

Full Length Research Paper

Climbing the Ladder, Holding the Ladder: The Mentoring Experiences of Higher Education Female Leaders

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Female administrators in comprehensive research universities were surveyed to gain their perceptions on their mentoring experiences. The females affirmed they had informal mentors in roles of sponsor, counselor, coach, and teacher, and they are also mentoring others. The findings both confirmed and contradicted former studies on females in higher education

Keywords: Mentoring, higher education, administration, females, advancement

Introduction

There is significant evidence that females are not holding leadership positions in higher education proportionate to their representation in the lower ranks (Dean, 2009). Female higher education leaders may face unique challenges in advancing their careers in higher education. Females may not embody deeply held mental models of what leadership should be (i.e., having a strong hero image). They may face resistance and lack of encouragement from those who are empowered to promote them to leadership positions (Dean, 2009; Kanter, 1977; Rhode, 2003). Mentoring has been shown to benefit females in their career aspirations in general (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Ballenger (2010), in an article titled "Research on Female's Cultural and Structural Barriers to Access to Higher Education Leadership," found that female leaders in higher education who had established in-depth mentoring relationships with other females and men made significant advancement in their careers.

With that recent research in the background, the authors of this article sought to learn more about the mentoring experiences of females in higher education leadership positions who have acquired upper-level administrative positions such as university deans, provosts, and presidents. It was their desire to explore the mentoring experiences of females in higher education administration in order to add to the thin body of literature on this topic, and to inform aspiring female leaders of the possibilities that mentoring holds for those interested in developing their leadership potential. The definition of mentoring used in this study was: "Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and

psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development" (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p.722).

The conceptual framework used for this study was the *feminist perspective* which validates females' personal experiences. As further background for this study, the authors summarized the literature of two intersecting concepts – traditional and emerging mentoring constructs, and females and mentoring in higher education. The research questions were aligned with the concepts and terms found in these two bodies of literature. Thus, the research questions for the study were: (a) What were the roles of the mentors in the lives of female higher education leaders? and (b) What were the roles of female higher education leaders when they were mentors to others?

Conceptual Framework: The Feminist Perspective

A common obstacle faced by many females is finding mentors and access to informal networks of advice and support. Professional females have expressed both the perception and the reality of exclusion from "boys clubs" or "old boys' networks." The result is that many females remain out of the loop in career development (Carr, 2012; Rhode, 2003). The "old girls' network," if it exists, suffers from the comparatively few females in the upper echelons of higher educational leadership (Dean, 2009). Females aspiring to move up in an organization may also experience discrimination from other females who are in higher ranks – labeled as the Queen Bee Syndrome in Staines' groundbreaking work on female executives in the workplace (Staines, Travis, & Jayerante, 1973). Consequently, females in

higher education leadership positions may be challenged when they seek out mentors or networks for advice, contacts, and support. Early mentoring researchers indicated that mentors who have more power in the organization may be better able to provide sponsorship, exposure, and visibility than mentors with less power, and in general, White men have more power in organizations than females or non-White men (Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Researchers have also found that the challenges of finding a mentor include availability of and access to mentors and difficulties for men and females to identify ways to work with one another in a mentoring relationship (Dean, 2009). Men may also prefer to mentor other men rather than females because of shared experiences (Carr, 2012).

A feminist tradition or perspective validates personal experience and recognizes marginal voices. Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan (2000) defined feminist tradition as follows:

Feminist research validates multiple and diverse perspectives, in particular the values of examining these perspectives to clarify one's own beliefs and values, and for the pedagogical opportunities to help one to consider viewpoints of other individuals. Women learn from other women's voices and experiences. (p. 29)

Further explaining how feminist perspectives work, Blackmore (1999) stated that such a perspective requires consideration of "responsibilities of and accountability to, females in leadership for other females" (p. 219). Thus, mentoring from the perspective of females in professional roles takes into consideration experience, gender differences, power relationships, and authority conflicts. Diverse perspectives are sought out and carefully considered (Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000).

