explanations and
22
23 improve predictions for how mentoring works. In extending the
24
25 theoretical base of mentoring, these contributions have clear
26
27 implications for mentoring policy and practice, and these are
28
29 examined in what follows, with the implications for empirical
30
31 research in mentoring being considered subsequently.
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39 The first key contribution lies in our articulation of an
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41 identity perspective on mentoring whereby occupational learning
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43 is understood in terms of identity development. Through the
44
45 systematic theorization of identity from a social constructionist
46
47 perspective we have moved the understanding of mentoring into a
48
49 more fruitful, processual, direction (Janssen et al., 2016)
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51 where, in particular, the mutuality of mentoring is more
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53 effectively explained than has been the case to date. Drawing
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3 upon situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) we
4
5 established that while not denying the importance of acquiring
6
7 knowledge and skill in occupational learning, a crucial, and as
8
9 yet neglected facet of occupational learning is the cultivation
10
11 of ways of being, that is, of cultivating identities, within
12
13 practice communities. Adopting an anti-realist ontology that the
14
15 social-world is produced in and through interaction (Christensen,
16
17 2016), identity was conceptualized as socially constructed,
18
19 relational and intersubjective, being crafted, negotiated, and
20
21 maintained within everyday communities, and at particular moments
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23 (Watson, 2008). As gatekeepers to communities, mentors can
24
25 facilitate protégés' cultivation of desired identities.
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32 It was seen that identity-work is particularly necessary
33
34 given the contemporary precarity of identity in organizations.
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36 Identity-work contributes, as was seen, to overcoming the
37
38 insecurities and anxieties that arise nowadays from identity
39
40 being less an ascription and more an achievement (Alvesson,
41
42 2010), to countering identity challenges, and to constructing a
43
44 desired sense-of-self. It is thus predicted that mentoring will
45
46 become more important than ever for the existential purpose of
47
48 enabling individuals to ascertain a clear trajectory of becoming
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50 and to secure a desired way of being in work and, in turn, in
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52 life. A key implication for mentoring practice is the need for
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 mentors to enable protégés to understand that a sense of
4
5 vulnerability is as normal as a sense of security and that by
6
7 acknowledging vulnerability the protégé can become more receptive
8
9 to learning and change. Further, mentors need to recognize that
10
11 being a mentor primarily involves enabling protégés to understand
12
13 themselves, that is, who they are currently striving to be and
14
15 who they could possibly be. In particular, mentors might
16
17 scaffold protégés' aspirational identity-work in their attempts
18
19 to fashion distinctive and ideal versions of themselves
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21 (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Mentors can, moreover, assist with
22
23 envisioning possible selves and trialling provisional selves
24
25 (Coupland & Brown, 2012).
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32 While, as our review showed, the effects of mentoring on
33
34 mentors themselves has, until recently, been under-researched, we
35
36 conclude that a key effect for mentors is that mentoring enables
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38 mentors' own identity-work. Whereas, the mainstream literature
39
40 has depicted mentors as providers of benefits to protégés (e.g.
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42 Allen, Lentz & Day, 2006), from the identity perspective, the
43
44 benefits of mentoring are revealed to be reciprocal. Mentoring
45
46 has the potential to bolster a mentor's sense of security in her
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48 or his identity through conferring status and credibility among
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50 peers, and through providing a feeling of 'generativity', that
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52 is, of bringing on the next generation at time when the mentor's
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3 own occupational sense-of-self may be fragile and in need of
4 rejuvenation. An important contribution of our inquiry therefore
5 lies in showing that mentors need protégés as much as protégés
6 need mentors; identity theorizing explains that the two parties
7 are interdependent in constructing a satisfactory sense-of-self.
8 The psychodynamic perspective extends this understanding, finding
9 that the self is conceptualized as constituted in the gaze of
10 others and that recognition by others is a condition of existence
11 of the self (Roberts, 2005). Therefore, the proclivity of
12 experienced employees to become mentors is more readily
13 understood. The key implication of this contribution for
14 mentoring as a HRD practice lies in mentors needing to
15 acknowledge the reciprocity of benefits and to thereby cultivate
16 circumspection and humility. However, that mentors might be
17 threatened by their protégés' successes points to a further
18 implication for mentors in that support is needed for remedial,
19 repairing or restorative identity-work (Knights & Clarke 2014);
20 mentors may themselves need mentoring to secure a satisfactory
21 sense-of-self.
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48 The second key contribution arising from our theorising
49 predicts that mentoring might serve to entrap and regulate as
50 much as enable identity development for both parties despite the
51 best of intentions. As shown, identity claims are typically
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 directly challenged, contested or constrained by others (Alvesson
4 & Willmott, 2002). For instance, subject positions are assigned
5 according to role and often, too, according to race, class and
6 sexuality (Mizzi & Rocco, 2013). Being a protégé has the
7 potential to constrain identity, locking the individual into a
8 subservient subject position. However, being a mentor might also
9 constrain identity, carrying connotations of being a leader
10 rather than being a learner in a world where survival requires
11 not merely leaders but lifelong learners. Identity is also
12 constrained, or at least limited, indirectly and in more
13 pernicious and pervasive ways by the un-reflexive appropriation
14 of dominant discourses. It was noted earlier that language is
15 constitutive rather than representational (Reedy, 2008) and
16 identities are conceptualized as constructed through narratives
17 drawing upon available discourses. Brown and Lewis (2011) found
18 that discourse is the primary medium of organizational power and
19 control. Discourse is a technology of the self, being readily
20 available, beguiling, and normalized. Managerially-favored
21 discourses colonize workers from the inside through being
22 incorporated into self-narratives. The result can be docile,
23 disciplined and corporately scripted, stencil, subjects with a
24 deluded and dependent sense of security (Alvesson, 2010; Huber &
25 Brown, 2017). It is all too easy for mentors to be complicit
26 with power, regulating protégés' potential through encouraging
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3 the unquestioned absorption of limiting managerial discourses
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5 into their self-narratives (Collins, 2012), a process that
6
7 Alvesson (2010) referred to as constructing identity for
8
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10 performativity.

