Mentoring relationships, in most cases, have been unquestioningly and uncritically accepted as fundamental to foster learning in the workplace, advance careers, help new employees learn workplace culture, and provide developmental and psychological support. Many definitions of mentoring, such as that by Daloz (1986), who proposes that mentors may act as “interpreters of the environment” (p. 207), reflect the notion that mentors help protégés understand the culture in which they find themselves. However, as mentioned in the introduction and earlier chapters of this monograph, just as Athena transformed into the male image of Mentor to guide Telemachus, in the real world of organizations and educational institutions, persons who serve as mentors may primarily be members of dominant and/or hegemonic groups within organizations or institutions. Because of this, potential protégés, particularly those considered “other” by virtue of the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation, may experience difficulties initiating and participating in informal mentoring relationships. In addition, issues of power and interests within organizations or institutions might hamper the mutual attraction that is required to participate in an informal mentoring relationship (Hansman 2000, 2001).

If informal mentoring relationships are unavailable to members of historically marginalized groups, then they may have the opportunity to participate in formal mentoring programs organized by work organizations or educational institutions. As discussed by Ellinger in the second chapter, formal mentoring programs were designed and implemented within organizations to provide opportunities for mentoring between disparate groups to occur, to achieve racial balance among executives, and to foster workplace learning. In addition to promoting workplace learning, mentoring programs may help contribute to increased profits for the sponsoring organization. “Despite the best intentions, though, many organizations have failed,” claims Thomas (2001, p. 99), whose research on three major corporations shows that formal mentoring programs have failed to remove barriers to advancement for marginalized groups. Consequently, formal mentoring programs may not address the individual needs of the protégés, but instead reflect the power and interests inherent within organizations. Mentoring programs may help improve employee performance, but the interests of the organization may be served at the cost of employee or human interests (Bierema 2000; Thomas 2001).

Business organizations and educational institutions do not exist independently of the outside world. They mirror the changing culture and uncertainty of our times. Mentoring programs within these organizations reflect society; thus, they must continually accommodate a changing world. Early research (i.e., Levinson et al. 1978) and models (i.e., Roche 1979) for mentoring were based largely on white males, or it was assumed that the gender, race, ethnicity, class, ability, or sexual orientation of either mentors or protégés were not significant and therefore did not affect the quality of the interaction between mentor and protégés.
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Clearly, mentoring relationships do not always provide the rosy outcomes depicted by much of the research. Gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and issues of power may affect how protégés and mentors interact and negotiate their relationship, both internally and externally, and ultimately affect the success of formal mentoring programs. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to probe mentoring from a critical perspective, consider the problems of historically marginalized groups within mentoring frameworks while examining issues of power and democracy within mentoring programs, and finally, suggest ways of planning for and promoting mentoring and mentoring programs to enhance adult learning and development for all groups of people.

Mentoring and Marginalized Groups

Women in Mentoring Relationships

The presence of women has grown and is continuing to grow in the labor force in the United States, as evidenced by the fact that in 1996 women represented almost half of the total workforce (U.S. Department of Labor 1996). Despite their presence in the work force, however, women still face “glass ceilings” that are difficult or impossible to transcend (McDonald and Hite 1998). Mentoring has frequently been touted as the way women can overcome barriers to advancement within the workplace, and early research on mentors assumed that the gender of either the mentor or protégé does not affect the development of the mentoring relationships (Merriam 1983). However, research concerning mentoring and women has shown that these notions may be problematic and that mentoring relationships are frequently not as available to women as they are to men (Cox 1993; Hansman and Garafolo 1995; Hite 1998; Ragins and Cotton 1999); or if they are available, are not as meaningful or helpful as they could be (Egan 1994; Hansman 1997; Stalker 1994). Women who have responsibility not only for their careers but also for children or parents or women who interrupt or delay their careers because of family concerns may also face problems participating in mentoring relationships. Because they may “stop in and stop out” of careers, women may not be perceived as being as serious as men about their careers; thus, they may not be “chosen” as a protégé by men or women mentors (Chandler 1996). Furthermore, sexual harassment concerns also add to the reluctance of mentors to choose protégés of the opposite sex (Hansman 1998). Other research studies uncover more dilemmas surrounding cross-gender mentoring relationships, such as sexual tension when the mentor is male and the protégé female (Kalbfleisch 1997), and gossip and sexual innuendo by co-workers about the mentoring relationship (Hansman 1998).

