

Mentoring Relationships in Graduate School

Harriet R. Tenenbaum

Harvard University Graduate School of Education and Judge Baker Children's Center

Faye J. Crosby

University of California—Santa Cruz

and

Melissa D. Gliner

Office of the Army Surgeon General

This study asked graduate students at the University of California about their relationships with their advisors, satisfaction, and academic success. Both the women and men students worked primarily with male advisors, but not disproportionately to the availability of male and female professors. Instrumental help and networking help contributed positively to productivity (i.e., publications, posters, and conference talks). Psychosocial help contributed to students' satisfaction with their mentor and with their graduate school experience. The results are interpreted and implications are discussed in a framework of recent research on mentoring in organizations. © 2001 Academic Press

Over the past 2 decades, both scholarly and popular interest in mentoring has increased dramatically. Following the lead of Kram (1985), a growing number of researchers have examined the dynamics of developmental relationships within industrial and academic organizations. The large majority of methodologically rigorous studies have been done in business or industrial settings. In contrast, many of the publications that extol the benefits of mentoring in school settings lack compelling quantitative data (Crosby, 1999).

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Address correspondence Harriet R. Tenenbaum, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Larsen 3, Cambridge, MA 02138. E-mail: tenenbha@gse.harvard.edu. or Faye J. Crosby, Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA 95064. E-mail: fjrosby@cats.ucsc.edu.

Work Settings

Within the scientific studies of mentoring at work, several findings have been replicated with sufficient regularity to be considered reliable. First, researchers have discerned that mentoring or guidance involves distinct components. In the original in-depth interview study of mentoring pairs in a public utility organization, Kram (1985) differentiated between two types of help: instrumental and psychosocial. "Instrumental" help includes coaching, sponsorship, exposure, and opportunities for challenging assignments. "Psychosocial help" includes role modeling, empathizing, and counseling. While some scholars (e.g., Crosby, 1999; Ragins, 1999) propose terminological refinements and others (e.g., Eby, 1997) expand the typologies, a number of researchers (e.g., Scandura, 1992; Tepper, Shaffer, & Tepper, 1996) have provided firm support for the distinction between practical and emotional guidance.

A second reliable finding is that mentoring, especially instrumental mentoring, benefits the junior person (e.g., Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999; Chao, 1997; Corzine, Buntzman, & Busch, 1994; Koberg, Boss, & Goodman, 1998; Scandura, 1992; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991), the senior person (e.g., Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997), and the organization (e.g., Koberg, Boss, & Goodman, 1998; Laband & Lentz, 1995; Seibert, 1999). The benefits of mentoring often, but not always, include increased satisfaction and commitment as well as elevated promotions and pay.

Nevertheless, not all mentoring experiences are positive (Seibert, 1999). For example, Collins (1983) reported that a quarter of women in her sample reported having had sexual relations with their mentor. More recently, Eby, McManus, Simon, and Russell (2000) have developed a taxonomy of negative experiences. Their work underlies the difficulties of diversified mentoring relationships, difficulties that can be especially evident when the mentor and the protégé have different values or attitudes. From a protégé's point of view, failed mentoring can produce a feeling of alienation (Ervin, 1995). From a mentor's point of view, difficulties can also arise when protégé's have unrealistic expectations about the mentor's power to affect outcomes within an organization (Murrell & Tangri, 1999). Mismatched expectations may be especially challenging when the mentor and the protégé come from different backgrounds (Ragins, 1997b; Thomas, 1990).

Some researchers express concern that the benefits of mentoring are less, and the costs of mentoring are more, for women than for men protégés. Kram (1985; also Clawson & Kram, 1984) worried that both men and women may assume stereotypical roles when a female protégé links with a male mentor. The mentoring relationship is often quite ambiguous, prompting people to resort to familiar roles in which women may become less autonomous while men may become protective. Recently, Thomas (1989, 1990, 1999) identified analogous problems in cross-race mentoring pairs.

Research (Burke, 1984; Cox & Nkomo, 1991; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1989; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Ragins, 1989, 1997a, 1999; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1990; Steinberg & Foley, 1999;

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