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Mentoring of Women Faculty: The Role of Organizational Politics and Culture

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ABSTRACT: This article reports on a key finding of a phenomenological study on the mentoring experiences of women faculty. The study revealed the political climate of the organization as an essential attribute of this experience. Women faculty identified organizational culture and gender issues that affected the mentoring they received. This study suggests the need for human resource and organization development initiatives to facilitate the provision of academic mentoring for women faculty—individually, departmentally, and culturally—as a means to foster transformation and change in academic institutions.

KEY WORDS: mentoring; women faculty; organizational culture; gender; organization development.

Human resource and organization development professionals in various contexts—corporate, education, government, and nonprofit—seek to improve individual and organizational performance. These professionals have long recognized the impact that the culture of the organization has on their ability to foster learning and career development (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Swanson & Holton, 2001). In the academic environment, there have been reports of continued marginalization of women faculty, and the culture of academia has been described as less than hospitable to women as they attempt to navigate the various aspects of their positions and environments (Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Hamrick, 1998; Hopkins, 1999). Women faculty frequently view themselves as "outsiders," feeling both isolated and constrained by the existing structure of academia or because of outside responsibilities. There is often no one readily available to assist them in gaining access to the informational networks and organizational systems that are required for success (Rios & Longnion, 2000).

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In addition, women faculty who are pretenure or in the early stages of their careers (i.e., junior faculty) believe that family-work responsibilities are likely to have an impact on their success (A study on the status of women faculty, 1999; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). Programs sponsored by universities and colleges to support faculty in balancing work-life demands lag behind those in business and industry, which are designed to support the objectives of the organization. These work-life programs are often seen as nice perks that "keep the women on campus happy" but not as integral components of the mission of the institution (Rios & Longnion, 2000, p. 8). The difficulty that women experience in balancing work-life concerns may be a contributing factor to their lower rate of success in academia than that of men and the persistence of gender inequity among full-time faculty (Bentley & Blackburn, 1992; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Hensel, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Likewise, when senior women faculty are asked to describe their careers, almost half report that family problems remain a significant issue; and almost two-thirds identify continuing areas of bias, primarily of a subtle or stereotypical nature (Gerdes, 2003). "In sum, cultural, attitudinal, and structural constraints inhibit women's progress" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. 198).

One intervention that can enhance socialization, orientation, and career progress of faculty, as well as improve equity for women faculty, is the establishment of mentoring relationships (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Brennan, 2000; Jackson & Simpson, 1994; Smith, Smith, & Markham, 2000). In interviews with women faculty, Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) noted the following: "In story after story, then, the factor of support—received or not received—appears to be critical to the course of a woman's professional development" (p. 50). In a study conducted almost a decade later, a high proportion of senior women faculty, when asked what advice they would give to young women starting out in higher education, recommended mentoring, networking, or both (Gerdes, 2003). Variations on traditional mentoring have also been proposed in higher education, including peer mentoring/networking through which a group of faculty support each other (Smith et al., 2001) and peer communities that foster "connections between naturally developing relationships, shared power, and collective action" (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002, p. 196). In addition, it has been posited that, because women's learning and development is more rooted in relationships (Gilligan, 1982), mentoring may be more beneficial for women than for men, as women have the capacity to use these relationships to better advantage (Bloom, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991).

Therefore, mentoring may be of greater value to women in their struggle to succeed in their roles as faculty members.

Although there is recognition of the need to provide support to women in higher education, the culture of academia and the proportionately fewer women in positions of power makes this a difficult agenda to fulfill. Johnetta Cole, the first African American female president of Spelman College, now presidential distinguished Professor of Anthropology, Women's Studies and African American Studies at Emory University, described mentoring as essential for women and minority faculty:

> Mentoring could help but it is less available to those who aren't mainstream white males. The demands on women or minority faculty to mentor are intense. Most do this essential work generously, then find it ignored by those who evaluate them for promotion or tenure. (Cole, as cited in "Social Change Requires," 2000, p. 2)

As Wanberg, Welsh, and Hezlett (2003) noted, mentoring relationships are embedded in a larger organizational context, reflecting the values and attitudes held by organizational members and the cultural attributes of the organization. Therefore, gaining knowledge of the mentoring experience in its context is important to understand the attributes that characterize this experience and to determine actions that would best facilitate these relationships. This paper reports on the findings of a phenomenological study of the academic mentoring experiences of women faculty. The study identified the political climate of the organization as an essential attribute of this experience. Implications for the development of human resources in academic environments are explored with respect to how mentoring can best be facilitated and, in turn, can foster cultural change and transformation.