Even if female protégés are involved in mentoring relationships with women mentors, there is no assurance of successful outcomes. In her research on female doctoral graduate students at a major university, Ervin (1995) discusses the difficulties encountered by female protégés with women professor mentors. Protégés in her study described the ideas of success touted by most of the older women professor mentors as preaching “the same ideals as my male professors” (p. 448), of knocking others out of their way to achieve success, perhaps with a disclaimer that once the female protégé was successful she could
“do it differently” (p. 448). These “male” ideals are criticized by the protégés as androcentric and not reflecting the real goals of the protégés. The women mentors also seemed to have uncritically accepted the cut-throat politics at play in academic institutions without problematizing them in terms of women protégés’ needs and the realities of their protégés’ everyday lives.

Despite the difficulties detailed by the protégés in Ervin’s research, Kalbfleisch (2000) found that from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés, “same sex mentoring relationships occur more frequently than cross-sex mentoring relationships … further, the sex of the mentor or the protégé was the best predictor of the sex of the corresponding partner in a mentoring relationship” (p. 59). In other words, both women and men seem to prefer and be more comfortable with both mentoring and being mentored by someone of the same sex. There is also a tendency to choose mentors most like themselves; however, there are typically fewer women in higher-level positions available to mentor women than there are men available. One barrier reported associated with women mentoring other women is that, because women may have less power and influence than their male counterparts in the workplace, women mentors may be perceived as less able to propel a protégé to career success (Hale 1995) and are therefore not desirable to other women as potential mentors. In addition, women protégés may have unrealistic psychosocial expectations for their women mentors and make unreasonable demands on them for time or emotional commitments (Eldridge 1990).

It seems obvious that a single personal mentor may not be able to provide everything to his or her protégés, such as proper political connections and developmental support. As Ellinger reports in the second chapter, in recent years, other forms and types of mentoring relationships are mentioned more frequently in the literature and research. A study of women doctoral students for whom mentoring relationships with the predominately male faculty members were not available revealed that the women students formed supportive group relationships with other women doctoral students. These peer mentoring relationships provided participants with the professional encouragement and affirmation they needed to start careers as academics (Hansman and Garafolo 1995). Other types of mentoring that may provide alternatives to one-to-one mentoring relationships include the concepts of group mentoring or mentoring circles, in which one mentor is assigned to several protégés (McDonald and Hite 1998). Caffarella, Clark, and Ingram (1997) studied women in an organization working in leadership roles who had been unable to break through “the glass ceiling” through mentoring or other means. These women developed personal learning webs, including formal and informal mentoring relationships; these relationships occurred both inside and outside the organization. They found, however, that it was important to document and validate their informal learning. Inman (1998) suggests that, as women develop their careers and advance, they may find that multiple mentors are helpful in order to strengthen both individual and professional development.
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Ethnicity, People of Color, and Mentoring

As hard as it is for European American women to find and form helpful mentoring relationships, women of color face even more difficulties because of the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, and gender. Mentoring for women of color has been described as the difference between “isolation and integration, failure and success” (Dickey 1997, p. 73). Johnson (1998) discusses the “unwritten rules” of an institution or dominant work culture and how difficult it is for African American women to learn them; these rules can include such things as unwritten dress codes and social norms. Johnson found that “African American women mentors are able to communicate these rules to African American women protégés without the protégés fearing the stigma of trying to sound or act ‘White.’ The protégé benefits from the mentor’s knowledge of the culture of the organization: what dictates the politics for change, whether communication is formal or informal, and what constitutes an acceptable leadership style within the organization” (pp. 54-55). Jackson, Kite, and Branscombe’s 1996 study of African American women on two university campuses revealed that they overwhelmingly preferred African American female role models, but that these women were not readily available as mentors on university campuses. They did find that if the women protégés in their study developed mentoring relationships with a relative or someone outside of the university, this relationship could buffer the impact of being a “token” minority in the university. Hite’s 1998 study of black women professionals showed that they were able to experience mentoring relationships within their organizations; however, they also indicated that more same-gender and same-race mentoring relationships should be available to them.

