Gender Barriers to the Female Mentor – Male Protégé Relationship

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores gender barriers to the formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. The authors consider both physiological as well as social gender as a way to help understand the scarcity of these relationships. A number of gender-related factors are considered, including organizational demographics, relational demography, sexual liaisons, gender stereotypes, gender behaviors, and power dynamics. The paper concludes with directions for future research that will help provide further insights into the development and success of the female mentor – male protégé relationship.

The earliest female mentor – male protégé relationship can be traced to Greek mythology. In ancient Greece, when Odysseus left to fight the Trojan War, he entrusted the education of his son Telemachus to his wise and trusted counselor and friend, Mentor. Unknown to others, the goddess Athena disguised herself as Mentor for the protégé Telemachus. Although it is unclear exactly why Athena disguised herself as a male, gender may provide some of the explanation. For example, perhaps Athena misrepresented herself to Telemachus to create an all-male mentoring relationship. Or, perhaps she was concerned about Telemachus' perceptions, and disguised herself to convey a sense of masculinity to him. Regardless of the motivations and perceptions of these Greek characters, the possibility of gender-related barriers to the formation of a female mentor – male protégé relationship is an interesting and complicated topic in this ancient legend as well as today.

Theory suggests that the gender composition of a mentoring relationship is one of its most important components (Ragins, 1997, 1999). Indeed, in the past decade, research on gender and mentoring has received increasing attention. There are two ways to conceptualize gender: physiological and social (Bem, 1974; Scott, 1986; Spence et al., 1975). A person's physiological gender is either male or female while an individual's social gender can be masculine, feminine, or androgynous (Bem, 1974; Goktepe and Schneier, 1989; Spence et al., 1975). In other words, social gender considers individual personality characteristics while physiological gender considers biological sex (Spence and Helmreich, 1979; Spence et al., 1975).

Existing mentoring research has considered the role of gender in these two distinct ways. Most research on gender and mentoring has compared the different experiences that men and women have in mentoring relationships (see reviews by O'Neill, forthcoming; Ragins, 1999). In addition, at least one study found that masculinity, femininity, and androgyny were more important than biological gender in predicting the likelihood of having a mentor and the functions of the relationship for men and women protégés (Scandura and Ragins, 1993).

Physiological and social gender are both likely to influence the formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. To date, however, there has been little research on women mentoring men. In part, this is because of the limited number of these relationships. More

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specifically, while women are more likely than men to be in a cross-sex mentoring relationship, there are more male mentor – female protégé combinations than there are female mentor – male protégé ones (e.g., Burke et al., 1990; Ragins, 1999; Ragins and Cotton, 1991). Thus, most research has considered only the male mentor – female protégé relationship (for exceptions, see Kalbfleisch, 1997; Ragins and Cotton, 1999).

The limited number of women in management positions has clearly influenced the nature of mentoring research to date. Specifically, the historical shortage of women in advanced managerial positions has led to a reported shortage of female mentors and a limited number of female mentor – male protégé relationships (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kanter, 1977; Noe, 1988a; Parker and Kram, 1993; Ragins, 1999; Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ragins and Scandura, 1994). However, changing demographics indicate an increase in the rate that women are entering managerial ranks (Burke and McKeen, 1990; Cox, 1993; Ragins, 1997). In 1990, the United States showed a 40% rate of women as executives, managers and administrators (Corsun and Costen, 2001). And, the percentage of women in managerial positions in the U.S. increased from 32% in 1983 to 41% in 1991, and is expected to grow even higher in the future (O'Neill et al., 1999).

In response to the trend towards more female executives, recent literature has begun to acknowledge that women act as mentors. For example, some studies have focused on women mentoring other women (e.g., Duff, 1999; Gallese, 1993). And, Ragins and Cotton (1999) deliberately designed their study to yield a large number of female mentors. As the number of women managers continues to rise, there is a need for more research on the female mentor – male protégé relationship as it clearly has the potential to become more common in the future. However, understanding the formation of this particular dyadic combination is dependent upon more than just the increased presence of women in managerial positions.

