

The Way We Were: Gender and the Termination of Mentoring Relationships

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The relationship between gender and the termination of mentoring relationships was assessed in a matched sample of 142 male and female ex-protégés. Counter to prevailing assumptions, when gender differences in rank, salary, tenure, and other demographic and organizational variables were controlled, women did not differ from men in the number or duration of prior relationships or in their reasons for terminating the relationship.

Mentoring relationships have been shown to be an important determinant in career success and advancement. Mentors are generally defined as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward support and mobility to their protégés' careers (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985). Research has indicated that individuals with mentors receive more promotions (Dreher & Ash, 1990), have higher incomes (Dreher & Ash, 1990), and report more career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989; Turban & Dougherty, 1994) and mobility (Scandura, 1992) than those lacking mentors. However, the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship is partially determined by the timeliness of its termination (Kram, 1985). At some point, the relationship fulfills its functions and the protégé needs to move on to the next mentoring relationship (Burlew, 1991; Kram, 1985). It has been suggested that overdependency on a mentoring relationship can actually be deleterious to a protégé's career progression (Burlew, 1991; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985). In fact, the effective use of multiple sequential mentors has been identified as a key ingredient in career development and advancement in organizations (Burlew, 1991; Roche, 1979).

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Mentoring relationships may be especially important for women in organizations; mentors can help women overcome gender-related barriers to advancement (Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989). Although it is particularly important for women to have multiple sequential mentors (Parker & Kram, 1993), it has been suggested that there are gender differences in the termination of mentoring relationships; women are viewed as having fewer mentors than men, as being more dependent on the relationship, and as holding on to the relationship past its usefulness (Collins, 1983; Ragins, 1989). This view has not been empirically tested and may reflect sex role stereotypes and assumptions regarding women's dependency in relationships (MacCoby & Jacklin, 1974). On the other hand, if these gender differences do in fact exist, women would be at a definite disadvantage in the development of multiple mentoring relationships. This has direct implications for organizations that are developing mentorship training programs for women (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Scott, 1992; Zey, 1985). If women hold on to mentoring relationships past their usefulness, organizational training programs could address this problem by stressing the importance of moving on to new and more effective mentoring relationships and by providing strategies for terminating relationships that no longer meet female protégés' needs. This study may also contribute to the development of gender and mentoring theory that is based on empirical data rather than assumptions influenced by sex role stereotypes and attributions. The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to assess whether there are gender differences in the history and termination of mentoring relationships.

Theoretical and Literature Review

Termination of Mentoring Relationships

According to Kram (1983, 1985), mentoring relationships pass through four distinct phases: initiation, cultiva-

tion, separation, and redefinition. The relationship develops during the initiation and cultivation stages and reaches the separation stage after 2 to 5 years. The separation stage involves a significant change in the mentoring relationship whereby the mentor and protégé relinquish their hierarchical roles. The protégé may no longer need the mentor's guidance, and the mentor may no longer see the need to coach or sponsor the protégé. Separation may therefore be initiated by the mentor, the protégé, or both members of the relationship. The separation stage is critical for the development of the protégé; separation is a precursor to improved self-confidence, autonomy, and an independent sense of professional identity. Separation also allows the mentor to exit relationships that are not effective and move on to new relationships that provide greater challenge and personal growth. Separation is therefore beneficial to the protégé, the mentor, and the organization. Separation may occur because of psychological reasons, because of physical separation, or as a result of some combination of these two factors. According to Kram, the redefinition phase occurs several years after separation and, depending on how the relationship ended, may involve friendship and peer status or hostility and lack of contact. The relationship essentially becomes reborn as a new role relationship involving peer status and friendship. Although mentoring relationships evolve through different stages, current mentoring research has focused nearly exclusively on the initiation and cultivation phases.

There are both functional and dysfunctional psychological reasons for termination of mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). Functional termination occurs when the protégé outgrows the mentor and can no longer profit from the relationship. However, sometimes the relationship ends in hostility and turmoil. An example of dysfunctional termination would be an instance in which the mentor becomes jealous of the protégé and seeks to sabotage the protégé's career. Another example of dysfunctional termination is when members become overly dependent; the mentor may smother the protégé or expect the protégé to be the mentor's clone, and the protégé may expect the mentor to assume absolute responsibility for the protégé's career.