Relevant Related Literature

The body of literature accessed for this study and from which the research questions were derived consisted of traditional and emerging mentoring constructs and females and mentoring in higher education. Highlights of this relevant literature are now provided.

Traditional and Emerging Mentoring Constructs

Mentoring has become a commonly accepted phenomenon in business, industry, and academia as a process that enhances an individual's professional development. Previous researchers have shown that those who are mentored earn higher salaries, receive more promotions, and have greater career and job satisfaction than those who are not mentored (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004), in their analysis of over 300 research-based mentoring articles in the fields of education, business, and medicine, found that mentoring yields positive outcomes of learning, personal growth, and development of professionals. Kram's (1985) foundational work on mentoring was the first to identify the career and psychosocial benefits of mentoring for the protégé. The

psychosocial benefits were labeled as role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, counseling, and friendship; the career benefits were identified as sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. A brief description of each of these roles is warranted.

Sponsorship involves the mentor nominating the protégé for promotions, lateral moves, and other recognitions such as awards, assignment to research projects, and recommendations for fellowships. Exposure and visibility is provided when the mentor creates opportunities for the protégé to interact with senior colleagues and other gatekeepers who can open doors for the protégé. Coaching is the practical act of helping the protégé develop work-related skills and leads to the mentor giving the protégé challenging work assignments to help him/her develop further as a professional. Protection may be provided when the protégé needs shielding from individuals and situations that could be harmful, personally or professionally. Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett (2003) proposed that these career-related functions require the mentor to use his/her influence on behalf of the protégé, and that this will rarely occur in formal mentoring environments (such as a program which assigns mentors to protégés).

The psychosocial benefits of mentoring are more personal, and are associated with the quality of the mentoring relationship. The mentor is a role model, and the protégé will frequently assimilate the mentor's attitudes, values, and behaviors. Social influence literature supports this premise, proposing that the norms, values, and beliefs of an 'influence agent' (such as a mentor) may have an effect on an individual even without that individual's realization (Forgas & Williams, 2001). Acceptance and confirmation occur when the mentor provides support, encouragement, and nurturing. Counseling happens when the mentor has created a safe environment for the protégé to express and explore personal concerns and issues. Friendship also frequently develops, with the mentor and protégé enjoying interactions both inside and outside of the work environment (Dougherty, Turban, & Haggard, 2010; Kram, 1985). Stoddard and Tamasy (2003) have labeled the roles that mentors play in the life of a protégé. They are advisor, coach, role model, spiritual guide, and sponsor.

The traditional form of mentoring described by Kram in 1985 was based on a mentoring dyad, in which one mentor was paired with one protégé. In more recent mentoring literature, the concept of a developmental network of mentors has been explored (Higgins & Kram, 2001), sometimes referred to as a mentoring 'constellation' (Higgins & Thomas, 2001), or a mentoring 'mosaic' (Mullen & Lick, 1999). This draws from social network theory and is based on the concept that individuals may rely on a number of different mentors to provide career support, and that the network may be quite diverse (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The developmental network or mentoring constellation consists of "the set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the

protégé's career by providing developmental assistance" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 268).

Females and Mentoring in Higher Education

Researchers have confirmed the influence that mentoring has on the career development of females in higher education (Shults, 2001; Wilson, 2001). However, Gersick and Kram (2002), in a study of high-achieving female managers, found that the females had to piece together help for themselves from various sources. They predominantly found help with career skills and advancement from male managers, and psychosocial help, such as identity, confidence, and support for their aspirations from female family members, friends, and female colleagues. Only rarely did they find senior mentors who offered both. Historically, even females with excellent credentials have still found it challenging to rise to leadership without the sponsorship of an individual already in a position of power, especially a male (Moore, 1982). Because men have traditionally dominated the administrative positions in higher education, females have less exposure and access to other females who can sponsor them for promotions (Brown, 2005).