While there might be more women available to serve as mentors to men in the future, both physiological and social gender may hinder the formation of a female mentor – male protégé relationship. For example, the fear of real or perceived sexual intimacy can be a barrier for both men and women in entering into these relationships. Or, gender stereotypes that men and women have of each other may discourage a male protégé and female mentor from forming a relationship.

This paper explores some ways in which physiological and social gender might contribute to the formation of female mentor – male protégé relationships. To accomplish this, we first provide an overview of mentoring. Then, we discuss the different ways that both physiological and social gender may prevent female mentor – male protégé relationships. We consider organizational demographics, relational demography, sexual liaisons, gender stereotypes, gender behaviors, and power dynamics. We conclude with some directions for future research.

Overview of mentoring

In recent years, interest in mentoring relationships at work has grown. One reason for this increased interest is because of the benefits associated with mentoring. Protégés can benefit with career success and increased satisfaction (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Scandura, 1992; Turban and Dougherty, 1994; Whitely et al., 1991). Mentors can benefit with accelerated promotions, an increased power base, and other rewards (Allen et al., 1997; Burke et al., 1994; Zey, 1984). Organizational benefits include development of leadership talent, employee motivation, and improved retention rates (Burke et al., 1991; Hunt and Michael, 1983; Messmer, 1998; Viator and Scandura, 1991; Wilson and Elman, 1990).

Mentoring relationships can be either informally established or formally mandated by the organization (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Ragins et al., 2000). An informal relationship develops when two people are interested in establishing a relationship. Either the mentor or the protégé might initiate an informal mentoring relationship. The protégé will often attract the

attention of the mentor through outstanding job performance or similar interests (Noe, 1988a). Likewise, a protégé may seek out a more experienced organizational member to answer work-related questions or explain the ropes of the organization (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988a). A formal relationship arises when the organization assigns protégés to mentors (Blake-Beard, 2001; Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988b). While many mentorships are informally established, organizations have recognized the importance of the relationship and have created formal mentoring programs (Noe, 1988b; Ragins and Cotton, 1999).

Mentoring relationships change over time (Clawson, 1980; Kram, 1983, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978). Kram (1983, 1985) suggests that a mentoring relationship has four predictable, yet not entirely distinct, phases. First, the initiation phase is the time period when the relationship is started. Next is the cultivation phase in which the two people learn more about the other's capabilities and optimize the mentoring relationship. The third phase, the separation phase, involves a structural and psychological separation between the mentor and protégé. Last is the redefinition phase in which the relationship either takes on a new form or ends.

Mentors provide two types of activities for the protégé: career and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1985). Career functions enhance career success and include exposure and visibility, coaching, championing, protection, and challenging assignments. Psychosocial functions enhance protégés' sense of competence, confidence, effectiveness, and esteem and include role modeling, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, and friendship.

Barriers to the female mentor – male protégé relationship

Mentoring research has shown that women do indeed serve as mentors. For example, results from several studies indicate that women are as likely as men to mentor junior members of their organizations (Ragins and McFarlin, 1990; Ragins and Scandura, 1994). In addition, Ragins and Cotton (1993) found that although women anticipate more drawbacks, they are as willing as men to be mentors.

Despite the findings of these studies, there are still relatively few female mentor – male protégé relationships. For example, although Ragins and Cotton (1999) designed their study to yield a larger number of female mentors, the composition of their final sample shows a very small number of female mentor – male protégé relationships, especially compared to the other pairings. More specifically, their study yielded 233 male protégés who reported having male mentors, 237 female protégés who reported having male mentors, 115 female protégés who reported having female mentors, and only 24 male protégés who reported having female mentors.

