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Emerald Article: Taking a hard look at formal mentoring programs: A consideration of potential challenges facing women

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Abstract *Research indicates that although women have achieved virtual parity with men when entering organizations, within five to six years their careers begin to lag behind those of their male counterparts. This lag is often attributed to the glass ceiling and mentoring has been suggested as one tool to assist women in breaking through. We still have very little empirical research that informs our understanding of the effectiveness of formal mentoring in comparison to informal mentoring relationships. The purpose of this article is to take a hard look at formal mentoring programs and the implications for women participating in them. It compares formal mentoring to informal mentoring. It focuses on the practice of formal mentoring relationships and the unique challenges that women may face as they negotiate these planned relationships as well as some suggested strategies to deal with these challenges. It concludes by discussing the implications of this work as well as alternative sources of support for women.*

Introduction

Women have made great strides in terms of workforce participation. Recent statistics indicate that 46 percent of the total US workforce is now female (US Department of Labor, 1996). The percentage of women in managerial positions in the USA has risen from 32 per cent in 1983 to 41 per cent in 1991, with more gains by women expected in the years to come (Catalyst, 1997; O'Neill *et al.*, 1999). Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) acknowledge the idea that women holding seats on corporate boards and running major companies was unimaginable 50 years ago. Yet in spite of the gains that women have made in advancing their careers in organizations, there are still significant barriers preventing them from reaching the upper echelons in significant numbers. Research from Catalyst (1998) indicates that although women have achieved virtual parity with men when entering organizations, within five to six years their careers begin to lag behind those of their male counterparts. This lag is often attributed to the glass ceiling (Ragins, 1989; Ragins *et al.*, 1998; Solomon, 1990; Stuart, 1992). The glass ceiling is defined as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management level positions" (US Department of Labor, 1991, p. 1). Mentoring has been suggested as one tool to

assist women in breaking this glass ceiling (Burke and McKeen, 1990; Catalyst, 1998; Heery, 1994; Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Ragins *et al.*, 1998; Ragins, 1999; Van Collie, 1998).

Mentoring has been connected to a number of positive organizational outcomes, including more promotions (Dreher and Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992), higher incomes (Chao *et al.*, 1992; Dreher and Cox, 1996; Whitely *et al.*, 1991), reduced turnover intentions (Viator and Scandura, 1991), greater career satisfaction and easier socialization (Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1993). In an attempt to capture the benefits described above, many organizations are creating formal mentoring programs as a mechanism to address the inequalities that women face in organizations. Ragins and Cotton (1999) cite statistics that indicate that one third of the nation's major corporations have instituted formal mentoring programs and that this number is growing. Although formal mentoring programs may offer some benefits, the creation and successful implementation of these initiatives are not without challenges (Douglas, 1997; Kram and Bragar, 1992; Ragins and Scandura, 1997; Scandura, 1998). More than a decade ago, Kram (1985, p. 185) cautioned:

> Aside from the practical difficulties inherent in creating an effective formal mentoring system, the premises on which this kind of structural intervention is based are of questionable validity.

Despite Kram's warning, we still have very little empirical research that informs our understanding of the effectiveness of formal mentoring in comparison to informal mentoring relationships. The purpose of this paper is to take a hard look at formal mentoring programs and the implications for women participating in them.

In the first part of this article, I will review the academic and anecdotal mentoring literature to provide a working definition of formal mentoring, as well as some of the characteristics of formal relationships that delineate it from informal mentoring relationships. In the second section, I will focus on the small body of empirical work comparing formal mentoring to informal mentoring to see how formal mentoring programs have measured up in comparison to informal mentoring. The third section of this paper will focus on the practice of formal mentoring relationships and the unique challenges that women may face as they negotiate these planned relationships, as well as some suggested strategies to deal with these challenges. I will conclude by discussing the implications of this work as well as alternative sources of support for women.