Haynes and Haynes (2004) have emphasized the need for females to mentor other females into positions of leadership by doing what good mentors do: helping them find their voice, helping them understand obstacles in the career path, encouraging them by helping them to identify their strengths and skills, and helping them access resources for career development. Brown (2005) also urges females in higher education administrative positions to mentor other females:

Female administrators should seek and prepare the next generation of female leaders. Females in leadership positions should take the responsibility to serve as mentors and to legitimize mentorship because they have the utmost need and stand to gain the most. (p. 660)

On the other hand, she counsels that females aspiring to college administrative posts should not wait for mentors to appear and offer to mentor them, but should take the initiative in seeking their own mentors.

The extent to which females provide career assistance to other females through mentoring is not clear. Anecdotal accounts of females who are not helpful and indeed may even sabotage other females exist (Rhode, 2003; Staines, et al, 1973; Tarule et al. 2009). These behaviors may be a result of the pressures of working in male-dominated cultures that do not recognize or support them, leaving many females ambivalent about helping other females professionally (Bell, 1995). Ten years after the Bell (1995) study, Brown's 2005 study of female college presidents found that females who are not helpful to others may be in the minority. According to Brown (2005), females *are* mentoring other females. Her study showed that 64% of the female college presidents responding were serving as mentors to others, with 50.8% mentoring both men and females, and 42.4% mentoring only females. Older females (ages 50–59) were more likely than younger females to be serving as mentors (73.5%).

Ragins and Cotton (1993) found that females primarily tend to have female mentors, because mentors tend to select protégés who are similar to themselves (Johnsrud, 1991; Moore, 1982; Queralt, 1982; Swoboda & Miller, 1986). However, that is challenged in other studies. Cross-gender mentoring has always occurred, and several studies indicate that it is important. Vincent and Seymour (1995), surveying female executives nationally, found that females are mentoring both men and females. Brown (2005) found that most female college presidents had a primary mentor who helped them secure an administrative position, and the majority of their mentors (68.6%) were males, and the majority of those males (74%) had actually sought them out. "Women may be encountering fewer barriers in gaining access to mentors because nearly three quarters of the female college presidents in this study reported that their primary mentors had actively sought them" (Brown, 2005, p. 664), and since the majority of those mentors were male, this may indicate that "men are beginning to recognize the value of women in higher education administration" (Brown, 2005, p. 664).

Men who mentor females may be doing some things right, according to Allen and Eby (2004), who studied male and female professionals engaged in mentoring others. They found that female mentors provided less career mentoring and more psychosocial mentoring functions than did males. Female mentors also provided more psychosocial mentoring to female versus male protégés. However, male mentors provided similar mentoring to both genders.

Method

Procedures

The purpose of this survey research study was to explore how female university administrators have experienced mentoring relationships in their career paths, either as mentors or protégés. The specific research questions for the study were: (a) What were the roles of the mentors in the lives of female higher education leaders? and (b) What were the roles of female higher education leaders when they were mentors to others? Survey methodology was selected because the authors sought to gather information from a large sample of female university administrators and believed that the convenience of responding to a brief online survey would likely result in a higher response rate.

Survey research is appropriate when the goal is to collect participants' opinions or perceptions on some issue (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). A combination of selected response and open-ended questions were included in the design of the survey instrument. The authors accepted the potential disadvantages of this methodology which include: (a) inconsistencies in length and content of responses, (b) possibilities of misinterpretation of questions and responses, and (c) difficulties in tabulation and synthesis of open-ended questions on the survey. Open-ended responses, therefore, were viewed as a way to gain further descriptions

from participants and to identify potential areas for future research, but not to draw fully synthesized conclusions, especially on questions where there were relatively few comments (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. The criteria for selection were that females must be currently serving as higher education administrators, and employed by Research Universities/Very High Activity doctoral granting universities in the following Carnegie categories: (a) comprehensive doctoral with medical/veterinary; (b) comprehensive doctoral with no medical/veterinary; (c) doctoral, humanities/social sciences dominant, and (d) doctoral/STEM dominant (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education). The authors were very interested in exploring the mentoring experiences of female administrators who were in the top positions in these universities. The Carnegie list of doctoral granting institutions provided potential participants from 163 different universities where the emphasis is on research. E-mails for 350 female administrators from these 163 universities were obtained by going to the websites of each university and perusing the names of the top administrators (presidents, provosts, vice provosts, vice presidents, associate vice presidents, chancellors, vice chancellors, deans) looking for distinctly female names.

