Graduate Student - Faculty Mentoring: Does Gender Matter?

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GRADUATE STUDENT—FACULTY MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS: DOES GENDER MATTER?

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Minnesota Duluth, 1997

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This thesis, submitted by Jodi L. Hallsten in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the faculty advisory committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

(Chairperson)

This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Dean of the Graduate School

Date
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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is an historically popular way to successfully guide a younger person’s talents in a given field. The success of a mentoring relationship relies on close and frequent communication between its participants. When communication breaks down between a mentor and protégé the relationship cannot fulfill its mentoring function and is rendered ineffective.

Communication literature asserts that women and men are socialized at very young ages into distinct, gender specific communities (Tannen, 1990; Tingley, 1993, and Wood, 1994). As a result of the different communication styles used by each gender, interactions between women and men often result in misunderstandings. In mentoring relationships, when communication between participants is vital to the relationship effectiveness, different communication styles, such as those resulting from gender differences, could cause complexities that affect the communication and ultimately the mentoring relationship success.

The collection of data for this study employed qualitative research methods involving telephone interviews with male and female participants (both mentors and protégés) in a formal graduate student-faculty mentoring program at a large university. Results of the study indicate that gender-specific communication style differences are
virtually non-existent in such mentoring relationships, and gender plays little, if any, role in the function and success of these graduate student-faculty mentoring relationships.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Odysseus left his son Telemachus with his good and trusted friend Mentor, to guide, teach, and counsel the boy whilst Odysseus was away. During Odysseus' absence, suitors began calling on his wife and threatening Telemachus. When Odysseus finally returned many years later he joined his well educated, grown son, and together they defeated the suitors and lived happily ever after.

A famous epic saga, Homer's *Odyssey* introduced the concept of mentoring as a way to guide, counsel, and educate a young, inexperienced person. Mentoring is still heralded widely as an effective way to guide a younger person's talents in a given field. In academia, mentoring is a way for students to establish productive relationships with professors. Mentoring can benefit all members involved. It can enhance the protégé's career and personal development while helping rejuvenate the career of, and bringing personal satisfaction to, the mentor.

Successful mentoring relationships develop over four stages, identified by Kram (1985) as initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Through these stages, a deep, emotional bond is usually formed between the mentor and protégé as a result of the close and frequent communication necessary for successful relational functioning. When communication breaks down between a mentor and protégé, the relationship effectiveness
is compromised. One reason for communication complexities in mentoring relationships is disparate communication styles used by the participants (Kram, 1985). This situation impedes the development of the relationship by preventing function fruition.

The literature on mentoring recognizes gender as an important issue in relationship effectiveness. As a result of distinct, gender specific socialization, men and women use different communication styles. Tannen (1990) and Wood (1994) assert that women and men often have difficulty communicating with one another effectively. If a mentoring dyad consists of a member of each gender, the communication difficulties that may arise as a result of the different communication styles used by each participant could impact the relationship so severely as to render it useless.

Because mentoring is widely used within organizations as a tool to enhance career and personal development of new and seasoned employees and students, it is important to understand the communication that occurs between mentors and protégés. Questions that arise from the implications of gender and mentoring include:

- What effect, if any, do different communication styles have on a mentoring relationship?
- What, if anything, influences a protégé to change communication styles during a mentoring relationship?
- What is the status of a formally paired mentoring relationship following the period of required interaction?
The answers to these questions can give those who have established formal mentoring programs, or those that are considering implementing formal mentoring programs, a better comprehension of the role gender plays in mentoring relationships. Furthermore, understanding the communication that women and men use in mentoring relationships furthers understanding of gender communication, still a young field.

An obvious necessary next step in understanding more clearly this important issue is a thorough awareness of mentoring relationships: their functions and stages, in addition to understanding the communication styles each gender uses, how they develop, and how gender communication styles interconnect with mentoring in organizations and academia.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of previous and relevant research on mentoring and gender communication will give the reader a thorough understanding of the problems presented in this document. Only when such an understanding is reached can the reader recognize why the questions that guide the current research are of significance and deserve exploration.

The concept of mentoring — when a younger person enters a career under the guidance and support of an older, more experienced person — is ancient. An important tool in the training, development, and upward mobility of young professionals, it is widely used throughout many organizations. Since the 1980's interest in mentoring has surged (Braun, 1998). According to Zey (1989), the major organizational social and economic trends that have led to the rise in this phenomenon include the quest for innovation, the merger explosion, the changing composition of the workforce, the labor shortage, and the emergence of the cross cultural corporation. Mentoring has helped to solve the problems caused by these trends.

With an immense amount of literature on mentoring since its recent resurgence in popularity, many definitions exist. They are generally similar and include phrases such as providing support and guidance; helping someone to learn; helping develop leadership abilities; tutelage; promotion of upward mobility, and counsel. The definition for
mentoring used in this research is a combination of definitions by several researchers:

An influential, senior member of the profession or organization with advanced experience and knowledge, who shares values and is committed to providing emotional support, career counseling, information, advice, professional and organizational sponsorship, and facilitates access to key organizational and professional networks. (Olian, Carroll, Giannantonio & Fere, 1988, p. 16; see also Collins, 1983; Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979).

Mentoring can occur in many ways, including team mentoring, group mentoring, peer mentoring, and dyadic mentoring. This research shall focus on dyadic mentoring.

Dyadic mentoring is a mentoring relationship between two people: a mentor (the one providing the support and guidance) and a protégé (the less experienced person). Each member of the relationship assumes a specific role. According to Levinson (1978), “a mentor may act as a teacher to enhance the younger person’s skills” (p. 98). Kram (1985) adds, “a mentor supports and guides the young adult” (p. 2). In addition, Noe (1988) maintains, “mentors also act as an outlet for protégés to discuss confidentially their personal concerns and fears, and to facilitate informal exchanges of information about work and nonwork experiences” (p. 66). Collins (1983) best describes the role of the protégé: “the willingness to assume responsibility for her or his own growth and development, and receptivity to feedback and coaching” (pp. 13-14).

Certain relationship characteristics are unique to dyadic mentoring. Hunt and Michael (1983), Missirian (1982), and Shapiro, Haseltine and Rowe (1978) agree that the
mentor-protégé dyad relationship is extremely intense, emotionally charged, and hierarchical, fostering deep strong feelings of gratitude, admiration, respect, love, and trust.

Mentoring can be beneficial to all members involved. In a mentoring dyad the protégé may experience career enhancement, elevated self esteem, an introduction to corporate structure and politics, professional sponsorship, and personal development (Collins, 1983; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993; Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989). Though there is no restriction or guideline on the age of a protégé, Kram (1985) asserts that mentoring is extremely beneficial to young adults:

Young adults who are launching new careers are concerned about competence, whether they will succeed, and are searching for occupational identities. In addition, these concerns about self and career are accompanied by concerns about family life as well. Finding the appropriate structure and balance with one’s work life are critical challenges that are part of what one brings to relationships at work. (p. 13)

Mentors can help guide and counsel a young person as she or he addresses, and progresses beyond, these concerns.

Hunt and Michael (1983) contend that “mentoring gives mentors the opportunity to develop a base of technological support, respect, and power throughout the organization for future use” (p. 475). Other benefits for the mentor include fulfillment from nurturing the professional and personal development of a protégé, internal
satisfaction from passing skills and wisdom to a protégé, and career rejuvenation from interaction with a creative, youthful, and energetic protégé (Ragins & Scandura, 1994, p. 994).

Organizations that sponsor or facilitate mentoring programs benefit through increased employee motivation and production, personnel retention, and improved employee morale (Murray, 1991). In addition, as a training tool, mentoring is powerful in recruiting. O’Reilly (1989) explains:

Recognizing that the people we hire will be the future leaders of our company, we develop our employees technically and continue to invest in them. [Because of the mentoring program] recruits can see we just don’t throw them into a difficult job and say good luck. (p. 4)

Mentoring in academia has similar benefits. DeCoster and Brown (1982) explain that mentoring can “enhance the quality of faculty-student relationships in college; provide a proactive, developmental perspective for student affairs educators; and assist in humanizing the general college environment for students” (pp. 13-15). Mentoring has also been known to benefit graduate students by providing information on unspoken rules and politics in departments, and enhance student productivity towards publication (Waldeck, Orrego, Plax & Kearney, 1997).