Formal mentoring: definitions and characteristics
Formal mentoring programs have become increasingly popular in the past decade as an intervention to support organizational change efforts (Catalyst, 1993; Corey, 1996; Douglas, 1997; Gray, 1994; Heery, 1994; Lawlor, 1997; Noe, 1988a). In contrast to spontaneously-derived informal mentoring

relationships, formal mentoring programs, which are sanctioned by the organization, are usually in the form of voluntary assignment or matching of mentoring and protégés. Another difference between informal and formal mentoring relationships is that the latter are generally much shorter in duration (Chao *et al.*, 1992; Douglas, 1997; Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Informal mentoring relationships have been documented (see Kram, 1983) as moving through four distinct phases: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition. There has not been the same degree of attention given to the evolution of formal mentoring relationships (Collins, 1983; Ragins and Scandura, 1997). We know there is an initiation phase when the mentor and protégé are first matched and that there is a separation when the formal program ends. I am not aware of any study that offers an empirical investigation of how the formal relationship evolves between those two phases.

In addition to the characteristics noted above, there are other significant differences between formal and informal mentoring. Ragins and Cotton (1999) discussed these differences along three dimensions: initiation of the relationship, structure of the relationship and processes in the relationship. The initiation of formal mentoring relationships is externally directed; the program coordinator generally determines the matches between mentors and protégés. In contrast, informal mentoring relationships are initiated when two people are attracted to one another based on the foundation of perceived similarity (Byrne, 1971; Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989). Thus the mentor and the protégé involved in a formal mentoring relationship may not have the same level of identification and interpersonal comfort as those dyads who started their relationship informally. The structure of formal mentoring relationships differs in several ways from that of informal mentoring relationships (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Formal mentoring programs are contracted for a specific amount of time (generally a year); generally have predetermined frequency and locations for meetings between the mentor and the protégé; and, goals that are set at the beginning of the relationship. In contrast, informal mentoring relationships last from three to six years; meetings and activities occur when desired as opposed to a set schedule; and, the goals of informal mentoring relationships evolve over time. A final consideration is how interpersonal processes may be affected by the formalization of the mentoring process. Two of the processes that Ragins and Cotton (1999) discuss are the mentor's motivation and ability to act on behalf of the protégé. They suggest that formal mentors may be more motivated to enact the role of good organizational citizen rather than developmental supporter of their assigned proteges. They also note that mentors in formal programs may be more visible, and therefore less able to engage in career development behaviors that may be construed as favoritism by co-workers in the organization. In the next section, I provide a brief review of the empirical research comparing formal and informal mentoring.

A review of the empirical research on formal mentoring relationships

Ragins and Cotton (1999) observed that many organizations are developing and implementing formal mentoring programs without the benefit or guidance of empirical research. Although there are only a small number of studies that can actually inform the question about differences in outcomes for those involved in formal and informal mentoring relationships, this growing body of research provides informative and interesting results which should be considered, as formal mentoring programs are used in organizations. In this section, a brief review of that body of research is provided.

I am aware of only three studies (Chao *et al.*, 1992; Raggins and Cotton, 1999; Hurley and Fagenson-Eland, 1996) that directly investigated the effects of being involved in a formal mentoring relationship in comparison to involvement in an informal relationship. In each of these studies, the authors found that informal mentoring relationships provided greater outcomes for the protégés than did participation in formal mentoring. Chao *et al.* (1992) studied protégés involved in 212 informal and 53 formal mentoring relationships. They found that protégés involved in informal mentorships reported greater career support and higher salaries than their peers engaged in formal mentoring relationships. They found no support for their hypothesis that informal mentors provide greater levels of psychosocial support. In contrast, Hurley and Fagenson-Eland's (1996) study of 16 informal and 30 formal protégés found that more psychosocial benefits were reported by informal protégés than protégés involved in formal mentoring relationships. They found no reported difference between informal and formal protégés in terms of the level of career development and role modeling reported by the two groups.