Research Design

The authors designed a survey that participants could complete in a relatively brief time (about 5 minutes). The survey was developed based on concepts, terms, and definitions found in mentoring literature and it was reviewed by an expert panel of experienced female higher education administrators who also had knowledge of mentoring. The instrument and procedures were modified based upon feedback gathered from this panel. Credibility for the authors to conduct this research was established based on their extensive background in the field of mentoring. Their work in mentoring has been recognized through peer review in professional journals (a total of 17 research-based journal articles on the topic of mentoring have been published singly or jointly by the three authors). In addition, they have created and implemented mentoring programs in professional organizations and institutions (National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Illinois Women in Educational Leadership, Southwest Educational Research Association, and their respective universities). The researchers employed their mentoring expertise in the development of the overall research design including survey questions, analysis of responses, and in final conclusions.

After approval from the Institutional Review Board at Bradley University, a web-based survey service (Qualtrics) was utilized for data collection. A solicitation e-mail was sent to participants, which included a cover letter of introduction and purpose of the study, contact information of the researchers, and a link to the

online survey. Participants were advised that their response implied informed consent to participate in the study.

The survey was titled "Mentoring and Females in Higher Education Administration." The cover letter included in the e-mail message began as follows: "You are likely aware that females remain significantly underrepresented in top academic leadership positions. We believe your insights into mentoring either as a mentor or protégé can help advance other highly qualified females aspiring to academic leadership. Our interest in mentoring for academic female leaders stems from our roles as researchers and leaders in both state and national professional organizations solely devoted to female leadership development. We believe that females who have successfully achieved leadership pinnacles in higher education can help other females realize their career aspirations."

Part I of the survey asked participants to provide demographic data including their current position, years of experience, highest degree earned, ethnic identification, age range, and professional affiliations. The female gender of participants was assumed since the introductory letter was addressed to "female higher education administrator," specified the research as pertaining to female administrators' experiences, and the survey explanation contained the phrase "help other females." In Part II, participants were asked to respond to five questions, designed to provide information about their mentoring experiences, both as protégés and as mentors. For Part II, questions were formulated that asked participants to identify the roles that their mentors had played in their lives, as well as the roles they played when they were mentoring others. The terms for those roles were derived from a synthesis of the various terms used in mentoring literature: spiritual guide, coach, counselor, sponsor, and teacher. Each of these forced-choice questions allowed participants the opportunity to write comments after selecting their response. Part III asked participants to provide advice to female leaders and female's organizations to strengthen mentoring practices.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, in the form of frequencies and percentages, were generated by the Qualtrics software program. The survey generated responses from 131 participants, for a response rate of 37%. The number of surveys completed was 120 because not all participants answered every question. The open-ended responses were downloaded into a Microsoft Word document for qualitative analysis. To achieve credibility and reliability in this study, the three researchers independently coded and analyzed the same transcripts of the open-ended survey responses. First, open and line-by-line coding was conducted. Each researcher reached consensus on the initial list of codes. Next, the dominant codes were chosen to categorize and were given labels. Then, those categories were converted to longer-phrased themes. The themes were then used to organize the findings of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In addition, trustworthiness was established by the use of rich, thick descriptions of excerpts taken directly from the transcripts to support the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Results

This study was designed to understand how female university administrators have experienced mentoring relationships, either as mentors or protégés, in their ascension to higher education administrative positions. The study was guided by the following questions: (a) What were the roles of the mentors in the lives of female higher education leaders? and (b) What were the roles of female higher education leaders when they were mentors to others?

