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Mentoring Experiences of Women in Graduate Education: Factors that Matter

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This exploratory study focused on the mentoring experiences of women faculty members and graduate students within a counseling psychology graduate program. Results from semi-structured interviews and focus groups identified the women's contextual mentoring experiences in higher education and highlighted several factors that contribute to mentorship experiences unique to women in graduate higher education. Findings demonstrate the importance of relational mentoring relationships and investment by mentors. Implications for building upon mentoring theories for women and future research are discussed.

Since the late 1970s, female-focused literature has emphasized that women's gender socialization in the United States influences their relationally-focused approach to interpersonal interactions (Gilligan, 1982; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). This process of gender socialization has led women to seek out and enact horizontal (relational) versus vertical (hierarchal) connections in their relationships with both men and women (Gilligan; Liang et al.). Although women may be more comfortable with horizontal, relational approaches, hierarchical/paternalistic models prevail in most U. S. educational institutions (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Schwiebert, 2000; Tannen, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to explore the subjective mentoring experiences of women faculty and graduate students within a counseling/counseling psychology academic program, who were involved in informal mentoring relationships. The study's objectives were to begin to understand the women's mentoring experiences in higher education independent of their age, role, and status; to identify factors that contribute to mentorship experiences unique to women in graduate education; to explore the costs and benefits of mentoring relationships for women; and to examine the women's familial and professional role models.

The Roots of Mentoring Models and Stages

The construct of mentoring has multiple meanings that may be described as uni-directional, reciprocal, and/or hierarchal (Tannen, 2001). Traditional mentor-mentee relationships include: a) giving rather than receiving; b) sharing and giving that brings joy, inspiration, and vitality based on expertise; c) incorporation of another's attitudes and thinking about mentees' work and career benefits; and d) a role modeling process at its best (Arredondo, 2001). Reciprocal mentoring involves a relationship between two individuals to which both contribute and derive mutual benefits for personal and professional growth (Kram, 1988). According to Sweeny (2001), mentoring is a "tool to…increase openness to professional feedback, learning, and the power of seeing oneself through another person's eyes" (p. 7). Sweeny purported that mentees derive benefits for growth and learning in a supportive and friendly relationship, thereby enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence. Because of their experiences, mentors

also assist in negotiation of organizational barriers, enabling career advancement for the mentee (Kram, 1988).

In traditional male-to-male mentoring relationships, there appears to be an acceptance of organizational hierarchy. In fact, the hierarchical model seems to complement men's gender-role socialization experiences, whereas for women, a web-like model is more complementary (Tannen, 2001). According to Kram and Isabella (1985), women seemed to value reciprocal, peer relationships, perhaps seeking the emotional support that is lacking in hierarchical and patriarchal organizations. However, Schwiebert (2000) cautioned individuals not to make the mistake of interchanging the constructs of mentoring and role modeling. She indicated that role modeling allows the mentee to identify with and emulate the mentor's most desirable characteristics. In the current study, mentoring was defined as a reciprocal process that occurs in women's vertical (faculty to student) and horizontal (peer to peer) relationships in a higher education setting.

Multiple definitions of mentoring within higher education settings exist. Sweeny (2001) described mentoring as, "one of the best tools there is to promote the creation of better norms of collegiality and collaboration . . . and consistently improving student learning" (p. 7). Cunningham (1999) suggested that educational "mentoring provides, first, an instrumental or career function (e.g., sponsorship, coaching, instruction), and second, an intrinsic or psychosocial function (e.g., serving as a model, a confidant, a friend)" (p. 443). Finally, Gates (2003) stated, "We must continue to develop people as they progress through the ranks if they are to be effective leaders" (p. 104). Thus, the theoretical understandings of mentoring in higher education aid in the understanding of the complex relationships involved in the process.

Kram (1983) outlined four stages of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. These are developmental stages through which mentees or protégés theoretically move in relation to the mentor. In the first stage of initiation, the protégé develops a strong positive fantasy, admiration, and respect toward the mentor. The protégé also begins to feel cared for, supported, and respected. The second stage of cultivation occurs when the protégé's expectations are constantly tested against reality and the psychosocial functions of the relationship are at their peak. A growing sense of competence occurs when the mentor challenges or coaches the protégé. In the third stage of separation, the protégé experiences independence and autonomy. The mentoring relationship no longer remains a central part of both members' lives, which is typically characterized by feelings of loss. In the final stage, redefinition, a new relationship is developed between the mentor and the protégé. Typically both members are on equal footing and the relationship takes the form of a friendship. Kram (1983) stated that the mentoring relationship has the potential to enhance the development of both the mentor and mentee. This suggests the importance of determining those characteristics of the mentoring relationship that contribute to the mutual development of the parties involved.