But women of color are not the only ones who experience difficulty in developing and participating in mentoring relationships. Men of color also face challenges. For example, a study of mentoring at a public university in the Midwest revealed that a larger proportion of European American male faculty than Asian American male faculty were involved in mentoring relationships (Sands, Parson, and Duane 1992). When Asian Americans were asked why they did not have mentors, the most frequent response was that one was not available, or there were no mentoring programs in their departments in which they could participate. Asian American faculty members who were involved in mentoring relationships, however, expressed unhappiness about the power inequities and the possibilities of exploitation that could occur within the relationship, and over half indicated that they had negative experiences with their faculty mentors. Issues of power and control are clearly central to minority concerns about mentoring relationships with cross-race/ethnicity mentors.

Besides the difficulty experienced in forming and participating in mentoring relationships, members of historically marginalized groups, both male and female, also experience mentoring relationships differently than do their European American counterparts. In a 3-year research project, Thomas (2001) compared the career paths of European American professionals and professionals of color at three major U.S. corporations. He discovered marked differences in their career paths, suggesting that companies have two distinct trajectories for European American and executives of color for access to top jobs. Thomas found that European American professionals are sorted early in their careers
and the most promising proceed on the fast track, arriving in middle management and at the executive level before their minority peers. Professionals of color, on the other hand, are fast-tracked only after they reach middle management; thus the process of advancement is much slower for them.

The most interesting aspect of Thomas’ research was the experiences of professionals of color who advanced to top levels. Their trajectory seemed to consist of three stages. In the first stage, many professionals of color became “discouraged, de-motivated, de-skilled” (p. 101) and plateaued early in their careers when they failed to be fast-tracked like their European American peers. But some professionals of color, those who were involved in mentoring relationships and whose mentors invested in them as if they were on the fast track, did advance to middle management. In addition to mentoring relationships, the more successful members took on continuous learning of new skills, placing them at the leading edge of the work they liked. They also developed relationships with sponsors and peers who supported them in their efforts.

In the second stage, professionals of color moved into middle management, their careers broadened, and they were more likely than were their European American peers to have powerful corporate-level executives as mentors and sponsors. Through demonstrating their competence and potential, they were able to develop “working relationships with key people in functional areas” (p. 102) who served as their mentors and sponsors. In this stage, careers of European American executives and executives of color became more similar in terms of rates of advancement. However, compared to their European American peers, middle managers of color were “twice as likely to change functions, twice as likely to take on special projects or task-force assignments, three times as likely to take a turnaround assignment, almost twice as likely to change locations, and four times as likely to report big success” (p. 103). In other words, they worked harder and their successes came at a higher price.

To advance to stage three, the executive level, Thomas described how executives of color needed “highly visible successes that were directly related to the company’s core strategy” (p. 103). Successful relationships with superiors were also central in helping executives of color move to the highest level. Executives of color also reported more diversified mentoring relationships; most had “genuine, personal long-term relationships with both European American and African American” (p. 104) peers and mentors.

One of the key findings in Thomas’ study is the type of mentoring that the plateaued professionals of color in stage one received in contrast to the mentoring relationships experienced by the professionals of color who moved through the three stages to the executive level. The type of mentoring plateaued professionals of color received was mostly instructional and focused on developing skills. Successful executives of color, on the other hand, enjoyed developmental relationships with their mentors and sponsors throughout their careers; in addition, they participated in mentoring relationships with both executives of color and European American executives. Mentors of successful executives of color seemed to have provided different types of developmental mentoring that was appropriate to the current stage of the protégé. Mentors took an interest in the overall development of their protégés, not just in developing their skills.
This interest displayed by mentors in their minority protégés seems to reflect discussions in previous chapters in this monograph of Kram's ideas of informal and psychosocial mentoring. Kram points out that informal and psychosocial mentors do more than just provide career support; they also provide developmental support that is crucial to helping protégés succeed.