Methodology

Phenomenology is an interpretive research methodology that is aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of lived experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology, as founded by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), emerged as an epistemological philosophy that proclaimed the lifeworld (the natural world) as the most appropriate starting point for human science. In applying the philosophical concepts of phenomenology to research, investigators go to the lifeworld and study the way in which humans, who are in their

natural attitude, experience particular phenomena (Gibson & Hanes, 2003).

In conducting this study, I employed the lifeworld research concepts of openness, encounter, immediacy, uniqueness, and meaning (Dahlberg & Drew, 1997) in an attempt to remain as open as possible to the phenomenon of mentoring from the perspective of the participants who had experienced being mentored. Openness is defined as a "perspective free of unexamined assumptions," and it is through the researcher's actions to ensure openness that objectivity is gained in phenomenological research (Dahlberg & Drew, 1997, p. 305). In this methodology, the investigator's role is critical in uncovering the essence of a particular phenomenon. As such, this method of inquiry requires that the researcher's assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation be bracketed (i.e., brought into conscious awareness and then set aside), so that the researcher can be fully open to the phenomenon as it reveals itself.

The results reported here focus on one key finding of a phenomenological study that looked at the experience of being mentored for women faculty across the variety of mentoring that they had experienced in their academic careers—formal or informal, with a faculty member or administrator, and with male or female mentors at the same or varying ranks—in an attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of the essential nature of this experience (see Gibson, 2004, for a more in-depth description of this study). Nine women faculty members who stated that they had been mentored were selected for this phenomenological study. The key criterion in the choice of these participants was their assertion that they had been or were currently being mentored as a faculty member. The participants were asked to describe mentoring experiences that had occurred over the course of their careers. Therefore, their mentoring experiences spanned multiple institutions in which they were employed as faculty members. A description of the participants is listed in Table I.

The research question for this study was as follows. What is the experience of being mentored like for women faculty? In-depth conversational interviewing was the primary method used to gather the rich descriptions of mentoring from each faculty member. Each interview lasted from 90 to 120 minutes. Questions were generated that focused specifically on the faculty members' concrete mentoring experiences, staying as close as possible to the experience as it was lived by the participants.

Table I
Participant Profiles

Pseudonym[a]	Rank	No. of years as faculty member	Age (years)	Discipline
Laura	Professor	16	44	Social sciences
Sue	Assistant Professor	6	37	Life sciences
Barb	Professor	14	49	Behavioral sciences
Rebecca	Instructor	4	48	Health sciences
Wendy	Assistant Professor	7	49	Life sciences
Linda	Associate Professor	11	42	Business
Nancy	Assistant Professor	1	53	Education
Ellen	Professor	22	52	Social sciences
Lillian	Associate Professor	8	39	Social sciences

[a]Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality of responses.

As the researcher, I used a journaling process to document and to bring to conscious awareness any assumptions or biases that I held about the phenomenon of mentoring so that I could set them aside (bracket them) to be open and allow the phenomenon to present itself through the participants' descriptions. I documented these assumptions prior to beginning the study and at various points during the study (e.g., after each interview and during the theme analysis phase). Each interview was audiotaped, and the interview transcripts served as the text for the theme analysis. I analyzed this text using the selective reading approach (van Manen, 1997), which involved looking for phrases or statements that seemed to be essential or revealing about the phenomenon described. I used a tripartite structure of analysis—moving from the whole to the parts and back to the whole of the interview text—to ensure full understanding. The identification and the revision of themes continued through many iterations with each successive iteration being supported by the actual words of the participants. Preliminary themes that emerged were then sent to the participants who were asked to review and to inform the researcher of any statements that might reveal their identity so that these could be modified or removed.

This research process led to the identification of five essential themes of the mentoring experience of women faculty:

- Having someone who truly cares and acts in one's best interest,
- A feeling of connection,

- Being affirmed of one's worth,
- Not being alone, and
- Politics are part of one's experience (Gibson, 2004).

This paper specifically discusses the theme "Politics are part of one's experience," which explicates one of the essential attributes of the mentoring experience for women faculty. Two subthemes, "A culture of success" and "A gender gap" are described that assist in explicating the main theme. Following the description of findings, implications for the development of human resources in academic institutions are discussed.