The majority of females who responded to the survey held administrative positions such as vice-president/associate vice president, had three to ten years' experience (68%), held a Ph.D. or Ed.D. (53%), and were 46 years of age or older. The ethnic representation was 85% White, 10% African American, and 3% each Hispanic or Asian Pacific (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

	Percentages	# Responses
Positions		
University Presidents	3	3
University Provosts	7	8
University Dean	3	3
Other Administrative Positions (Vice Presidents)	87	96
Total Responses	100	110
Years' Experience		
1–2	11	12
3–5	35	38
6–10	33	36
11–15	11	12
16+	10	11
Total Responses	100	109
Ethnicity		
White or European American	85	93
African American	10	11
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	3
Hispanic or Latina/o	3	3
Total Responses	100	110
Highest Degree		
Ph. D.	46	50
Ed .D.	7	8
Masters	25	27
Other	21	23
Total Responses	100	108
Age Group		

26–35	0	0
36–45	5	6
46–55	31	34
56 +	64	70
Total Responses	100	110

Research Question One: What were the roles of the mentors in the lives of female higher education leaders?

The first research question was designed to ascertain the characteristics of the mentors who were influential in the lives of the female university administrators. Survey data revealed the majority (68%) of these female university administrators experienced multiple mentoring relationships, having had both females and males as mentors. It was interesting to note that only one percent of these females were mentored by a female only.

Another difference was observed in the data of females in the role of protégés. A majority (51%) of these females reported the role their mentor played was 'sponsor.' The role of counselor came in second (47%), with the role of spiritual guide listed last as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

The Roles of the Mentors When Women in Administration were the Protégés

Responses	Percentages	Number
Spiritual Guide	11	11
Coach	39	41
Counselor	47	49
Sponsor	51	53
Teacher	35	36
Total	100	104

There were 28 open-ended comments to the question "When thinking of the mentoring experience(s) that assisted you most in acquiring your current position, which of the phrases below is most applicable?" Consistent with other responses, the participants reported having had multiple mentors, both male and female. Comments accompanying the responses ranged from "I didn't have many mentors, and those who I would identify were both females and males" to "I have had many mentors for various stages and aspects of my career – men and women." Several commented that there were fewer females in higher positions, reducing the possibilities that a female might serve as mentor at higher stages of one's career. One respondent commented that, in her opinion, female mentor sponsors can be viewed as less influential than men. Another respondent stated that in her case, one female mentor was the most influential. Two comments clearly stated that throughout their careers, they sought out mentors based upon their learning needs.

Fourteen females commented on the question "Mentors play various roles in our career development. When thinking of your

most influential, helpful mentor as you were ascending to your current position, what role did he/she play in your life? (with the choices being spiritual guide, coach, counselor, sponsor, or teacher). The predominant response was ‘sponsor’ (51%). A sponsor was defined as ‘one who helped further one’s career with his/her connections.’ The role of counselor followed a close second (with 47%), being defined as ‘one who helped the protégé gain a perspective on self and actions/reactions.’ However, the participants were able to check as many of the choices that applied to the roles their mentors played, so the choices of ‘coach’ (one who helped you gain specific skills to do your job) and ‘teacher’ (one who helped you learn how to do something new, learn the culture), also were frequently selected (39% and 35% respectively). Only the choice of ‘spiritual guide’ (one who helped you look at your values and mission) showed a distinctly low percentage (11%), as indicated in Table 2.

Consistent with previous comments, females stated that their mentors played multiple roles, such as ‘role model,’ ‘sounding board’ and ‘counselor.’ Distinctions the participants might have made between their mentors acting in those roles were not evident from their brief comments. Females noted that having multiple mentors is helpful for developing varied skill sets. One woman pointed out the value of multiple mentors by stating that “I advocate for multiple mentors and mentoring moments where the person is less important than the message received. These could be what to do and what not to do. And given that life changes over time, multiple mentors are critical.”

Research Question Two: What were the roles of female higher education leaders when they were mentors to others?

In the second research question, the kinds of mentoring relationships female university administrators experienced as mentors were examined. Female university administrators’ responses were reported as a percentage of total responses for each item rather than a percentage of total participants. The higher the percentage, the more often the response was identified by those who commented. The survey data revealed that 92% of these female university administrators were currently serving as mentors, and the majority (88%) of them were mentoring both females and males in multiple mentoring relationships.

