Women and Mentoring: A Review and Research Agenda

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Women and Mentoring: 
A Review and Research Agenda

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Mentoring provides career guidance and psychological support to employees. However, women may have difficulty establishing a mentoring relationship. This paper describes the individual and organizational factors that may inhibit the development of mentorships for women. An agenda for research on the development and dynamics of mentoring relationships is proposed.

The number of women seeking management positions is increasing as a function of their greater participation in the labor force, expanded access to educational and employment opportunities, and affirmative action programs. However, the number of mentoring relationships (mentorships) available to women does not appear to be keeping pace with the increasing number of women needing mentors (Berry, 1983; Shockley & Stanley, 1980). Without a mentor, women often are unable to understand the reality of the male-dominated business culture and they fail to obtain the sponsorship needed to identify them as highly talented and to direct them in their career advancement (George & Kumnerow, 1981; Solomon, Bishop, & Bresser, 1986; Stewart & Gudykunst, 1982). From the organization's perspective, the failure to identify and utilize talented women reduces effectiveness, and it may result in the organization not being able to meet equal employment opportunity or affirmative action goals.

Overview of Mentoring Research

According to Kram (1985), a mentor is an experienced, productive manager who relates well to a less-experienced employee and facilitates his or her personal development for the benefit of the individual as well as that of the organization. The mentor usually is eight to fifteen years older than the protégé who frequently is a young professional with high career aspirations (Hunt & Michael, 1983). The relationship may be initiated by either party. Often, the protégé attracts the attention of the mentor through outstanding job performance or similarity in interests or hobbies. Also, the protégé may seek out a more experienced organizational member to help answer work-related questions and to explain formal or informal organizational norms.

The majority of mentorships are informal; that is, the two persons are interested in establishing a relationship. However, formal mentoring programs, in which the organization assigns or matches mentors and protégés, are increasing in popularity in both the public and private sector (Klauss, 1981; Roche, 1979). Successful formal mentoring programs are characterized by top management support, careful selection of mentors and protégés, an extensive orientation program emphasizing the development of realistic expectations concerning the relationship, clearly stated responsibilities for both the mentor and protégé, and established minimums of duration and frequency of contact between mentor and protégé (Lean, 1983; Phillips-Jones, 1983; Zey, 1985).
Research regarding the benefits of mentoring relationships is in its infancy. The plethora of operationalizations of mentoring (e.g., Clawson, 1980; Kram, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe, 1978) suggests that the construct needs to be clearly defined. Few rigorous quantitative studies of the antecedents or outcomes of mentoring have appeared in the organizational behavior literature. Initial work by Kram (1983, 1985) and Burke (1984) suggests that mentors may provide career and psychosocial benefits to protégés. The mentor may advance the protégé’s career by nominating him or her for promotion (sponsorship), by providing opportunities for the protégé to demonstrate competence and special talents (exposure and visibility), by suggesting strategies for achieving work objectives (coaching), by minimizing the likelihood that the protégé will be involved in controversial situations (protection), and by assigning challenging work assignments. In the psychosocial area, the mentor may enhance the protégé’s sense of competence and identity by serving as a role model and encouraging the protégé to experiment with new behaviors, and the mentor may provide performance feedback (acceptance and confirmation). Often, mentors serve dual interpersonal roles, acting as an outlet for protégés to discuss confidentially their personal concerns and fears (counseling) and to facilitate informal exchanges of information about work and nonwork experiences.

Women and Mentoring

Although mentoring has been related to the advancement of men (Barnier, 1982; Orth & Jacobs, 1971), its role in the career development of women is not easily defined. For men, the earlier years of adulthood correspond to the early career years, but such a relationship may not hold for women (Missirian, 1982). Later career selection, more frequent career interruptions, and fewer advancement opportunities complicate career development for women (Bolton, 1980; Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe, 1978). Mentoring may help women to develop career plans and to acquire a self-identity. Ilgen and Youtz (1986) suggested that the career and psychosocial benefits women may obtain from a mentoring relationship increase the likelihood that they will receive the support and cooperation of peers and subordinates, and these benefits may increase the probability of success in the organization. Also, mentoring may reduce job stress experienced by professional women who frequently do not have a peer group within the organization to rely on for psychological support (Nelson & Quick, 1985).