More specifically, Limbert (1995) discussed two models of mentoring that focused specifically on women faculty members. The first model is that of mentoring between a senior female faculty and a junior female faculty member. Limbert indicated that an advantage to this model is the shared experience of having gone through the ranks in academia. However, a disadvantage is the reality that there are "too few senior women to help junior women" (p. 87). In addition, a female who feels she has not been integrated into the male networks that dominate academia, is not in a position to mentor another who is entering the system (Johnsrud & Wunsch, 1991). The second model Limbert (1995) discussed is a peer-mentoring model between women in academia. Limbert reported one disadvantage of this model is the time it takes to develop trust. However, she also identified several advantages: 1) flexible time commitments in relationships among women, 2) less of a tendency to become overly dependent on one another, 3) opportunities to exchange external networks to build on one's own network, and 4) the opportunity to feel safe to fail.

Mentoring Women in Higher Education

Women have been increasingly represented in graduate higher education programs during the last two decades, with a recent report indicating that nearly half of the doctorates awarded in the year 2000 went to women (Hoffer et al., 2001). Because female graduate students report significantly less social support from family and program faculty than their male counterparts, the gender-specific mentoring of women in higher education appears to be of utmost importance (Limbert, 1995; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Schwiebert, 2000). Specifically, effective mentoring in higher education involves the transmission of skills, knowledge, and attitudes, and allows for level of trust and communication which permits mentees to risk making mistakes and to develop personally and professionally (Schwiebert). In order to achieve success, female students and new faculty must be socialized to the world of higher education (Arredondo, 2001), a process in which mentors are vital.

Past literature suggests the positive effects mentors can have for female students. Students who have professional and personal mentors feel more committed to their work, have greater career aspirations, and report higher self-esteem (Gilbert, Gallessich, & Evans, 1983). In a study of women doctoral recipients at Stanford University, participants overwhelmingly responded that an active advisor facilitated the completion of their program. In fact, this response was most frequently given by those who were classified as "early finishers"; completing their degrees in less than 4.25 years (Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004). Because academic programs have become more aware of the advantages mentoring provides for students, programs have sought to make mentors more accessible to women and people of ethnic/racial minority groups (Packard, 2003). Even if mentors who share characteristics with these students are not readily accessible (due to under-representation in their programs), formal mentoring initiatives have been implemented that are quite different from traditional serendipitous mentoring relationships. Female students and faculty in the life sciences have begun to seek out each other through web-based mentoring programs such as MentorNet and other networking groups (Kasprisin, Boyle Single, Single & Muller, 2003; Packard). Additionally, the Western Interstate Commission of Higher Education's (WICHE) Doctoral Scholars Program was designed to provide mentoring for racial/ethnic minority counseling psychology students (Hill, Castillo, Ngu, & Pepion, 1999). Margolis and Romero (2001) suggested that planned mentoring of underrepresented students in higher education can grant access to positions of power in the academic social structure. This type of mentoring "…assumes an expanded role, that of addressing the needs of the organization, racial and ethnic groups, students, faculty, and, ultimately, society" (Redmond, 1990, p. 191).

Although students have been encouraged to find mentors they can relate to, academia has been comprised of Euro-American males historically (Moyer, Laovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999), thus making it difficult for female and ethnic/racial minority students to find faculty members of similar genders and racial/ethnic statuses. In a study of female doctoral students, women reported that they appreciated their female professors because of their ability to demonstrate confidence and competence as a woman (Bruce, 1995). These professors also modeled the balance of personal and professional life (Bruce). Female faculty members also increase the likelihood that young female students will join them in academia: "…As the role and status of these women change the discipline—as they take their place in the hierarchy—they will be in a position to aid those who come after her" (Margolis & Romero, 2001, p.95). It seems that women faculty in higher education are in a position to lessen opposition for female students and facilitate their progression through higher education.

Studies on mentoring with college-age women (Liang et al., 2002), multicultural female pairings (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991), and with women in the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995) suggest the effects of positive mentoring on self-esteem, relationship-building, loneliness, and persistence in primary tasks. Focusing on the mentoring of women in academic environments, Gilbert et al. (1983) found that women who had female mentors ranked higher on self-esteem, work commitment, career aspirations, and satisfaction with student roles than those women who had male mentors. However, men did not have any significant differences on these variables whether or not they had a sex-matched mentor. On the other hand, in a replication of the Gilbert et al. (1983) study conducted by McQuillen (1992), it was found that women who had female mentors reported greater levels of stress and conflict than those with male mentors. Although an explanation for these stress differences was not offered, it is possible that emotionality, a component of mentoring relationships, differs in cross-gender matches. Thus, this exploratory study examined mentoring experiences of women faculty and graduate students within a graduate program in higher education.

