

Mentoring, Organizational Rank, and Women's Perceptions of Advancement Opportunities in the Workplace

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine perceived career barriers of women in entry-level and mid-level positions who were formally and informally mentored. Research studies have found that mentoring can yield positive outcomes; however, there is limited research on how mentoring style impacts career advancement. The primary research questions were: Do women who reported being informally mentored identify the same perceived barriers to career advancement as women who reported being formally mentored, and are there differences based on whether women reported being in entry-level or mid-management-level positions? Professional women representing a variety of professional organizations were invited to participate. Mentoring style (formal and informal) and organizational rank (entry-level and mid-management) were compared on perceived career barriers (lack of cultural fit, exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentoring, poor organizational management processes, difficulty getting developmental assignments, and difficulty obtaining opportunities for geographic mobility). Results indicated only one significant finding. Informally mentored protégés rated Lack of Mentoring as more of a barrier to advancement than who reported being formally mentored. The study contributes to social change by providing empirical support for the importance of formal mentoring in empowering women for future career advancement. Managers who understand the importance of formal mentoring for women can help create work environments that provide equal opportunities for advancement for both men and women.

Introduction

Over the last few years, a large body of research has been dedicated to the study of mentoring. Literature on mentoring across several different professions suggests that mentoring provides benefits to the mentor, the protégé, and the organization (Kram 26). Mentoring can take on several different forms, whether formal or informal, as well as the relationship being between supervisor to subordinate, subordinate to superior, or peer to peer (Young and Wright 204). Mentoring is also used by organizations to develop employees professionally as well as to develop more loyal employees (Eisenberger, et al. 48). Further, mentoring has been a great success for many organizations that have mentoring programs. Research conducted by Kram, Higgins and Chao supports mentoring as being powerful resource that offers protégés both professional and personal development (270). As a result, developing mentoring relationships has become a common practice among organizations. The number of mentoring relationships in organizations over the past few years have been high in numbers; however, not all individuals have experienced being mentored (Broadbridge 344). Some of those individuals who lack mentoring opportunities are women and less skilled workers, among others. Since mentoring is known to promote career development, it is often used as a career management tool (Allen, et al. 135; Phillip and Hendry, 215).

Mentoring also offers organizations insight on their employees from other perspectives other than an employee, their work skills, and their duties on the job. Mentoring helps organizations see their employees more personally and obtain knowledge of their personal needs as well as their work needs. For example, mentoring allows organizations to see their employees from a holistic approach. When organizations meet employees' needs and address employees concerns, the result is a loyal and productive worker (Jayne 25). In addition, mentoring offers some overall benefits to organizations. When companies implement mentoring programs that are designed to meet employees at all levels and when employees take full advantage of being mentored the growth of a company often skyrockets (Domeyer 20). When companies are seeking to fill vacancies in management positions the recruitment process can often be conducted in-house due to mentoring programs—developing interpersonal skills and leadership abilities of current employees (Domeyer 20). Another benefit of mentoring for organizations is that mentoring promotes a company's best practices, policies and procedures, as well as the overall cultural of a company. As a result of mentoring, new employees are better able to adapt to the culture of the organization as well as be successful. A third benefit to organizations is that mentoring promotes information sharing. For example, employees possessing special talents or skills help train other staff members in order to retain those skill sets within the company.

The Domeyer study also revealed that employees committed to mentoring other employees increases worker productivity and helps to promote the organizations goals and objectives (20). Due to the benefits of mentoring, many companies offer employees the experience to learn from another individual through formal mentoring programs. In contrast, there are individuals who prefer to find their own mentor to guide them in their career development process. This type of relationship is known as an informal mentoring. Sometimes these individuals may have more success than those who have been assigned to a mentor. The research supports that informal mentoring offers more overall benefits than formal mentoring (Noe, 465; Ragins and Cotton 533). However, women often have difficulty in identifying and finding persons to commit to being their mentor (Ragins and Cotton 542). Not only do women have problems finding a mentor, but it is also difficult for them to find a mentor who can help them develop their skill sets, reach their goals, and provide them important feedback in order to help them advance in the workplace (Gambhir and Washington 3).

This study will take a close look at women in entry-level positions and mid-management level positions who have experienced formal or informal mentoring and their perceived career barriers to advancement. Some researchers suggest that in order for women to advance to their career a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who will take responsibility for guiding their professional development is needed (Gambhir and Washington, 4; Thomas, 100; Vertz 38 -57). In recent years, the number of women pursuing high-ranking positions within organizations has increased (Lyness and Thompson 360). Although women have advanced in the workplace, there is still a need for gender equity in the workplace. The upward mobility for women still remains below and well behind men (Bush 118). There is also evidence that women face different barriers depending upon their level in the organization (Lyness and Thompson 105). It is often a struggle for women seeking the top jobs, due to many of the high-ranking jobs being dominated by men. Therefore, women really need someone (i.e., mentor) who can coach them and help pull them up through the ranks. Even after women have climbed the career ladder, oftentimes they still face more barriers than their male colleagues (Lyness and Thompson 101). In order for women to advance and to be seen as valuable assets to an organizations they have to be more intelligent, stronger, and out-shine the men within their organization (Saar 75).