Since much of the past research and mentoring models have focused on white males as both mentors and protégés, little research exists on the impact of traditional formal mentoring programs on African Americans. F. Harris (1999) claims that “Eurocentric models of mentoring in the literature … have persisted for more than twenty years and have been applied to a variety of minority groups, especially African American college students without any regard to their sociocultural history” (p. 230). She proposes an Africentric model for mentoring that focuses on interpersonal relationships and communalism. Her model emphasizes one’s lived experiences in relationship to community while recognizing the experience of others as well. This model/paradigm is “supported by a ‘collective perspective’ that is static but not dynamic” (p. 232). It emphasizes the holistic mentoring process that allows those in the process to be mentored and provide mentoring to others at the same time. The mentoring loop consists of unity/collective work and responsibility, nurturing/self-determination, skill development/creativity, self-confidence/independence/purpose, collaboration/convergence of “I” and “we,” and mentor/mentee/faith. Although more empirical research is needed to substantiate her model, Harris claims that her model will foster a developmental process in each stage.

**Cross-Race/Cross-Gender Relationships**

Sociocultural factors can challenge cross-race/cross-gender relationships, and the racial and/or gender makeup of mentoring relationships affects the overall mentoring experiences of both mentors and protégés. Women may face more barriers to participating in mentoring relationships than men because they are more likely to have low status and to be “filtered out” by organizational politics than are men because of “discriminatory selection and treatment” (Koberg, Boss, and Goodman 1998, p. 61). As discussed earlier, women may not wish to be involved in cross-gender mentoring relationships because of fears of sexual innuendo, sexual harassment, and other concerns.

Women protégés may also encounter discordance in the advice offered to them by male mentors. For example, Ervin (1995) discusses her discomfort with her male professor mentor’s definition of success: “to be successful … a graduate student has to crawl over—literally or figuratively, whoever or whatever stands between him [sic] and his desired goals … I was also disturbed by the definition of success that my professor offered us, and the paths he considered successful” (p. 448). She goes on to describe some female colleagues who had taken paths different from those described as successful by her male mentor, such as waiting to accept academic jobs at universities until their partners or spouses had offers at nearby institutions. Another of her female colleagues left academic life when it became clear that she did not agree with the lack of value placed on teaching at her employing research institution. These women were considered unsuccessful by the
standards of success set by Ervin’s male mentor; therefore, they received little, if any, mentoring help.

African Americans may receive less psychosocial mentoring from cross-race mentors than they do from same-race mentors. People of color may perceive European American mentors as less helpful than a mentor of color (F. Harris 1999). In addition, a study by Grant-Thompson and Atkinson (1997) of African American male students found that the students rated a faculty member described as African American more credible and more cross-culturally competent than a faculty member described as European American.

As Thomas (2001) found, some cross-race/cross-gender relationships can be positive relationships. But as much as Thomas (2001) found supportive cross-race and cross-gender relationships in his study, he recognizes that there are problems with them. Potential European American mentors may hold negative stereotypical images about minority protégés and withhold needed support until the minority protégé has proven himself or herself worth the investment. This covert racism may explain why European Americans in Thomas’ study were placed on the fast track based on their perceived potential whereas “people of color had to display a proven and sustained record of solid performance—in effect, they often had to be overprepared—before they were placed on the executive track” (p. 104).

Perhaps the answer to some of these concerns about cross-race/cross-gender mentoring is for organizations to address these issues through training sessions when they plan and implement formal mentoring programs. By focusing on issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, and sexual orientation during mentor training and orientation sessions, mentors may learn to understand the importance of providing developmental help and support to forge helpful cross-race/cross-gender mentoring relationships. European American mentors need to develop an appreciation for the obstacles women and people of color face and understand that they may need to be sensitive to these obstacles as they mentor their protégés. They can increase their credibility with their protégés by being more culturally responsive. Models such as Harris’ Africentric paradigm of mentoring might be examined and adopted in order to facilitate more holistic and mutual mentoring among cross-race/cross-gender groups.