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14 Therefore, and in terms of practical implications, mentors
15
16 should be critically self-reflexive (Cunliffe, 2016) as to who
17
18 they themselves are attempting to be, through examining the
19
20 discourses they weave into their own narratives of self. In
21
22 turn, mentors then need to aid protégés to develop self-awareness
23
24 (Opengart & Bierema, 2015) so as to be able to narrate more
25
26 authentic, coherent, independent and sustainable ways of being
27
28 for themselves. Significantly, mentors can create identity-
29
30 workspaces for themselves and their protégés (Muir, 2014).
31
32 Identity-workspaces are spaces of resistance and for emancipation
33
34 (Sambrook, 2017). In such spaces individuals can experiment with
35
36 counter-narratives (Brown & Humphreys, 2006) and with narratives
37
38 that draw upon new discursive resources so as to craft
39
40 alternatives to organizationally prescribed identities. Mentors
41
42 can, in other words, enable protégés identity-work in
43
44 experimenting with possible future selves and in developing a
45
46 “flexible repertoire of identity options” (Nicholson & Carroll,
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48 2013, p.1239). Quite simply, protégés need enabling to author
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 new stories of self that draw upon more diverse discursive
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5 resources.
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10 A third set of contributions emerges from the psychodynamic
11 conceptualization of identity-work developed in the paper. This
12 conceptualization provides further explanations and predictions
13
14 for how mentoring works and suggests further practical
15
16 implications. The psychodynamic conceptualization shows how
17
18 certain ways of being might be aspired but might also delude and
19
20 entrap both parties. In adding a psychoanalytic perspective to
21
22 identity-work it was shown how the self is expressed in the
23
24 conscious 'symbolic order' that is only a partial and inadequate
25
26 reflection of the 'real' self and results in an unremitting but
27
28 unconscious sense of lack. Identity-work to achieve a stable,
29
30 secure and aspired sense of self can therefore be seen as
31
32 chimeric, because identity is never more than an imaginary and
33
34 incomplete construction. This conclusion has far-reaching
35
36 implications for mentoring. Acknowledging and accepting the
37
38 inevitable failure of identity-work to achieve an imaginary
39
40 identity opens up the liberating possibility not of overcoming
41
42 lack but, rather, of giving up attachment and living with lack
43
44 (Hoedemaekers, 2010; Driver, 2017). Therefore, while enabling
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46 protégés to author new stories of the self and achieve
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48 alternative ways of being, mentors also need to prevent protégés'
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3 unthinking pursuit of imaginary, and inevitably illusory, ways of
4
5 being and to enable protégés to instead achieve authenticity.
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10 Finally, the limitations of the alternative theoretical
11
12 perspective on mentoring that this paper has advanced need to be
13
14 acknowledged and the directions for future research discerned.
15
16 First, we are conscious that more attention needs to be given to
17
18 examining the important area of mentoring for diversity from the
19
20 identity perspective that we have developed. Examining this area
21
22 of mentoring through an identity lens has particular potential
23
24 for further refining the theoretical tools. Second, we
25
26 acknowledge that identity development in relation to occupations
27
28 and organizations may be of relatively minor importance for
29
30 certain groups of workers for whom identity is derived from their
31
32 roles as, for example, home-makers. Third, we recognise that
33
34 identity may yield a better understanding of certain types of
35
36 mentoring relationship than others and that identity-work may be
37
38 more or less important depending upon the career stage of the
39
40 mentor or protégé. Fourth, we do not suggest that identity is
41
42 the only theoretical perspective required to answer 'how' and
43
44 'why' questions pertaining to mentoring. However, we have
45
46 established that social constructionist identity theorizing
47
48 combined with the psychoanalytical perspective has good traction
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Meaning in Mentoring

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3 in answering such questions and in informing the development of
4 mentoring practice.
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10 Nonetheless, in extending the utility of the understandings
11 developed theoretically in this paper, empirical investigations
12 are required. Whereas, the tradition of developing and refining
13 mentoring scales has become an important empirical research
14 methodology (Ghosh, 2013), the perspective developed here will
15 require empirical inquiry using qualitative methodology. In
16 particular, ethnographic approaches and associated methods
17 designed to engender mentor and protégé narratives will be
18 required. Thus, open interviews and dyadic observations of
19 mentoring encounters in progress will be useful. Moreover,
20 methods for ascertaining indicators of identity and particularly
21 for uncovering unconscious identity process will need to be
22 deployed. For example, the close examination of narratives for
23 unconscious slips and contradictions provide insights into
24 unconscious facets of identity (Winkler, 2013; Hoedemaekers,
25 2010). Empirical research might, therefore, examine propositions
26 such as: within accounts of mentoring experiences, to what extent
27 can discourses be discerned that are indicative of identity-work?
28 And, within mentors' accounts of mentoring: how is language used
29 to position the mentor in relation to her or his protégé/s?
30 However, despite the noted limitations and areas for further
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3 research, we conclude that there is 'more than meets the eye'
4
5 happening in mentoring relationships. Examining the 'I' in
6
7 mentoring holds the key to explaining how mentoring works.
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9 Through mentoring, mentors as much as protégés find meaning for
10
11 themselves in a world where a desired identity has to be worked
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13 on but can readily go awry.
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For Peer Review

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