The termination of mentoring relationships is necessary not only because it allows protégés to move out of relationships that no longer serve their needs but also because termination allows protégés to seek and develop new relationships that may better serve their emerging career development needs. Career theorists suggest that individuals should have multiple sequential mentoring relationships and that different relationships address different needs at various career and life stages (Burlew, 1991; Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978). Burlew (1991) developed a multi-

ple mentor model that specified three types of sequential mentoring relationships. The first mentor provides socialization functions by helping the protégé make a successful adjustment to a new job or work environment. The second mentor helps the protégé plan and implement his or her career progression within the organization. The third mentor promotes the personal effectiveness of the protégé outside the organization's boundaries and helps the protégé balance personal and professional goals. Burlew's (1991) model implicitly recognizes that different mentors have different strengths, abilities, and resources and that it is unreasonable to expect one mentor to fill all of the protégé's needs over the course of a career. Along those same lines, Kram and Brager (1992) observed that, given changing developmental needs, it is necessary to build several developmental alliances rather than relying on just one mentoring relationship.

Gender, Mentoring History, and the Termination of Mentoring Relationships

A prevailing assumption in the literature is that women are more dependent on their mentoring relationships than men and are less likely to terminate the relationship, even when it has served its purpose (Collins, 1983; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Halcomb, 1980; Ragins, 1989; Richey, Gambrill, & Blythe, 1988). As mentioned earlier, this assumption has not been tested and may reflect pernicious sex role stereotypes and attributions regarding women and dependency in relationships (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Alternately, the assumption may be true; there are, in fact, three objective reasons for expecting gender differences in the termination of mentoring relationships.

First, given the discriminatory barriers to advancement that women face in organizations (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Northcraft & Gutek, 1993) and their social isolation and lack of peer support (Ibarra, 1993; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994), mentors may be more important for women than men; mentors buffer women from adverse forces, provide support, and promote advancement (Ragins, 1989). Given the importance of these functions, female protégés may be reluctant to relinquish their mentors, even after the relationship has served its purpose.

A second reason for expecting gender differences in termination is that even though women are as likely to have mentors as men and have relationships that provide equivalent benefits (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fagenson, 1989; Turban & Dougherty, 1994), women face greater barriers to developing a mentoring relationship than their male counterparts. Using a matched sample of male and female managers, Ragins and Cotton (1991) found that women reported less access to mentors, less willingness on the

part of mentors to assume a mentoring role, more disapproval of the development of the relationship by supervisors and coworkers, and greater fears that the initiation of a cross-gender relationship would be misconstrued as a sexual advance. Given these barriers to initiating a relationship, women may justifiably be reluctant to relinquish mentors.

The third reason is that theories of adult development suggest that sex role expectations and developmental differences make men more likely than women to seek multiple, short-term mentoring relationships (Gallos, 1989; Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan (1982) theorized that whereas male developmental patterns focus on separation and individuality, the identity formation process for women involves the development of interpersonal relationships and the connection of the self to others. In support of this idea, Van Velsor and Hughes (1990) found that, in comparison with men, women reported a greater reliance on work relationships for sources of development and learning. Gallos (1989) observed that because most of the literature on career theory and mentorship was developed on the basis of male experiences (e.g., Levinson et al., 1978), it may be limited in explaining women's career experiences. She theorized that male definitions of career success are tied to independence and self-sufficiency, whereas career success for women is related more to the development of meaningful and close work relationships. As applied to mentoring relationships, sex role expectations concerning independence and self-sufficiency may lead men to cycle through more mentoring relationships than women. Women may therefore have more latitude to develop fewer long-term relationships than men. To the extent that relationships are more important to women than men, it may also be more difficult for women to terminate these relationships, particularly given the difficulty in establishing new relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1991) and the greater social acceptance involved with the establishment of long-term relationships.

