

# Stacy Blake-Beard

## Research Statement

### **Mentoring as a Catalyst for the Inclusion of Diverse Populations and Perspectives**

The theme of building diverse and inclusive communities started in my research on mentoring. I became interested in mentoring as I considered my own experiences in the corporate sector. As I turned to the literature to help me understand the impact of mentoring on attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, I found that there was not much there to inform me. With my research, I wanted to expand our understanding of how mentoring may be shifting as a result of changing demographics and evolving career dynamics. In answer to this gap in the literature, I focused my mentoring research on two topics: 1) mentoring and gender, particularly the experiences of women of color; and 2) the advantages and challenges of formal mentoring programs. Cutting across these two streams, I focused my research on three inter-related research questions: what are the *experiences* of those engaged in mentoring; what happens in the *interaction* between mentoring partners; and how can mentoring be used as a *catalyst of change*? My interest in building diverse and inclusive communities guides each of these research questions.

#### *Question One: Understanding the Mentoring Experiences of Women of Color*

My first question was about whether or not women of color have access to mentoring to the same degree as white women—were their experiences the same? Using data from my dissertation study of 195 African American and White women (Blake, 1996, 1999),<sup>i</sup> I found that there was no statistical difference in the amount of mentoring received by women in each group. Although the findings were not statistically significant, this paper did two things. It broke new ground, as there was very little research focused on contrasting the experiences of women of color and white women. This paper also led to more questions because I had expected to find quantitative differences between the two populations.

To delve deeper into the experiences of women of color, I began two qualitative investigations. One study focused on the mentoring experiences of five female doctoral students (aspiring superintendents) immersed in a formal mentoring program with male superintendents (Blake, 1998). This article assessed the challenges and opportunities facing women developing mentoring relationships across lines of gender. These respondents faced dual workloads—on one hand they had to manage the relationship between themselves and

their male mentors; they also had to manage external perceptions of their relationships as they worked in the school district. The second study focused on senior women in the corporate sector engaged in informal mentoring relationships (Blake, 1999). Some of my findings confirmed what we were already seeing in the literature—these women were pioneers in their fields, and their mentors were predominantly male. There were also unexpected findings. I expected that these women would describe supportive and satisfying relationships with white women. I was surprised by the overwhelmingly negative feelings that I uncovered. In both articles, I was only seeing half of the story. In order to understand the mentoring experiences of women of color, I needed to understand the interaction between these women and their mentoring partners.

*Question Two: Examining the Interaction Between Women of Color & Their Mentoring Partners*

In research with Catalyst, I examined the mentoring relationships of 916 African American professional women to explore the impact of mentor race and gender on types of assistance offered and on outcomes received by protégés (Giscombe, Blake-Beard, Murrell & Crosby, 2005). Results indicate that mentor race and gender do affect types of support offered and outcomes received by protégés. For example, African American women with white male mentors earn more and have a higher job level within the organization compared to African American women with any other type of mentor in terms of race and gender. But understanding the interaction between women of color and their mentors meant I also needed to gain access to the mentors' experiences. In research that I was conducting focused on a formal mentoring program between businesswomen and high school students sponsored by the New York chapter of the Financial Women's Association, I interviewed both mentors and protégés (Blake-Beard & McGowan, 2000). This research provided a rich understanding of the opportunities and challenges of mentoring across dimensions of race, class and age. I also learned a great deal about the internal and external conditions that support effective mentoring relationships. Formal mentoring relationships were more likely to be successful if mentors entered the relationship open to learning from, as well as giving to, their mentoring partners. What really stood out was the role of the organization in supporting successful formal mentoring. There were critical steps that the sponsoring organization needed to take to support formal mentoring, including careful matching of pairs, training of mentoring partners, and evaluation of the effort (Blake-Beard, 2001). Based on what I was learning with this research, I wanted to understand how organizations were taking up mentoring as a tool for change.

### *Question Three: Utilizing Mentoring as a Catalyst for Change and Enhanced Diversity*

As I was looking at diverse populations, I noticed that a number of organizations were setting up formal mentoring programs to address issues of diversity. Leaders within many of these organizations envisioned mentoring as a way to be inclusive in terms of who has access to career guidance and support. The programs that I was studying utilized mentoring as a way to change the demographics of their industries; mentoring was envisioned as a tool to welcome women and people of color and to harvest diverse perspectives and new ways of learning. Again, I had a number of questions that motivated this research. What is the impact of formalizing these relationships? What are some of the particular challenges of formalizing mentoring relationships—what enables them and what gets in the way? Most importantly, how can mentoring be used as a catalyst for change in organizations?

For example, an important factor tied to the success of formal mentoring programs is how the mentoring pairs are matched. In a forthcoming paper on the importance of matching, I discuss the tendency of program administrators to match on surface-level similarity characteristics such as race or gender (Blake-Beard, O'Neill & McGowan, 2007). In fact, administrators will be better served by matching mentoring pairs based on several factors: 1) complementarity of skills; 2) deep-level similarities; and 3) connection to organizational goals and bottom line measures. In order to really harness the power of formal mentoring, we need to better understand how and why formal mentoring programs are employed and under what conditions are they successful.

### *Future Directions: Mentoring as a Lens to Examine Second-Generation Issues*

I find myself at a critical juncture in my research on mentoring; I would like to explore a number of “second-generation” issues stemming from my work on mentees’ experiences, mentor-mentee interactions and formal mentoring programs. By second-generation issues, I mean taking the mentoring literature from its focus on traditional populations and traditional questions to explore dynamics related to the increasing diversity and complexity of 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations. The literature has focused predominantly on the mentoring relationships of white women, with a growing literature on the experiences of African-American women. One frontier is to move beyond black and white to explore the experiences of other women of color. What do we learn about mentoring as we include the experiences of Asian, Latinas and Native American women? Another second second-generation issue concerns interactions between mentors and mentees. Studies of mentoring have predominantly reported male mentors. How will mentoring be different (or the same) as more and more women take on the role of mentor

(O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002)? How will male and female protégés react to women mentors in positions of power and leadership? A third second-generation issue stems from increasing use of formal mentoring programs. A recent statistic indicated that 70% of Fortune 500 companies either had mentoring programs in place or intended to offer one. I am very interested in studying how organizations will use mentoring for numerous purposes. Right now, we hear a great deal about organizations using mentoring as a tool for succession planning and retention. But the mentoring literature needs to move beyond the study of promotions and salaries to include 21<sup>st</sup> century outcomes. What happens as companies begin to utilize formal mentoring as a way to build learning organizations or to tap into the power of diversity from a learning and effectiveness paradigm? I see these three areas as inter-related; each one is related to my mission of enabling the building of diverse and inclusive communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Papers referenced in this statement are provided in Appendix B—Research Papers