Waldeck et al. (1997) believe that students’ experience of graduate school is unnecessarily difficult without the guidance of a faculty mentor. Phillips (1979) maintains:
The intimate mentoring relationship between professor and student is imperative in graduate studies. Success or failure in the profession depends on locating a mentor who is properly sympathetic, who has an accommodating style, and who is willing to carry the student through to a completed program. (pp. 340-341)

In addition, Hills, Bahniuk and Dobos (1989) found that graduate students who are mentored have lower levels of communication apprehension.

For any mentoring relationship to be successful the mentor and protégé must spend a great deal of time interacting. Collins (1983) explains:

A mentor and protégé should be willing to commit time and emotion to the relationship. This is an intense commitment; one of great devotion. There must be a mutual willingness to develop and foster the relationship. It takes time to discuss both fears and problems, as well as to share victories and successes. (p.8)

If either the mentor or the protégé are not committed to the relationship and the time it requires, its objective will have not been rendered and the protégé will not advance.

Functions of a Mentoring Relationship

Unlike other work relationships, mentoring relationships enhance development through their functions. Much of the literature on mentoring discusses the functions by separating them into two categories: those that are perceived as helping enhance the career of the protégé, and those that are perceived as supporting and guiding the psychological and social development of the protégé (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1987; Olian et
al., 1988; Ragins, 1989; & Waldeck et al., 1997). Widely cited throughout the literature on mentoring, Kram (1985) labels these two categories of functions that mentoring relationships provide as “career functions” and “psychosocial functions.”

Career functions are those aspects of the relationships that enhance career advancement. They include sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging work assignments, and are possible because of the mentor’s position, experience, and organizational influence. Psychosocial functions are those aspects of the relationship that enhance sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. They include role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship, and depend more on the quality of the interpersonal relationship. (pp. 23-32.)

However, the functions are not solely beneficial to the protégé. Career functions serve the mentor in a variety of ways as well. Sponsorship of the protégé is a reflection of the mentor’s good judgement, coaching validates the value of the mentor’s experience, and advancement of the protégé reflects the mentor’s ability to develop young talent for the organization (Kram, 1985). Psychosocial functions also serve the mentor. Through her or his interaction with the protégé the mentor is able to reconnect with the “youthful parts of her or himself,” reflecting on previous pivotal points of decision during earlier career stages, and overall “enhance an individual’s sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in her or his work role” (Kram, 1985, p. 39). The functions of a mentoring relationship are easily identified by the abundant meaningful rewards for both the mentor
and protégé. The functions are served as the relationship evolves through the four stages of a mentoring relationship.

Stages of a Relationship

Mentoring relationships grow and develop in stages. Career and psychosocial functions of a mentoring relationship occur in four stages: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Each stage has distinct characteristics and levels of mentor and protégé development. In addition, recognizing that the relationship has stages indicates that mentoring relationships have distinct beginnings and ends. Kram (1985) claims that mentoring relationships must come to an end so the protégé can establish autonomy.

Kram’s (1985) research on stages in mentoring relationships is echoed throughout the current literature. Because this research is acknowledged by numerous other researchers, including those who have studied mentoring in academia, it is used as a guide for the research in this paper.

Stage 1: Initiation

Stage one of a mentoring relationship, approximately six to twelve months in duration, is the initiation stage. It is characterized mainly by what Kram (1985) refers to as a fantasy. This stage is where the protégé takes notice of the mentor and respects and admires her or him for her or his competence and capacity to provide support and guidance (p. 51). The fantasy becomes reality a short time later when the protégé is given challenging tasks and the mentor displays behavior that exhibits confidence and
encouragement; the protégé recognizes the affirmation of being perceived as intelligent, respected, and having potential.

In the initiation stage the mentor also experiences a fantasy. The (potential) protégé is noticed by the mentor as someone who, according to Kram (1985), is “coachable, someone with potential, and someone who is enjoyable to work with” (p. 51). Kram believes that the mentor recognizes the value in the protégé as someone who can be an object of transmission for the mentor’s values and positions in the organization. The fantasies in the initiation phase lead to reinforcing behaviors in the second stage.

Stage Two: Cultivation

The cultivation stage is characterized by mentor and protégé fantasies becoming reality. In this stage the functions begin to emerge and the benefits begin to be gained.

It is important for the mentor to be able to anticipate and respond to the protégé’s needs. This becomes part of the psychosocial function of the relationship. The bond between the mentor and protégé strengthens greatly in this stage, and intimate interactions such as counseling and friendship occur. In addition, career functions emerge. The mentor engages in behaviors such as publicizing and protecting the protégé while continuing to challenge her or him, creating an environment that fosters the protégé’s growth.

Kram (1985) explains that in this stage the relationship navigates towards mutual exchange:
The mentor feels satisfaction in knowing she or he positively influenced the protégé's individual development through the transmission of values and skills that enhanced her or his capabilities. The protégé derives a sense of accomplishment and security as she or he becomes competent and feels increasingly confirmed and respected. (pp. 54-55)

Because the protégé can reach her or his potential in the cultivation phase, a natural next step in the progression of this relationship is the separation stage.

**Stage Three: Separation**

The separation stage is a "letting go" stage in the mentoring relationship. The mentor lets go of the influence over, and support of, the protégé, while the protégé lets go of the security of the relationship functions. Though a time of loss for both, it can also be a time of excitement. The protégé has the opportunity to prove her or himself adept at handling new and important job tasks alone, while the mentor can take pride in a job well done.

Kram (1985) asserts that the separation stage is critical to the development of both mentor and protégé.

It allows the protégé to demonstrate essential job skills while operating without support from the mentor. At the same time, it enables the mentor to demonstrate to her or himself, peers, and superiors that she or he is successful in developing new talent. (p. 60)
The separation stage occurs for two reasons. Physical distance and a decrease in authority over the protégé prohibit the mentor from continuing to provide career and psychosocial functions. Similarly, the demands of a new arrangement reduce the protégé’s energy available for the developmental relationship (Kram, 1985, p. 60).

Crucial to the separation stage is the time in which it occurs. Structural and psychological separation should occur at a time when the protégé is ready and able to function effectively alone. According to Kram (1985),

If a structural separation occurs prematurely, anxiety may result as the protégé is forced to operate independently of her or his mentor before feeling ready to do so. If it occurs later than emotional separation, either mentor or protégé is likely to resent the other as the relationship becomes unresponsive to individuals’ changing needs and concerns. (p. 56)

The separation stage is necessary because the members involved have no further need for the relationship in its previous form. The separation stage, though characterized as an “end,” is actually just a necessary step towards the final stage: redefinition.

**Stage Four: Redefinition**

In a successful mentoring relationship respect, love, and trust grow from time and interaction between the mentor and protégé. When the two “separate,” they no longer benefit from the functions of the relationship. However, because of the strong bond between them, the relationship does not terminate, it evolves into the final stage, redefinition.
This final stage does not occur without discomfort. Ambivalence, uncertainty, and sometimes competitive feelings arise. As a result of these feelings, the redefinition stage can take different routes. Ideally, and quite often, the relationship evolves into a permanent friendship. Although the mentor still supports the protégé, it is now only from a distance. The protégé works independently from the mentor, but based on the friendship, can still call upon the mentor for counsel.

If psychosocial functions are never achieved in the mentoring relationship, friendship may not follow separation. Since the dyad was not friendly during cultivation it does not endure separation. Kram (1985) maintains:

The redefinition stage is evidence of changes that occurred in both individuals. Since both have experienced a shift in developmental tasks, the previous relationship is no longer desired or needed. Over time these developmental relations continue as friendships or gradually fade into positive memories. (pp. 62-63)

The redefinition stage gives rise to new relationships: with peers and subordinates for the protégé, and often with a new protégé for the mentor (Kram, 1985).

Gender and Mentoring

Much of the literature on mentoring recognizes gender as an important issue in mentor-protégé relationships (e.g. Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Ragins, 1985). The dynamics of mentoring seem to change when the participants are of opposite genders. This, according to Kram, may have a range of effects on the relationship and
participants. To better understand the important role gender plays in mentoring relationships requires an understanding of the communication used by each gender.

A communication style — the way a person communicates, both verbally and nonverbally — begins to develop very early in life through socialization. Often separated by biological sex, young children primarily interact with members of the same sex, thus experiencing different socialization. This separate socialization process of each sex creates gendered speech communities. In these communities girls and boys learn how to interact in very gender-specific ways (Braun, 1998).