The participants were asked to describe the roles they believed they played as mentors. These female university administrators reported that they served mostly in the role of counselor to their protégé (41%). The role of teacher came in second (24%), while the role of spiritual guide was mentioned the least (1%), as indicated in Table 3.

Twelve participants chose to comment on the question that asked them to describe whom they mentored. Those who commented stated that they mentored both men and females in higher education. One woman reported that she regarded mentoring as part of her job. Nine participants chose to comment on the question asking them to characterize the roles they have played as mentors. The females who commented said that they played multiple roles as mentors. For some, the terms used to describe

the roles (spiritual, coach, counselor, sponsor, and teacher) seemed limiting to them. The results on the questions that asked females to give advice to other females and to female organizations is not comprehensively reported in this paper, but will be outlined in future papers, due to the lengthy nature of the responses.

Table 3

The Roles of Women University Administrators Serving as Mentors

Response	Percentages	Number
Spiritual Guide	1	1
Coach	19	20
Counselor	41	44
Sponsor	15	16
Teacher	24	26
Total	100	107

Discussion

The results of this study of top female administrators at doctoral granting research institutions were both contradictory and confirmative of reports in mentoring literature, and revelatory about the attitudes towards mentoring for females in higher education leadership positions. Data from the surveys were analyzed to address the two central research questions of this study: (a) What were the roles of the mentors in the lives of female higher education leaders? and (b) What were the roles of female higher education leaders when they were mentors to others? The findings challenged the assumptions that often are held by observing females in roles of higher education administration; namely, that they do not have access to mentors and that they likely are not mentoring others. What was concluded after analyzing the responses of the surveys was that female higher education administrators *are* being mentored, and *are* mentoring others (at least in this representative sample). They are not only climbing their own career ladders, but they are also holding the ladder for others, paying attention to helping other females ascend to positions of greater influence. The findings of this study, of course, cannot be generalized to all females in top university positions, but the responses of the 131 females surveyed can be compared to previous mentoring literature concepts. Selected descriptions and their alignment to mentoring literature follow.

Females are Being Mentored and are Mentoring Others

First of all, the researchers in this study found that female higher education administrators are finding mentors for themselves or experiencing informal mentoring. At least, they are interpreting their multiple helping and developmental relationships as mentoring. Even though none of the females mentioned being a part of any formal mentoring program, when given the definition of mentoring as “a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial development”

(Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p. 722), the majority of the females (68%) said they had mentors. The Queen Bee Syndrome spoken of by Staines et al. (1973), and Rhode (2003) may likely exist, but it was not evident in the responses of the females surveyed. Not one of the females responding to the survey mentioned experiencing Queen Bee behavior from females above them, although there was no direct survey question asking for examples of this.

Secondly, the majority of the female higher education administrators in this study (92%) were tuned in to mentoring others, both males and females, who are aspiring to higher positions on the career ladder. In contrast to studies that identified Queen Bee behavior (Rhode, 2003; Staines et al, 1973), there is evidence from other mentoring literature that individuals who have been previously mentored are more willing to serve as a mentor than those who have not (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997; Ragins & Scandura, 1999), and female administrators are mentoring other females (Brown, 2005). In addition, employees at higher levels of an organization are more likely to intend to mentor others, and report fewer barriers to mentorship (Ragins & Cotton, 1993). These behaviors were described by the participants in this study, and this sample of females in higher education administration *were* mentoring others.

Roles are Interconnected and Mentoring Occurs Cross-Gender

A difference was noted in the mentoring relationships female university administrators experienced as protégés and the kinds of mentoring relationships they experienced when they were mentors to others. When these females were the protégés, climbing the career ladder themselves, they reported their most influential mentors in their career growth served them chiefly as a sponsor (51%), counselor (47%), coach (39%), and teacher (35%). It should be noted that the females commented on the interconnectedness of their mentor's roles. Several of the participants reported that their best mentors played all of these roles (i.e., sponsor, coach, counselor, and teacher); therefore, they had difficulty in choosing only one mentor role. Some of the comments from the participants that supported this interpretation were: "It is difficult to choose only one [role] because my best mentors have played all of these roles," and "I would have marked all [roles] if I were looking at the composite influence of many mentors."