Several studies have focused exclusively on women in mentoring relationships. Riley and Wrench (1985) found that women who had one or more mentors reported greater job success and job satisfaction than women who did not have a mentor. Interviews with women executives revealed that mentors created opportunities for them to operate outside of the organizational norms, set high performance standards that stimulated personal motivation, publicized the protégée’s achievements, and provided an environment that was conducive to experimenting with new behaviors and ideas (Missirian, 1982). Results of a survey of female executives and academicians indicated that women who participated in mentorships reported greater self-confidence and an enhanced awareness of and use of skills (Reich, 1986).

Although women can benefit from mentoring, often female mentors are lacking. Warihay (1980) surveyed 2,000 female managers and found that as women advanced into upper management, the absence of women mentors to offer support was very acutely felt. In male-dominated occupations, the shortage of female mentors probably reflects the lack of women in management positions. Employment statistics reveal that women hold only 38 percent of executive, managerial, and administrative jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1987), and the majority of women performing managerial functions are found in traditionally female-dominated occupations, such as retailing or education (U.S. Department
of Labor, 1983). Another factor inhibiting the use of female mentors is that males hold more centralized, critical positions that give them access to valuable information concerning job openings, pending projects, and managerial decisions often shared through the "old boy network" (Barner, 1982; Smith & Grenier, 1982). As a result, a male mentor may have a wider base of power, may help set realistic career goals, may provide greater visibility to important organization members, and may have access to more valuable resources than a female mentor (Woodlands Group, 1980). Unfortunately, the development of cross-gender mentorships may be inhibited by a number of perceptual and situational factors.

**Barriers for Establishing Cross-Gender Mentorships**

A number of barriers, including lack of access to information networks, tokenism, stereotyping, socialization practices, norms regarding cross-gender relationships, and reliance on inappropriate power bases, may stymie the development of mentorships for women.

**Lack of Access to Information Networks**

Women may fail to develop mentorships because of limited contact with potential mentors. This may be due to a lack of knowledge of how to develop informal networks, a preference for interacting with others of similar status in the organization, or the intentional exclusion of women by male managers. Evidence indicates that women have fewer interactions with individuals in positions of power in the organization (i.e., the dominant coalition). For example, Rosen, Templeton, and Kirchline (1981) and Brass (1985) found that females were less central to males' networks, especially the network of the dominant coalition. Similarly, Stewart and Gudykunst (1982) found that women were receiving more promotions than men, but were not advancing as far in the organizational hierarchy. One explanation for this is that women lack the sponsorship, provided by a mentor, that is needed to move to the upper levels of the organization. The positive relationship between access to the dominant coalition and promotion suggests that women who do not have a mentor may not be visible to organizational decision makers, and, therefore, reduce their chances of promotions and job transfers.

The notion of leader-member exchange, which was advocated by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) may be valuable for understanding why females are excluded from mentorships. According to them, leaders differentiate their subordinates in terms of competence, the extent to which they can be trusted, and their motivation to assume responsibility. Subordinates who have these characteristics are considered in-group members. In-group members are more likely to be given challenging work assignments, to be asked to participate in managerial decision making, and to have a more supportive relationship with the manager than other members of the work group (e.g., Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Liden & Graen, 1980; Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986). Because women may not be perceived as possessing desirable qualities such as leadership, assertiveness, competitiveness, and emotional control (e.g., Bardwick & Douvan, 1972; O'Leary, 1974; Schein, 1973), they are less likely to be considered in-group members. As a result, women may have limited access to mentors who can provide entry into informal communications networks.