According to Wood (1999), communication rules for boys are:

1. Use communication to assert yourself and your ideas; use talk to achieve something.

2. Use communication to attract and maintain an audience.

3. Use communication to compete with others for the “talk stage,” so that they do not gain more attention than you. Learn to wrest the focus from others onto yourself. (p. 121)

Rules for girls are:

1. Use collaborative, cooperative talk to create and maintain relationships.

   The *process* of communication, not its content, is the heart of relationships.

2. Avoid criticizing, outdoing, or putting others down; if criticism is necessary, make it gentle; never exclude others.
3. Pay attention to others and to relationships; interpret and respond to others' feelings appropriately. (p. 122)

As individuals enter adulthood these gender-specific rules continue to guide communication. As we interact with others throughout life, society encourages their acceptance and embodiment in all communication (Wood, 1996). As a result, expectations for each gender are dissimilar. For women, Wood states, "society encourages women to be sensitive to relationships and to others' feelings, and many women reflect these feminine prescriptions. Men are generally urged to be competitive and emotionally controlled, and this learning surfaces in how many men communicate" (p. 6). Though different, each communication style is valid, and both ways of talking are not inherently right or wrong.

Disparate Gender Communication Styles

In her meta-analysis of eight studies on communicator style and biological sex, McDonald Pruett (1989) concluded that communicator style variables differ consistently between the sexes. Communication styles between the sexes have been regarded as so different that Johnson (1989) and Tannen (1990) describe women and men as "from different worlds." Tannen explains, "Women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence" (p. 42).

Indeed, Tannen (1990) says that intimacy is important in a world of connection for women, where "individuals negotiate complex networks of friendship, minimize differences, try to reach consensus, and avoid the appearance of superiority, which
would highlight differences” (p. 26). For women, then, talk is the essence of relationships, and communication establishes that intimacy and maintains those relationships (Tannen, 1990; Tingley, 1994; Wood, 1994).

However, for men, independence is key because “a primary means of establishing status is to tell others what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status” (Tannen, 1990, p. 26). Thus, talk for men is a means of preserving independence, competition for position, and is goal oriented (Tannen, 1990; Tingley, 1994; Wood, 1994).

Dissimilar gender styles are also evident in conversation maintenance. Women and men have different ways of keeping a conversation going once communication is established. Wood (1996) identifies these differences:

Feminine culture emphasizes including others, responding, and sharing the talk stage. Masculine culture stresses competing for status and attention. The masculine emphasis on independence leads many men not to tune into others or feel responsible for including them in conversation. Men feel no need to invite others to talk because they assume others will speak up if they have something to say. (p. 157)

Gender socialization also affects women’s and men’s nonverbal behavior. Women are socialized to display responsive nonverbal communication. Proper to women’s communication prescription of establishing intimacy, their responsive nonverbal communication style demonstrates engagement and involvement with others. Socialized to focus on status and hierarchical relationships, men use vocal inflection,
gestures, and proxemics to nonverbally supplement their verbal communication. For example, in sharp contrast to women, resisting eye contact for men is a way of establishing friendly connection (Tannen, 1990).

Because women are socialized to maintain emotional bonds, they are naturally more interested in empathy and feelings, and subsequently are more attentive to nonverbal behavior than men (Hall, 1978). Unfortunately, however, women and men frequently misinterpret nonverbal communication because of their differences in style. According to Wood (1994), “A woman could easily judge a man to be insensitive and domineering if he keeps an impassive face and offers little response to her talk” (p. 172).

Conversational style differences between genders, though obviously significant, are still subtle enough that in conversation they are often not recognized. This oversight is noted by Tannen (1990) when she explains, “Women and men are inclined to understand each other in terms of their own styles because we assume we all live in the same world” (p. 179).

Meaning in conversation resides in the receiver's interpretation of a message. In an interaction between members of different speech communities (such as gendered speech communities), the meaning of an interaction will be interpreted based on each person’s community (gender) distinct rules. The frequent result of different translations is misinterpretation and subsequent complications in interactions between women and men.
Differences in Gender Communication Styles in the Workplace

In organizations, where communication between the sexes is recurrent, the consequences of different styles of communication can be dire. Unfortunately, a widespread belief is that difficulties that arise from differences in communication between genders disappears in the workplace (Wood, 1996). Another widespread belief stated by Wood is that “neutral professional standards guide most professional communicative behavior” (p. 214). However, research indicates that gender significantly affects communication between men and women, and denying its influence is detrimental to both sexes and the work environment as a whole (Tannen, 1990; Tingley, 1994; Wood, 1996).

Historically speaking, women have only recently entered the workforce. Therefore, the prevailing professional culture over time has been masculine, and women, socialized differently from men, have entered it at a disadvantage (Tingley, 1994; Wood, 1996). Since women are socialized to maintain connections and men are socialized to compete for status, men are more disposed to boast about their accomplishments, while women are more inclined to downplay their achievements (in order to avoid asymmetrical relationships with coworkers). Yet many women have just as many, and sometimes more accomplishments, than men, but because of the polarized communication styles, upper management may only hear of the successes of men, much to the detriment of women.
Communication styles also differ greatly in women’s and men’s professional communication approaches to problem solving. Using a task-oriented approach, men discuss problems intending to solve them; communication becomes a means to an end. Conversely, women, following their socialized prescription of maintaining affinity and symmetry in relationships, approach conversation about problems as discussion towards empathy and understanding. It is not uncommon for men to react to what they perceive as women’s “pointless complaining” with frustration (Wood, 1996).

To establish and maintain friendly working relationships requires that workers are comfortable with one another, and this is established through informal, nonwork conversation (Tannen, 1994). The difference between the genders lies in what each discusses. But, according to Tannen, talk at work is not confined to talk about work, and communication style-based problems arise out of the friendly nonwork conversation that transpires as well.

Women’s nonwork talk revolves around their personal lives and relationships. The subject of men’s nonwork talk is usually centered on sports or politics. The problem that arises is that women and men easily get left out of each other’s conversations, and subsequently left out of the informal, friendly conversations which help maintain a friendly working environment (Tannen 1990, 1994).

Clearly, differences in communication styles as a result of gender socialization create complexities in communication between women and men which impact virtually every interaction in life.
Gender, Communication Styles, and Mentoring Relationships

The preceding analysis of the literature asserts that successful mentoring is extremely beneficial. Collins (1983) emphasizes the immense amount of time and interaction necessary for successful mentoring. With the knowledge that mentor-protégé roles are not gender specific, and under Tannen’s (1990) and Wood’s (1994) postulate that men and women have difficulty communicating with one another effectively, the combination of the premises suggests that cross-gendered mentoring dyads could engage in dissimilar communication that would hinder the achievement of success.

Based on this hypothesis, and Wood’s (1985) conclusion that women downplay their achievements to maintain asymmetrical relationships, Noe (1989) maintains that if female protégé’s fail to stress their expertise, male mentors may perceive them as capable of providing only limited assistance towards the achievement of personal objectives (p. 71). Furthermore, Olian et al. (1988) discovered in their research of mentor-protégé relationships that women are more sensitive to nonpositive social cues than are men (p. 35). Considering the closeness of the bonds developed in a mentoring relationship, the implications of this miscommunication on psychosocial development could be profound.

Because the communication styles and societal expectations of communication styles are so different between the genders, a male mentor may have difficulty understanding that communication that works for a man in an organization may not work for a woman (Missirian, 1982). Kram (1985) states:
Some of the personal and professional dilemmas that young women bring to a work context are very different from those of their male senior colleagues; thus, whatever strategies and solutions a male has developed for coping, or career strategies for managing them, may diverge because what works for a man in a particular work setting won’t necessarily work for a woman. (p. 113)

Noe (1987) discovered that the psychological and psychosocial benefits received by first year mentors were perceived by them as more important than career functions. Kram (1985) and Ragins (1989) noted that some protégés are reluctant to engage in frequent and intimate contact with a protégé of the opposite sex for fear of rumors among coworkers or sexual attraction. Kram (1985) states, and Zey (1984) agrees, that this behavior “cuts off contact that may provide critical information, coaching, and career opportunities, eliminating critical developmental functions” (p. 122).

Levinson (1978) maintains that essential modeling and identification processes are obscure in cross-gendered relationships, and concludes that mentors should be of the same sex. These complexities symbolize how the “virtue of a mentoring relationship can be limited by cross gender dynamics” (Kram, 1985, p. 128).