**Power in Mentoring Relationships**

Mentoring relationships can be characterized as socially constructed power relationships that are designed to advantage certain groups while disadvantaging other groups. For instance, mentors can be considered “superior” by virtue of their phenomenal knowledge and their main task could be seen as passing on to or “filling up” their protégés with this knowledge. The power mentors have and exercise within mentoring relationships can be helpful or hurtful. Indeed, the biggest paradox surrounding mentoring relationships is that although mentors seek to “empower” their protégés, the relationships themselves are entrenched with power issues. Thus mentoring relationships involve the negotiation of power and interests of all involved, including mentors, protégés, and sponsoring organiza-
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tions or institutions. However, few studies or mentoring models reflect the realities of the entrenched power issues.

In describing mentoring relationships, Ragins (1997b) combines psychological and sociological definitions of power and defines power as the “influence of one person over others, stemming from an individual characteristic, an interpersonal relationship, a position in an organization, or from membership in a societal group” (p. 485). Mentoring relationships involve two kinds of power: one internal to the relationship and existing between mentor and protégé, and one external to the relationship that reflects the power dynamics of the organization. The micro dynamics of the mentor/protégé relationship are sensitive to the larger organizations in which they reside; therefore, they are “influenced by the macro dynamics of intergroup power relationships in organizations…resulting in subtle or dramatic shifts in power relations among groups in organizations” (p. 487). Protégés may learn (or not) to command resources and thus gain power within organizations; the gain (or loss) of power is reflected onto the mentor by the protégé’s performance, resulting in positive (or negative) recognition among colleagues.

In mentoring relationships, mentors may exercise power through the assumptions they make about their protégé. Mentors may function within a framework of power relations that “assumes that one person knows what is best for the other, has superior knowledge and skills and is perceived as somewhat paternalistic in his [sic] interactions” (Brinson and Kottler 1993, p. 241) with protégés. For example, Brinson and Kottler discuss how faculty of color who are protégés of European American faculty mentors are encouraged to participate in service activities related to ethnic issues but are not informed of or encouraged to apply for research grants, engage in professional development activities, or participate in other academic opportunities that would help the protégé during the tenure/promotion process. Since service activities do not usually count as much toward tenure as academic and scholarly pursuits, in essence the faculty of color are not being helped toward achieving tenure in the university. This is an example of how mentors may exercise their power to guide (or not guide) protégés through political quagmires of organizations or educational institutions, reflecting the power mentors have to determine successful outcomes for their protégés.

Another important power issue inherent in mentoring relationships is that protégés will simply become replicas of their mentors and uncritically accept their mentors’ and their organizations’ or institutions’ cultural norms and values. Protégés should be encouraged to examine critically the advice they receive from their mentors, and mentors and protégés should also explore the cultural practices and norms at play in the organizations or institutions in which they work. Especially as mentoring relationships fade, protégés should be encouraged to test their own ideas and concepts that may be different from those of their mentors and their organizations. Negotiation between mentors and protégés becomes an important aspect of fading mentoring relationships.

Traditional mentoring relationships are hierarchical, composed of one experienced person who advises a less experienced person. Freire, Fraser, Macedo, McKinnon, and Stokes (1997), in their examination of mentors and protégés, explain that in this traditional
view the mentor (teacher) is presumed to know everything and the protégé (learner) little or nothing. The mentor’s role—to “fill up” the protégé with knowledge”—denies the validity of the ontological and epistemological productions of the learner and the learner’s community. This is authoritarian, manipulative, ‘banking’ pedagogy, which negates the possibility of democracy and distorts the lived experiences of the learners who are silenced and denied the opportunity to be authors of their own histories” (pp. xiv-xv). Freire et al. promote the idea of “democratic substance” and ethical democracy in mentoring relationships (p. xv), in which the mentor is prepared to dialogue and offer his or her insights, not through a banking approach, but through respecting their protégés, not forcing them to be passive receivers of knowledge but as a “position of agent, of cognizing subject. As such the learner is not a subordinate to the teacher or mentor, but a participant in a dialogic exploration toward knowing and understanding” (pp. xv-xvi).