**Tokenism**

According to Kanter (1977), individuals are considered tokens when they enter a job environment in which their social category (e.g., sex or race) historically has been disproportionately represented. In many traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as engineering or manufacturing, women are tokens in the work group. In addition, because of the lack of women for managerial positions, court-ordered relief, or social responsibility, organizations may use affirmative action plans which give women preferential treatment for jobs which are prerequisites for managerial positions. As a result, women tend
to be highly visible and to attract attention (i.e., the performance and socialization experiences of women are more likely to be monitored by management). Potential mentors for female employees may be dissuaded from developing a relationship because of the visibility of women in the organization. If the mentorship is unsuccessful, the manager may have a greater likelihood of receiving adverse publicity which could stymie the attainment of his or her own career goals.

In situations in which women are given preferential treatment for certain jobs within the organization, other employees may become resentful and dissatisfied with the promotion and development policies (Rosen & Mericle, 1979). Potential mentors may view female employees as a threat to their job security and, therefore, may be reluctant to initiate a developmental relationship with them. Additionally, Bruning and Snyder (1983) suggested that preferential treatment of women may perpetuate sexism by magnifying differences between women and men and by contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy regarding sex differences. As a result, managers may be unwilling to establish mentorships with women because of beliefs that women are disinterested in career advancement.

Preferential treatment also may have a negative impact on women's job attitudes, self-perceptions, and problem-solving skills. Chacko (1982) found that women who perceived that gender was a major factor in their selection by the organization were less committed to the organization and less satisfied with work, supervisors, and co-workers. Heilman, Simon, and Repper (1987) found that women who were selected for a leadership role on the basis of preference rather than merit rated their performance more negatively, took less credit for successful outcomes, viewed themselves as more deficient in leadership skills, and were less motivated to pursue leadership roles. Women also may become overly concerned with how they are perceived by organizational members, resulting in attention deficits and poorer task performance (Lord & Saenz, 1985). These studies suggest that women who receive preferential treatment due to affirmative action policies may lack personal motivation for establishing mentorships due to perceptions that their success in the organization may be linked to policy decisions rather than their ability.

**Stereotypes and Attributions**

Although research indicates that women are successful managers and that they possess management philosophies similar to those of men (e.g., Donnel & Hall, 1980; Moore & Rickel, 1980), negative attitudes toward women's abilities to manage persist. These attitudes may be the result of sex-characteristic stereotyping, beliefs regarding women's job preferences, attributions regarding performance outcomes, and sex-role stereotypes. Sex-characteristic stereotypes result in the attribution of characteristics or traits to an individual that are believed to describe a particular gender. Research conducted in the early 1970s indicated the existence of a stereotype of specific traits such as leadership ability, competitiveness, self-confidence, aggressiveness, and ambition, which women were believed not to possess (Bardwick & Douvan, 1972; O'Leary, 1974; Schein, 1973, 1975). Massengill and DiMarco (1979) replicated Schein's work to determine if perceptions of the compatibility of men, women, and managers had changed. The results were identical to Schein's initial findings: Men and managers were perceived to be more similar than either men and women or women and managers. Similarly, Dubono (1985) found that the negative attitudes of MBA students toward women managers were similar to attitudes of MBA students that were researched eight years earlier. Therefore, one plausible explanation regarding why women may be excluded from mentorships is that they are perceived as not possessing characteristics that are necessary for managerial success.

Additional barriers for women attempting to attract mentors are beliefs regarding women's job preferences and attributions regarding women's performance. Taylor and Ilgen (1981) found that both men and women were more
likely to perceive women as suitable for unchallenging, rather than challenging, positions. Although no differences appear to exist between men’s and women’s attitudes concerning advancement opportunities, men believe that women place more importance on hygiene factors, such as pleasant working conditions, than motivators, such as responsibility and advancement possibilities (Rynes & Rosen, 1983; Sigfried, Macfarlane, Graham, Moore, & Young, 1981). These studies indicate that women may be excluded from mentoring relationships because of beliefs that they are not interested in advancement opportunities.