Although there are a number of reasons for expecting gender differences in the history and termination of mentoring relationships, it should be pointed out that the first two of the three reasons just cited may reflect opportunity and organizational barriers rather than protégé sex. In fact, a structuralist perspective (Kanter, 1977) holds that many gender differences in organizational behavior are really a function of gender differences in rank and organizational power and that differences in rank should be controlled for when conducting comparative gender research. This caveat certainly applies to the present study. Prior research has found a relationship between rank and the development and functioning of mentoring relationships (Koberg, Boss, Chappell, & Ringer, 1994; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Viator & Scandura, 1991). Individuals at lower ranks may

be more dependent on mentors and may be less willing to terminate the relationship than individuals at higher ranks. Because women tend to hold lower ranks in organizations than men (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), gender comparisons on mentoring that do not control for rank may be confounded by this structural artifact. Women in management researchers have advised the use of a matched-pairs research design to control for structural differences that are associated with gender but do not directly reflect gender (Powell, 1990; Riger & Galligan, 1980; Sekaran, 1990). Accordingly, our study used a matched-sample design to control for gender differences in rank, tenure, and other organizational variables. This design may control for opportunity and organizational barriers that can create artificial gender differences in the termination of mentoring relationships. However, even when controlling for factors that could create artificial gender differences, we still expected gender differences to emerge on the basis of the adult and career development theories reviewed earlier.

Only one study to date has investigated gender and the termination of mentoring relationships (Collins, 1983), but this study, now a bit dated, relied on an all-female sample and was therefore unable to make conclusions regarding gender differences in termination of mentoring relationships. Nevertheless, Collins (1983) used Levinson et al.'s (1978) descriptive accounts of male protégés as a basis for drawing conclusions about gender differences in the number, duration, and termination of mentoring relationships. Collins (1983) concluded, based on a sample of 400 executive and professional women, that women had fewer mentors than men, were more dependent on the relationship, and held on to the relationship past its effectiveness. Collins (1983) reported that many of the female protégés in her sample were well past the age of 40 years, and observed that, because most of the men in Levinson et al.'s (1978) study had outgrown the protégé role by this age, women are unwilling to terminate their mentoring relationships. However, her conclusion did not consider the fact that, at the time her survey was given, many women entered the workforce at a later age than men and may have therefore become protégés at a later age. Collins also concluded that men and women differed in reasons for termination; this conclusion was based on the fact that the majority of women in her study reported termination due to physical separation, whereas the men in Levinson et al.'s (1978) study reported conflict as a key reason for termination. Furthermore, Collins did not ask her female protégés whether their mentoring relationship terminated because they outgrew their mentor, and she did not explore other psychological reasons for termination. Nevertheless, the preliminary results from this early exploratory study, combined with the adult develop-

ment theory reviewed earlier, suggest that women may differ from men in their psychological reasons for termination and that their relationships may be more likely to terminate because of physical separation. The purpose of the present study was to investigate gender differences in mentoring history and the psychological and physical reasons for termination of mentoring relationships.

Hypotheses

Given the theory and research reviewed earlier, we formulated the following two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Women will have fewer mentoring relationships than men.

Hypothesis 2: Women will have longer mentoring relationships than men.

Consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2 and the preceding discussion, we formulated two additional hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3: Women will be more likely than men to report that their mentoring relationship terminated primarily because of physical separation.

Hypothesis 4: Women and men will report different psychological reasons for termination.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Data on mentoring were collected as part of a larger investigation on gender and career issues in organizations. Because our targeted sample was former protégés and one of the goals of our study was to assess gender differences in number of mentors, we needed a sample of individuals in advanced career stages who had completed mentoring relationships and had the opportunity to develop more than one relationship. Because executives are more likely than other populations to have had mentors and, therefore, to have terminated mentoring relationships (Roche, 1979), we decided to use a sample of high-ranking managers and executives.

As a means of ensuring adequate representation of women, purchased mailing lists of high-ranking female managers and executives were first used to identify potential respondents. Because some of the women were CEOs or in positions with no comparable male match within their organization, we asked the female executives to identify two male peers within or outside their organizations with similar positions, ranks, and, when feasible, specializations and to give them copies of the surveys.

The first step in our data collection process involved sending postage-paid business reply postcards to the 1,200 potential respondents randomly drawn from the mailing lists. The postcards contained demographic questions used to assess nonresponse bias and a question asking whether they would participate in the study. Postcards were returned by 977 executives, and 443 of these individuals indicated that they would participate in the study. Surveys and postage-paid return envelopes were then mailed to the 443 female executives. Extra copies of the survey

and return envelopes were included, and the executives were instructed to give these to their male peers. Given that executive samples tend to have notoriously low response rates (Dillman, 1978), follow-up letters and surveys were sent to respondents who did not respond to the first mailing.