Ragins and Cotton (1999) sought to extend the prior research by using a more comprehensive measure of Kram's (1985) nine mentor roles and by examining the effects of these roles on a greater number of career outcomes than previously studied. In their study of 510 informal protégés, 104 formal protégés and 548 non-protégés, Ragins and Cotton found that informal protégés reported that their mentors were more effective and that they received higher salaries than protégés with formal mentors. Informal protégés also reported more of five career development functions and greater support in four of six psychosocial functions (friendship, social support, role modeling and acceptance). These studies support a general trend of finding that protégés in informal relationships report greater outcomes than those in formal mentorships. While more research is needed to further elucidate the reasons why these differences occur (Ragins and Cottom, 1999), there are lessons that may be distilled from this small but critical body of research. In the following section, I will explore the challenges facing women who are thinking about or currently participating in formal mentoring programs, as well as strategies to enable more successful relationships.

Challenges facing women in formal mentoring programs and strategies for success

Clawson and Kram (1984) noted that those involved in cross-gender mentoring relationships are faced with two tasks: managing the internal relationship between the mentor and protégé and managing the external relationship between the dyad and the rest of the organization. The framework presented by Clawson and Kram is instructional for women involved in formal mentoring relationships as they are essentially faced with the same tasks. In the following sections I will discuss several of the internal and external challenges that women in formal mentoring relationships must negotiate, as well as potential strategies for nurturing successful relationships (see Table I). These internal and external challenges are drawn from a review of the anecdotal and empirical literature on gender and mentoring relationships (Burke, 1982; Burke and McKeen, 1990; Catalyst, 1993; Chao *et al.*, 1992; Clawson and Kram, 1984; Collins, 1983; Devine and Markiewicz, 1990; Douglas, 1997; Duff, 1999; Hurley and Fagenson-Eland, 1996; Kram and Bragar, 1992; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989, 1999; Ragins and Cotton,1999; Ragins and Scandura, 1997).

Negotiating internal aspects of the formal mentoring relationship

In this section, I will focus on five of the internal aspects of the relationship that women should pay attention to as they participate in formal mentoring programs. These issues include: unrealistic expectations, lack of attraction/ opportunity for identification, managing the developmental dilemma, unbalanced focus on the protégé, and forging a post-program relationship.

A common challenge in negotiating the internal relationship between the mentor and protégé is managing unrealistic expectations (Douglas, 1997). For many participants entering a formal mentoring relationship, there is a sense of anticipation that may be out of proportion with what one or both of the partners is able to provide. These inflated expectations may derive from the implicit assumption that the formal mentoring provides the same experience and outcomes as informal mentoring, which the review of the literature provided earlier suggests is not the case. Mentors and protégés should take some time at the very beginning of the relationship to lay the ground rules and to clarify their expectations (Duff, 1999). Each person should discuss her goals for the relationship as well as how she sees the relationship progressing to meet those goals. Those actions can save a great deal of time and energy by avoiding raised expectations and the resulting disappointment and anger that follow when those expectations are not met.

A second challenge that has received a large amount of attention in the literature on gender and mentoring (Burke and McKeen, 1990; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989, 1999; Ragins and Cotton, 1999) is that women entering formal mentoring relationships may not have the same natural attraction to their mentors that is found in informal mentoring relationships. This attraction, which is based on a level of similarity along important demographic dimensions, provides a foundation for identification to occur between the