There are several ways physiological and social gender might explain the limited number of relationships that female mentors have with male protégés. Following is a discussion of six possible gender-related barriers to female mentor – male protégé relationships: organizational demographics, relational demography, sexual liaisons, gender stereotypes, gender behaviors, and power dynamics.

Organizational demographics

Organizational demographics provide one explanation for the relatively limited number of female mentor – male protégé relationships. In spite of the increasing number of women represented in management, the persistence of the glass ceiling has been a barrier that has prevented women from attaining the highest positions in corporations (Morrison, White, Van Velsor and The Center for Creative Leadership, 1992; Powell, 1999; Stroh and Reilly, 1999). Catalyst's (1996) census of women in corporate leadership positions shows that only 3% of officers of Fortune 500 companies are women. Other research by Catalyst (1998) indicates that while women and men are equal when entering organizations, within five or six years their careers begin to lag behind those of the men who started with them.

The trend for women in positions of leadership has implications for their roles as mentors.

Specifically, the relative scarcity of mentoring pairs with a senior woman and a junior man is certainly in part because women are scarce at the upper levels of management. As McCambley (1999) found, although women were ready to mentor, they held so few positions in senior management that men tended to be mentors more often than women. Thus, the few number of female mentor – male protégé relationships can be partially attributed to the demographics of the business world.

Relational demography

Literature from research on relational demography (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989; Turban and Jones, 1988) offers yet another perspective on the scarcity of female mentor – male protégé relationships. Relational demography refers to the "comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions" (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989, p. 403). The underlying process driving relational demography is the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971). In simple terms, this paradigm suggests that people tend to be drawn to those who are more similar to them in terms of demographic characteristics, activities or attitudes (Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Relational demography has important implications for relationships at work because "conceptually it appears that relational demography can affect work perceptions and attitudes through both interpersonal attraction and the frequency of interactions" (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989, p. 404).

Individuals' preference to interact with members of the same sex because they have similar attitudes, beliefs, values, and experiences (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Levinson et al., 1978; Noe, 1988a) may influence a man's interest in having a woman mentor. In fact, scholars who have applied relational demography concepts to mentoring relationships have found some support for differential outcomes for same-sex and cross-sex relationships (Burke et al., 1990; Tsui and Gutek, 1999; Thomas, 1990). Thomas (1990) reported that protégés involved in same-sex mentoring relationships reported more mutuality and trust than protégés in cross-sex relationships. Koberg et al. (1998) study of health care professionals also found greater psychosocial support in same-sex mentoring relationships than in cross-sex mentoring relationships.

The dynamics associated with relational demography and the similarity-attraction paradigm offer another explanation for the limited number of female mentor – male protégé relationships. Specifically, men and women may be drawn to mentoring relationships with those most like themselves. As Burke et al. (1990) found, male mentors reported greater similarity to male protégés than female protégés. Therefore, a male protégé may also prefer a male mentor who is like himself. Likewise, female mentors may prefer female protégés because of similar attitudes, beliefs, values, and social factors.

Sexual liaisons

The potential for real or perceived sexual involvement may also help explain the small number of female mentor – male protégé relationships. Indeed, one of the most widely recognized risks of mentoring between men and women is the potential to lead to sexual involvement (Blake, 1998; Clawson and Kram, 1984; Devine and Markiewicz, 1990; Fitt and Newton, 1981; O'Neill et al., 1999; Ragins, 1989; Ragins and Cotton, 1991). Sexual involvement, real or perceived, can produce anxiety and confusion in both the internal relationship between the mentor and protégé as well as in the external relationship between the mentoring dyad and the rest of the organization (Clawson and Kram, 1984; Kram, 1985). As Clawson and Kram (1984) note, even the possibility of unfounded rumors may deter people from becoming involved in cross-sex mentoring relationships.