Research also suggests that male managers may believe that the lack of women in management positions is a function of intrinsic characteristics such as lack of skill or effort (Colwill & Josephson, 1983). Additionally, good job performance by women may be attributed to a temporary state such as effort, rather than to ability (Etaugh & Brown, 1975; Feldman-Summers & Kiesler, 1974; Taynor & Deaux, 1973). As a result, males may be less willing to become a mentor for a female employee because good performance is viewed as an exception based on effort, rather than a more stable cause such as ability.

Sex-role stereotypes refer to widely held beliefs concerning gender-appropriate behavior. It is believed that women are lacking in achievement-oriented attributes necessary for success in “male” occupations (Heilman, 1983). Numerous studies have found that for traditionally male-dominated jobs, women receive less favorable hiring recommendations when compared to equally qualified men (e.g., Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Dipboye & Wiley, 1977). Similar results have been found for promotion and development decisions (Rosen & Jerdee, 1974). Although more women have gained entry into traditionally male-dominated occupations, sex-role stereotypes continue to influence decision making. Heilman and Martell (1986) evaluated what influence exposure to successful women had on sex bias in personnel decisions. Individuals who received limited information regarding the competence of female job candidates evaluated men more favorably than women. Nyquist and Spence (1986) investigated the influence of gender and expression of dominance on leadership choice. Their results indicated that men were perceived as possessing more legitimate authority than women. Also, in mixed-sex dyads, only 35 percent of the high dominant women paired with a dominant man emerged as the leader. This suggests that men may be unwilling to relinquish their traditional claim to leadership. Managers may avoid entering into a mentoring relationship with female employees because of perceived incompatibility between women and the managerial role.

Socialization Practices

Female socialization practices encourage the development of personality traits and behaviors (e.g., fear of success, unwillingness to take risks) that are contrary to those needed to be a successful manager (Hyland, Curtis, & Mason, 1985; Riger & Galligan, 1980). Due to socialization practices, men may develop a stronger autonomous motivation for achievement, whereas women may be more receptive to external standards for appropriate achievement-oriented behavior (O’Leary, 1974). The traditional subordinate role of women in society has led women to value and develop greater sensitivity for the feelings of others (Snodgrass, 1985). Research also indicates that self-confidence, performance expectations, and self-evaluations of ability may be lower for women than men (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkranz, 1972; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Wong, Kettlewell, and Sproule (1985) found that women who identified with the feminine sex role characterized by nurturance, accommodating warmth, and eagerness to soothe hurt feelings, had lower levels of career achievement and were less likely to make ability attributions for career outcomes in comparison to women who identified with a masculine sex role. Similarly, Nordholm and Westbrook (1982) found that women who described themselves as assertive, independent, and pos-
sessing other “masculine” traits rated taking part in decision making a more important job characteristic than women who were less “masculine” in their self-descriptions.

Role models, such as mentors, may be necessary to help women become recognized as legitimate candidates for managerial positions and to facilitate their needs for achievement. Traditional sex-role stereotypes regarding females may be overcome by the presence of female role models. For example, in a number of studies (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Ezell, Odewahn, & Sherman, 1981; Geis, Boston, & Hoffmann, 1985; Taylor & Ilgen, 1981; Tsui & Gutek, 1984) the experience of working with female authority models or having information regarding competent women resulted in a more positive evaluation of women. Studies by Heilman and colleagues (Heilman, 1984; Heilman & Martell, 1986) suggest that exposure to successful women in male-dominated occupations may help to overcome sex-role stereotypes if the link between the occupation of the female model and the job is clearly specified and the information provided regarding competence is perceived to be representative of a number of women holding the position.

Socialized roles and role expectations of peers and managers may have a chilling effect on women’s career aspirations if they are isolated from performing and mastering behavior that is required for future managerial performance. According to social learning theory, direct and observational learning may be used to acquire managerial behavior patterns and to strengthen women’s expectations regarding their ability to successfully perform managerial tasks (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b). If a mentor is not available to serve as a model, it is likely that women’s aspiration levels and self-efficacy regarding managerial behaviors will be lowered (Barclay, 1982; Hackett & Betz, 1981).