Politics Are Part of One's Experience

A Culture of Success

Women faculty described political and departmental cultures that affected how mentoring was provided for themselves and others. Politics in this context refers to the characteristics of the departmental/institutional culture and structure (including roles and responsibilities) with which these women were associated. These women faculty had experiences in a variety of academic environments, which ranged from being unsupportive and, in some cases, even detrimental to the woman faculty member's success to, at the other end of the spectrum, a mentoring culture in which senior faculty were committed to the success of junior faculty. These differing departmental cultures had a large impact on both the mentoring that was available to protégés and on what protégés saw as the possibilities for achievement within their academic environments. The following excerpts from the participants' descriptions are shared to exemplify this theme (pseudonyms are used to maintain the participants' confidentiality).

Ellen described feeling very lucky to be in a department that had what she saw as a mentoring culture:

> It is essentially stated by faculty, if not the department head, that we're here to support these people and if we don't do a good job in the mentoring committee, how else are they going to know what they have to do? So that was very much part of the department culture and perhaps brought on by that policy of having a mentor committee who's responsible for them.... We want to show this person's very best side to the Dean and to the rest of the community... it's the department's responsibility to lay

> that stuff all out and give context. I've just been so lucky. I'll tell you. Really lucky. (Ellen, Professor)

She described how a mentor committee was assigned to each faculty member, to assist them in achieving the next position level. This mentor committee assisted in her promotion to full professor.

> In our department ... we have a mentor committee. And that mentor committee meets with you, sometimes twice a year, reviews your vitae, your annual report, your goals, whatever you ask them to review and they mentor you. . . . So, to help me gain my promotion to full professor, I had three full professors, two in the department and one outside the department. . . . And I met with them probably once a year to figure out if I'm on track. (Ellen, Professor)

Lillian also identified a mentoring culture in her department, in that her colleagues were very supportive when she decided to begin a family:

> I think that there's some acknowledgement that as an assistant professor who has a young child or is about to have a young child, there are some things that they're able to do to help out. . . . So there's sort of this general acknowledgement that we can work some things out. . . . It was an issue of how are we going to do this, not whether we were going to do it. (Lillian, Associate Professor)

She further described the overall tenor of the department in terms of dealing with these types of work-life issues:

> I guess it just seemed to me to be a way to try to help me get to where I needed to be in both my academic career and in my personal life and so the mentoring thing, I think, in my mind, is in both of those arenas. And it's not simply a career mentoring kind of process because at least for me with having now two kids, trying to figure out how to juggle those things is always a struggle and thinking about, well, how do I approach my career so that I have some time for home and how do I approach things going on at home so I still have time for my career and the willingness of this individual in particular to help me out with those kinds of things. . . . I just see that as a way for me to try to maintain both some kind of academic momentum and some kind of family momentum. (Lillian, Associate Professor).

Lillian also discussed benefiting from having other women in the department who had been there a long time and had paved the way. These women's experiences and their influence on the department made a substantial difference in her experience as a woman in that department:

> I think that their [senior women colleagues] experiences and their influence in the department had a fair amount to do with that feeling

> that I had, that this was a place that felt like it would be supportive or at least acknowledge the kinds of difficulties that you have as a person on the tenure track and with small kids. (Lillian, Associate Professor)

Nancy described a mentoring environment at her university that encouraged the establishment of a mentoring group for junior women faculty:

> We actually have the [specific name] club, where all the junior faculty get together ... and then they have senior faculty come in. So it's like a little club where we have guest mentors.... But I think if the environment wasn't like that she [the woman who started it] might not have done it. If there wasn't a mentoring environment type of thing. (Nancy, Assistant Professor)

She also noted that the following message of support was communicated to her during her interviews for the faculty position:

> It was kind of like you're going to be here, you're going to be successful, we're going to help you be successful ... and all the people that I interacted with through the process, it was, we're committed to you.... We are committed to your success. (Nancy, Assistant Professor)

A bad department head or a detrimental departmental culture significantly affected women faculty's experience. Wendy recounted her experience of being assigned a mentor, whom she did not perceive as performing a mentoring role:

> That particular mentor had been given to me by my departmental head, who had issues with me even before I was hired, and he was basically a conduit for him. And once the other faculty figured it out, they realized that that had to be stopped. This whole thing had to be more positive and so I got a second mentor who was very good. (Wendy, Assistant Professor)

Ellen expressed her horror at the tenure committee process in her former institution, which reflected a culture that was not supportive and that did not work to ensure others' success.