Implications of Ineffective Mentoring

Successful mentoring relationships create intimate bonds between the mentor and protégé:
We look to our closest relationships as a source of confirmation and reassurance. When those closest to us respond to events differently than we do, seem to see the same scene as part of a different play, say things that we could not imagine saying in the same circumstances, the ground on which we stand seems to tremble and our footing is unsure. (Tannen, 1990, p. 73)

The intense closeness characteristic of a mentoring relationship can cause the complexities that arise out of gender differences to have a profound effect on the protégé if the complexities render the process ineffective.

According to Bullis and Bach (1989), protégés can be left feeling dissatisfied with their jobs and their organization as a result of a negative mentoring experience. Imperative relationship characteristics such as meaningful communication, honesty, trust, and confidence may never occur as a result of a mismatched dyad (Viryani, Crimando, Riggar, & Schimdt, 1992). Waldeck et al. (1997) agree, adding that it is possible that mismatched dyads may also be unable to disengage. In addition, Kram (1980) believes that relationships with the wrong mentor can cost the protégé valuable career time. Furthermore, the protégé can experience negative feedback, by association, as a result of a mismatched dyad.

If the functions of a relationship are not being served and the needs of the protégé are not being met, the relationship could enter the separation stage prematurely. Kram (1985) believes that this can result in feelings of anxiety by the protégé. Further, Hunt
and Michael (1983) state that "relationships that are prematurely ended may result in a loss of self esteem, frustration, blocked opportunity, and sense of being betrayed" (p. 479).

Though cross-gender mentoring can be immensely rewarding, difficulties can arise which reduce significantly the effectiveness of, and satisfaction with, the relationship.

Current Relevant Research

In 1998 Braun conducted a study of 24 participants in a formal faculty-mentoring program at a mid-sized university in the Midwest. She sought to answer four questions in her research: what communication styles female protégés use when initiating a mentoring relationship; whether female protégés can successfully initiate a mentoring relationship when the mentor and protégé use different communication styles; what influences the female protégé to change her communication style during the cultivation stage of a mentoring relationship; and, whether a mentoring relationship prematurely enters the separation stage when the mentor and protégé do not share a communication style (p. 23).

Braun learned from her research that most mentor participants were significantly influenced in their communication styles by their mentor, and those few that did not share the same communication style as their mentor did not experience a premature separation stage in their relationship as a result of the difference. In addition, protégés with different communication styles than their mentors were able to initiate successful mentoring relationship without difficulty despite their differences.
The results of Braun's research are significant, but focuses only on mentoring relationships among college faculty. It remains to be seen if these same findings would apply to a different audience: graduate students in mentoring programs.

Research Questions

Based on Braun's highly suggestive findings, in conjunction with the literature on mentoring, gender, and communication styles, which, when considered together imply that participants in cross-gender mentoring relationships may experience difficulty in the relationship as a result of the different communication styles used by each member, the following research questions arise regarding the new audience of graduate students:

• What effect, if any, do different communication styles between a mentor and protégé have on a mentoring relationship?

• What, if anything, influences a protégé to change communication styles during the cultivation stage of a mentoring relationship?

• What is the status of a formally paired mentoring relationship following the period of required interaction?

These questions are important for many reasons. First, men and women are socialized by gender into separate, distinct speech communities (Wood, 1994). These speech communities teach communication styles that women and men use throughout life. Research indicates that as a result of these disparate styles, communication between women and men can often lead to misunderstandings. In an important, developmental relationship, research needs to ask, do different communication styles have an impact on
a mentoring relationship? Learning the answer to this will be beneficial to those involved in mentoring program by indicating whether or not it is prudent to place members of opposite sex together in a mentoring relationship.

The second research question seeks to understand what influences a protégé to change communication styles during the process of a mentoring relationship. Learning the reasons behind any style changes made by protégés should further indicate the effect of style differences in a mentoring relationship. Furthermore, if parties have different communication styles, through the answer to this question it should become evident if the mentor has influence over the communication style of the protégé. If that is the case, and should the protégé choose not to change her or his style as a result, the answer to the question may indicate whether or not a relationship prematurely enters the separation stage as a result. Finally, the research questions also stand to validate the previous research on gendered communication styles and their implications for interpersonal communication.

This research holds great importance to the academic community, specifically to those who have, or are considering implementing mentoring programs. Beyond this, any organization with an interest in formal mentoring programs should find the research important because of the influential role mentoring currently plays in organizations. Finally, in the field of communication research this is beneficial because it furthers understanding in gender communication, a relatively young field.
The next step in the current study is an overview of the methods used to guide the research. A thorough understanding of the participants and how the data was collected will help the reader understand the data and subsequent conclusions of the study.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative inquiry holds that reality is socially constructed. That is, people's words, feelings, and thoughts paint a realistic portrait of the world around them. Ethnographic research, as a qualitative study, allows the researcher to observe and identify the subjects' world with both their words and those of the subjects themselves. This method is appropriate for this study because it allows the subjects to describe in their own words the communication styles used in their mentoring relationships. Therefore, instead of relying on preexisting explanations of communication styles, a clearer understanding can be reached through subject explanations.

Interaction between mentors and protégés in a mentoring relationship occurs in varied places and at various times over a relatively long period of time. Witnessing this interaction as a researcher is nearly impossible. Ethnographic interviews allow the researcher to gain an understanding of the communication in the interactions, as understood by the subjects, without having to witness each event. For this reason, ethnographic research is not only the most appropriate but also perhaps the only method that will effectively discover communication styles in mentoring relationships.

The Role of the Researcher

In interpretative research, such as ethnographic interviews, the researcher plays a
role in the data obtained. Therefore, biases, values, and judgements of the researcher must be identified and understood prior to the commencement of the research.

This researcher has had no previous experience in a formal mentoring relationship. However, the researcher, at the time of the research, was involved in an informal, cross-gender mentoring relationship in the role of the protégé. This has been identified as an exceptionally positive experience by the researcher, and has given the researcher insight into the value of mentoring during the graduate school experience. In addition, the dynamics of mentoring relationships are more clearly understood by the researcher as a result of the experience. This knowledge was useful, because the researcher understood the explanations of the subjects in the interviewing and data interpretation processes.

Selection of Participants

For this study to fulfill its objective, participants had to meet specific criteria. The research questions focused on communication styles of both genders in both relationship roles (mentor and protégé). Therefore, the sample population had to include participants in both roles, and of both genders, to provide thorough results.

Another criterion used in the selection of the sample was that the mentors and protégés had to be formally paired in a mentoring program. Informal mentor relationships were not considered.

This thesis is a study of a method of mentoring graduate students by the faculty of a large Midwestern university. The communication department of the university is in its third year of a mentoring program between faculty and first semester graduate teaching
assistants (GA’s). The program was established to ensure quality instruction of its basic course (Comm 110), taught overwhelmingly by GA’s. Faculty who serve as mentors are required to instruct the basic course. As a result, temporary faculty as well as full-time professors are involved. Because of the size of the program and number of GA’s involved, faculty mentors had two or more protégés assigned to them per semester.

The program pairs incoming (first semester) GA’s with faculty members based on the participants’ schedules. Protégés are required to attend the basic course with their assigned mentor every day class is held, assisting with tasks such as grading, test writing, and at the instructors discretion, occasional lecturing. In addition, protégés must also meet with their assigned mentor outside of class five hours per week for discussion and guidance. Following this semester, protégés are assigned their own section of the same basic course to teach throughout the remainder of their time at the university.

There is a limitation in the use of the participants in this university's program since the program requires the mentor and protégé to interact for one semester - approximately four months. The literature on mentoring, as described in the literature review, indicates that the initiation stage (first stage) of a mentoring relationship lasts approximately six months. Therefore, the length of time required for interaction at this university does not even equal that of the average length of time in only one of the four stages. However, it is important to understand that the participants in this program are required to interact for four months. After that time, participants are encouraged, but are not required, to continue the mentoring relationship. As a result, some mentoring relationships end, but many continue. It proved valuable to interview participants
from both types of relationships to determine whether their duration was a result of, or affected by, communication styles.