Method
Research Team and Participants

Prior to collecting data, the researchers, who consisted of four female graduate students and two female faculty members, who all acted as reviewers, met to discuss the purpose of the study and the questions that would be asked during the interviews. Based on theory and previous research, the researchers discussed their expectations regarding themes of mentoring relationships that could emerge from the focus groups and interviews. All researchers were authors of the study.

Twenty-eight female graduate students in a counseling/counseling psychology program at a major southwestern university participated in focus groups designed to study mentoring relationships. The seven focus groups consisted of female graduate students (Ph.D. and Master's level) usually ranging in size from two to six participants. Six female faculty members participated in individual interviews. The researchers of this study were also included as participants when they were not facilitating the focus groups or interviews. The following demographics include both students and faculty. Participant ages

ranged from 23 to 59, with the mean age being 33.52 (*SD* = 11.46), and the median age being 29. Of the 28 student participants, there were 19 doctoral (67.86%) and 9 master's (32.14%) students. Participants included 18 (54.5%) Euro Americans, 4 (12.1%) Latinas, 3 (9.1%) African Americans, 2 (6.1%) Asian Americans, and 6 (18.2%) biracial/multiracial individuals. In addition, 18 (56.3%) of the participants self-identified as single/unmarried, 12 (37.5%) were married or had a life partner, 1 (3.1%) reported being separated, and 1 (3.1%) reported being divorced. The majority of participants did not have children (*n* = 26, 78.8%). Demographic information was not available for one of the student participants.

Demographic forms. The demographic forms requested the following basic information from participants: age, race/ethnicity, marital status, if they had children and how many, if entering the counseling/counseling psychology field was a significant career change, terminal degree (i.e., M.C., Ph.D., Ed.D.), year in the counseling/counseling psychology program, when and where they earned their undergraduate degree, if they had mentors, and the sex of their mentors.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via email listservs. Any person answering the call for participants was included in the focus groups and faculty interviews. Follow-up attempts were made on two occasions in an attempt to recruit more participants. Focus groups comprised of individuals from the same cohort in their doctoral or master's program (i.e., Individuals from the same year in their respective program). All focus groups were conducted by two of the reviewers or faculty supervisors and lasted one to one and a half hours. The six faculty interviews were conducted individually by two students. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to one hour.

Based on the research ideas to be explored, the research team, in order to provide structure to the interviews with faculty members and to facilitate discussion and data collection in the focus groups, designed a set of open-ended questions. The first part of the focus groups and interviews focused on current and prior mentoring relationships. The middle portion of the focus groups and interviews focused on similarities and differences between that of the mentors and mentees, and how those similarities and differences might have affected the mentoring relationships. The final portion of the focus groups and interviews focused on suggestions for mentoring guidelines. Upon completion of the first focus group, the research team met to revise the set of questions to include in the focus groups and interviews (see Table 1). Based on the direction of the discussion and

dialogue, the facilitator would ask questions to gain clarity and understanding. A second researcher recorded the responses using paper and pencil. Additionally, the researchers took active-member-researcher roles (Adler & Adler, 1998) in that they were each members of their own cohort focus group and the faculty participated in individual interviews. In this sense, the researchers took roles as active participant observers who, as mentioned by Adler and Adler, were able to be members and not researchers so that the flow of the interaction was not altered unnaturally.

Table 1

Final Interview Questions

1. Discuss your current mentoring relationship(s). What are some of the attributes of the relationship(s)? What differentiates this relationship from other faculty-student, faculty-peer, and student-student relationships?

2. How did this mentoring relationship begin and how has it evolved over time?

3. Discuss the ethnic match(es) of your mentoring relationships. What is similar or different among these relationship and those where there is not an ethnic match?

4. What are the costs and benefits of the relationship?

5. What are the effects of the mentoring relationship (s) on personal well-being (self-esteem, stress, loneliness, power)?

6. How have the mentoring relationships affected your commitment to a counseling career? Please make mentoring recommendations.

Upon completion of the focus groups, the recorded responses were typed and independently analyzed by four student researchers. Using grounded theory, the researchers coded for main themes that emerged from the transcripts. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory allows the data to drive the themes that emerge. This is a more accurate representation of "reality" than the arbitrary selection of themes from one's own experience. "Grounded theories, because they are drawn from the data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action." (pp. 12). Thus, given the purpose of this study (i.e., to identify factors that contribute to helpful and positive mentorship experiences unique to women), grounded theory appeared to be the most appropriate approach to data analysis.