Women are behind in having networks that can connect them with decision makers that lead to their advancement in the workforce (Wells 54). For example, an interview study conducted by Davies-Netzley found that women in high-ranking corporate positions (i.e., company president) reported being excluded from informal networks with male peers (173). As a result, of not being included among key networks women felt that their performance suffered and was so noted in their performance evaluations. The study also found that women feel that being isolated from networks limits any possible future opportunities for growth. The most common gender-based barriers that women face include the following: (a) corporate policies and practices, (b) training and career development, (c) promotion policies, (d) compensation practices, (e) behavioral and cultural explanations, (f) behavioral double binds, (g) communication styles, (h) stereotypes, (i) preferred leadership styles, (j) power in corporate culture, (k) maintaining the status quo "old boy" networks, and (l) tokenism in top management circles (Oakley 330). Overcoming barriers is a process and does not happen overnight. Protégés and mentors must allow the mentoring relationship to run its course.

Mentoring is a process that occurs in phases. According to Kram "phases of mentoring", there are four phases of mentoring: (a) initiation phase, (b) cultivation phase, (c) separation phase, and (d) redefinition phase. In each phase of the mentoring process protégés have the ability to maximize their mentoring experience and gain positive outcomes (51-62). In addition to phases of mentoring, there are also two main capacities that mentors serve: (1) career guidance and (2) psychosocial support (Chao 23). Providing career guidance consists of sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments ("career guidance" 21). Psychosocial support includes being a role model, counselor, and friend "(psychosocial support" 32). It is argued that mentoring relationships are developed and maintained based on a common goal between two individuals (Kram 47). When a common goal is shared, previous research demonstrates that mentoring yields many positive outcomes for protégés. The overall benefit of mentoring is for mentors to offer support and guidance to protégés' that will develop a protégé professionally and enhance his/her career path (Burke and McKeen, 100; Chao, 20). In other words, mentors provide protégés with access to resources and networks that contribute to long-term career success. The majority of the literature on mentoring focuses on how mentors help protégés develop. According to Kram, career-related functions and psychosocial functions are the two main elements of a mentoring relationship (23). There are five career-related functions: (a) providing sponsorship, (b) exposure, (c) coaching, (d) protection, and (e) challenging assignments (Chao & Walz, 1992). The impact and success of career-development functions that a mentor offers to a protégé is believed to depend on the mentor's power and position within an organization (Chao & Walz).

To contrast, the impact of psychosocial functions depends on the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the bond between the mentor and protégé (Chao & Walz). Psychosocial functions include: (a) providing mentoring, (b) acceptance, (c) confirmation, (d) counseling, and (e) friendship (Chao and Walz 625; Wilson 123). Research studies continue to cite and follow Kram's framework. Career-related functions and psychosocial functions vary depending upon the style of mentoring that a protégé receives. Over a third of the nation's major companies have developed mentoring programs and the majority of these programs are formal mentoring programs (Ragins and Cotton, "formal mentoring" 535) to assist in career development of employees as well as to develop and implement succession plans (Soonhee 535). Mentoring programs that are established by companies offer employees key resources such as career development, opportunities in management training, increased employee retention and provide effective ideas for succession planning that are inclusive of women advancing into upcoming vacancies in high-ranking positions (Linehan and Walsh 400).

The problem with organizations developing mentoring programs is that some of these programs are not based on empirical data (Ragins and Cotton "mentoring outcomes" 543). It is important for organizations to research the structure of mentoring programs that they design for their employees to make sure these programs will meet employees' needs. If not, employees may not fully benefit from the mentoring experience. In the long run, if companies don't carefully consider the structure of their mentoring programs they may hinder their employees from developing new skills and abilities by offering or requiring employees to participate in certain types of mentoring relationships, (i.e., formal mentoring) if they are not as effective as other types of mentoring relationships, such as informal mentoring. Organizations should clearly outline what processes the mentoring program will follow in order to yield the anticipated benefits and make sure the format is a good fit for employees. According to Fagenson, there are certain techniques that need to be considered when developing effective mentoring programs these techniques include: (a) conducting needs assessments of employees, (b) establishing clear program objectives, (c) defining the roles of the mentor and the protégé, and (d) providing clear procedures to monitor and evaluate the relationship (315).

There is evidence of two corporations who have developed programs according to the above stated recommendations. In 1991, Procter & Gamble established a corporate mentoring due to a large number of employees who were asking for and wanting help in developing their career (Fagenson 315). The program was designed for all employees; however, the main focus was on women and minorities due to the company's high turnover rates of minorities. Since the company believed that females have limited access to informal networks the company believed that their mentoring program could offer support to females. The mentoring program has been a success and has tremendously helped minority employees. As a result, Procter & Gamble continues to use their mentoring program in developing their employees. Nynex had a group of employees who were affiliated with the Nynex Association of Management Women that developed a mentoring program in 1991. The company's program was designed differently from most company mentoring programs. Protégés received mentoring through *mentoring circles* rather than one-on-one relationships. On average, the circles consisted of six to ten protégés and two to four upper level mentors. The protégés and mentors would meet according to a schedule that lasted between 12 and 18 months. Most circles involved only women, except for a few senior men who were needed to mentor high-level female protégés.