The selection of participants was aided by recommendations by the program director. The director, a trustworthy source because of familiarity with faculty participants and personal experience in the program, provided the researcher with a list of nine faculty mentors and 38 current GA’s. The researcher then contacted every person via e-mail to ask for their participation. The e-mail letter provided an overview of the study, explained the research process, and guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality. By responding, participants acknowledged and agreed to allow audio recording and transcription of the interview. To comply with institutional review board rules, the letter also guaranteed destruction of all transcriptions and audio tapes following the completion of the research.

Of the 38 GA’s contacted, eighteen responded. Two GA’s refused participation, and 16 agreed, though six were either unable to be reached or were unavailable for interviews until long after the data collection process was completed. Of the nine faculty mentors contacted, four responded, but one was unable to be contacted. The breakdown of the participants who completed interviews is shown in Table 1. All of the faculty mentors interviewed had experience mentoring protégés of both genders.

Table I

Subjects by role and gender
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Mentors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Mentors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Protégés</td>
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<td>Mentored by Females</td>
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<td>Female Protégés</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored by Males</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored by Females</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participants</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the limited number of interviews conducted, and limited data gathered, a limitation of the study is recognized. That the results indicate a similarity in communication styles across both genders and relationship roles could suggest that only people of a certain communication style are the type of people who would respond to such a call for research participation. In addition, a limitation exists in the gender of the faculty mentors interviewed. No interviews were conducted with female faculty members, though several were contacted to request participation. However, since three protégés interviewed (including one male) described their relationships with female mentors, the researcher believes that experiences with female mentors are reasonably, though perhaps not sufficiently, explored in the data. In addition, the point when the interviews failed to produce much new information was reached after about six interviews. As a result it was ascertained that the information gathered was sufficient.

Interview Setting

All interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews occurred on all days of the week and at various times of each day. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Participants were advised to choose a private place where they felt
comfortable in answering all questions openly and honestly. None of the participants was
alerted of the others involved in the study, and great care was taken to ensure each
subject's privacy.

Interview Protocol

The interviews began with an overview of the study and its purpose. A list of 32
interview questions (found in the appendix of this document) was asked of each
participant. Questions varied slightly depending on the role of the subject in her or his
mentoring relationship; for example, mentors were not asked questions pertaining to how
they felt in a protégé role because it didn't apply to them. In addition, the researcher
asked additional questions based on the information provided by the subject, i.e. if the
point needed further clarification for understanding.

The interview questions began directed towards the communication style used by
the participant while in the mentoring relationship. Subjects were questioned about what
they perceived their mentor/protégé's style to be, and whether they attributed their own
communication style or that of their mentor/protégés to gender. Interviews concluded
with questions about how the mentoring relationship had ended and asked for any
additional comments the participants wished to add (most had additional comments). The
interviews lasted from 15 to 75 minutes, depending on the length of the subject's
responses to the questions. Because all of the participants adequately answered interview
questions, no follow up interviews were necessary. The interviewing process lasted
twelve days. The questions presented in the interviews sought data to answer the
following research questions:
• What effect, if any, do different communication styles between a mentor and protégé have on a mentoring relationship?

• What, if anything, influences a protégé to change communication styles during a mentoring relationship?

• What is the status of a formally paired mentoring relationship following the period of required interaction?
CHAPTER IV
DATA, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will focus on interpretation and discussion of the data gathered from interviews with the research participants. The organization of the chapter follows each of the three research questions.

Communication Styles and Effects

The first research question asks, “what effect, if any, do different communication styles between a mentor and protégé have on a mentoring relationship?” The question was asked under the assumption that women and men have different communication styles which, when paired together in a mentoring relationship, could cause difficulties. The results indicate that the graduate level academic setting at this university seems to be a “culture” which has a certain non gender-specific communication style that all genders seem to employ. Furthermore, in mentoring relationships where members may have different communication styles, the differences were minimal and/or do not seem to affect the functioning of the relationship. It was also discovered that power roles (dominant/subordinate), unrelated to the gender of the participants, though affecting the communication that occurred in some relationships, did not affect the overall functioning of the relationships, or the benefits each participant derived from the opportunity.

To understand communication style differences, subjects were first asked to describe their own communication styles. Though the subjects used a variety of
terms, “open” was used most predominantly, followed by “outgoing,” “easy-going,” and "assertive.” No subjects described their communication styles in negative terms, and most had difficulty separating their description of communication style from a description of their personality. There was no overall difference in the descriptors each gender used to define their own communication styles; both genders used terms like “easy going,” “assertive,” and “direct.”

The women and men interviewed did not see their gender as a major influence on their communication style equally. While all of the men interviewed believed that their communication style was not attributed to their gender, most of the women felt their gender played at least some role in their communication style (some more than others). One male stated that gender did not “at all” play a role in his communication style, yet he described his style as, “assertive; sometimes aggressive,” and said, ‘I always want to get my opinion in because I believe it matters.” According to Wood (1994), one of the communication ‘rules’ for boys is to “use communication to assert yourself and your ideas; use talk to achieve something” (p. 139). It seems, then, that this gentleman clearly ascribed to Wood’s masculine communication style description, even though he did not believe his gender influenced his communication style. However, his response was the only response of that kind.

The current research supports the research that asserts that men talk more than women (Aries, 1987; Easkins & Easkins, 1976; Tannen 1990; Wood, 1999) and
research by Wood (1994), who contends that the male communication rule is to assert
yourself or your ideas. Average transcription lengths for interviews with men averaged
eight pages, while those with women averaged only six. In addition, men’s responses to
the interview questions were significantly longer than the responses by women. The
average word count of the transcribed interviews with males was 3,314, while for women
was only 1,911. Therefore, although not all of the men interviewed described their
communication style as stereotypically “male,” or perceived themselves as
communicating in that way (or even overtly communicated in that manner), the male
subjects as a whole seemed to ascribe to the pattern that mirrors the literature.

All subjects described the communication styles that they perceived their
mentor/protégés using with similar terms as they did their own styles. Again, descriptors
used by both men and women included terms like “laid-back” and “assertive.” The few
that noted differences in the communication styles between themselves and their mentors/
protégés described them in a way that either made the differences seem insignificant, or
that qualified the differences in some manner.

**Protégé Responses**

One male student noted of his male mentor:

I might be a little more on the assertive side [than my mentor], but I think that’s
more due to the professional relationship. It’s easier for me as a student to just
come out and say things, where faculty will be more apt to listen wholeheartedly
to what you have to say every time.
Another student illustrated of her female mentor:

> She seems to really be supportive of some people, but it doesn’t quite happen to me, and I think part of it is probably my fault. I tend to be, “Oh, I don’t want to bother you...”

The majority of subjects who identified differences noted little impact on their relationships. A female protégé noted of the style differences she perceived in her mentoring relationship that, “I know that I’m a high interrupter. I think that may – I don’t think it necessarily causes problems, but I do think he [her mentor] notices it.” Some mentors, too, noticed non-problem causing style differences.

**Mentor Responses**

One mentor explained his experience with communication style differences:

> If you’re so assertive and so aggressive that you won’t listen to any suggestions that I have, then that’s going to be problematic. . . . And that caused problems when that style of communication clashed with some of the expectations that we have for communication with students in the classroom. . . . I wasn’t exactly sure in the beginning whether or not he [the protégé] was getting what I was saying to him, or if he was getting it and just kind of throwing it back in my face.

But that mentor also said that “everybody got something out of this relationship,” indicating that though a style difference had caused a misunderstanding, it did not affect the functioning of the mentoring relationship. Another mentor noted of his style difference:
It’s possible that I could confuse my students. Because I’m using this sort of relational notion they might think I’m not concerned with what’s right or wrong, so there may be that confusion, but I’ve never noticed it per se.

Communication style differences between mentors and protégés did not affect these relationships, but there was one exception.

The Exception

One student discussed at length the communication style differences between her and her assigned mentor, and the effect on the mentoring relationship. Defining her own communication style as “shy, but open and expressive,” and her female mentor’s style as “open and emotional in her communication,” she explained that her mentor also communicated “some negative space needs; it’s really sometimes hard to approach her when you feel like she’s busy.” The protégé further explained that her mentor “does tend to be, not beat around the bush, come right out and say things.” And that made the subject feel:

For the most part, good. You don’t have to second-guess anything with her: she’ll come right out and tell you. But it’s also, I don’t know, a little less of an open environment. I don’t know, she can be harsh, almost.