Mentors also may facilitate women’s needs to be successful and to attain power. According to McClelland and Burnham (1985), the need for power is the single most important motivational force of successful managers. Need for power is the desire to have power or influence over others (McClelland, 1975). Research indicates that women possess equal or greater needs for achievement, power, and motivation to manage than do men (Chusmir, 1985, 1986; Miner, 1974; Stahl, 1983). However, the influence of needs for achievement and power may be inhibited if women lack confidence in their ability to perform successfully in traditionally male roles due to socialization or other circumstances (Lenny, 1977). Women’s lack of self-confidence in achievement situations may be alleviated through the use of positive performance feedback (McCarthy, 1986). Mentors can help to increase women’s self-confidence by providing psychological support, reinforcement for achievement-oriented behavior, and specific task feedback. Without a mentor, female employees’ needs for achievement and power may be stymied, resulting in a lack of motivation to acquire managerial skills and decreased quality of performance in their present positions.

Norms Regarding Cross-Gender Relationships

Because of the lack of female mentors, especially in traditionally male-dominated occupations, the majority of available mentors are male managers. However, research indicates that men and women prefer interacting with members of the same sex in the work environment (e.g., Larwood & Blackmore, 1978). As a result, women may find themselves without a mentor because male managers may prefer developing mentorships with male subordinates.

An additional problem in establishing cross-gender mentorships is peer perceptions. Often, the relationship between the mentor and the protégé is interpreted as sexual in nature, leading to jealousy, resentment, and malicious gossip. Concerns about the public image of the relationship may cause male managers to avoid establishing mentorships with female employees because of the personal contact and frequent interactions regarding work tasks, problems, and personal concerns that are required in such a
relationship (Berry, 1983; Clawson & Kram, 1984; Fitt & Newton, 1981).

Reliance on Ineffective Power Bases

Power can be defined as the ability to influence others (Dunham, 1984). French and Raven (1959) identified five bases of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. The ability to provide positive and negative outcomes (coercive and reward power) and the right to influence based on organizational position or assignment (legitimate power) are consequences of organization membership. The ability to influence others because of expertise (expert power) or personal attractiveness (referent power) are inherent in the individual.

Several studies have demonstrated that women use more indirect and acquiescence influence strategies than men. An acquiescence influence strategy is characterized by acceptance of power imbalance and dependent, helpless behavior. For example, Johnson (1976) found that it was expected that coercive, legitimate, and expert power would be used by men much more than by women. Men were more likely to exert direct power by issuing orders or requests, by bargaining with concrete resources such as knowledge or money, or by stressing their own competence by making others aware of their expertise, whereas women’s influencing effort was based on the development of personal relationships. Also, women tended to emphasize their own weaknesses or incompetence in order to influence others. Similarly, Mainiero (1986) found that regardless of position power, women were more likely to rely on an acquiescence strategy. Why is this? Mainiero (1986) suggested either a structuralist or socialization explanation. The structuralist perspective suggests that women have not been able to gain access to critical positions that allow use of coercive, reward, or legitimate power. Therefore, the alternative is to rely on a dependency strategy. The socialization perspective suggests that because women have not been reinforced for the use of more directive influence strategies, they behave in ways that suggest helplessness. For example, Wiley and Eskildson (1982) found that men were perceived as more powerful and received more positive evaluations of performance than women when they used expert power.

Although women may lack a coercive, reward, or legitimate power base because of their organizational position, male managers may be motivated to develop mentorships with female employees who possess technical expertise or expert knowledge that may help the manager or the work unit to deal more effectively with problems or assignments. Mechanic (1962) and Fairhurst and Snively (1983) suggested that acquiring a certain type of expertise that makes managers and peers dependent on an individual is a valuable way of increasing power and visibility in the organization. However, if female employees fail to stress their expertise and, instead, rely on helplessness or acquiescence, or stress incompetence in order to gain influence, it is likely that they will not be sought out for mentorships. Potential male mentors may be unaware of female employees’ expertise, or they may perceive that these employees can provide only limited assistance in the achievement of personal or work group tasks and objectives.