Data Analysis. In order to analyze the data, the researchers used open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding was conducted first. This is a method whereby themes and their properties emerge from the data. In order to do this, the researchers individually analyzed the transcripts for emergent concepts. After the initial coding, the research team reconvened to reconcile the list of

concepts to compile them into themes with definitions. Reconciliation occurred through discussion of the concepts that emerged and independent meaning assigned to each theme. Sub-themes were also identified. Upon reconciliation, the researchers again individually analyzed the transcripts using axial coding. This is a process whereby sub-themes based on the level of properties and dimensions of the themes emerge. The team met a second time to reconcile coding records. An identical process of data analysis was applied for the faculty and graduate student interviews.

Results

Seven major themes emerged from the data (summarized in Table 2). Recurrent themes throughout the focus groups and interviews suggest that female graduate students and faculty members share common views regarding mentoring relationships in higher education. This is especially true regarding what women desire in their mentoring relationship. However, students took the perspective of mentees whereas faculty, with the exception of a junior faculty member, took the perspective of the mentor. The junior faculty member presented both perspectives. This difference in perspectives can be seen by differences within each theme.

Empowering Relationships

Discussion about empowering relationships included comments referring to encouragement, support, motivation, trust, pride, self-esteem, collaboration, well being, and personal growth. An example of this is exemplified by Vanessa, "Mentoring relationships are very supportive, nurturing and encouraging. They provide the opportunity to pass down knowledge and network. They teach you how to maneuver in an academic world without giving up your identity." Faculty also emphasized empowering relationships. This is exemplified through the following statement by Julia:

> As a mentor, I try to treat students as colleagues and provide resources to gain power. I also provide resources for research, and I help my mentees to achieve a sense of meaning and purpose to what they are doing. I affirm their dreams.

Another faculty member, Kathy stated, "Seeing what my mentors have done as professional women gives me motivation to succeed. I think, look what they've done. Here we are in the 21 st century – let's see what I can do."

Dynamic of the Relationship

The dynamics theme included comments about a sense of obligation, a power differential, feelings of stress, comfort/discomfort, evolution of the relationship, and ambivalent feelings regarding the relationship. This can be seen through a comment made by Wendy:

> The relationship with my mentor started out by being an advisee. If I felt a connection, then it developed into mentoring. Shared experience, connections, shared goals, and wanting to follow a similar path. The questions change. In the beginning, it was more academic, now more long-term. Boundaries are looser, but they are still there.

Table 2

Mentoring Themes for Women Participants

Theme	Description of Theme
Empowering relationships	Provided motivation, support, and encouragement
Dynamics of the relationship	Sense of obligation, power differentials, feelings of comfort/discomfort, relationship evolution
Investment of the Mentor	
Personal/emotional support	Personal investment and interest. They are not alone.
Professional development	Opened doors, professional opportunities.
Time/availability	Privileged relationship, more time made available.
Financial	Offer of financial support, travel grants if available.
Shared Experience	
Ethnic/Racial	Shared ethnic/racial background, more understanding.
Gender	Same gender, more understanding.
Academic/Research	Similar research interests and professional pursuits
Personal	Common values, similar personalities
Experiences with male mentors	
Grandfather/familial role	Mentor takes on a paternal role
Lack of emotional connection	Less personal/emotional contact
Slower relationship building	Relationship takes more time to develop than with a female mentor
Balance	Mentors act as role models and help mentees juggle the balance between professional and personal life
Peer Mentoring	Dynamics between peers, shared experiences

Another student named Joy also stated, "Mentors should be aware of the power differential and their amount of influence. They should be respectful of mentees and recognize their research contributions, remembering that they are developing future colleagues." Faculty members' views of

dynamics include similar perceptions and observations. Susan said:

> Faculty-faculty relationships might be defined through being co-researchers and being on committees together. There is less difficulty with dual relationships with colleagues. You have to be aware that no matter how egalitarian you are with students, you still need to be aware of the power of the role.

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Investment of the Mentor

Four sub-themes emerged under this particular theme: personal/emotional, professional development, time/availability, and financial investment.

Personal/emotional. Students discussed the personal/emotional investment that their mentors provided for them. Lisa said:

> Mentors should get to know mentees on a personal basis. Where they want to go, what their personal interests are, their goals, more than just academics. It is long-term. It shows when they are committed to a student. Mentors should know what is going on because they are making an investment.

Faculty members also discussed the personal/emotional investment on the part of the mentor. This is exemplified by Elizabeth, "I believe that the task of the mentor is to listen, help address concerns and problems, interpersonal and professional problems. However, I do not provide therapy."