The protégé believed the style differences affected the functioning of their mentoring relationship, “I think it makes a big difference. . . /?!/ not necessarily get the whole experience. I would like to be able to feel like I’m comfortable enough to ask any things.” The protégé later summarized:
I do think we both tend to be emotional and expressive when it’s allowed, and that is one characteristic that I really like about her. So I think that we are different in some big ways, but we have that similarity, and that’s something that I can relate to. I think we have a very good relationship, but there’s also a lot of times where I feel I could’ve gotten more from, just, you know, the time and comfort I felt.

Of the ten protégés interviewed, this was the only one who indicated a major communication style difference and a subsequent effect.

That all subjects in the current research described both their own and their mentors/protégé’s communication styles using the overall same non gender-specific descriptors, and no significant differences were acknowledged, seems to indicate that those involved in graduate level education use similar communication styles. This may indicate the existence of a communication culture amongst those in graduate level communication education at this university that encourages and fosters an “open,” “easy going,” “direct,” and “assertive” kind of communication style.

Even though female subjects believed that their communication style was influenced to some degree by their gender, it seems from the responses that gender communication differences are in fact minimal in mentoring relationships. One example of this was that members of both genders explored the personal lives of their protégés/mentors in order to enrich (enhance) their relationships. The literature on gender communication in the workplace asserts that a difference in gender communication in the workplace occurs in the small talk that takes place. Tannen (1994) and Wood (1999) assert that non-work
related chat is essential in the workplace; for women this chat tends to surround personal
and family issues, while for men it often surrounds politics and sports. These differences
in topics often cause misunderstandings when one gender does not understand the
important role that such talk plays for the other gender. However, the results of the
current interviews suggest that mentoring relationships are different than normal
workplace socialization because subjects in both gender-similar and gender-opposite
relationships indicated that their discussion often included work-related topics as well as
personal issues and general conversation (usually only characteristic of female
communication). One protégé said of the conversation that occurred between himself and
his male mentor:

We discussed anywhere from, you know, we had the discussions about
construction of tests, what we should do for this lecture, what we should do for
this lecture... we had a very- some days we wouldn’t talk about school at all,
some days that’s all we’d talk about... It was very broad. Kind of a mixture of
both.

Another protégé asserted of himself and his male mentor,

I’ll talk to my mentor about everything from what I did over the weekend, my
plans for the future; I even talk to my mentor about things that are going on in my
personal life... [and] of course everything school related.

A female protégé explained that discussions occurring between herself and her male
mentor included:
The class that we were teaching, and we might discuss how his class was going and how we felt how his students were responding. . . . We talked about what classes we should take. . . . About television. . . . The movies. . . . His past experiences, sports. . .

From these declarations it may be concluded that mentors, having more work (and sometimes life) experience, understand that extreme closeness is vital to a successful mentoring relationship. Therefore, in a mentoring situation, regardless of the genders involved, communication explores personal discussion in order to enhance the members' experience, thus minimizing normal gender communication differences.

**Power Differentials**

Some mentors and protégés recognized that the power relationship (that a student protégé is subordinate to the faculty mentor) affected the communication that occurred in some of the relationships. Both genders in both roles recognized this effect, thus indicating that power differences are not gender influenced.

**Mentor Responses**

One mentor summed up this difference best when he described his experience:

The one thing that was hard to do. . . it was hard to get, I think it was hard for them – it was hard for them to call me by my first name. They wouldn’t do that for a long time. But it was hard for them to, I think, get over the fact that all first year graduate students have. . . that you can actually have a relationship with a professor different than you could when you were an undergraduate. And, for
instance, I had them all over for dinner at the end of the term, and I know it just freaked them out. They just weren’t used to that. . . . And some of them, the communication is stifled at the beginning because they don’t know what they can say, and it’s hard at the beginning to say, ‘you know, really, you can tell me just about anything. It’s not that I’m going to . . . like, feel free to say . . . feel free to criticize me and I’ll feel free to criticize you. That’s both of our jobs.

Indeed, graduate school is different than undergraduate school. Professors tend to be more interested in graduate students than undergraduates because the graduate students have more advanced interests, are more motivated, are usually more capable and are fewer in number than undergraduates. As a result, the communication that occurs between graduate students and faculty occurs at a different level than that which occurs between undergraduate students and faculty. Part of the transition into graduate school is learning this difference and socializing with faculty at a new level. Because the program at this university involves graduate students in their first semester transition, the mentoring relationships may be the first exposure they have to the new communication rules and communication community, thus affecting how they communicate with their faculty mentors.

Another mentor recognized that power seemed to influence the communication between him and his protégés as well:
The status, the relationship, that I’m the professor and they’re the mentee, I think that has a big impact on their communication with me because I think they’re much more deferential and I think that they’re much more conciliatory. And obviously that, that situation, that power differential, will affect the communication greatly.

The other mentor did not describe the power differential as affecting the communication that occurred between him and his protégés, but described communication with them that suggests the issue was there:

One student I had, he was a male student, was very respectful in his communication. Always called me doctor, always sort of had an approach, sort of a humility that he didn’t think he was right, and yet he would still openly discuss concepts and he usually was. . . . And with the female I work with it’s the same way. . . . But there weren’t any status markers of communication per se.

Protégé Responses

Some of the protégés also did not expressly recognize the issue of power affecting their communication, or did not describe it as such, but again, their descriptions of the communication between themselves and their mentors suggest that it affected both their perceptions of the relationship and their communication. Two male protégés with female mentors indicated that their mentor’s (dominant) position affected their communication. One stated:
I’ve met people, probably with similar characteristics to her style. But because I’m in a position where I have to be reverent to her, you know, status... and it’s a learning experience... I’m really, like, examining how I’m going to teach my Comm 110 classes.

The other protegé indicated that his mentor influenced his communication in that, “I do have a great deal of respect for her, and I am often very careful not to put my foot in my mouth.”

A female protégé with a male mentor felt that power was an issue in the mentoring relationships, stating, “I do think it was a good experience for me. The student has, really does have a responsibility though, to show a lot of respect for the mentor.” However, all of these mentors and protégés indicated that they were very pleased with their relationships and that they felt the communication that occurred within the relationships fulfilled their needs.

The subject’s descriptions of the communication that occurred in their relationships identifies that gender differences in communication styles used in mentoring relationships are minimal, and communication style differences between participants have little or no effect on the mentoring relationship. Furthermore, though non gender-specific power differentials within mentoring relationships occasionally affect a protégé’s communication, the effect does not impact the career and psychosocial functions gained from the relationship.
Communication Style Changes and Influences

The second research question asked, “what, if anything, influences a protégé to change her or his communication style during a mentoring relationship?” The author concludes that nearly all protégés change their communication style over the course of a mentoring relationship, and change is overwhelmingly attributed to a mentor’s influence. The responses of those subjects who believed their communication style had changed over the course of the relationship can be categorized into changes in personal communication and changes in classroom communication.

Change in Personal Communication Styles

Six of the ten protégés believed that their personal communication styles had changed over the course of their mentoring relationship. All of those protégés who noticed a difference attributed it to their mentor’s influence.

Protégé Responses

A male protégé indicated at first that his communication style had remained consistent throughout the relationship, but then explained:

I’m less quick to be as vocal as my thoughts are taking place. Not that I wouldn’t think about what I had to say before I’d say it in the past, but now I’m more apt to.

. . . my listening skills have really gotten sharper as a result of my relationship.

Another protégé described a similar change in her style:

I, you know, took note of the fact that, you know, he’s very good about taking things in and listening. You know, critically reflecting what he’s hearing and
then making a comment or statement or asking a question about something. So I have, I think, tried to emulate that a little bit.

**Mentor Responses**

Though he stated that he had not intentionally influenced their personal communication styles, one mentor also spoke about such changes in his protégé’s personal communication style over the semester:

I can see differences in the communication styles my mentees, my female mentees, used last semester. They became more confident in what they were doing and what they were saying. They became more open, they became more, ah, I don’t know... aggressive is probably not the right word, but at least assertive and more willing – the qualifying remarks reduced as the semester went on. They made less of them and I can definitely see the changes in their communication styles.

**Changes in Classroom Communication**

Of the ten protégés interviewed, although two believed that their communication had not changed throughout the course of the relationship, four believed that their classroom communication style had been influenced as a result of their mentoring relationship. It is important to clarify at this point that these students had not previously spent time as instructors, so it can safely be assumed that they had never previously established a personal or specific communication style in the classroom.
Furthermore, it could be argued that the protégés, in describing their classroom communication style, are actually describing their teaching style. However, teaching style could be considered synonymous with communication style because teaching is essentially communicating information to students.