Challenge	Strategy
Internal	
Unclear and/or unrealistic expectations	Engage in proactive and mutual sharing of expectations and goals at the beginning of the relationship
	Check-in with one another during the course of the relationship
Lack of attraction/reduced opportunities for identification	Move beyond surface-level diversity to identify dimensions of similarity
	Spend enough time together to locate these dimensions of similarity
Negotiating the developmental dilemma-balance of intimacy and distance	Acknowledge the potential for sexual attraction
	Review the organization's policy on sexual harassment
	Discuss the consequences of violations of policy and/or taboos
	Set clear boundaries for conversation
Unbalanced focus on the benefits of the relationship for the protégé	Determine potential contributions that the protégé can make to the mentor
	Reduce overdependence on mentor and foster reciprocity
Moving the formal relationship through the separation phase	Use the end of the formal program as an evaluation point to assess the future viability of the relationship
	Devote the necessary energy and commitment to redefine the relationship
External	
Managing the troublesome triangle of the direct supervisor, protégé and mentor	Involve the direct supervisor in a way that keeps her informed without compromising the relationship
	Organizational opportunity to include direct supervisors in early stages of the program
Resentment and/or anxiety from non-participating peers	Share information to allay concerns of unfair advantage
	Organizational opportunity to provide developmental opportunities to all employees
Damage from sexual innuendo and gossip	Make sure the process is open and highly visible by:
	• Meeting during the workday
	• Meeting in places that discourage intimacy
	• Getting to know each other's family
	• Not using nicknames
	Keep mentoring journals to provide a written record of any problems
Belief that women participate in formal mentoring programs as a remedial solution for lack of necessary competencies and skills	Participate in awareness training that surfaces, confronts and corrects stereotypes
	Provide the mentor with opportunities to see the protégé's work competence

Table I.
Challenges and strategies for women in formal mentoring programs

mentor and protégé. Identification is the process by which the mentor is able to see something of himself in the protégé that he would like to nurture and support; the protégé also sees something in the mentor that she would like to role model and emulate. In the case of women involved in formal cross-gender relationships, the concepts of deep-level diversity and surface-level diversity may provide a strategy to bridge the differences inherent in such a relationship (Harrison *et al.*, 1998). Surface-level diversity is characterized by differences in overt, biological characteristics that are typically reflected in physical features. These characteristics include age, ethnicity/race and sex. Deep-level diversity is reflected by differences among attitudes, beliefs and values. While surface-level diversity is detected immediately, deep-level diversity is discerned only through extended and individualized interaction. Women involved in cross-gender formal mentoring relationships are immediately confronted with the surface-level diversity dimension of gender (and sometimes age as well). The challenge for these women is to look below the surface-level differences to find similarities in values, attitudes, knowledge and skills. The benefits of finding similarities may be critical for effective formal mentoring relationships. Past studies have found that attitudinal similarity has been associated with higher group cohesiveness, satisfaction, performance ratings, and pay ratings (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989). Attitudinal similarity was found to be a powerful predictor of attraction and friendship and a catalyst for effective communication. While this work on deep-level and surface-level diversity was used to study interactions at the work group level, these concepts may provide a valuable template for women involved in dyadic formal mentoring relationships.

Yet another challenge faced by women involved in formal cross-gender mentoring relationships is the negotiation of intimacy in the relationship. Clawson and Kram (1984) describe this struggle as the "developmental dilemma." They characterized the "developmental dilemma" as the tricky line that you walk in determining the appropriate level of intimacy in the relationship. How do you get close enough in the relationship to be open and develop trust with one another but maintain enough distance so that the relationship does not become inappropriately intimate? All of the suggestions for negotiating this very challenging dilemma require a commitment to communication. Clawson and Kram (1984) suggest that mentors and protégés have a frank conversation in which they acknowledge the potential for sexual attraction, review the organization's policy on sexual harassment, and discuss the consequences of violations of policy and/or taboos. But Clawson and Kram (1984) warn that open communication can be a potential pitfall if it is not managed carefully. They suggest that the mentor and protégé differentiate between conversation topics that are "personal" and those that are "private." Personal topics are those that deal with ways of coping at work and events at home that affect job performance. Private topics, which are not pertinent to the workplace, may be about fantasies and feelings of attraction. Women involved

in formal mentoring programs need to set and observe clear boundaries around the appropriate level of conversation for a healthy relationship.