Professional development. Statements from students also included the investment of the mentor regarding students' professional development. This can be seen in the statement by Ashley, "Mentoring relationships have an official status. Mentors should provide professional experiences. Mentors should monitor professional growth and development and mentors and mentees can do personal things together. Currently, I only have an advisor." Faculty echoed the sentiments made by students. One faculty member, Rebecca, spoke of her own mentor:

> My relationship with my mentor began the moment I entered the program. Then it began to develop professionalism. I had to do presentations and my mentor provided opportunities for me. He encouraged me to follow his lead and then encouraged my independence. He made sure that there were opportunities and spent time with me in networking. He would introduce me to people that he thought I should get to know. This relationship was more like an apprenticeship. He encouraged me to make sure that doors were open so that I could go into whatever field I chose.

Time/availability. Students addressed the need for mentors to be available to their mentees. Farrah stated, "My mentor is more available than other professors and is quick to welcome me into her office." Jenny also stated, "I used to be hesitant to call my mentor at home or on the cell phone late at night. Now I feel more comfortable doing those things." Faculty members also addressed the availability of the mentors to mentees. Elizabeth addressed this as a cost in the following excerpt:

> One of the costs is the time and energy spent on mentoring. I engage in several hours of student-focused work every night. This is a choice that I make in order to get the students their feedback quickly. It takes away from private time.

However, Julia describes this as a process of the relationship.

> For the first year I am not very available to my mentees. They might have difficulty in getting an appointment with me and in their fist year may feel like I am a phantom. In their second year, when students blossom into their research and service interests, I

begin to see them a lot. By the last semester of their program, my students and I see each other all of the time and there is not a lot of boundaries. Over time, there is an escalating amount of involvement and moving into private space.

Financial. Some students suggested that mentors should assist their mentees in finding financial assistance. Wendy stated, "The perks of the mentoring relationship include TAships, travel funds, research opportunities, and opportunities to co-teach a class. We need something to show for being someone's mentee." Bertha added to this by saying, "It shows when a mentor is committed to a student when they offer research projects. Mentors should know what is going on. They are making an investment. Dishing out money for a conference, is that asking too much?" Another student, Elena, echoed this sentiment in the following statement, "Mentors should assist mentees in finding financial assistance." Faculty interviews did not echo this sub-theme, as faculty members did not make mention of personal financial investment on the part of mentors.

Shared Experiences

The shared experiences theme was defined as having a sense of common experiences that helped the women relate to their mentors, brought the women and their mentors together, and/or maintained the mentoring relationship. The participants related four sub-themes that emerged within this theme: ethnic/racial match, being women, having common academic or research backgrounds, and having similar personal experiences.

Ethnic/racial match. This is exemplified through a statement by Isabella:

I came from a mentoring relationship in which there was an ethnic match. The university I came from was a White man's club, even the women acted like men. Therefore, having an ethnic match meant that someone was taking an interest, especially in the sense that others who were not of my ethnic/racial group did not validate my goals of going to graduate school. Women and minorities face more hurdles. There is a shared experience in having a mentoring relationship with someone of an ethnic match. They want to promote ethnic inclusion.

Faculty echoed sentiments, exemplified by Kathy,

I sought out my mentor because we were both women of color. This woman exudes professionalism that I admire and would like to emulate. This mentor has been able to role model ways in which she dealt with barriers being both a woman and non-White.

Women. This shared experience can be seen in a quote by Cynthia, "I always go to women for advice and we work collaboratively together. When men are around, there is a new power differential. Because of this, I am more comfortable with women mentors." One faculty member, Rebecca, stated,

I am non-discriminating in mentoring males and females. There are more females in the program, so I have a propensity to make sure female students connect with people. Males, because of socialization are already seeking out opportunities. I think that female students need to be pushed more to seek out opportunities such as fellowships and scholarships.

Academic/research. This shared experience was mentioned frequently. Jennifer stated, "Faculty have the experience of going through what we are going through as students. They can lay out a path for us and point us in the right directions. They can share the stories of their own academic experience." Faculty also addressed the issue of similar research interests. Cecilia stated, "The relationship begins out of my desire to work with that student. I may even advocate admitting a student into the program due to similar interests."

Personal. One student, Keisha, mentioned, "One of my mentors had similar religious traditions as myself and so we would talk about those. I think it helped the relationship, but it had little to do with my professional development." Faculty mentioned personal history as a shared experience. Rebecca stated, "I was the first person in my family to go to college. I think this may parallel what ethnic minorities who are the first to come to college are experiencing, rather than from coming from an advanced degree family."

Balance of Personal and Professional Life within Oneself

This theme emerged through the comments participants made about how to balance their personal and professional life, rather than balance personal and professional roles. Students had differing opinions on how this was modeled. Jo-Anne stated, "My undergraduate mentor provided me a model of striking a balance between work and family." However, Sherry stated,

Both of my male mentors maintain a private practice, which has shaped the idea that I can go into academia and still have a private practice. However, I have not received any advice about how to balance family with a career.