However, when the females in the study were serving as mentors, the chief mentoring function or role changed. Rather than seeing themselves as a sponsor to their protégés first, the majority reported serving as counselor (41%), followed by teacher (24%), and next as coach (19%). Having been the recipients of mentoring assistance themselves, these females were now providing mentoring to others. They reached out to others to counsel, teach, and coach.

Another interesting finding from this study was that the career type, career stage, and academic discipline often dictated the

gender of the mentors available to females in higher education. The majority of the females reported they had multiple mentors, both male and female (68%) and they also mentored multiple protégés, both male and female (88%). But, it should be noted that there were females who were mentored by only males (24%). This finding is interesting, with several females noting that early in their careers, females were underrepresented in their chosen field. Responses representative of this finding were: "My strongest and earliest mentoring was from males;" "My significant mentors have been males, which is perhaps a reflection on my academic field of chemistry where females are underrepresented and the fact that university presidents are dominated by males;" and "Coming into Higher Education as early as I did, there were few females in a position to serve [me] as a mentor." In summary, when females were mentored, they saw their mentors mainly as sponsors and counselors, but when mentoring others, they saw their roles chiefly as counselors and teachers. In addition, several experienced only male mentors early in their careers, especially when they were in a career where females were underrepresented.

Mentoring Relationships are Intentional and Informal

Females in this study provided anecdotal comments to the question about their mentors which indicated that many of the mentoring relationships were intentional. One woman said, "I have had a mentor at almost every level of my career. I sought them out and didn't wait for them to find me." The majority of the participants gave the title of 'mentor' to those assisting them in career development, which seemed to indicate that they viewed their interactions as a mentor/protégé relationship, even if it was not formalized. Ensher and Murphy (2005) purport that wise individuals "understand that their career development is in their own hands, and these employees know that to get ahead they need to be aligned with the movers and shakers of their organization" (p. 42). In today's changing career environment, individuals must drive their own career growth, and since females may cross organizational boundaries more frequently than in the past, they cannot expect mentors to be available for long-term relationships (de Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting, 2003). Thus, being intentional about seeking mentors for oneself may be a prerequisite for females seeking to rise in an academic organization.

The comments provided by participants revealed that though their mentoring relationships were intentional, they were also likely informal. With the inclusion of the phrase "informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support" in the hosen definition of mentoring for this study (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), the stage was set for female participants to think of mentoring in a broad sense. Informal relationships are those that develop naturally or spontaneously without outside assistance (Eby, Rhoades, & Allen, 2010). Thinking of mentoring as informal also opens up the possibility of mentoring taking place without the mentor even being aware, as these participants noted:

- “I would characterize the females who influenced my career as role models as much as mentors;”
- “Mentors were not prominent when I was in junior positions. One had to simply observe those who could be positive and negative role models;”
- “Never formal mentoring engagements; leading by example, private conversations, on the job learning;”
- “Mentoring is perhaps overly generous in describing the information or support that others provided. I would call them positive interactions that I found useful to some degree in my professional attainment.”

So, as Forgas and Williams (2001) have so aptly noted, an influence agent (i.e., role model or someone admired) may have an effect on an individual without the role model’s realization. The informal mentoring may take place in occasional positive interactions or by an individual watching the way a person of influence behaves. None of the participants in this study mentioned being in a formal mentoring program or being assigned to a mentor. Therefore, the authors propose that informal mentoring relationships can be very valuable to females aspiring to positions of greater responsibility in an organization.