Although the initial executive sample was randomly drawn, it is still possible that differences existed between respondents and nonrespondents. To assess this possibility, the postcard asked respondents to report their rank, the number of individuals they supervised, and the type of organization. Geographic regions were assessed by return postmarks. No significant differences were found between female executives who completed the survey ($N = 176$) and those indicating that they did not wish to participate ($N = 534$).

Two hundred seventy-five usable surveys were returned (176 from women and 99 from men). Of the individuals returning usable surveys, 187 (68%) had experience as a protégé, and 142 (52%) had experienced the termination of a mentoring relationship. We used an established definition of mentor (Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Cotton, 1991) in our survey: "an influential individual in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to providing upward mobility and support to your career." The average number of mentors was 2.65, and the average duration of these relationships was 2.7 years.

The final sample consisted of 142 former protégés (51 men and 91 women). Sixty-one respondents were in same-gender mentoring relationships, and 62 were in mentoring relationships with someone of the opposite gender. As in other studies (e.g., Ragins & McFarlin, 1990), most of the protégés reported having a male mentor (46 of the male protégés and 59 of the female protégés). Female mentors were less common; only 15 female protégés and 3 male protégés reported having a female mentor.

Almost all of the respondents were Caucasian (97.9%), and their average age was 42 years. Most of the participants were married (87.2%) and employed fulltime (97.2%). The majority of the sample held bachelor's degrees (45.8%), and some had completed (23.2%) or pursued (12%) graduate degrees. The respondents held relatively high-ranking positions in their organizations; 94.1% were within three decision levels of the top of their organization. However, it should be noted that rank is relative, because most respondents (80.7%) were employed at small or medium-sized organizations (500 employees or fewer). The majority of the respondents were employed in service (56.6%) and manufacturing (27.9%) organizations. Their average current salary was \$61,000.

Measures

The survey was developed and pretested on a separate pilot group of 110 executives and upper-ranking managers in the midwestern and southeastern regions of the United States. The pretest was used to develop, revise, and select initial items. From both the pretest and existing theory (Kram, 1985), it became clear that mentoring relationships terminate because of both physical and psychological reasons. Accordingly, all respondents with terminated relationships were requested to complete survey

questions relating to both psychological and physical reasons for termination.

Psychological termination. Because there are no published measures on the psychological reasons for termination, we developed a 7-point Likert-type instrument with 17 items; responses ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The specific items were derived from the mentorship theories discussed earlier (Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978).

Principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the termination scale of the final sample. Using unit weights, we combined items into factor subscales. Four factors emerged, explaining 55% of the common variance. Two decision rules were used to determine which items defined the factors (Comrey, 1973). First, the item had to have a factor loading equal to or greater than .30. Second, items had to clearly load on one factor. All of the items had more than satisfactory loadings. Three items that had high loadings but loaded on more than one factor were deleted from the subscales, as shown in Table 1.

The first three factors can be characterized as dysfunctional reasons for termination. Factor 1, Jealousy, reflects strongly dysfunctional reasons for termination that are highly destructive

and relate to the mentors becoming jealous of their protégés and attempting to stifle their advancement (three items; $\alpha = .86$, eigenvalue = 7.13). Factor 2, Dependency, is also dysfunctional and reflects a sense of suffocation, lack of support, and dissatisfaction with the relationship (five items; $\alpha = .76$, eigenvalue = 1.73). Factor 3, Support, represents dysfunctional reasons for termination related to the lack of support in the relationship and the mentor's unrealistic expectations (three items; $\alpha = .69$, eigenvalue = 1.23). Factor 4, Outgrew, can be classified as functional and reflects the protégé outgrowing the mentor and needing to prove that he or she can succeed without the mentor's assistance (three items; $\alpha = .64$, eigenvalue = 1.02).