Data from faculty interviews did not reflect the same sentiment that emerged from the student focus groups. This can be seen through this comment by Elizabeth, "For beginning professors, it is important to remember to balance personal time with time spent with students. You won't make it if you don't have appropriate boundaries for mentoring."

Male Mentoring Relationships

Three sub-themes emerged for this particular theme: a grandfather/familial role, a less personal connection, and slower relationship building. Although students spoke to these themes, no faculty members addressed them. For the grandfather/familial role, Charlotte's quote addressed this, "My dad was the disciplinarian and wasn't often home. The way I feel about my male mentor is the way I feel about my dad." In the sub-theme of lack of emotional connection, one of the students, Linda, mentioned, "I only have male mentors. The relationships are impersonal and serve mainly to make sure my academic needs are met." Finally, for slower relationship building, a quote by Alisha illustrated the sub-theme:

I had a male mentor and felt intimidated at first, but it was partly due to his credentials. Now I feel more comfortable, like a friendship. We have respect for each other. Though there are still times when I feel uncomfortable and think, 'Do I want to go there with him?'

Peer Mentoring

The peer mentoring theme consisted of experiences and views relating to peer mentoring including the importance of it, the dynamics of the relationship, and shared experiences. Laura stated, "I get advice about the program from other students. I feel that they are more forthright than the faculty regarding the program. I go to the older students for questions and concerns because they can empathize with my concerns."

When discussing student-student mentoring, Cecilia said, "I like the idea of teams. Here students can be mentored by both faculty and other students." When talking about faculty-faculty mentoring, Rebecca stated these relationships "might be more defined through being co-researchers and being on committees together. There is less difficulty with dual relationships with colleagues."

Discussion

It appears that women in higher education create unique mentoring experiences and relationships that meet their specific mentoring desires, and are consciously aware of additional components they may need. The purpose of this study was to explore the subjective mentoring experiences of women faculty members and graduate students within a counseling/counseling psychology program,

who were involved in informal relational models of mentoring. What can the current women's views about their mentoring experiences teach us about future successful mentoring of women in higher education? The current findings indicate that notwithstanding age, levels of professional experience, or perspectives of the mentoring relationship (faculty member versus graduate student), women in higher educational counseling psychology settings are similar in the themes they experience and desire in their mentoring relationships. Specifically, the preliminary themes that surfaced in this exploratory study include:

- Empowering mentoring relationships
- Dynamics of mentoring relationships
- Investment of mentors
- Shared experiences between mentors and mentees
- Need for personal balance of personal and professional lives
- Experiences with male mentoring relationships
- Peer mentoring (see Table 2 for further detail).

Overall, t hese preliminary themes describe the multi-dimensionality of the mentoring needs of women suggesting a relational, web-like process through which women travel to experience successful professional and personal mentoring. In addition, congruent with past research, this study's thematic findings highlight several factors that matter most to women when engaging in mentoring relationships that differ significantly from men's needs (Allen & Eby, 2004; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). Through the themes that surfaced, it appears that women share similar, unique needs and desires for relational approaches to mentoring relationships versus more traditional, male-appreciated hierarchical models (Allen & Eby; Dreher & Cox; Gilbert & Rossman; Gilligan, 1982; Liang et al., 2002).

In their discussions of each of these themes, the women revealed a number of factors that are important to them as women in mentoring relationships. First, the theme of "empowering relationships" surfaced in several manners; the women expressed their needs for encouragement, support, and motivation, within *any* mentoring relationship. Consistent with past research, they reported that their *female* mentors are personally, educationally, and emotionally supportive, and effectively able to provide the relationships mentees' desire, as was reported in an earlier study (Allen & Eby, 2004; Dickens & Sagaria, 1997). Mentoring as collaboration is a common practice among female scholars (Dickens & Sagaria) and it appears that

female mentors reportedly provided relational, psychosocial approaches to mentoring relationships that offer the empowerment and trust the women participants desire (Allen & Eby; Limbert, 1995). Contrary to more traditional, hierarchal mentoring models, female mentors were reported to impart opportunities to succeed and flourish in the academic setting and created atmospheres in which to grow (Allen & Eby; Dreher & Cox, 1996; Limbert). The participants in this study described empowering relationships as crucial to successful mentoring, thus offering the possibility to inform future approaches for mentoring women in higher education.