Both men and women may be unwilling to enter into a cross-sex mentoring relationship because of the potential for real or suspected sexual involvement. For example, scholars have suggested that women may be reluctant to initiate

a cross-sex mentoring relationship for fear it will be misconstrued as a sexual advance (Ragins and Cotton, 1991). Likewise, men may have similar concerns about entering into a mentoring relationship with a woman. Because it is common for a sexual liaison to occur (or be suspected) between a senior man and a junior woman (Devine and Markiewicz, 1990), both men and women may hesitate to enter into these relationships. In addition, concerns about real or perceived sexual involvement in the female mentor – male protégé relationship may very well influence the willingness of both men and women to enter into such a relationship.

Gender stereotyping

Gender stereotyping may also provide insights into the limited number of female mentor – male protégé relationships. A stereotype begins with the classification of individuals into groups according to visible criteria like sex, age, and race. As individuals are observed in different activities, the traits and behaviors related to those activities subconsciously become a component of the stereotype (Falkenberg, 1990). Therefore, the behaviors connected to certain individuals form social categories that are considered typical of all members of a group (Eagly and Steffen, 1984). While some argue that stereotypes often reflect accurate generalizations about large social categories (Eagly and Steffen, 1984; Falkenberg, 1990), a stereotype usually carries with it a negative connotation because it is often inaccurately applied to specific individuals and is often a source or excuse for social injustice (Falkenberg, 1990).

Each person's sex is an immediately perceptible feature, and one's sex elicits stereotypes of his or her gender regardless of that person's inclinations (Locksley and Colten, 1979). This framework is often used to categorize a person when little is known about him or her, and it serves to guide interactions and expectations with the person. Historically, members of society have held expectations about the behaviors of men and women (Bem, 1974; Edwards and Spence, 1987), and these ideas lead to gender stereotyping that assumes men behave in masculine ways and women in feminine ways.

Masculine and feminine stereotypes are quite different (Bem, 1974; Eagly and Crowley, 1986; Eagly and Steffen, 1986; Korabik, 1999). The masculine stereotype depicts men as tough, aggressive, forceful, dominant, risk-takers, adventurous, and able to endure pressure. In general, masculinity has been associated with an instrumental orientation that focuses on "getting the job done." The feminine stereotype, on the other hand, depicts women as emotionally supportive, kind, compassionate, gentle, helpful, and warm. In general, femininity has been associated with an expressive orientation and concern for the welfare of others (Eagly and Crowley, 1986; Eagly and Steffen, 1986). In the past, masculinity and femininity were generally considered to be opposites. Men were expected to be masculine, and women were expected to be feminine; anyone who fell in the middle or at the wrong end of the continuum was considered to be maladjusted and in need of help (Bem, 1974; Edwards and Spence, 1987).

Overall, studies have found that masculine behaviors are more associated with successful management than feminine behaviors (Powell and Butterfield, 1979, 1989; Schein, 1973, 1975). Because masculine behaviors have been equated with being a successful manager and feminine behaviors have not, gender stereotyping leads people to perceive that women have less power and ability than they actually have (Broverman et al., 1972), and may result in the perception that women are less qualified than men for high-level management positions (Schein, 1973). Furthermore, research has found that stereotypes of women are deeply rooted, widely shared, and remarkably resistant to change (Heilman et al., 1989).

Gender stereotyping can negatively impact a woman manager. With little personal knowledge or information about a woman manager beyond the immediately recognizable feature of her sex, people may use a cognitive process that encodes information in terms of gender stereotypes. Thus, a woman's managerial abilities may be underestimated because she is placed in a feminine category rather than a manager

or leader category (Baumgardner et al., 1991; Petty and Bruning, 1980). This categorization produces an assumption that a woman manager has feminine characteristics, but provides little knowledge related to that specific woman's management or leadership ability.