Protégé Responses

One student explained how her mentor had influenced her classroom communication style. She explained, “I watched her /?/ the classroom and I feel like I’m taking a lot of things from her classroom communication.” A male protégé said similar things of his mentor’s influence on his classroom communication style:

When I first got into the program, you know, I was just kind of starting out teaching. I didn’t really know much about it. Just the way he [the mentor] treated us as mentees was how I ended up treating my students. You know, the way he was very opened up /??/ affected how I treated them.

Another protégé explained:

His [the mentor’s] style was really laid-back. He didn’t, like, lecture right out of the book. He was really open to the class. He was able to reach their level, you know, and break things down for them where they were easier for them to understand. So I try to emulate that.

Mentor Responses

The mentors were asked about any influence they may intentionally exert upon the communication style of their protégés. Although one professor said he “would be
against” influencing his protégé’s communication styles, the other two openly discussed their attempts to influence their protégé’s classroom communication styles. One explained:

I try to impart on my mentees that it is important that we, in the classroom, that we provide that [open] kind of communication, or that opportunity for communication as well. . . . I don’t say, “you should talk to your students this way.” About certain things I do because certain issues have to be handled a certain way, you know. I mean, there’s a policy about how we interact with students on certain areas, and that’s got to be followed. . . . In terms of my own communication style I think I am a model, clearly, but I don’t know that I really propagate myself as the model. I don’t think that I say, “emulate me, emulate me; do as I do.”

The other mentor said:

I probably try to get them to, especially at the beginning of the term, to take a style that would be professional and to place some sort of barrier between them and the students (they’re very close in age), so that the style should differentiate them from the students. I think they all try. Especially the, well, the one protégé who is older didn’t need to try as much because she had that difference. But the other two; I think that they did in fact attempt to, you know, take my advice. . . .

One of the mentors who intentionally influences his protégé’s classroom communication style indicated satisfaction with the change he saw in his protégés’
classroom communication style over the course of their relationship: “They certainly gained confidence. And their presentation – when I saw them their presentation went from being nervous in front of the classroom to being able to control and gain the respect of the students.”

The results clearly indicate that mentors have a tremendous amount of influence over their protégé’s communication style regardless of gender, and whether they intend to or not. It appears that such change is perceived positively by the protégés who experience it.

Relationship Status Following the Required Semester

The final research question asks, “in a formally paired mentoring program where participants are required to interact for a determined period of time, what is the status of the relationship following the period of required interaction?” The results from the interviews indicate that most participants remained in the mentoring relationships following the required semester of interaction when both members’ personal research interests matched. Those relationships in which participants research interests were not similar seemed to enter the separation stage after the required semester of interaction.

The status of the mentoring relationship following the required semester of interaction indicates whether the relationship has achieved its intended functions in the required semester. All of the mentors and protégés felt positive about their experience following the required semester of interaction and all were still friendly with their
mentor/protégés. That virtually all of the relationships either continued or entered the separation stage indicates that the mentoring relationships were successful, clearly having achieved career and psychosocial functions, despite any communication style differences the participants may have encountered.

Protégé Responses

Seven of the subjects at the time of the interviews were still in relationships with their faculty-assigned mentors/protégés. Three protégés were still in the first semester of their relationship, spending the required five hours a week with their protégé outside of class time. When asked, these three protégés indicated their satisfaction with the communication in the relationship and felt that both the communication and the relationship in general fulfilled their needs. One indicated that she could foresee the relationship continuing to postgraduate work, while another said that he had learned a “great deal more than I would have otherwise [without a mentor].” He stated:

I’m committed to graduate school, and I’m sure this relationship is very important to that. I don’t know that I will work beyond this first semester ]with my mentor in terms of doing very close work. . . . [because of] the direction of the research that I’m looking at. . . . It’s been a good experience. . . . and my mentor has been very helpful, so I’d recommend it.

Already beyond their first semester of graduate school, the other protégés were no longer required to spend time with their mentor, yet many of them still did. Four of the remaining seven protégés indicated that they were still involved in the mentoring
relationship because their assigned mentor had become a member of their thesis committee. Two of the individuals indicated that they had initially switched mentors during their first semester. Explaining, "we had conflicting personalities," one insisted that it was because of personality differences between herself and her assigned mentor, having nothing to do with communication styles. The other protégé who switched mentors in the first semester did so because his research interests were not the same as his assigned mentor. This protégé was quoted earlier describing the style differences between him and his second mentor, and stated this about his relationship:

    I'm going to remain friends with my mentor probably for the rest of my life. He's played such an important role in not only shaping me as a teacher, as a student, but just overall life lessons. I have so much respect for this man, I don't even know where to start.

Another protégé explained why she had invited her faculty assigned mentor to be her thesis committee chair:

    [The reason my mentor is now my thesis chair] is 100% communication style. Her communication style and her persona makes a person feel like her ideas are respected. She is extremely unlikely to give you inherently negative feedback. More likely she would offer suggestions on how to either reroute your thinking or of something that might work better. . . . She is available and you can tell that she genuinely cares about your projects. . . . And because of all that I respect her.
The remaining protégés who did not have their assigned mentor on their thesis committee indicated that they had good feelings about their mentoring relationships following the first semester. Two still felt close to their mentor. The one who was no longer close to her mentor indicated that one reason for the separation was that he had left the department. She stated:

[The relationship ended] on a good note. It was the end of my first year, and by the second semester of my first year, you know, and we didn’t even have to meet with him any more. So, but if I saw him, you know, in the hallways, I’d say ‘Hey, how ya doing?’ and, you know, he would know me and say hello.

Another protégé who no longer felt directly mentored by her assigned faculty mentor (quoted earlier describing their stark communication differences), had very positive words to say about the relationship despite the communication style differences she had experienced:

I think she would be considered a... kind of gives us the impression that we’re friends. ... Like, it’s not a personal relationship where we’ll call all the time, but at the same time I’ll have a lot of respect for her. ... I think we have a very good relationship. ... I know I will look up to her and remember her when I move on. I hope to see her at conferences and things down the line.

The mentor’s responses were consistent with those of the protégés.
Mentor Responses

One mentor, quoted earlier describing the communication style differences he had experienced in his mentoring relationships, stated:

I still see my mentees in the hall, in the coffee room, in the office. . . . it’s not obviously as frequently as we did last semester, but we still talk about things and they still come and talk to me and ask for advice. . . . So the relationship really has continued, but the communication is a lot less frequent because we just don’t see each other as much. . . . The fact that they’re still coming around, that tells me something about the relationship that we had last semester.

Another mentor explained that following the semester of required interaction he was now, “directing one of their master’s theses; I’m on one other committee. Socially I spend time with them. . . .” The mentor described why he no longer connected as much with the one student from his group of first semester protégés:

My area of research and interest in teaching doesn’t overlap; I wouldn’t fit on her committee. I don’t think it had anything to do with communication style because it, you know. . . . we played poker together a couple of weeks ago.

None of the subjects indicated discomfort or dissatisfaction with their mentoring relationship, and all had positive words to say about the relationship regardless of the stage of the relationship they were in.

The literature on mentoring states that a mentoring relationship is not successful if it does not achieve its intended functions. A successful mentoring relationship
accomplishes all four stages. When the relationship enters the separation stage, the members no longer benefit from the relationship functions, but the relationship does not terminate. Instead it evolves into the redefinition stage because of the strong relational bond between them. Friendship, both during and following the separation stage, indicates the achievement of psychosocial functions in the relationship. Those subjects who no longer felt that they were actively involved in the mentoring process with their assigned mentor/protégé (because they were not involved in the thesis process together) indicated through their positive and detailed responses that they were clearly in the separation stage of the relationship. These statuses of the mentoring relationships indicate they had achieved the intended functions. The mentoring relationships experienced by all subjects ended on positive terms. This indicates the relationships were all successful, despite any communication style related differences or changes that were experienced in the process of the mentoring relationships.