Second, the current findings point to multi-dimensional "dynamics in mentoring relationships." These dynamics were viewed as being both positive and stressful. Participants stated they often felt a sense of obligation to their mentors, both to impress them and to live up to their expectations, and similar to past research, this sense of obligation motivated as well as burdened them (Moyer et al., 1999). In addition, the women reported recognizing power differentials in their relationships that often lead to comfort as well as to discomfort and ambivalent feelings regarding the relationships. At times, the mentees and/or mentors wanted to be friends as well as colleagues, but stated that it is complicated to navigate this while honoring the power differential that exists. Faculty mentors stated that as students progress to graduation, they become colleagues and the mentoring relationship should mirror this evolution. In addition, the faculty members stated that when mentoring relationships evolve, the dynamics of the relationship with women mentors often led to long-term friendships more easily than with male mentors. These findings align with past research with women; women view their relationships in the long-term (Gilligan, 1982), thus mentoring relationships are assumed to be a long-term commitment that will evolve and go through numerous stages (Kram, 1983). The dynamics highlighted by the participants illustrate the sense of emotional and ethical vulnerability that mentors and mentees may feel, the possible emotional risks they take, and the multi-dimensionality of mentoring relationships for women. As past research has indicated, the "process" of mentoring appears to be of utmost importance to women (Allen & Eby, 2004; Dreher & Cox, 1996) and results in dynamics that these women consider important for productive mentoring relationships.

Third, the findings illustrate these women's expectations of their mentors' investment in them as mentees and as persons. The participants described having expectations that their mentor would invest in them on a personal and emotional level, would be available and devote time to them, and should assist them in finding financial assistance for professional development opportunities. Mentees openly discussed the personal/emotional support their mentors provided for them. Again, this theme lends voice to the importance of the relational model of mentoring for women (Schwiebert, 2000); this sample of women in higher education prefer their mentors to support them both personally and emotionally by knowing them well enough to walk *beside* them during some experiences and to *lead* them through others. The women agreed that mentors invest in mentees on multiple levels and aid in their professional and personal lives by investing personal and emotional support. Congruent with past research, mentees added that this appears to come more freely from female versus male mentors (Dreher & Cox, 1996).

Although the majority of the current data *describes* women's mentoring relationships, "shared experiences" can be conceptualized as possible *predictors* of mentoring relationships. Frequently the women reported seeking out their mentors or mentees according to shared research interests, gender, or ethnicity. The identification of the commonalities, by either mentor or mentee, appears to precipitate a deliberate choice to begin the mentoring relationship. Schwiebert (2000) suggested that shared experiences may be the quality that differentiates a mentor from an advisor or role model. As one faculty member stated, "True mentoring is very rare—it grows out of shared perspectives."

The identification of shared experiences and perspectives within the mentoring dyad appears to provide mentees the sense that their mentors have experienced, and can anticipate, obstacles that they will encounter during their academic, personal, and professional progression. The women participants had expectations of their mentors' abilities to ameliorate these personal and professional hurdles, thereby enhancing their professional experiences. If shared experiences enhance mentoring relationships, then this is likely one of the contributing factors to the satisfaction and commitment reported by females that have benefited from having female mentors (Gilbert et al., 1983).

Further, participants reported that the balancing of personal and professional roles is a salient issue for females in higher education. The women in this study felt similar to those female graduate students in a past study, in which over one-third of the participants reported the balance of personal and professional lives a "most pressing" concern (Moyer, et al., 1999). Women with families who take on additional roles (i.e., student) typically add these roles without making changes to lessen

their familial responsibilities. Role expansions and expectations put unique stressors on women (Gilbert et al., 1983) and the current results indicate that mentees want more guidance from mentors in this area.

From the perspective of the female mentors, participants stressed the importance of keeping time spent with students from bleeding into personal time. Many mentoring relationships are considered one-sided, with the mentor giving far more than receiving (Tannen, 2001). However, the female faculty members in this study admitted that they gave their time and emotion with, generally, only satisfaction in return, meaning that their academic mentoring dyads may be more uni-directional than reciprocal (Arredondo, 2001). Because this imbalance has the potential to be taxing on mentors, future research might focus on the creation of formalized higher education mentoring guidelines to prevent possible mentor burnout. Further research may reveal that female mentors are more susceptible than male mentors to burnout due to the unique emotional aspects of female-to-female mentoring relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

In higher education, where female faculty members are in the minority, the question of the dynamic of male mentoring is a significant one. Because this study was designed to focus on the mentoring experiences of women-women relationships, the women participating in this study focused the majority of their attention on the impact of female mentors in their lives. However, although some women mentioned receiving positive and empowering mentoring from male faculty members, the discussions consistently came back to the lack of personal connection with men and the fact that male mentors often took on a patriarchal role, which is a congruent theme with past research (Allen & Eby, 2004; Dreher & Cox, 1996). It would, however, be remiss to imagine that male mentors have not held an important role in the lives of women who have arrived at the graduate level in their academic careers. Although they experienced a less personal connection with male mentors, the women in this study gave examples of their male mentors believing in them and encouraging them to apply to graduate school. Nevertheless, the women described the process associated with male mentors as different from the process that occurred with female mentors. Perhaps gender differences impeded the process of initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition as outlined by Kram (1983). When there is a gender difference with male mentors, it is possible that socialized roles and expectations affect the relationships, influencing possible stages of development for female mentees (Allen & Eby, 2004;

Dreher & Cox, 1996; Nykodym, Freedman, Simonetti, & Nielsen, 1995).