In the mentoring literature, the focus has tended to be on what the mentor gives to and what the protégé gains from the relationship. An inordinate focus on the benefits reaped by the protégé while ignoring the reasons that the mentor may gain from participation is another challenge that women face. Women involved with formal mentoring programs may be well-served by thinking about what they contribute to their relationships and how they may assist their mentors. This proactive stance will reduce their dependence on their mentors and also foster an authentic sense of reciprocity – the mentor and protégé really are both gaining as a result of being in the relationship. This sense of reciprocity will be important in determining how much energy the mentoring partners put into the relationship and if they decide to continue it after the formal mentoring program has ended.

What happens when the time for the formal mentoring program has concluded? For women involved in formal mentoring programs, the end of the initiative represents both challenge and opportunity. The challenge facing women is how to move the relationship from a company-mandated and externally structured interaction to one that is powered solely by the mentor and the protégé. The opportunity is in the promise of taking the relationship to the next level. One of the phases that informal mentoring relationships move through is the separation phase (Kram, 1983), characterized by a physical or psychological change that affects the relationship. The end of the formal program represents a literal push into the separation phase. At this point the mentor and protégé have to decide how to redefine the relationship. Ideally, formal mentoring programs should provide a platform for informal mentoring to develop (Kram and Bragar, 1992). If the mentor and the protégé have effectively utilized their time together, the chances are greater that they will have identified sufficient "deep similarity" characteristics upon which to build a relationship that survives the conclusion of the formal mentoring program.

Negotiating the external aspects of the formal mentoring relationship

In addition to negotiating the relationship between herself and the formal mentor, those who participate in formal mentoring programs are also charged with paying attention to a number of factors outside of the internal interaction between the mentor and protégé. External aspects of the relationship that women should pay attention to include: involvement of the direct supervisor, resentment of non-participating peers, perception of formal mentoring programs as remedial, prevalence of negative stereotypes of women, and damaging sexual innuendo and rumors.

Careful consideration should be given to the issue of how the protégé's manager is involved in the formal mentoring program. A classic and troublesome triangulated relationship may be formed if this does not happen. The supervisor may feel that the protégé can access information and resources

via the mentor that are not available to him or her. The supervisor may also feel as if his or her management style is under scrutiny because the protégé will be sharing information with the mentor. If the supervisor feels in any way as if his/her ability to supervise the protégé is being compromised or that he or she is not included in an important information loop, the effects on the protégé's ability to fully utilize the mentoring relationship may be negatively affected. To avoid these uncomfortable and potentially career-damaging situations, women involved in formal mentoring programs should think proactively about how to communicate with their supervisors about the relationship. Kram and Bragar (1992) indicated that in some organizations, direct supervisors are included in advisory groups established to define expectations and to monitor the formal program's impact. Participation in the early stages of the development of the formal mentoring program enables direct supervisors to have their concerns addressed and to differentiate their role from that of the assigned mentor.

Direct supervisors are not the only external relationships that must be managed. Peer resentment is another effect that is commonly reported by those involved in formal mentoring relationships (Catalyst, 1993; Duff, 1999; Kram and Bragar, 1992). Often, those who are not selected to participate in formal mentoring programs may feel that they are not getting access to an important opportunity for visibility and potential advancement, and that those who are selected for participation are receiving a form of preferential treatment. Just as women should develop proactive strategies to appropriately include and manage their bosses, they must also think about the perceptions of co-workers. One sub-optimal strategy that participants in a formal mentoring program in a Fortune 500 company used was to simply not share with their peers that they were part of the formal mentoring program designed to develop high potential employees; they did not want to deal with the anxiety that their status as program participants would raise with their peers. As organizations move towards more and more teamwork and cooperative efforts, strained relationships between co-workers may negatively affect productivity and other work outcomes. A more productive manner to address peer workers' concerns is to share information, to the extent that it is comfortable and appropriate, that is gained from the mentor with them. The insecurity that peers feel has its basis in the fact that they may feel that a protégé in a formal program has access to information and opportunities to which they are not privy. Thus sharing the limited resource of information should allay some of their concerns. Yet another suggestion is to enable all employees to participate in some form of developmental relationship. This is an organizational level strategy that may be instrumental in curbing the anxiety and resentment that those in formal mentoring programs may receive from their peers who are not being sent similar signals of being valued by the organization.