> So I sat in on the tenure committees there and I was just horrified at the raking over the coals; you know, "Well, she doesn't, look at here. In this class she only got a 4.5 out of 5. And all the rest are 4.7 s or 4.8 s. Oh, there's a problem there!" Holy mackerel. I mean, it's just rip them apart and tear them up and spit them out. There was no sense of camaraderie, and pretty soon you kind of get caught up in it and, "I'd better find something wrong with this person." Because you want to show that you're just as critical as the rest of them. Oh, what a terrible, terrible place to be. (Ellen, Professor)

Wendy further noted that, "Politics can ruin mentoring. So people can take the mentoring system and use it as a way to get information on you." People can be called mentors but not provide mentoring. As stated by Wendy,

> I think you can subjugate the mentoring system to a spy system, an informational transfer system, where somebody isn't truly your mentor to help you but does give information back to powers in the department. And I got myself in a situation like that. (Wendy, Assistant Professor)

Protégés perceived that, in some departments, the effort of mentoring does not get rewarded, so people then tend to focus on that which brings recognition. As Laura stated, "I think that the effort also gets not recognized and that's what puts people off from trying to help in those ways, too." Sue explained that a change in department heads, who had different priorities about the importance of being mentored, may have been what triggered her being assigned different mentors.

> We got a new department head in who ... obviously thought about [mentoring] differently to the way the department head previously had. And so he thought this was important and so thought we had to do this, and this is what needs to get done, and at that point he assigned two faculty members. (Sue, Assistant Professor)

In discussing one of her mentors, Nancy noted that her mentor's decision to set up a formal mentorship for her and other junior faculty was based on his concern that, "We'd be swimming with sharks." She stated the following: "If you really care about the junior faculty, you tend to set it up to where there's, if it's not formal, at least there's some mentor system in place" (Nancy, Assistant Professor).

A Gender Gap

Women faculty described a number of gaps in areas specific to being a woman in academia, which were not addressed through an academic mentoring relationship. In some cases, male mentors were not seen as people with whom female faculty could address certain issues. The relatively low numbers of women in senior faculty positions was seen to contribute to this gap in available mentors. Barb noted that her mentor, although highly supportive of her career, was also aware of and acknowledged that she might have some specific concerns that were unique to her as a woman. "I think he was sensitive to issues that I might have, and some of them are, when am I going to have these babies?" (Barb). Although Lillian felt supported by her department in

her decision to have children, she was aware that this could be an issue and that other women faculty did not feel the same in other areas of the university:

> Some of that decision to have children probably was influenced by the fact that I felt like I could probably do it here. . . . I did remember talking to this one woman who is an assistant professor in one of the engineering departments here, at a women's faculty dinner, and one of the issues that came up at this dinner was women saying that they were basically afraid to stop the tenure clock for a year because it would signal to their male colleagues that they weren't serious about their jobs. . . . I had never gotten that impression from colleagues in my department. . . . And so I thought, well, this is something that's very different. (Lillian, Associate Professor)

Although also viewing her mentor as supportive, Barb noted a gap in her mentor's understanding of certain issues facing women in academia:

> I felt there are certain areas where either he or I would've felt that he wasn't the best advisor. Like where is it better, which department is more compatible for a woman. . . . There were certain people in the field he would've thought, they'd be such wonderful colleagues, and I would think to myself, yeah if you're a man, they'd be wonderful colleagues. Not so good, maybe, if you're not a man. . . . I knew of issues within a department in this campus, where I knew women who had had bad experiences, but he would have been oblivious to that. (Barb, Professor)

Barb spoke of women faculty who would approach her on issues about which they felt less comfortable approaching a male mentor, especially issues related to having children:

> And I think particularly this happens with women in a position like mine, because there are so few women and they come in here to talk about, you know, agonizing over some decision of whether to try to have a baby or not before you get tenure or whatever. I mean these issues that they don't want to talk to their mentor about, because their mentor's a man and wouldn't know what the deep issue is about this. (Barb, Professor)

Linda noted both the lack of women in her profession as well as the political reality that men were better networked.