Power issues within and without the relationship affect mentoring relationships. To ignore these dynamics of power is to fail to understand completely and address the internal and external influences of protégés, mentors, and the contexts in which they live.

The Future of Mentoring: Conclusion

We live in a constantly changing world that is reflected in our personal and professional lives. Workplaces no longer provide lifelong jobs; work settings are continually being transformed by new technology. As workplaces change, flatter organizational structures become the norm, and jobs are reengineered or downsized. Senior employees are being encouraged or forced into early retirement, therefore, less “experienced” employees within organizations are available to serve as mentors. Despite all this turmoil and change, however, mentoring programs are increasing in workplaces, perhaps as a way to offer some kind of security in insecure times.

So what should mentoring look like in the dawn of the 21st century and beyond? Darwin (2000) advocates the ideas of mentoring circles and peer mentoring to promote diversity and the notion of “non-hierarchical, democratic relationships” (p. 207). Her ideas are echoed by Higgins and Kram (2001), who advocate a “Developmental Network Perspective” (p. 268) for mentoring that would include multiple dyadic and networked relationships that are intra- and extra-organizational and involve mutuality and reciprocity between and among members. Gunn (1995) advocates “democratic” mentoring programs, such as that run at CSX Corporation. This mentoring program is not administered by the company’s human resource department but is instead run as a grassroots program through the participation of employees. It is employee driven; the employee participants decide the goals and objectives for the program.

It seems clear that mentoring cannot be reduced to simple one-on-one relationships, and further, that mentoring relationships are not a panacea for historically marginalized groups. Nor is mentoring a politically neutral or power-free process. Mentoring programs and relationships may reflect the power and interests of the organization and not the always the interests of the mentors and protégés. Power is inherent in organizational life
and should be an ethical concern for those in a position to plan mentoring programs within organizations. Knowledge should be viewed as socially constructed by mentors and protégés in negotiation with each other and others, not as something to be “handed out” or to “fill up” the protégés. Key questions that should stay in the forefront of planning for mentoring programs include: Whose interests are primarily being served through mentoring programs, the organization’s or institution’s, the mentor’s or the protégé’s? Whose interests should be served? Can and should mentoring programs challenge unequal power relationships and institutional structures or simply reinforce existing hegemonic culture? How do those who were historically excluded from positions of power within an organization because of gender, race, ethnicity, class, ability, or sexual orientation contribute to and recreate organizational cultures and mentoring programs that do not replicate hegemonic cultures of the past?

Developing a “knowledge society” and exploiting “intellectual capital” are touted as the keys to economic success in present and future society. Critically examining the interests of organizations as they plan and develop mentoring programs is essential to developing democratic programs that are reflective of the needs of the participants, not just the interests of the organization or institution. Helping people develop their potential through mentoring programs in different contexts and in a changing world is a challenging prospect. However, adult educators and human resource development trainers who plan mentoring program can act in ways that are ethical while enhancing the personal, workplace, and professional development of all involved in the mentoring process. Organizations can and should address issues of power, race, class, gender, ethnicity, ability, and sexual orientation through training sessions when they plan and implement formal mentoring programs, helping mentors to understand the importance of providing developmental help and support as they forge mentoring relationships. Care should be taken to help mentors and protégés critically examine the cultural norms at play within organizations so that the unquestioning adoption of dated or unethical organizational cultural norms does not take place. Protégés should also examine their mentor’s approaches to success and make sure they are not adopting a system of values that favors one socioeconomic, ethnic, or racial group over another, or that their mentor’s definition of success is a definition with which they agree. Most essential, however, is keeping the questions of who benefits and who should benefit at the forefront of planning and participating in all mentoring programs (Cervero, Wilson, and Associates 2001).