Although this is not commonly discussed, another challenge that women face is the perception that participation in a formal mentoring program does not represent a high potential candidate. Instead, the signal that is given is that

this candidate needs help, and that the program is remedial in nature (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Duff (1999) notes that the proliferation of special programs for women may have two effects: they perpetuate the assumption that women do not know how to behave in the workplace, and they signal that women are different (read deficient) and require remedial training. This signal may have a number of negative costs to women. In effect, male mentors may see women's participation in a formal mentoring program as confirmation of a number of negative stereotypes regarding their ability to effectively lead in organizations. Noe (1988b) discusses two common barriers facing women in cross-gender mentoring relationships: tokenism and stereotypes. Tokenism occurs when individuals enter a job environment in which their social category has been disproportionately represented (Kanter, 1977). So the visibility that women in male-dominated fields already face may be compounded by the increased visibility that accompanies participation in many formal mentoring programs. This increased visibility, and the accompanying scrutiny, may dissuade mentors from fully developing the relationship. Another factor that may affect women's abilities to participate fully in formal mentoring programs may be persistent negative attitudes and stereotypes of "the fairer sex." Noe (1988b) discussed the perception some male managers hold that women lack a number of intrinsic skills or the effort necessary to succeed in leadership positions. Participation in a formal mentoring program may be viewed as a way to provide women who are deficient in terms of their leadership skills with an opportunity to nurture and develop necessary competencies. Each of these barriers, tokenism and stereotypes, may negatively affect the formal mentoring relationship between women protégés and male mentors (Ragins, 1989; Ragins and Cotton, 1991). What can women do to address these damaging stereotypes? It is very difficult to change deeply-rooted beliefs but this is the task that many women are faced with as they engage in relationships with male mentors who may have preconceived notions about their abilities and competencies. Cox (1993) indicated that the reduction of stereotyping behavior is key to developing effective work relations across diverse work groups. One way to address stereotyping behavior is for the mentor and the protégé to participate in awareness and sensitivity training that illuminates the presence of harmful stereotypes and prescribes alternative truths to replace incorrect and damaging information. Another strategy that might seem appropriate is for women to aggressively promote themselves and to ensure that their competence is visible to dispel concerns that the mentors may have. Self-promotion has been found to enhance the extent to which a person is perceived as competent (Carli and Eagly, 1999). But research indicates that women face a double bind in terms of self-promotion. Carli and Eagly (1999) indicate that although a woman who self-promotes may be perceived as more competent than one who is modest, men accept such a woman only when they can directly benefit from her competence. And they tend to like the woman who self-promotes less than the one who is self-effacing. So showing oneself to be competent by being prepared and doing excellent work that the mentor can see and evaluate may be an

effective strategy for women. On the other hand, talking about yourself and aggressively promoting your competence may backfire.

A final factor that has received considerable attention in the literature is the need to handle the sexual rumors and innuendo that may arise from cross-gender mentoring relationships (Burke, 1982; Clawson and Kram, 1984; Devine and Markiewicz, 1990; Hurley and Fagenson-Eland, 1996; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989). This challenge is the public dimension of the developmental dilemma that was described in the section on managing the internal relationship. Women involved in formal cross-gender mentoring relationships have to manage the perception that the boundaries of the relationships have not transgressed appropriate levels of intimacy. Whether or not the relationship has actually crossed that line is almost irrelevant. The potential ramifications that may occur as a result of sexual innuendo and rumors range from mean-spirited gossip to career-ending decisions. Because of the power differential between men and women, as well as a double standard about appropriate behavior, the ramifications may be more deleterious for the female protégé involved in the relationship than for the male mentor. Respondents in Collins' (1983) study of 381 professional women pointed out that in a sexual situation, it is almost always the woman's reputation that suffers. The strategies for dealing with this challenge are not as apparent as they have been in other areas. Hurley and Fagenson-Eland (1996) noted that the elimination of sexuality and intimacy from cross-gender mentoring relationships is not possible. They offer a number of preventative measures that mentors and protégés can use to manage the perception of intimacy by those outside of the relationship. They suggest that the mentor and protégé take a number of steps to ensure that the mentoring process is open and highly visible:

(1) schedule meetings during the workday;

(2) meet in places that discourage intimacy;

(3) meet with the office door open;

(4) get to know each other's family; and

(5) do not use nicknames.

Of course, if the mentor and protégé are expending so much energy managing the perceptions of colleagues, there may be costs to the relationship. Some cross-gender dyads opt to take on a father/daughter form of behavior. While this arrangement is less likely to invoke concerns around sexual attraction, it may also hamper the ability of the mentor to offer risk-taking opportunities and the ability of the female protégé to demonstrate competence. Ragins and Cotton (1991) indicated that men may avoid mentoring relationships with women altogether in order to avert destructive office gossip and discrediting innuendo.

Conclusion
The purpose of this paper was not to dismiss the use of formal mentoring programs in organizations. There are a number of benefits that may accrue to

those participating in formal mentoring relationships. Kram and Bragar (1992) listed several benefits culled from interviews with program participants and employee surveys: learning new skills, developing self confidence and professional direction, realizing new opportunities for advancement, and making greater commitment to one's career and organization. Ragins and Cotton (1999) suggest that formal mentoring relationships may be more effective for influencing immediate performance measures, such as on-the-job training, or developing early career goals. But these initiatives are not without their challenges and costs. The purpose of this paper was to scrutinize those factors, particularly as they relate to women who may be considering or participating in formal mentoring programs. Kram and Bragar (1992) concluded that formal mentoring programs represent only one alternative with considerable limitations that must not be overlooked. Participation in a formal mentoring relationship should be only one of many sources of support that women utitlize (Higgins and Kram, 1999; Higgins and Thomas,1997; Hill and Kamprath, 1991; Ibarra, 1993; Kram and Isabella, 1985; Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). What else should women be doing besides participating in formal mentoring programs? Kram (1985) suggested developing a constellation model of support.

The major tenet of the constellation model of support is that psychosocial and career support are gathered from a number of sources rather than depending solely on one relationship. Those additional sources of support may be: a traditional mentor, other advanced organizational members, peers, and organizational groups. Each of these sources may offer some portion of the support that women have traditionally sought in a mentoring relationship. For example, Kram and Isabella (1985) point out that while peers are generally not in a position to offer the career support and protection that a mentor offers, they may be excellent sources of psychosocial support. Women's careers are best served by having a formal mentor as one of many potential providers of developmental support.

In closing, I would like to propose one other source of support that I rarely see included in the management literature: our families. Schwartz (1992) described a conspiracy of silence that envelops our conversation of women, work and the facts of life. When the specter of the family is raised, it is oftentimes as a negative factor, something that women must balance, struggle with, neglect or forego in their quest to achieve career advancement (Hochschild and Maching, 1989; Hymowitz, 1984). Yet statistics clearly indicate that women with families are active participants in the workforce. The number of married women in the labor force rose from 20 percent in 1947 to 59 percent in 1991. Since 1959, the labor force participation rate of women with preschool-age children has more than quadrupled (Schwartz, 1992). Although there is an extensive body of research on the work-family interface (see Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999), I am not aware of one mentoring study that empirically, or even anecdotally, examines the family as a source of mentoring support. Rather than looking at families from a negative perspective, researchers might consider how familial relationships contribute to the developmental constellation of women.

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