The interactions between the mentors and protégés consisted of the mentors sharing professional advice as well as personal experiences and information, which they attributed to their success. Protégés also had opportunities to ask questions and share their concerns and problems with their career planning and advancement in the workplace. The program benefited women tremendously and continues to be used by the company. Due to the many successes that mentoring has yielded both protégés and organizations, many organizations use mentoring as a resource for women and minorities to advance their careers and break through the glass-ceiling (Herry 17; Scott 170). If the mentoring experience is continued to be used as a tool for developing and for advancing individuals, more time and research is needed in developing a mentoring framework that is tried-and-true. As the research has shown, mentoring can be a positive resource for both individuals and organizations. However, without supporting evidence (i.e., empirical research) on effective mentoring techniques, companies risk the chance of mentoring being ineffective (Nemanick, 2000). Ineffective mentoring is related to the following: (a) a lack of interest in the mentoring relationship, (b) poor effort and commitment, and (c) limited compliance between the mentor and the protégé (Nemanick 137; Ragins and Cotton 530). These negative effects can impede a protégé's career development. Therefore, mentoring must be a committed relationship between both the mentor and the protégé in order to be effective.

Formal and Informal Mentoring

One of the main objectives of the study is to assess the differences between formal and informal mentoring relationships and which style of mentoring is more effective in combating protégés' perceived career barriers.

The two most common styles of mentoring are formal and informal mentoring. The mentoring process is traditionally known to be informal. Informal mentoring relationships are considered to form by chance. Basically, informal relationships develop when protégés look to another individual that they admire and sometimes emulate for career guidance (Armstrong et al. 1120; Chao et al. 630). Researchers postulate that the main differences between formal and informal mentoring are based on the structure of the relationship (Ragins and Cotton, 535; Noe 460). However, due to the assumed positive impact that formal mentoring is considered to have on protégés, many companies are implementing formal mentoring programs. As a result, protégés may not consider seeking out an individual and developing an informal mentoring relationship. Protégés need to know that informal mentoring is an option to consider when a formal mentoring relationship is not mutual and there is not agreement on the career development path. Since females have a difficult time finding quality formal mentors, informal should be definitely be taken into consideration.

Chao and Walz suggested that informal mentoring relationships are developed through interactions of senior and junior level employees as well as informal networking opportunities outside the workplace (620). Research conducted by Fagenson et al. suggested that unassigned mentoring relationships (informal mentoring) were more effective than assigned mentoring relationships (formal mentoring) (32). The difference of effectiveness between the two styles of mentoring was mainly attributed to the level of commitment between both the protégé and mentor. In informal mentoring relationships the level of commitment is higher than in formal mentoring relationships (Chao and Walz 627). The formation of informal mentoring relationships generally consists of mutual respect by both parties as well as similar goals (i.e., long-term career development) as they relate to career development. The length of informal mentoring relationships is long-term—lasting 3 to 6 years if not longer (Ragins and Cotton 544). Since informal mentoring relationships are long-term there are greater learning opportunities as well as constant guidance for protégés as they develop professionally. In contrast, formal mentoring relationships last between 6 months and 1 year and the goals are typically short-term and more focused on the present. Due to time limit constraints there is very little room for psychosocial development functions for the protégé in formal mentoring relationships (Kram 15).

Informal mentoring relationships are believed to consist of mutual feelings of trust, respect and caring (Wright and Werther 27); whereas, formal mentoring relationships are believed to be less sympathetic (Armstrong et al. 1125). Informal mentoring relationships generally develop based on the compatibility between two individuals, which also helps to develop a successful relationship (Kram “mentoring relationships” 13). Formal mentoring relationships generally viewed as being forced, which in many cases has proven to be ineffective in offering protégés certain functions such as guidance and exposure, which are needed in order to have a successful mentoring relationship (Armstrong et al. 1117). For example, organizations will pair members from different departments within the organization (Douglas 217). Relationships that are forced or assigned can cause both the protégé and mentor to display discontent, anger, resentment and suspicion during the mentoring process (Dreher and Ash 540).

Sometimes formal mentors view certain protégés as unworthy of their time and/or guidance (Chao and Walz 622). Because some mentors have such a negative view of their protégés, they are not willing to invest the necessary time in order to expose protégés to various career-related opportunities associated with effective mentoring. In contrast, informal mentors select protégés who are high-performing and protégés select mentors who display a certain level of competency and expertise (Scandura and Haring-Hidore 497). The research supports that the differences and similarities between formal and informal mentoring are directly related to the outcomes of the mentoring relationship. As a result, certain mentoring functions that are received in formal mentoring may not be received in informal mentoring and the relationships will offer different outcomes.

Communication also influences the career-related functions often received from mentoring. Formal mentors may have less effective communication and coaching skills than informal mentors (Kram 150; Ragins and Cotton 530), which influencing the career-related functions that a protégé receives through. A lack of effective communication can prevent a mentor from providing a protégé with exposure and challenging assignments which are generally experienced in a mentoring relationship. Further, mentors who are from different departments than his or her protégé may also have different career goals and agendas. As a result of different viewpoints, a mentor is sometimes unable to provide effective coaching/guidance to a protégé to help advance his or her career. Formal mentors are often reluctant to engage in certain career development behaviors (i.e., providing challenging assignments) that will provide protégés with exposure due to the fear of being viewed as showing favoritism to certain individuals in the workplace (Ragins and Cotton “formal mentoring relationships” 542). However, formal mentors often are the only source for some protégés in obtaining career success. Informal mentors position themselves to expose protégés to new experiences that they feel will led to advancement of a protégé.