Existing mentoring research has shown that gender stereotypes can negatively impact women as potential protégés. Specifically, men may not want to mentor women because of widely held perceptions that women lack managerial skills and are unsuitable for challenging positions (Noe, 1988a). For example, a man may not want to mentor a woman believing that she cannot manage the complexities of balancing both career and family demands (Kanter, 1977) or because of the tendency to view women as mothers, daughters, and spouses rather than as executive peers or potential protégés (Cook, 1979; Shapiro et al., 1978).

Extending this perspective, gender stereotyping of women may also have a negative influence on the potential formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. More specifically, gender stereotypes decrease the likelihood of a man wanting a female mentor. In one study, men characterized women as less likely than men to exhibit successful managerial performance in terms of leadership ability and skill in business matters, thought styles (e.g. logical, analytic, and objective), potency (e.g. firm, forceful, and assertive), and psychological health (e.g. emotional stability and feelings not hurt) (Heilman et al., 1989). Thus, a male protégé might rely on gender stereotypes, perceiving that a woman lacks the skills necessary to be a successful manager and a good mentor. In other words, if the male protégé uses stereotypes to place the female manager into a feminine category, he may prefer a male mentor.

Similarly, women may not want to mentor men because of stereotypes that women have of them. Traditional male stereotypes include aggressiveness and competitiveness (Bardwick and Douvan, 1971); therefore, women managers may believe that men do not need as much help advancing their careers as women do. There are several examples that demonstrate that organizational life is more difficult for women than for men. For example, Heilman et al. (1989) found that the qualities of "leadership ability" and "skill in business" characterize successful male managers more often than women managers, even successful women managers. Moreover, because gender stereotyping is more problematic for lower level women than for middle level women (Baumgardner et al., 1991), senior women managers may prefer to mentor women because they believe that women need more assistance in furthering their careers than men. In sum, the influence of gender stereotyping may lead to men and women alike preferring to avoid the female mentor – male protégé relationship.

Gender behavior

Gender behaviors may also influence the formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. While stereotypes influence expectations about behavior, they do not necessarily reflect actual behavior. Individuals differ to the extent that they adhere to predefined social categories (Bem, 1979), and their gender behavior is not necessarily correlated with their sex (Bem, 1974, 1979; Heilman et al., 1989). For example, playing into gender stereotypes, women may feel more comfortable than men asking for and receiving help. Conversely, because women may worry about gender stereotypes and appearing anything less than perfectly competent, they may avoid asking for help. Thus, while gender stereotyping has the potential to influence the female mentor – male protégé relationship, actual behaviors are also an important consideration.

Researchers have suggested that gender stereotypes can influence actual behaviors in cross-sex mentoring relationships (Clawson and Kram, 1984; Kram, 1985). Some research has suggested that a male mentor may act as a protector and helper, indicating that he is powerful and dominant while a female protégé may rely excessively on her male mentor for guidance and advice, conveying that she cannot act autonomously (Kanter, 1977; Kram, 1985). While these behaviors fulfill expectations, ultimately the female manager's competence and

effectiveness are reduced (Clawson and Kram, 1984; Kram, 1985).

Gender behaviors are likely to be different in the female mentor – male protégé relationship. For example, as Kanter (1977) notes, an individual's position within the organization's power hierarchy will shape behavior, suggesting that a woman in a senior hierarchical position is likely to use behaviors that men exhibit in those positions. Therefore, we might expect that female mentors are more likely to behave in masculine ways rather than feminine ways. In fact, research has shown that successful women managers are higher in masculinity than are women in the general population (e.g., Korabik, 1990). Nevertheless, men may not want a masculine female mentor because it is incongruent with expectations based on stereotypes.

Power dynamics

A consideration of the concept of power, and the gender issues associated with it, may offer further insights into the limited number of female mentor – male protégé dyads found in organizations. Historically, power has been conceptualized as an individual's ability, or perceived ability, to influence another (French and Raven, 1959). More contemporary definitions of power consider dynamics beyond the individual level of interaction. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) use four levels of analysis (individual, interpersonal, organizational and societal) to provide a more comprehensive definition of power. They define power as: "influence by one person over others, stemming from a position in an organization, from an interpersonal relationship, or from an individual characteristic" (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989, p. 51).