Consequences for Women and Organizations

The lack of mentorships for female employees may result in adverse consequences for both the individual and the organization. Ilgen and Youtz (1986) and Martinko and Gardner (1982) suggested that one major outcome of the lack of mentorships for female employees is reduced job effectiveness. Poor job performance may result from limited opportunities to develop interpersonal and task-oriented skills (i.e., the lost opportunity effect, or frustration with discriminatory employment practices). As a result, fewer women are likely to be promoted to supervisory positions, therefore perpetuating the problem of lack of role models and female mentors for fe-
male employees. Also, women's intellectual functioning and self-efficacy may be curtailed if mentors are lacking in the workplace (Miller, Schooler, Kohn, & Miller, 1979; Hackett & Betz, 1981). Women may have negative beliefs regarding their task success, which can cause them to avoid challenging assignments and to decrease their motivation to advance in the organization. Mentorships may help develop women's self-efficacy because through them initiative, thought, and independent judgment are encouraged and reinforcement and feedback are provided.

The lack of mentorships for women may bring the organization under legal scrutiny. Because mentoring can be considered a training and development strategy for increasing promotion opportunities, mentoring programs must comply with the provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which forbids discrimination in compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment. Mentoring programs that deny women equal participation are guilty of disparate treatment. Such programs also may result in disparate treatment when women are selected, but they are assigned to ineffective or powerless mentors. For example, in Watkins v. Scott Paper Company, the court clearly stated that any employment practice is discriminatory if it retards the advancement of qualified individuals to jobs they might have attained in the absence of discrimination.

Carter v. Shop-Rite Foods illustrates the need for the organization to monitor carefully both the process of and the effects of mentoring. In this case, the court awarded relief to a plaintiff who challenged a promotion system which barred women from management. Women were never informed of the requirements for promotion, and they were not taken seriously when they expressed interest in promotion to management. Statistical analysis revealed that 97 percent of the managers were male, although over 50 percent of the jobs in this company were occupied by women.

It is likely that the legal problems of apprenticeship programs parallel those of mentoring programs. Both apprenticeship training and mentoring involve the organization delegating responsibility for socialization and learning to skilled, senior employees. In Eldredge v. Carpenters JATC plaintiffs alleged that the process by which applicants were selected into the apprenticeship program (i.e., an "unrestricted hunting license system") discriminated against women. Under this system, participants had to convince an employer to hire them as a beginning apprentice before they were allowed to participate in the program. The plaintiffs successfully argued that by relying on this system, individual employers did not hire women and, therefore, the system was discriminatory. The "unrestricted hunting license system" is similar to the dilemma that women face when seeking a mentor. Women often are excluded from promotional opportunities because male managers are unwilling to establish mentorships with women.

It is likely that failure to inform women of developmental opportunities such as mentorships will result in statistical disparities that suggest adverse impact in promotion rates. The lack of formally sponsored mentoring programs may not relieve the organization of the responsibility to ensure that discrimination against women does not occur. If mentorships exist, and they are public knowledge, and if protégés benefit in terms of promotional opportunities, the organization remains liable for managers who may exclude women from participating in such activities.

An Agenda for Research

Although many organizations use mentoring for employee socialization or development, few empirical research studies have attempted to examine the antecedents or consequences of mentoring. The continued emphasis on the use of mentoring programs for employee development (e.g., Kram, 1985; Stumpf & London, 1981; Zey, 1984) dictates that systematic study of mentoring be undertaken in order to more fully understand the implications of these relationships.
for the individual and the organization. In order to stimulate further research on mentoring and issues regarding the barriers women face in establishing mentorships, suggestions for future research are provided.