These mentors also believe that it is important to provide challenging assignments for protégés to help enhance his/her career. Different perspectives of mentors are directly related to a study conducted by Ragins and Cotton (528). The study suggests that protégés in informal mentoring relationships typically report receiving more career development functions from mentors than protégés in formal mentoring relationships. It is expected that career development functions offered by the mentor (coaching, exposure, and challenging assignments) are directly related to the amount of career-related functions that protégés receive (Ragins and Cotton “mentoring functions” 540). In other words, a protégé is only going to gain what is provided by his or her mentor. In addition to the differences discussed above, mentoring relationships differ in the degree of motivation from both the mentor and the protégé. Motivation is necessary for any style of mentoring to be effective (Chao and Walz “mentoring functions” 622). Motivation levels are typically higher for protégés who are involved in an informal mentoring relationship than protégés who experience formal mentoring (Sosik and Godshalk 368).

Stimulating and motivating behaviors exhibited by mentors are linked to many of the functions that protégés receive from the mentor. Sosik and Godshalk found that goal-oriented protégés are motivated by having a competent mentor who gives challenging tasks, which lead to exciting learning experiences (379). The level of motivation influences a protégé’s self-image, competence, and career advancement (Chao and Walz “mentoring functions” 629). Also, high levels of motivation can be used to overcome career barriers that women protégés face in climbing the career ladder. High levels of motivation and mentoring support is known to create opportunities for promotions, higher salaries, and increased job satisfaction (Noe “successful mentoring” 466; Mullen 325) all of which are often barriers for women seeking to advance their careers. With effective mentoring and coaching women can overcome many of their career barriers that hinge on advancement. The difference between formal and informal mentoring relationships has yielded outcomes such as increased compensation, new job opportunities and enhanced career development. Informal protégés who are select mentors compared to protégés who are selected by mentors may perform better in mentoring relationships than those who are forced to be mentored (Scandura 170).

Informal protégés seem to be more career-driven than formal protégés, which impacts mentoring outcomes. According to Nemanick, protégés in informal mentoring relationships often have greater promotion opportunities and higher salaries than protégés in formal mentoring relationships (137). Chao, Walz, and Gardner found that protégés in informal mentoring relationships have higher levels of job satisfaction and better socialization than protégés in formal mentoring relationships (622). As a result of these differences, protégés in informal mentoring relationships seem to have higher levels of satisfaction and more positive outcomes from the mentoring experience than protégés in formal mentoring relationships. These results indicate that successful mentoring relationships can be used as a tool to conquer career barriers. Several studies have focused on the outcomes of mentoring as they relate to a particular style of mentoring. Hunt and Michael suggested that there are many benefits from mentoring (479). Chao and Walz studied mentoring relationships and compensation (619). Their study found that individuals who experienced informal mentoring relationships had higher salaries than individuals in formal mentoring relationships. Schockett and Haring-Hidore studied both career-related functions and psychosocial functions of mentoring.

The results of this study were that benefits of mentoring materialize at different times—career-related benefits are seen first followed by psychosocial benefits. Schockett and Haring-Hidore also found that there are many other variables that impact the career-related benefits associated with mentoring such as style of the relationship (i.e., formal or informal), length of the relationship, and goals for the relationship (628). There is a plethora of benefits linked to mentoring and for women one of the most vital resources used to overcome barriers to advancement is mentoring. The outcomes of mentoring are also linked to both nontangible and tangible benefits for both the protégé and the mentor (Aryee, Wyatt, and Stone 99; Turban and Dougherty 690). Mentoring offers many positives to protégés such as enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem, promotions, job satisfaction, increased salaries, and greater career satisfaction.

As a result of mentoring, protégés should present as more valuable to his or her organization. More specifically, three organizational outcomes associated with mentoring are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention (Aryee, Chay, and Chew 265; Corzine, Buntzman, and Busch 520; Goh 705; Seibert 489). The research is clear that mentoring can benefit all stakeholders if the process is utilized effectively. Moreover, research studies have found that protégés in informal mentoring receive greater benefits than protégés in formal mentoring relationships (Noe “successful mentoring relationships” 475). According to the Ragins and Cotton study, protégés in informal mentoring relationships experienced more career development and psychosocial functions than protégés in formal mentoring relationships (540).

These functions include the following: (a) coaching, (b) providing challenging assignments, and (c) exposure and visibility. The more career development and psychosocial functions that a protégé receives the more effective the outcomes are for the mentoring relationships. However, not all mentors offer both career related functions and psychosocial functions. Those mentors who offer both career related functions and psychosocial functions are considered to be a primary mentor (Fombrun 282; Moore 730). Fombrun and Moore found some interesting findings on primary and secondary mentors such as:

1. Primary mentors are typically found in informal mentoring relationships.
2. Secondary mentors only offers career related functions.
3. Secondary mentors are often what protégés experience in formal mentoring relationships.

Without question, there is a strong link between career development and mentoring. The link may be due to the style of mentoring that a protégé receives and it may not be. The researcher believes that style of mentoring influences outcomes that female protégés experience from being mentored. Therefore, it is important to determine how and what style of mentoring is most effective for women in order to combat common barriers to advancement. Not only is the style of mentoring associated with outcomes but so is a mentor's gender.