The combined data suggests that differences in the communication styles used by each gender are minimal, and that general communication style differences between a mentor and protégé have little or no impact on the functioning of the relationship. Furthermore, the status of a mentoring relationship between faculty members and graduate students following a required period of interaction depends most importantly upon whether the participants share research interests; gender plays virtually no role.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The concept of mentoring is ancient; in Greek mythology, Ulysses asked Mentor to care and guide his son Telemachus while he was away. Mentoring remains a popular way to guide, socialize, and enhance the experience of young talent in any field by providing career and psychosocial functions. Mentoring is also becoming popular in academia as a way to successfully train graduate teaching assistants and help assimilate and socialize graduate students into graduate school culture.

A successful mentoring relationship evolves through four separate stages, identified by Kram (1985) as initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Mentoring relationships rely on meaningful communication. Collins (1983) asserts that if the communication between the participants is not open and frequent, successful mentoring cannot occur.

Much of the literature on mentoring recognizes gender as an important issue in mentor/protégé relationships (e.g. Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Ragins, 1985). The dynamics of cross gender mentoring seem to change when participants are of the opposite gender. Gender communication literature asserts that men and women are socialized at early ages into distinct, separate gendered speech communities (Tannen, 1990; Wood,
1994). The pattern of communication established and learned in these speech
communities influences men’s and women’s communication styles throughout their lives.
Because of the disparate communication styles used by each gender, cross-gender
mentoring relationships may experience difficulties that significantly influence the
effectiveness of and satisfaction with the relationship. This study sought to understand
more clearly the communication style differences associated with gender, specifically in
graduate student/faculty mentoring relationships.

The research subjects included protégés and mentors involved in formally paired
graduate student/faculty mentoring program at a large Midwestern university. Phone
interviews were conducted with 13 participants of both genders in both relationship roles
in the program. Subjects were asked questions related to the communication styles they
had both used and experienced in their mentoring relationships. The data collected
provided valuable insight into the communication that occurs in such relationships,
answering the following three research questions:

• What effect, if any, do different communication styles between a mentor and protégé
  have on a mentoring relationship?

• What, if anything, influences a protégé to change communication styles during the
cultivation stage of a mentoring relationship?

• What is the status of a formally paired mentoring relationship following the period of
  required interaction?
Summary of Results

Subjects of both genders and in both roles used similar descriptors to define their own and their mentor’s/protégé’s communication styles. These non gender-specific terms included, “open,” “easy-going,” and, “direct.” Although the literature on gender communication describes men’s and women’s communication styles as very distinct and very different, this research indicates that gender related communication differences aren’t as prevalent as the literature suggests (see Tannen, 1990; Tannen, 1994; Wood, 1994; Wood, 1999). Furthermore, the participants experienced only insignificant communication style differences that they felt had little or no impact on the effectiveness of their mentoring relationship. The descriptors that all subjects of both genders used to describe both their own and their mentor’s/ protégé’s communication styles were the same and the style differences they experienced were not significant. For that reason it is the conclusion of this researcher that the department at the university from where the subjects were taken has its own non gender-specific communication style ‘culture’ that most, if not all, use, and into which graduate students are socialized. This has made the mentoring relationships at that institution both rewarding and successful.

Power differentials in mentoring relationships were recognized as having an effect on some protégé’s communication with their mentors. The researcher has attributed this to the protégé’s transition from the undergraduate to the graduate communication culture. Though communication was affected in some relationships, the overall functioning of the relationship was not impacted, and the relationships were still successful.
The data from the interviews indicated that mentors significantly influenced their protégé’s communication styles during the relationship. The protégés believed that their mentors positively influenced both their personal and classroom communication styles. In addition, two of the three mentors interviewed indicated that they intentionally influenced their protégé’s communication styles and felt satisfied with the changes they witnessed as a result of their influence. These results mirror the results of Braun’s (1998) study of academic mentoring relationships, which indicated that faculty protégés of both genders changed their communication styles as a result of influence by their faculty (peer) mentors. Subjects in both studies felt positive about both their mentor’s influence towards communication style change. Because of the similarities in the results of Braun’s research and the current study, this researcher concludes that in academic mentoring relationships, protégé’s communication styles are significantly and positively influenced by their mentor’s communication styles, regardless of gender.

Following the period of required interaction with their formally paired mentors or protégés, all of the subjects reported feeling satisfied about the status of their relationships. Many relationships continued, with the formally paired mentor becoming a member of the protégé’s thesis committee. The most important factor in the status of the relationship following the semester of required interaction was the research interests of the participants. If the mentor and protégé shared research interests, the mentoring relationship remained in the cultivation stage. If the participants did not share research interests, the relationship entered the separation stage. Gender was not a factor in the status of the relationship following the first semester, but communication styles seemed
to play a role. Thus it is concluded that in formally paired mentoring relationships
between faculty and graduate students, both areas of research interest and communication
style dictate how the relationship is redefined following the period of required interaction.

The present research indicates that gender communication style differences are not
as prevalent in mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students as the
literature on gender communication would suggest. Furthermore, communication style is
a noteworthy factor in mentoring relationships. Mentor’s communication styles
significantly influence the communication styles used by protégé’s, and communication
style plays a small but important role in the status of a formally paired mentoring
relationship between faculty members and graduate students.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of the present research indicate that a non gender-specific
communication style “culture” exists in the department of the university from where the
subjects were taken. This could be attributed to the fact that the mentors interviewed
were professors of communication and, therefore, focus more on communication
processes than would professors in other departments. Further research could explore
whether this “culture” exists across academia in all departments, or across academia in
communication departments.

Additional research on this subject could also explore more closely the
communication that occurs in mentoring relationships. Current research methods relied
on participant descriptions of the communication in the relationships. A study that
recorded participant’s conversations with each other as they occurred would give different
insights into the communication styles used by each gender, in each role, and the effect on the mentoring relationship.

The present research explored the communication that occurred in formally paired mentoring relationships. This research could be replicated using subjects in informally paired mentoring relationships to learn about the communication that occurs in those relationships and to discover whether the same results apply to that group.

It was recognized in this study that power roles have an effect on the communication that occurs in graduate student – faculty mentoring relationships. Additional research could explore such power relationships more thoroughly, focusing on communication that may subconsciously occur which amplifies the differences, and/or explore more clearly the role gender plays in such differences.

Mentoring has been established as an important tool in the graduate student experience, yet little research exists which explores it in detail. As a result, more research in all areas of academic mentoring should be explored to help make mentoring experiences as rewarding as possible for all participants in addition to assisting those who are considering implementing mentoring programs.
APPENDIX

Interview Questions for Participants

How would you define your communication style?

Do you attribute your communication style to your gender?

How would you define the communication style of your mentor/protégés?

Do you attribute her/his/their communication style(s) to their gender(s)?

Please compare and contrast your communication style to that of your mentor/protégés?

Do you believe there is an appropriate communication style for each gender?

Do you believe there is an appropriate communication style for a mentoring relationship?

How do you feel about the communication between you and your mentor/protégés?

How does your communication style affect your mentoring relationship?

How does the communication between you and your mentor/protégés make you feel personally?

Are you satisfied with the communication in your mentoring relationship?

Do you feel that the communication between you and your mentor/protégés fulfilled all of your needs?

Do you feel that the communication between your mentor/protégés helps/helped to serve the function a mentoring relationship is supposed to provide?

Have your communication styles ever caused misunderstandings in your relationship?

What happened?
Do you try to role model communication styles to your protégés?
Has the communication styles you and your mentor/protégés used remained consistent throughout your relationship?
How does your mentor/protégé’s approach you with conversation?
Do you feel comfortable asking questions of your mentor?
How is constructive criticism communicated in your relationship?
How do you communicate a sense of confidence in your protégés?
How does your mentor communicate a sense of confidence in you?
What things do you and your mentor/protégés discuss?
Have you ever discussed the goals of your relationship with your mentor/protégés?
Are there things you wish you could say to your mentor/protégés that you don’t? Why don’t you?
How do you feel about being a mentor/protégé?
How committed do/did you feel to the relationship(s)?
Where do you feel you’re at with your mentoring relationship(s)? Where do you foresee your mentoring relationship(s) going? Do you think your communication styles influence this?
Would there be a gender you would prefer to mentor/protégé?
Would there be a communication style you would prefer to be in a mentoring relationship with?
How did your relationship end?
If another opportunity arose for you to be in a mentoring relationship again, would you accept it? Why or why not?

Is there anything else about the communication you experienced in your mentoring relationship(s) or your relationship(s) in general that you would like to share with me?
REFERENCES