Physical termination. Termination due to physical separation was addressed with the item "Did your last mentoring relationship end primarily because of physical separation?" The majority of respondents reported that the relationship ended primarily because of physical separation (70.4%). (This item was coded as 1 [termination due to physical separation] or 0 [not due to physical separation].) For informational purposes and to ensure complete understanding of the physical separation item, respondents were then presented with a list of five physical reasons for termination immediately following the physical sep-

Table 1
Results of Factor Analyses of Psychological Reasons for Termination

Item	Factor loading				Final communality estimate
	1	2	3	4	
Factor 1: Jealousy (eigenvalue = 7.13; 41.9% of variance)					
My mentor became jealous of my accomplishments	.86	.29	.18	.15	.88
My mentor tried to prevent my advancement	.69	.33	.21	.12	.64
My mentor started stifling my growth ^a	.62	.01	.53	.36	.81
The relationship became destructive	.54	.38	.36	.05	.58
Factor 2: Dependency (eigenvalue = 1.73; 10.2% of variance)					
I was too dependent on the relationship	.30	.64	.19	.23	.59
My mentor wanted me to be a "clone" ^a	.36	.49	.37	.12	.53
Sexual issues arose in the relationship	.31	.62	.15	.03	.50
My peers were jealous of the relationship	.06	.59	.34	.09	.48
My mentor became involved with mentoring another	.14	.49	.29	.17	.37
I found a new mentor	.05	.48	.02	.09	.25
Factor 3: Support (eigenvalue = 1.23; 7.2% of variance)					
My mentor's performance expectations became too demanding	.26	.33	.53	.01	.46
I had to become independent of my mentor	.17	.18	.56	.37	.52
My supervisor did not support the relationship	.20	.25	.54	.15	.43
Factor 4: Outgrew (eigenvalue = 1.02; 6.0% of variance)					
I could no longer learn from my mentor	.40	.20	.14	.64	.65
I needed to prove to myself that I could succeed without my mentor	.18	.14	.41	.56	.55
I no longer profited from the relationship ^a	.48	.02	.48	.55	.77
My mentor was no longer in a position to help my career	.02	.08	.02	.50	.26

Note. All items began with the following stem: "My last mentoring relationship ended because" Primary loadings appear in boldface.

^a Deleted from the final instrument as a result of double loadings.

aration question and were asked to check yes or no for the physical reason(s) that applied to their last relationship. The most common physical reason for termination was "My mentor left the organization" (34.8%), followed by "I left the organization" (22%), "My mentor and I no longer worked on projects" (14.1%), "My mentor was transferred to another company location" (7.9%), "I was transferred to another company location" (4.3%), and "other" (17.6%). The "other" category may reflect termination due to other geographic moves, psychological reasons for termination, or both. The physical termination items directly preceded the psychological termination scale in the survey.

Results

As a means of assessing the efficacy of the matching strategy, *t* tests and del procedures (Hildebrand, Laing, & Rosenthal, 1977) were performed on the demographic and organizational variables. The del procedure is held to be superior to the chi-square test in that it allows for directional tests using a priori predictions and is robust to small samples (Drazin & Kazanjian, 1993). Evidently, the matching strategy was effective; the women in this sample did not significantly differ from their male match in rank, salary, tenure, employment status, marital status, type or size of organization, age, or race. However, men had more education, $t(140) = 2.49, p < .05$, than women. Education was therefore selected as a covariate for future analyses. (Tests were made of all control variable-independent variable interaction terms to determine whether any violations of the assumption of homogeneity of regression lines were present. Because these interaction terms were not significant, we concluded that this assumption was not violated.)

The intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of the study variables can be found in Table 2. We used *t* tests to test for hypothesized gender differences in the

number and duration of mentoring relationships and to determine whether termination was due to physical separation. The results revealed that men and women did not significantly differ on the number of prior mentoring relationships, $t(138) = 0.36, ns$; the duration of these relationships, $t(123) = 0.43, ns$; and whether their last relationship ended because of physical separation ($del = 2.91; z = .31, ns$). The del results were replicated with chi-square analyses, $\chi^2(1, N = 142) = 0.12, ns$. Post hoc analyses revealed no significant gender differences in any of the five specific reasons given for physical separation.

Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to test the relationship between protégé gender and the four termination scales while controlling for existing gender differences in education. The Box M multivariate test for homogeneity of variance yielded nonsignificant results, supporting assumptions of homogeneity among variance-covariance matrices. The analyses revealed that protégé gender was not significantly related to any of the termination scales, Wilks's $\Lambda = .97, F(4, 118) = 0.65, ns$.