Female Higher Education Leaders Have Multiple and Diverse Mentors

Kram’s (1985) early work on mentoring characterized it as a dyadic relationship, with one mentor and one protégé working together to assist the protégé in career and psychosocial development. However, more recently, the research of Higgins and Kram (2001) has reconceptualized mentoring to include multiple mentors in “developmental networks” (p. 264). The developmental network is defined as “a set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé’s career by providing developmental assistance” (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 268). It is unlikely that one mentor can meet all of the needs of a protégé (de Janasz, et al., 2003). Thus, individuals should seek to learn from multiple mentors, including those unlike themselves. Mentoring research has increasingly found that having mentoring relationships across gender and racial lines yields benefits on both sides (Ragins, 1997). People different from the dominant racial or gender group bring diverse opinions and perspectives, and can enhance an individual’s visibility in new places (Ensher & Murphy, 2005).

The authors have affirmed the tenets of the feminist perspective as noted by Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000), as research participants echoed the importance of having diverse mentors and learning from multiple perspectives. One woman advised, “Make sure that the mentoring process is diverse. Many times I attend the meetings and I am the only woman of color. We have to reach across racial and ethnic boundaries if we are to be successful.” Many females advocated including males as mentors:

- “Do not forget that men can be good mentors;”
- “Mentoring of both men and women is equally important. Don’t just focus on women”
- “Do not limit your networks to only women. Two of my most powerful and influential mentors were men. Advancement is human, not tied to one gender.”

Female higher education administrators in this study demonstrated the understanding of the power of having multiple and diverse mentors, as Higgins and Kram (2001) describe in their research on developmental networks. Therefore, the authors add this recommendation to the others made in this article: aspiring female administrators should watch for opportunities to learn from both females and males, and seek out diverse perspectives from a network of mentors.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. First of all, the return rate on the survey sent to the top administrators in the comprehensive research universities was 37%. Even though there were over one hundred responses, with this moderate response rate, the authors cannot (and do not) generalize that the participants are describing mentoring experiences for the entire population of female higher education administrators. Results of the study were descriptive in nature only, and the authors did not intend to make inferences or explanations as to why participants answered the way they did. It can only be speculated as to why 63% chose not to respond. One possibility is that they have not been mentored or do not mentor, thus, there could be a number of female higher education administrators whose message could be very different than the ones heard in this study. Another possibility is that they were just too busy with their demanding administrative positions to stop and take the survey.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

This survey research was conducted to explore how female university administrators (presidents, vice presidents, provosts, deans) have experienced mentoring relationships, either as protégés or mentors, in their ascension to college administration. The first conclusion drawn from the data is that female university administrators in this study are currently being mentored. The females sought out mentors at all levels as they progressed on their career ladder. None of the participants in this study mentioned being in a formal mentoring program or being assigned a mentor. However, they all voiced the benefits of mentoring and recognized it as a career-enhancing activity. Secondly, the females in this study affirmed that they had multiple mentors, both male and female, and they commented on the importance of seeking diverse perspectives. The third conclusion drawn from this study is that females are mentoring other females and males in higher education. They are reaching out to others who are aspiring to positions of greater influence. Lastly, it can be concluded that their mentoring experiences,

whether as protégés or mentors, have been both intentional and informal.

This study could be duplicated with surveys sent to a much larger sample of participants, including female administrators from all Carnegie university classifications. In addition, the authors recommend that this study be broadened using a mixed methods approach, in which personal interviews would be conducted with a select group of top-ranking female college administrators. This would produce more detailed insights into the mentoring experiences of females climbing the ladder in university administration.

In this research study, the authors confirmed the importance of the 'mentoring constellation' (Stanley & Clinton, 1992), and 'mentoring mosaics' (Mullen & Lick, 1999) in career development. The preponderance of data gathered in this study allowed for the feminist perspective (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000) to be illuminated. The personal experiences of female higher education administrators were validated as the participants shared their perspectives on the value of mentoring as reported here. Females *can* learn from other females' voices and experiences, and the voices in this study were loud and clear with the message: It is beneficial to find multiple and diverse mentors for yourself along your career path, and important to be intentional about mentoring others, as well. Climb the ladder, then hold the ladder for others.

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