Career Barriers

In the process of developing a protégé, mentors also aid in helping the protégé overcome barriers /challenges to advancement. Research suggests that protégés experience three common behaviors from mentors: (a) career development, (b) social support, and (c) role modeling (Raabe and Beehr 290; Thomas 485), which are necessary in order for mentoring to aid in overcoming career barriers. Aside from common behaviors that mentors exhibit there are two main areas that mentoring is considered to focus on: (a) career-related functions and (b) psychosocial functions (Kram 22). The career-related functions focus more on protégés' advancement within a particular organization (Ragins and Cotton 544); whereas, psychosocial functions deal with protégés' personal growth and professional development (Kram 23; Dreher and Ash 540). The two main functions of mentoring are important in aiding protégés in career planning and overcoming career barriers to advancement.

Career barriers can be classified into two main categories; internal (personality and trait variables) and external (situational and structural variables). The internal barriers are associated with certain roles and behaviors that society has placed on men and women in the workforce. For example, according to society, characteristics associated with being a manager mainly falls under male roles and behaviors. (Heilman et al. 65) Due to this, many females are discouraged about their advancement opportunities. However, there are characteristics normally associated with women, such as being people-oriented that are considered to be important in management positions (Marongiu and Ekehammar 425). In contrast, the roles and jobs assigned to women in the workplace are linked with personality traits, motivational needs, and behavior patterns that are not common among most managers and other high-ranking positions (Marongiu and Ekehammar "women in management 429). As a result of most leadership roles being defined as masculine, it presents problems for women advancing their careers (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 20).

Research shows that women in male-dominated roles often receive negative feedback from society and from their peers (Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky "gender and leadership styles" 17; Marongiu and Ekehammar "influences of women into management roles" 426). Further, organizations fail to show women who are in high level positions that they are valued and important assets due to certain stereotypes and expected behaviors that are mainly seen in men and not women (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 20). External factors are large barriers females face when seeking to advance in the workforce and even more so when females desire to be a part of management. Women who hold upper level positions within an organization are more prone to stress than men because they have often have to maintain dual roles managing work/family demands (Greenhaus and Beutell 69). However, most men rarely are faced with managing both family and work.

It is no secret that women in the workforce are challenged to maintain a balanced life between duties at home and responsibilities at work. A lot of women find it difficult to do so. As a result, they have to assume part-time jobs when they have demanding family roles (i.e., children). Because of dual roles women sometimes have to reduce their time in the workplace. With limited amount of time in the workplace men often have an edge on advancing in the workplace than women (Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy 8) which further divides men and women in the workplace. There are also certain rules and practices in organizations that sometimes automatically exclude women and limit the possibility of advancing into high management level positions (Marongiu and Ekehammar 427). The research is overwhelming supports that in the workforce most jobs are assigned and viewed by gender roles (Bielby and Barnon 779). As a result, women are often overlooked due to role conflict and stereotypes.

Certain career barriers that women experience will lay dormant without the help of a mentor. One of the main barriers women face when trying to climb the career ladder is limited access to mentoring and/or less effective mentoring than male counterparts. As a result of the limited mentoring experiences, women face hardships and barriers to advancing in the workplace. A study conducted by Lyness and Thompson suggested that career barriers are often greater for women than men (115). However, with the help of mentoring, women can overcome many of the career barriers they face among other 'glass-ceiling' effects. Mentoring is a powerful tool for professional development and can be used to overcome barriers. Despite the outcomes and successes related to mentoring, there are still limited opportunities for women to be mentored. Some of the reasons for women having limited access to a mentor and/or lack of willingness to mentor women are concerns that others (i.e. colleagues) would not consider the relationships appropriate or misinterpret a mentorship approach as a sexual advance (Ragins and Cotton 548; Noe 464; Lyness and Thompson 110). A lack of mentoring opportunities makes it difficult to find a good fit for a woman protégé (Tahmincioglu 64).

Although there is supporting evidence that individuals advance up the ranks faster from experiencing mentoring, women are slow to seek out mentors because they are not comfortable asking fellow women for help or because mentors are not available to them (Hawkins 8; McCune 20). When a woman does secure a mentor she is looking for her mentor to help her to develop both professionally and personally. Lyness and Thompson conducted a study that compared women executives to men executives climbing the career ladder (360). The results of the study revealed that women typically have different experiences than men in developing their career. One finding from this study was that females reported lower satisfaction with being able to experience future career opportunities than the males did. Also, women at the high levels typically report having other obstacles to overcome, such as not fitting the organization's culture and feeling isolated from certain networks. Being accepted is an important piece of job satisfaction as well as career satisfaction. Not only is cultural fit related to career and job satisfaction it is also a common barrier that women must deal with in advancing their careers to higher levels. Career advancement for women is linked to all sorts of barriers that often times hinder women from climbing the career ladder such as, career planning and isolation from networks (Lyness and Thompson 105). However, mentoring has proven to be a resourceful tool in overcoming career barriers in order to achieve career advancement and overall career success. Part of overcoming barriers is planning for success and professional growth.