Discussion

Counter to our hypotheses and prevailing assumptions in the literature, when gender differences in rank, salary, tenure, and other demographic and organizational variables were controlled, men and women did not significantly differ in the number or duration of prior relationships or in reasons for the termination of their last mentoring relationship. There was no indication that women are more dependent on their mentors, have fewer and longer mentoring relationships, are less likely to terminate the relationship once it has served its purpose, or use their mentors any less effectively than their male counterparts. The perspective that women are more dependent on their mentors than men—and are therefore less willing to ter-

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables Separately by Gender

Variable ^a	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Women		Men	
									<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Jealousy	—	.59**	.50**	.46**	-.44**	.05	-.21*	.14	1.69	1.18	2.13	1.69
2. Dependency	.56**	—	.52**	.34**	-.40**	.21*	-.13	.10	1.90	1.11	2.07	1.10
3. Support	.72**	.62**	—	.51**	-.52**	.01	-.16	.07	2.53	1.52	2.76	1.35
4. Outgrew	.36**	.43**	.45**	—	-.50**	-.01	-.23*	.01	2.90	1.57	2.87	1.53
5. Physical separation ^b	-.30**	-.31*	-.44**	-.13	—	.11	.14	-.09	0.71	0.45	0.69	0.47
6. Number of mentors	-.02	.13	-.03	-.01	.03	—	-.12	.18*	2.61	1.76	2.72	2.04
7. Years in relationships	-.11	-.12	-.31*	-.11	-.11	-.12	—	-.10	2.81	1.64	2.69	1.70
8. Education	-.09	-.01	-.20	-.13	.26*	-.08	.00	—	1.26	1.08	1.74	1.14

Note. Correlations above the diagonal are for women ($n = 91$); correlations below the diagonal are for men ($n = 51$). Decimal points are omitted for correlations.

^a To aid comparability, termination scale means reflect average item scores. ^b Coded 1 (physical reason) or 0 (not physical reason).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

minate their mentoring relationships—may reflect traditional sex role stereotypes and attributions rather than actual gender differences in mentoring relationships.

The results of the present study contradict Collins's (1983) conclusion of gender differences in the termination of mentoring relationships. One reason for this is that our study used a matched sample of men and women and therefore controlled for structural artifacts due to rank. In contrast, Collins (1983) surveyed only women and compared her results with Levinson et al.'s (1978) descriptive accounts of male protégés. A second reason is that sex role expectations regarding independence, self-sufficiency, and relationships may have changed since Collins's early exploratory research. It is important to recognize that research on gender effects and role expectations is very sensitive to changing societal norms. The definition of career success for women may have evolved over the last 15 years to incorporate elements of self-sufficiency and independence. Changing sex roles may therefore allow women to cycle through as many mentors as necessary, just like their male counterparts, and avoid overdependency on a single mentoring relationship.

Although our study may provide indirect support for a structuralist interpretation of gender differences in mentorship (Kanter, 1977), it is important to recognize that we did not attempt to compare structural and gender effects. A comparative analysis of structural and gender effects would require matched samples of male and female employees at high and low ranks in an organization; within-group gender differences would support a gender explanation, whereas between-levels differences would support a structuralist explanation. However, this design was not feasible for our study because of the dependent variables. Individuals at lower ranks are less likely to have a mentor (Koberg et al., 1994; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Viator & Scandura, 1991) and, therefore, a terminated mentoring relationship than individuals at higher ranks. Restriction of range on the termination and mentorship history variables would therefore attenuate variance for the low-ranking but not the high-ranking group, thus yielding an inconclusive comparison of structural and gender effects.

On a practical level, it is important to recognize that although gender per se may not influence the effective termination of mentoring relationships, if individuals at lower ranks use mentors less effectively than individuals at higher ranks and women hold lower ranks than men, the net effect of rank could be detrimental to the career development and effective termination of mentoring relationships among female employees. For this reason, as well as others, organizational mentoring programs should include assessment of mentor effectiveness, and termination techniques should be included in training programs.