> I found that males in my profession are just generally better connected. It's just a fact of life so it's nice having [a male mentor], I guess just from a practical matter. Because you're more plugged in. . . . There are small numbers of women in [my field] that are in academics and especially that are active in research. . . . Especially at the full professor level, the numbers are just quite staggeringly low. (Linda, Associate Professor)

Sue indicated that the mentoring relationship did not help her address work-life balance issues, as the formal mentorship that was established for her was predominantly focused on her work goals:

> It didn't help me balance my life the way I feel like I probably should have.... The mentoring relationship was more within the work world and what I was doing and how I get this particular goal achieved. But the kind of larger life question, like how do I balance home and work and those things together is a much harder question, and I'm not sure where you go for that. (Sue, Assistant Professor)

Issues of balance for women in academia continue to be of concern to women entering the field. Barb expressed her concern about being able to keep talented women in academia:

> And I worry about the young faculty coming up or young graduate students ... a lot of young women are ... looking at us as role models and thinking, who needs this? This is like, impossible! Balancing your family life and your career here, and we're not attracting as many people as I'd like into academics right now, because it doesn't look that attractive. And particularly ... it seems to affect the women. (Barb, Professor)

Implications for the Development of Human Resources

The results of this study on the mentoring experience of women faculty revealed that organizational politics and culture had a profound impact on protégés' experiences with mentoring in academia. The departmental and, in some cases, institutional culture affected both the faculty member's mentoring experiences and her perceptions as to the possibility of academic success. There were issues specific to being a woman in academia that, although perceived as important, could not be addressed through an academic mentoring relationship.

The findings strongly suggest the need for a variety of human resource (HR) and organization development (OD) initiatives to address these institutional climate issues in support of women's career advancement. These initiatives are described as follows:

- Selecting department heads who are committed to the provision of mentoring will increase the likelihood that mentoring will be promoted within that environment. Responsibility for ensuring that mentoring occurs should be included as part of the department heads' responsibilities and considered in their evaluation. The example of professional associations such as the Academy of Human Resource Development, in which the charge of each

committee chair includes mentoring future chairs, could be used as a model for this type of statement of responsibility.

- Mentoring committees can greatly assist faculty members in attaining the next position level. Such a committee reflects a mentoring culture in the department—a culture committed to the success of all faculty members. One senior faculty member in this study specifically indicated that her department had designated a mentoring committee for each faculty member, and the committee's role was to assist that member in achieving his or her career goals. This mentoring committee was seen as a commitment by the members of that department to the success of their peers. In a similar vein, at Cornell University, learning networks have been developed to facilitate open communication, sharing of diverse perspectives and, ultimately, organizational change (Torraco, Hoover, & Knippelmeyer, 2005).
- Mentoring programs that cross institutions should be considered as a means to avoid some of the political challenges that confront faculty. These interorganizational relationships would help alleviate the discomfort some women experience in addressing traditionally female issues in their home institutions. In the business context, an example of this is the Menttium® program (http://www.menttium.com), in which women professionals are matched with senior mentors from other business organizations. National academic organizations such as the American Association of University Professors could use this as an exemplar to develop cross-university mentoring opportunities for academic women.
- Mentoring of others should be a component of faculty evaluation for tenure or promotion. This would enable those with a desire to mentor to allocate more time for this important task. The participants in this study recognized that there was an inherent conflict between the activities that gain one tenure and the need for service work such as mentoring. Although department charters frequently espouse mentoring as a desired initiative, this has rarely been supported by the institutional reward system. However, if the goals of enhanced equity are to be achieved, a systemic change in reward systems needs to be seriously considered.

The findings of this study provide support for the recommendations on improving campus climate and the status of women in higher education as identified by the National Initiative for Women in Higher Education (Rios & Longnion, 2000). These recommendations include

both encouraging and rewarding mentoring and service work with appropriate credit and developing orientation programs for women faculty on such topics as mentoring and networking, negotiating the institution, tenure and promotion, grant-writing, professional development, and understanding institutional politics (Rios & Longnion, 2000). However, although mentoring is, in and of itself, a worthy endeavor and can have a profound influence on a faculty member's career, focusing solely on enhancing the provision of individual mentoring may be insufficient to address the climate issues identified in this study. The findings make a compelling case for the implementation of OD initiatives that would address the cultural aspects of issues faced by women in academic organizations, especially as they relate to women's progress (McDonald & Hite, 1998). Universities and colleges are perceived as lagging behind the corporate world where OD is frequently an established function in the organization and is recognized as having the expertise required to implement effective change. For example, in discussing five colleges and universities employing organization development (Rutgers University, Cornell University, University of Minnesota, Babson College, and a new university in the United Kingdom), Torraco et al. (2005) found that change initiatives were frequently originated at the top levels of the institution. Yet, in a number of these cases, a lack of understanding of effective OD process contributed to these initiatives failing to fully meet their objectives (Torraco et al., 2005).