Finally, the findings of this study inform future mentoring with women in graduate training settings for the value of peer mentoring. As expressed by the participants, the main tenants of peer mentoring were that students gave each other forthright advice and peer relationships were safe and without expectations. As such, peer mentoring seemed to foster the intimacy needed to share fears and worries while still receiving key information toward successful achievement. Kram (1988) discussed how peer relationships provide information, career strategizing, and feedback. Psychosocially, peers help with confirmation, emotional support, and friendship. Lastly, mutuality is one of the most unique attributes among peers. The shared experience of being on the same path, especially in academia where there are defined trajectories, appears to be a powerful dynamic. The more advanced students and faculty members pave the way for their female peers, who are then able to pave the way for others. The participants did not mention any of the negative traits of peer mentoring; instead, as past research has indicated (Kram, 1988), peer mentoring showed to be purely helpful, encouraging, and a safe haven. Finally, the faculty participants seemed consistently aware that the ways in which they were/are mentored influences their mentoring of others and that the depth of their commitment allows the next generation of professional women to thrive in higher educational settings.

Limitations

As is the case with all research inquiries, this study included several limitations that should be noted. The researchers intended to elucidate themes around women's mentoring needs and experiences with a small sample of faculty members and students in a counseling psychology graduate program . The qualitative and interview nature of the study provided rich information about the impact of mentoring in the lives of these particular women in higher education; however, because the focus of the study was on female-female mentoring relationships, the women participants spent less time describing their male-female mentoring experiences. Future studies should focus on women's perceptions of both female-female and male-female mentoring relationships in higher education in order to further define women's perceptions, needs, and wants for mentoring. The ideas and experiences collected in the current study confirmed the notions that mentoring is empowering and engendering of success; however, due to the small and homogenous sample, future studies might focus on female and male students' mentoring

experiences in higher education. The current researchers' plan is to follow up the current study with additional research focusing on multiple disciplines and professional positions in higher education with both women and men. Further, there is the potential impact of social desirability in qualitative studies involving interviews and focus groups that may likely affect the manners in which participants respond in order to "please" researchers or "fit in" with other participants. In fact, social desirability may have contributed to the current participants' heightened attention on the importance of mentoring relationships in their personal/professional development; they may have been more reluctant to discuss their negative experiences. However, without specifically asking for positive and negative perceptions, the women participants offered both perspectives from their mentoring experiences.

The methodology used in the analysis of these data also deserves attention. The formats of the interviews and focus groups may have inhibited participants with unique mentoring relationship experiences to share. However, social scientists agree that semi-structured and focus group qualitative studies are intrinsically subjective processes that are shaped moment-to-moment by culture, context, the particular relationship between speakers (e.g., interviewers and interviewees), and by the identities and locations (Merrick, 1999; Rennie, 1999). Finally, studies with multiple forms of data collection are needed in future studies of this kind to solidify themes for women's mentoring experiences in higher education.

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

This study raises important points for reflection regarding the factors that matter in the mentoring of women in higher education. With the growing number of women in higher educational professional roles and the increasing number of female students in higher education, the ongoing research into the specific mentoring needs and wants of women promises to add greater depth to the existing knowledge about how women succeed and grow in mentoring relationships. This study serves as a foundation for the current research team members, who are interested in broadening this particular study with numerous other professional women, and ultimately working toward outlining specialized guidelines for mentoring women in higher education settings. It would be especially useful to conduct a similar study in other areas of the country within counseling psychology programs, as well as within other higher education disciplines to compare the findings that emerged in this study. It would also be informative to examine the mentoring process among women along isolated racial, ethnic, or regional lines, as this study was not able to capture how these unique factors contributed to all of the women's cultural, personal, and professional experiences. Further, studies of this nature should be conducted with male faculty members and students in order to allow for gender comparisons in higher education mentoring experiences for males and females.

In addition, quantitative studies should be planned that build upon these findings. Studies might focus on mentoring as a career and professional development enabler and esteem builder. Future studies might investigate the role of mentoring in workplace settings where relationships for women and men still appear to be stratified. Another area in need of focus is to develop a mentoring survey instrument that measures specialized multi-dimensional mentoring experiences among diverse groups of women, which could be coupled with a version for specific use with men. Finally, theorists and researchers can use these data to raise awareness of the profound influence of contextual parameters and gender role stereotypes on the mentoring experiences of women.

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