The findings of the present study must be viewed with caution until replicated in future research, because several factors might limit their generalizability. First, the participants in this study were high-ranking executives employed at small and medium-sized organizations. Although this is a prime population for studying female ex-protégés, the findings may not generalize to women at lower ranks. In fact, it could be argued that these female executives were successful because they developed effective career strategies that included the development of multiple sequential mentoring relationships. Moreover, the findings of this study may be most relevant to relationships with male mentors. Most of the former mentors in our study were male, which is common (cf. Ragins & McFarlin, 1990) and reflects the gender composition of male-dominated organizations. However, it is conceivable that different patterns of termination may occur with female mentors, and termination may vary by the gender composition of the relationship. The small number of male protégés with female mentors in our sample did not allow us to investigate the effects of cross-gender and same-gender relationships. Future research could explore these issues in greater depth using samples from female-dominated and gender-integrated organizations.

Second, although the use of a matched-pairs design is critical in controlling for structural artifacts and providing pure estimates of gender effects, some selection bias may have resulted from having the female executives choose their male counterparts. Because 20% of the women in our sample were CEOs, we believed that their judgment would be more accurate than ours in selecting male peers heading similar organizations. Fortunately, this proved to be the case; with the exception of education, the male and female respondents did not differ on any of the demographic or organizational variables (rank, salary, tenure, employment status, marital status, type or size of organization, age, or race). However, they may have differed on other variables that, unbeknownst to us, were important but not included in our investigation. In addition, because the female executives were responsible for delivering the survey to their male counterparts, it was impossible to assess the response rate among the male executives. Our response rate for the female executives (39.7%), although higher than the range typically obtained with other executive samples (Catalyst, 1996; Korn/Ferry International, 1990), was still less than what we would have liked. The response rate may have been decreased by the length of the survey (21 pages), even though we sent follow-up letters and surveys. Nevertheless, this response rate does raise the potential for nonresponse bias. As discussed earlier, female respondents and nonrespondents did not differ in terms of rank, number of individuals supervised, type of organization, and geographic region, but they may have

differed in their reasons for termination of mentoring relationships, even though the items on termination were not presented until midway through the survey.

The third limitation of this study is that we relied on a newly developed measure of psychological termination. Although it met traditional psychometric criteria, it remains relatively untested and will need further construct validation. Because mentoring is a relatively new area of research, few mentorship measures with established validity are available for typical methods of establishing construct validity. For this situation, Ghiselli, Campbell, and Zedeck (1981) suggested a process analysis approach for providing evidence of construct validity. This approach involves follow-up interviews with respondents to provide an understanding of why they responded in a certain way to the instrument. The respondents should be using a process similar to that which the researcher had in mind when the instrument was developed.

Future research could expand on the present study by exploring other factors influencing men's and women's decision to terminate their mentoring relationship at different ranks and career stages using qualitative and quantitative reports from both mentors and protégés. This research could compare effective and ineffective termination of mentoring relationships to provide an understanding of the impact of personality characteristics, prior experience in mentoring relationships, communication skills, and other individual factors on termination of mentoring relationships. One interesting research question, which could be assessed longitudinally, is whether the reasons for termination differ in the first and subsequent mentoring relationships. It is reasonable to expect that experience in mentoring relationships helps individuals choose more effective relationships and that these relationships are more likely to have positive, functional reasons for termination. It would also be interesting to explore the degree of congruency between mentor's and protégés' perceptions as to why the relationship ended and to explore variables that affect the congruency of those perceptions.

Future research could also compare the relative effectiveness of multiple versus single mentoring relationships. Although mentorship theorists present a convincing argument for the benefit of multiple sequential relationships that address protégés' changing career development needs, this has yet to be empirically investigated. Specifically, it would be challenging but instructive to assess changes in career and organizational outcomes over a specified period of time among protégés at equivalent ranks who have had multiple sequential mentors as compared with a single, long-term mentoring relationship.

Finally, future research could explore how the termination of mentoring relationships is affected by organizational turbulence, restructuring, downsizing, and the

changing nature of careers (Kram, 1996; Thomas & Higgins, 1996). These factors may lead to mentoring relationships that span organizational boundaries and are disrupted by physical relocations to other organizations or geographic areas. One result of this situation is that mentoring relationships will become shorter, less intense, and more likely to end with physical separation. On the other hand, long-distance relationships that span organizational boundaries may be resilient to distance. Individuals in these relationships may develop compensatory methods for communication; instead of meeting for lunch, they may meet daily on the Internet. In this case, these relationships may actually last longer than more traditional mentoring relationships. The nature of these "boundaryless" mentoring relationships and the processes by which they begin and end represent an important area for future research.

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