Specific Research Topics

Antecedents and Consequences of Mentoring. The career and psychosocial functions provided by mentors may vary depending on the career stage of the protégé. For women, mentors may be particularly important in early career stages when psychological support is needed for successful passage through the accommodation phase, which is characterized by anxiety due to the establishment of new interpersonal relationships at work, new job demands, and the need for role clarity. A study is needed that examines the types of functions that mentors provide protégés at each career stage. Specifically, it would be useful to determine if the functions that protégés desire from mentors at each career stage differs by gender. Early in their careers, women in traditionally male-dominated occupations may need mentors to provide more psychosocial functions (e.g., counseling, acceptance, and confirmation) which enhance feelings of competence, identity, and effectiveness.

The characteristics of protégés who have benefitted from mentoring relationships need to be investigated. Preliminary work by Noe (1987) indicates that mentoring relationships may be more beneficial for individuals who believe that relationships with others at work are worthwhile for personal and professional development. Self-efficacy, the belief that behavior required to cope with potentially threatening situations can be successfully executed, also may have an important impact on mentoring relationships. Protégés who have higher levels of self-efficacy may be more motivated to participate in mentorships.

Kram and Isabella (1985) argued that peers may be able to provide the same functions as mentors. This is an important issue for women in traditionally male-dominated occupations such as engineering, where mentors may not be available. Support systems for successful women in traditionally male-dominated occupations should be identified in order to enhance career guidance and planning for women seeking employment in these occupations.

The benefits and limitations of mentorships for mentors should be examined. Mentoring may provide opportunities for mentors to develop interpersonal skills, stimulate technical updating, and have a positive influence on a protégé's job and career attitudes. Also, the limitations of mentors in relating to protégés should be studied. For example, male mentors may be more willing and confident in providing career (e.g., protection, exposure and visibility) rather than psychosocial functions (e.g., counseling, friendship) for protégés because there is no need to develop a strong interpersonal relationship to provide these functions. If the motivation to provide certain functions is gender-related, training programs for mentors must ensure that ample opportunities for development and practice of all mentoring skills are provided.

Lack of Access to Information Networks. The use of leader-member exchange theory may further understanding of the dynamics involved in the formation of mentorships, and it may explain why women may be excluded. A study could include managers and potential protégés completing a leader-member exchange measure similar to that developed by Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp (1982). Responses on the exchange measure for manager-subordinate dyads who develop mentorships could be compared to dyads in which no mentorships develop.

Tokenism and Cross-Gender Relationships. An interesting question is whether the frequency and quality of mentorships for women in traditionally male-dominated jobs vary depending on the percentage of female job incumbents. One hypothesis is that as the percentage of women increases, men may be more willing to serve as mentors because of diminishing perceptions that women who hold these jobs are "tokens." An additional issue is whether male managers who have had more experience with women in
the work setting (e.g., as supervisors or colleagues) are more willing to serve as mentors for women.

The influence of the organizational climate and culture on the development of mentorships remains unknown. In organizations in which socialization practices emphasize employee development and prosocial behavior and managers are rewarded for the accomplishments of subordinates, women may have greater access to mentors.

Use of Ineffective Power Bases to Establish Mentorships. Research sorely needs to determine the effectiveness of various influence strategies for obtaining a mentor. For example, regardless of gender, employees who possess valued skills and abilities (i.e., expert power) may be more desirable protégés than employees with little expert power. Additionally, the types of functions provided by mentors to protégés who are perceived as having an expert power base should be examined. Mentors may provide more counseling, coaching, and protection to protégés who have referent power rather than expert power because the relationship is based on personal attraction.

Influence of Stereotypes and Attributions on the Establishment of Mentorships. It is likely that the effectiveness of training programs in alleviating the adverse effects of sex-role stereotypes on the treatment of women in the workplace will be improved if the specific factors that trigger the reliance on stereotypes can be identified. Heilman (1984) and Heilman and Martell (1986) suggested that providing decision makers with job-relevant competency information may reduce the use of sex-role stereotypes in personnel decisions. The use of information and exposure to successful women and their accomplishments needs to be further examined for overcoming the effects stereotypes have in decisions such as choosing protégés, assigning women to training programs, and making decisions about compensation for women.

References


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