According to Swanson and Tokar, males and females encounter a variety career-related barriers and these career barrier are often different between males and females 101). For example, the results revealed that females perceive greater career barriers than males around issues regarding them having to sacrifice their career for children, child-care concerns, and role conflict (Luzzo 320). Males see the most challenging career barriers being financial. Some researchers suggest that role conflicts are one of the most prominent issues when discussing and planning career development of females (Swanson and Tokar "career barriers of women" 99). However, due to the increase of women in the work force the issue of role ambiguity and role conflicts is rising (London and Greller 130). A study conducted by Roberts and Newton revealed that women develop their career aspirations based on two variables—both their career path and family (160). Men, on the other hand, set their career goals focusing on obtaining career successes in their field.

Although opportunities for women to advance have increased, men still are the key decision makers in most organizations (Freedman and Phillops 230; Hall and Richter 219). As a result, women who choose to consider taking on dual roles, both their career and family, often face challenges in organizational policies, (i.e., leaves of absence, fast track versus mommy track), as well as manager-subordinate relationships, (i.e., limited job assignments) and are viewed as lacking full commitment to the job (Sullivan 237). However, not all bad comes from having different perspectives. Differences in opinions can and often does encourage organizations to develop more gender-equality human resource policies that will aid females in combating discrimination and other career barriers (Sullivan "career and family" 236). For example, Sullivan found that if most women in the workforce juggled dual roles it would force organizations to consider implementing policies and practices that would allow for organizational childcare programs and flexible work schedules. As a result of the impact role conflicts of women, female's jobs and job opportunities differ significantly from a male's (Cook 229). In other words, career interests and aspirations remain highly linked to gender. Most females continue to choose careers that will be flexible to the dual roles that they must assume (i.e., parenting and maintaining the home) which significantly hinders opportunities for advancement (Lassalle and Spokane 62).

Glass Ceiling Phenomenon

Women are becoming leaders of organizations worldwide (Tischler 55). Women have changed the face of the workplace due to their increased participation and job opportunities in the workforce (Needleman 209; U.S. Department of Labor).

Women have also made their mark by obtaining jobs in traditionally male professions such as science and law (American Bar Association; National Science Foundation). When women transcend time it often adds more challenges for them such as difficulty advancing in the workplace. Despite women branching out into male dominated industries research suggests that women are still less likely than men to be promoted in fields such as, business management (Cannings 77), law (Spurr and Sueyoshi 840), and school administration (Joy, 1998). Research studies on occupations comparing men and women suggests that gender differences and worker attributes affect promotion rates of women, and men are more likely to get promoted than women (McDowell, Singell, and Ziliak 233). Even though women are making breakthroughs, the road to advancement for most women requires combating the glass-ceiling. These changes to the workforce that are spearheaded by women holding nontraditional jobs it comes with a price. Women in traditionally male professions are paid less than men (Keys 34), receive fewer promotions (Burlew and Johnson 309). Also, women have very few opportunities for advancement into top level positions (Jagaciniski 108). Other challenges result in problems in identifying a mentor (Roche 15), which leads to fewer opportunities for advancement (Burlew and Johnson 306).

The glass-ceiling is defined as barriers faced by women who attempt to obtain a senior level position (as well as a higher salary level) in corporations, government, education and nonprofit organizations (Cutler and Jackson 75). Glass ceiling effects come in all shapes and sizes. There are some signs that can be hidden, but most are very visible and some stand out more than others. Research is constantly being conducted on how to expand work opportunities for women. A research firm known as 'Catalyst' is considered to be the leading research organization that studies women. The goal of the firm is to help provide opportunities for women in the workforce through research. One of the most common signs of the glass-ceiling effect is gender-biased compensation (Wirth 96). Another sign of the glass-ceiling effect is women are hindered from advancing due to cultures of an organization. For example, the organization's policies and procedures work in the favor of men. The boards of directors can also play a major role in advancing women. Often times the boards of directors are mainly made up of all men and it is common practice for them to select CEOs, VPs, etc., who look like them; therefore, the first choice leadership roles in many organizations are given men (Cutler and Jackson 75).

Although women are making major strides in the workforce, they are second behind men in leadership roles. According to Cutler and Jackson, advancement continues to be a challenge for women due to the lack of support from organizational culture (79). One of the most common challenges for women is the lack of role models and mentors (Lyness and Thompson 115). Other challenges are certain policies and practices that favor men, which limit training opportunities for women. If women receive equal professional development they are better able to acquire new skill sets and talents needed for advancement. All of these are barriers that can be considered discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in the workplace many organizations have and continue to use discrimination practices. Women are often the more effected by discrimination than men. Some of the discrimination practices that women face include: (a) lower pay, (b) fewer advances in salary when compared with men, (c) hiring practices, (d) training and development, and (e) promotional opportunities (Cutler & Jackson, 2002). All of these are in disproportionate numbers when compared to men. In fact, it is believed that minority women face more barriers than majority women (Oakley, 2000). As a result of discrimination practices, there certain acts and policies that have been signed into law to help women fight discrimination: (a) Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), (b) Affirmative Action Policies, and (c) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act –1964 (Cutler and Jackson 80).