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) explore the interconnections between gender and power, finding that power has a significant influence on women's experiences in organizations at each of the four levels. At the individual level, differences in power between men and women may be partly due to characteristics of the individual or to qualities/experiences that the individual brings to the situation. In their review, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) present studies that indicate there are some gender differences in several traits (self-confidence, attributions, achievement orientation and aggression). For example, one finding is that successful women may be socialized in ways that psychologically align them more closely with the average man than with the average woman.

At the interpersonal level, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) indicate that perceived power is affected by a number of factors external to the person. Women face a plethora of stereotypes, attributions and prototypes that may affect their interpersonal relationships with peers, subordinates, and superiors. They conclude that women may not gain as much power from their interpersonal relationships as men.

The organizational level of analysis is focused on entry and promotion through the ranks. Ragins and Sundstrom enumerate several organizational factors that may contribute to women's lower levels in organizations. There are barriers that may prevent women from entering organizations (depending on how candidates for jobs are recruited, made aware of positions through publicity, and selected to join the organization). Once inside, there are several organizational factors that may contribute to the lower status, and thus lower power, of women, including biased performance evaluations, tracking and limited access to training and developmental opportunities.

The final level of analysis is societal. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) suggest that three societal factors clearly affect power for women: women's choice of a job over a career; predomination of women in gender-typed occupations (such as nursing, teaching and secretarial support); and women's self-selection into female-typed specialties, even in male-dominated fields (e.g., support staff in the field of management). Each of these factors is likely to negatively influence women's access to power.

There is a body of research that supports the importance of the mentor's power in achieving outcomes for the protégé (Fagenson, 1988; Kanter, 1977). Because Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) show that power is typically associated with men, and that men may react negatively to

women who display power, power is likely to influence the likelihood of women serving as mentors to male protégés. Indeed, Ragins (1997) suggests that because men are generally seen as more powerful than women, male mentors may be believed to offer greater access to valued opportunities and resources. Two studies provide support for this supposition. Erkut and Mokros (1984) noted that the male students in their study avoided selecting female mentors because they perceived women as having less power to use on their behalf. In addition, Brefach's (1986) study of 89 female psychologists found that male mentors were perceived as having more power at work and in the relationship than female mentors. Thus, we may see few female mentor – male protégé relationships because men do not perceive women as sufficiently powerful enough to yield career benefits.

Other complicating factors in the relationship between mentoring and power can influence the likelihood of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. In particular, power is largely a perceptually-based phenomenon, and Ragins (1997) reports that perceptions of power are affected by gender stereotypes. She finds that members of minority groups are found at lower ranks and have less power in organizations than majority members. Therefore, minority members must often go above and beyond the criteria applied to majority members. As a result, there may be fewer female mentor – male protégé relationships because women may have to exert more effort to overcome gender stereotypes and develop effective mentoring relationships with male protégés.

Future research

In this article, we have attempted to understand the reasons why there are a small number of women reported to be mentoring men. Future research can be designed to provide additional understanding of the scarcity of female mentor – male protégé relationships. Particular care should be given to both the definition and operationalization of gender used in future endeavors. In many mentoring studies, there is no distinction made between physiological and social gender; yet, the research that we have reviewed indicates that these concepts are separate and distinct. In future studies, researchers should consider conceptually distinguishing these two concepts. Operationalization of the gender construct is also worthy of attention. The use of established, reliable measures will be important as we seek to further explore the effects of both physiological and social gender on mentoring relationships, particularly the formation of female mentor – male protégé interactions. Many studies have used Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory to measure masculinity and femininity. However, researchers have criticized its conceptual and psychometric soundness (Locksley and Colten, 1979; Pedhazur and Tetenbaum, 1979). Clearly, future research would benefit from improved definitions and measurements of physiological and social gender.