Therefore, it appears critical that higher education institutions engage professionals trained in OD to facilitate the establishment of an academic culture conducive to individual development, so that mentoring can achieve its intended benefit. As OD is emerging as a key competency of strategic HR, this expertise may be found internally in the academic institution's HR department, although it is often underutilized because of the perception of HR as solely an administrative function (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). In addition, recognizing the tremendous change and external pressures impacting colleges and universities (Latta, 2005), many academic leadership programs now include fostering innovation and change as areas of competence; therefore, leadership staff in other administrative units, inclusive of persons working in faculty development, may be tapped for this expertise and engaged in change initiatives (for examples of leadership programs, see Higher Education Resource Services at http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/Hers/Frm_Home.htm; American Council on Education at http://www.acenet.edu/programs/index.cfm;

and Harvard Graduate School of Education at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/highered/index.html). Another option is hiring external OD consultants to lend their expertise to an institutional change effort. Whether internal or external, those facilitating change initiatives in institutions must have the requisite knowledge of effective OD process and an understanding of the unique context of higher education. Given the decentralized nature of academic institutions, change facilitators will need to work in collaboration with faculty governance committees, administrative leaders, and faculty developers to influence the culture of the institution and then cascade these change initiatives to the departmental level. For example, Latta (2005) discussed a change initiative at the University of Nebraska in which a partnership was formed with the Gallup organization, a noted corporate OD firm, to enhance employees' engagement and to create an inclusive climate in the institution. In this case, facilitators of the change initiative were drawn from university leadership and HR practitioners who subsequently worked with department chairs on the change initiative. Although the unique issues of the academy (e.g., shared governance, decentralization, lack of agreed-upon metrics for evaluation) made it challenging to implement this OD process, this case provides an example of an innovative partnership with both external and internal OD resources to effect change in the academy (Latta, 2005).

Moreover, OD facilitators can augment the individual development focus espoused by faculty development, by expanding this traditional perspective to the group or organizational level. For example, their knowledge of communities of practice, in which "groups of people are informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139) can be helpful in the establishment of peer communities through which faculty help each other achieve success and "have the potential to evolve as change agents" in the academic institution (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002, p. 196). These types of human resource strategies, when realized, can affect organizational commitment in the higher education context and impact employee retention (Buck & Watson, 2002).

As Boyce (2003) asserted, "Continued organizational learning is essential to successful and sustained institutional change" (p. 119). She emphasized the importance of "embedding changes in institutional structures, systems, and cultures" (p. 131) as a means for sustaining change that can be applied to higher education. Establishing institutional structures such as mentoring committees or

cross-institution mentoring programs has the potential for transforming higher education in ways that could have a long-term impact on the experiences of women who have chosen academia as their career path. Gerdes (2003) suggested that senior women must not be content with merely mentoring others or "passing the torch", but "must also use their positions to influence institutions—until the academic structures fit women as well as men and until women's issues truly become people's issues" (p. 269). Those engaged in an OD role in higher education will need to garner the support of senior women faculty, who are frequently working in isolated departments, to facilitate these types of organizational change efforts. As expressed by Lynn Gangone, Executive Director of the National Association for Women in Education:

> We need to really move from incremental changes and adding equity and diversity as add-ons somehow to really transforming the academy and looking at what are the structural changes that we need to really make a difference, so that when we talk about excellence in education, equity and diversity are part and parcel of that, not just an addition. (Rios & Longnion, 2000, p. 5)

Conclusion

In this study, the political climate and culture of an academic institution emerged as an essential attribute of women faculty's mentoring experiences. This research has emphasized the need for campus climate initiatives to enhance women faculty's access to mentoring. The findings also suggest that the establishment of a mentoring culture has a potential role in transforming the academy. Moreover, given the increasing diversity of the faculty population (Rios & Longnion, 2000), there is a growing need for change initiatives that would support the establishment of an academic culture committed to the success of all its faculty, including women and minorities. Institutions are at a turning point in addressing culture and gender equity issues, with recent reports on the status of women faculty recommending the examination of organizational climate as a critical initiative (Rabasca, 2000). Establishing structures that support the provision of mentoring promises to foster women's career development and to transform academic institutions. However, implementing these types of change initiatives requires significant skill and knowledge on the part of those facilitating such an effort. Given the challenges facing higher education today, effectively engaging the skills and expertise of OD professionals

will become critical in facilitating these change initiatives in the higher education context.

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