Although there are some women running companies and the board rooms there are only eight Fortune 500 companies that have women CEOs or presidents (Catalyst). These include: Brenda Barnes, *Sara Lee*, Mary F. Simmons, *Rite Aid*, Anne M. Mulachy, *Xerox*, Patricia F. Russo, *Lucent*, Andrea Jung, *Avon Products*, S. Marce Fuller, *Mirant*, Eileen Scott, *Pathmark Stores*, and Marion O. Sandler, *Golden West Financial Corporation*. Research shows that 90 of Fortune 500 companies have no women in high level positions (Catalyst; Wirth 93). Despite some advancement among women there are still many barriers preventing women from equal opportunity. As a result, women continue to have difficulty gaining valuable experience that is often necessary to advance in the workplace (DiNatala and Boraas 5). Although there are noticeable disparities among men and women in high-ranking positions (i.e., CEO and VP), the United States labor force predicts that participation is expected to increase among women (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This finding can be attributed to women gaining access to effective mentors. According to the data in Figure 1, men and women should become closer in opportunities in the workforce between the years of 1988 to 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

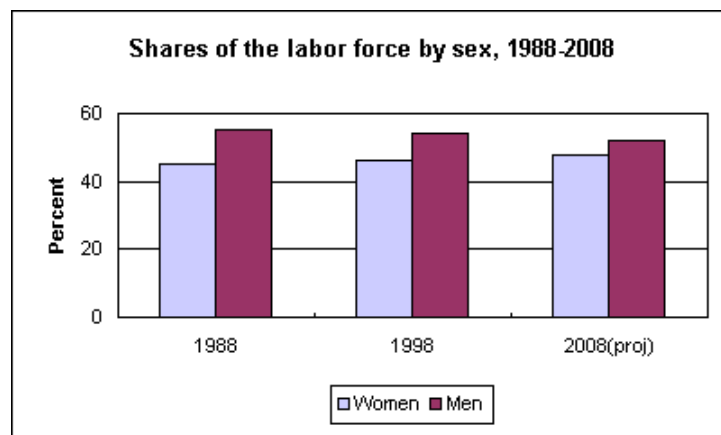


Figure 1. Percentage of women and men in the workforce.

Note. From “Women's share of labor force to edge higher by 2008” by Hecker. Copyright 2000 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Public Domain.

The U.S. Department of Labor has also released information on the labor force predictions for 2004 thru 2014. From 2004 to 2014, the number of women in the labor force is projected to grow by 10.9% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). If in fact these projections are accurate, the U.S. Bureau of Labor predicts that the number of women in the labor force will increase from 46.4% in 2004 to 46.8% by 2014. Ragins, Townsend, and Mattis posit that there are four critical career strategies for women to overcome career barriers and attain senior level positions (40):

1. Consistently exceed performance expectations
2. Develop a style with which male managers feel comfortable
3. Seek out challenging and visible assignments
4. Obtain the support of an influential mentor

Summary of Findings

Conclusions based on this study were that the majority of the findings indicated that there is no significant difference between style of mentoring and organizational rank and how the respondents scored the career barriers categories formed on the series of barrier scale questions. In other words, although mentoring is an effective tool, the style of mentoring appeared to have very little impact on how this study's sample views career barriers. Despite the fact that most of the comparisons analyzed in this study lacked statistical significance, there was one significant finding between style of mentoring and responses across one of the six categories. The significant difference was associated with Category 3: Lack of Mentoring—formally and informally mentored women responded significantly different on this item scale, with informally mentored women having a higher mean (2.75) than formally mentored women mean (2.3629), which indicates that informally mentored women viewed this barrier as more of a problem than formally mentored women. In interpreting the findings, it is important to note that there were six cases of organizational rank that were excluded from the research study due to the inability to properly allocate the cases to one of the two organizational rank categories.

The hypotheses for this study predicted that there would be differences in opinions regarding style of mentorship and organizational rank in how respondents perceived career barriers. However, the results did not match the predictions made, with the exception of Hypothesis 4. There could be many reasons for this and some of the reasons will be addressed in the discussion section. It is important to remember that these findings should be considered as exploratory trends. The conclusion is that style of mentorship, organizational rank, and the interaction between these two factors, appear to have very little effect on any of the categories formed from the series of career barrier scale questions. There appears to be “nominal” difference in mean opinion scores to the barrier questions based on style or rank. Additionally, the same can be said for the various combinations of style and rank as represented by the insignificant interaction effects. The purpose of this research study was to explore one of the gaps in the mentoring literature as it relates to women. More specifically, this study was designed to investigate how women who are formally and informally mentored perceive career barriers and how women in entry-level and mid-management level positions perceive career barriers. There is limited research on which style of mentoring (i.e., formal or informal) is most effective in helping women to overcome career barriers they face in the workforce. Additionally, this study was conducted in an effort to help provide more validity and reliability to the newly developed instrument—Career Barriers Scale.

This instrument is a scale that is used to measure perceived barriers to advancement. Mentoring has been documented as one of the most effective ways for protégés to pursue their career goals, learn from others, and obtain important guidance (Kram, 1985; Lyness and Thompson “glass ceiling” 368; Noe “successful mentoring” 465; Ragins and Cotton “mentoring outcomes” 540). Further, mentoring has been found to offer specific positive outcomes that include increased job satisfaction (Koberg et al. 220), greater organizational socialization (Ostroff and Kozlowski 176), and reduced turnover (Viator and Scandura 26). It is clear that advancement is a measure of success that brings increased status, financial benefits, responsibility, and authority, which motivates most to want to advance (Viator & Scandura). However, the mentoring research is fragmented as it relates to advancing women’s careers and the researcher was interested in examining the role(s) a mentor plays in an individual’s career development.