Recent research has begun to examine the negative side of mentoring (e.g., Eby et al., 2000; O'Neill and Sankowsky, in press; Scandura, 1998). While most mentoring relationships are in fact positive ones, this stream of research has provided illuminating insights into the things that can go wrong. By understanding the things that can go amiss in mentoring relationships, researchers can begin to better understand the barriers to the formation of relationships. For example, a more fine-grained perspective of dysfunction in mentoring could reveal differences in the same-sex and cross-sex combinations of these relationships. In particular, further understanding of the potential for dysfunction in the female mentor – male protégé relationship may provide further insights into the reasons for the scarcity of these relationships.

Further research should also consider the potential for negative outcomes for women when they mentor male protégés. Existing research has shown that in general, a mentor may suffer from association with an unsuccessful protégé or if a protégé's performance does not meet expectations (Fitt and Newton, 1981; Kram, 1985). The potential for negative associations may be even greater for the woman mentor who is guiding a male protégé. Ragins and Cotton (1993) found that women anticipate more drawbacks to being

a mentor than do men. Further research could extend this work to help understand whether women perceive differences in drawbacks to mentoring male protégés compared with female protégés, thus providing insight into the formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship.

In future research efforts, it will be important to closely examine the influence of both gender stereotypes and gender behaviors on the formation of the female mentor – male protégé relationship. Each will provide distinct insights on the formation of relationships. For example, extending the logic that masculinity pays off for both men and women (Taylor and Hall, 1982), we might expect that male protégés will prefer masculine female managers as their mentors rather than those with feminine traits. However, empirical testing is needed before any conclusions can be drawn.

The organizational context should also be considered when studying the female mentor – male protégé relationship. For example, a large number of studies on gender have been conducted in male-dominated organizations (e.g., Baril et al., 1989; Powell and Butterfield, 1989). While the results of previous studies of gender show a clear preference for the masculine manager, it is possible that different results will be seen in organizations that are not dominated by men, or even in male-dominated organizations that have successfully recruited and promoted significant numbers of women. Ely's (1994) research on women's proportional representation may provide greater understanding of organizational conditions that may make female mentors more tenable in male-dominated fields. She found that women in firms with high proportions of senior women were more likely to perceive senior women as role models with legitimate authority. While Ely's research focused on women's same-sex relationships, it might be instructive to study men's perceptions in the same context. Would a powerful cohort of senior women in a male-dominated organization counter the stereotypes that typically influence men not to select women as mentors? Kanter's (1977) research on tokens suggests that as minority members reach a critical mass, group dynamics shift. Research conducted across different organizational contexts (female-dominated occupations as well as male-dominated fields with significant presence of high-ranking women) should be pursued in future research efforts on female mentor – male protégé.

As the number of women in managerial positions continues to increase, the number of female mentor – male protégé relationships may also increase. Exploring how physiological and social gender can influence the formation of a female mentor – male protégé relationship is just the first step in understanding these complex relationships. Future research can also provide insights into the nature, quality, and effectiveness of these relationships once they have been formed. Sosik and Godshalk's (2000) study of 200 mentor-protégé dyads provides support for the mandate to focus on better understanding female mentor – male protégé relationships. Contrary to their expectations, they found that female mentor – male protégé dyads were superior to male mentor – male protégé dyads in terms of idealized influence attributes and behaviors. They explain their findings by drawing on the transformational leadership literature, which indicates that women leaders are likely to build trust more quickly than men by exhibiting idealized influence behaviors. The trust that is generated may enhance male protégés' identification with female mentors. The results from this study suggest that further examination may yield some areas where female mentors may be more effective than male mentors. Cross-sex mentoring research should be done in a manner that includes as many female mentor – male protégé dyads as possible. It is only with their inclusion in the study of mentoring that we will truly learn the effects of this particular dyadic combination.

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