Interpretations of Findings

A great deal of literature has been written about the many barriers women face in advancing their careers. In studying the perceptions of career barriers for women, research suggests that women who are given certain opportunities and experiences through mentoring find these things influential in their advancement such as effective mentoring relationships (Allen et al. “gender characteristics” 134). The findings from this study suggest that there are slight variations between style of mentoring/organizational rank and how women protégés perceive career barriers. According to the background literature on mentoring and career barriers that challenge women, style of mentoring is considered to play a critical role in assisting women to overcome barriers. Based on the literature, it was expected that there would be more significant differences between how women formally mentored and women informally mentored perceived these career barriers.

More specifically, it was expected that there would be differences such as informally mentored respondents viewing some of these barriers as serious problems (i.e., difficulty in obtaining challenging assignments) and formally mentored respondents perceiving some of the barriers as very little problems. However, most of the findings did not reveal significant differences. Further, research supports that white males are very effective in providing mentoring that yields to positive outcomes for protégés (Dreher and Cox 301). There is evidence that female mentors are not as influential as male mentors (Ragins and Sundstorm “gender and organizations” 71). These two factors could have influenced the perceptions of some the participants. If a protégé’s mentor was not in a position to catapult a protégés career then protégés could have viewed the mentoring relationship as less powerful. Research has proven that mentoring is linked with high levels of career success (Dreher and Ash “mentoring among women” 541). However, women face many barriers in obtaining mentoring opportunities. Some researchers believe that the advice and guidance that women receive from mentoring is less effective than what men receive (Kram “mentoring at work” 609).

Lack of mentoring can also be related to the development of the mentoring relationship. Research suggests that the style of a mentoring relationship (formal or informal) can and has been known to have an impact on the mentoring outcomes (Ragins 97), but this does not hold true for every mentoring relationship. Research finds that protégés in formal mentoring relationships generally report less mentoring functions than protégés in informal mentoring (Ragins and Cotton 545). The results of this study revealed a significant difference in how formally mentored women and informally mentored women viewed Category 3: Lack of Mentoring based on the significant finding ($p = .048$). That is, informally mentored women viewed ‘lack of mentoring’ as more of a problem than formally mentored women. Informally mentored women scored a mean of 2.75 and formally mentored women produced a mean of 2.36. In other words, women who have been informally mentored scored this category higher than formally mentored women.

This study’s results also suggests that on average women who are informally mentored viewed the career barriers as more of a problem than women who are formally mentored. Again, although there were differences between the two factors studied (i.e., style of mentoring and organizational rank), most failed to reach statistical significance. The analyses shed light on career barriers that women perceive as having an impact on their career path and advancement opportunities. As Kram suggests, mentoring is a key resource for protégés career opportunities (93). The accumulated empirical evidence indicates that formal and informal mentoring seem to offer different functions as it relates to aiding women in overcoming career barriers. More specifically, this study suggests that mentoring is objectively linked to what women believe are the key factors to advancing, such as lack of cultural fit and isolation from informal networks. Moreover, these findings have important implications for mentoring relationships. That is, there could be many variables that determine how effective mentoring is in terms of aiding women in advancing their careers. This view point may be linked to formal mentors typically having senior positions, having more experience, and an organizational influence.

Due to formal mentors positions, abilities and skills they should be in a position to help women overcome some of the barriers studied (i.e., networking and lack of cultural fit). Organizations alone are not the only beneficiaries of this research. The findings are just as important to individuals—women protégés. It is important for all women to be aware of the barriers that hinder females from equal opportunity in the workplace. Being aware these barriers allows women the ability to take action. The results of this study have the potential to level the playing field between men and women in leadership roles. More importantly, these findings can be used to provide women with the proper resources (i.e. mentoring relationships, networking, challenging assignment) that lead to advancement. In addition, these findings will allow women to properly identify those factors that have a profound impact on their career progression and then to position themselves to use mentoring to advance their careers.

Concluding Statement

As the workforce and the nature of jobs continues to change, it is important to understand the impact that these changes will have on individual's career paths, especially women. In recent years, the ratio of women in leading roles has shifted—more and more women are receiving mentoring, specialized professional training (Saveri and Falcon 42). Although some barriers still exist for women such as the gap in wages between men and women, major gains have been made by women in executive, administration, and managerial occupations. Mentoring is considered to be a critical factor in helping women climbing the career ladder (Lyness and Thompson 115). However, to what degree mentoring can be beneficial is a question that needs to be answered. If mentoring continues to be adopted, by organizations and individuals as a professional resource, to help catapult women's careers, then a clearer understanding of its benefits is needed.

As women continue to make strides in the workforce, it is important that they are equipped to succeed and have equal opportunities for advancement. When thinking about establishing a career path it is important for individuals and organizations to establish relationships with one another. Mentoring has been documented as a 'tried and true' process in aiding women in advancing in the ranks. Research suggests that many occupations are growing fast and often require specialized training and education (Saveri and Falcon 34). As a result, women should take advantage of mentoring opportunities in order to increase their successes not only the workforce, but also their personal lives. Women must remain diligent in circumventing career barriers and be committed to the mentoring process in order to truly reap the benefits of mentoring and to see a positive change in their lives.

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