

UCLA

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies

Title

Mentoring Away the Glass Ceiling in Academia: A Cultured Critique edited by Brenda L. H. Marina

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/15k8533m>

Journal

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 12(1)

Author

Campos, Magali

Publication Date

2016

DOI

10.5070/D4121029607

Copyright Information

Copyright 2016 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Mentoring Away the Glass Ceiling in Academia: A Cultured Critique edited by Brenda L. H. Marina. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015. 224 pp. ISBN: 978-1498515306

Mentoring Away the Glass Ceiling in Academia: A Cultured Critique (2015), edited by Brenda L. H. Marina, is a comprehensive examination of women's experiences in various stages in academia and the way mentoring can serve as a tool to break the glass ceiling that prevents many women from reaching higher ranks in academia. Although in recent years more women have entered all levels of academia, a stark gender gap persists, especially in regard to faculty. In the most recent Integrated Postsecondary Education Data systems, statistics show that although 48 percent of faculty are women, 32 percent are in non-tenured positions, compared to 19 percent of men in non-tenured positions, and only 37 percent of women are in tenured positions (American Association of University Professors, 2014). In light of this data, Marina's book is important because academia continues to be a white male dominated space where women are marginalized and overlooked not only as a result of their gender but also for their nationality, race, age, sexualities and other intersecting identities. She has compiled a remarkable body of work that looks at the intersectional identities of women in academia and paints a holistic portrait of their lives.

This edited volume brings together narratives and counter-narratives of women in academia to explore the ways mentorship can help close the gap between men and women in academic professions by drawing from their own experiences, interviews from women in the field, and participants' reflections of grassroots mentoring programs. Through different narratives, the authors in this book offer a wide range of examples of mentoring relationships, mentorship programs and experiences of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the volume includes voices from multiple disciplines (education, social work, and science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM)), different levels in academia (undergraduate, graduate, junior faculty, tenure-track faculty, and tenured faculty), and work spaces. The book is divided into three sections that cover graduate school mentorship, positive and negative effects of mentorship on mentors, and early faculty mentorship. Structuring the book into these three sections is highly effective because it simultaneously allows for a closer look at mentorship at different educational levels and identifies multiple successful strategies for each of the educational levels, facilitating both access and retention.

The first section, "On the Road to Academe," explores women's experiences with mentorship in graduate school. This is done through personal narratives of Black women, Women of Color in STEM fields, and "older-than-average" graduate students. Three overarching forms of mentorship are examined:

same race/gender mentorship, mentorship across race and gender, and peer mentorship. Previous studies have shown that same race and gender mentorship is one of the top factors in the retention of women in predominantly white institutions; however, a particularly illuminating chapter by Johnson and Snider, "PhowarD Progress: Moving Ahead through mentorship in Academia," demonstrates that peer mentorship across race and gender are just as effective as long as trust is established. Building trust is a constant theme throughout the book as it is key in establishing the conditions for social support. Within mentoring relationships, social support is often displayed through emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support, each offering a different, and more holistic, form of assistance to a mentee. Social support underlines the practices that develop mentoring relationships and when paired with communication privacy management (CPM), a body of literature interested in the maintenance of boundaries in relationships, mentoring can be conceptualized as fluid. CPM is most often used in research examining family relationships and is not widely used in mentorship research. Using CPM in mentorship research is especially helpful in demonstrating the ways that mentoring relationships have the potential to change over time. The insight that CPM provides can be very beneficial to mentorship research and I would like to see more expansion on this idea.

The second section, "Tapping on the Glass Ceiling in Academe," moves the focus to the positive and negative effects that being a mentor has on women faculty members. Within academia, mentorship is seen as a "soft" skill, and women are often expected to fulfill those roles because they are perceived as nurturing. As a result, women become overburdened with added care work, which can affect their own career development by limiting the time they can devote to doing their own research. This begins to show the complexities of mentorship because along with the benefits, there are costs that should be acknowledged. One way to address this challenge would be by having institutions incorporate formal and informal structures and processes to help every faculty member and staff develop effective mentorship relationships and networks. Through institutionalized mentorship, both mentors and mentees could be trained to increase the chances of successful mentoring relationships and alleviate the burden on women by ensuring that mentorship will be incentivized.

Lastly, the section on "Steps Toward Successful Mentoring," discusses collaborative informal and formal peer mentorship between faculty members intended to help women develop professionally. Each of the chapters in this section speaks to the weight of social networks on faculty's successful socialization into academia. Often, women and people of color have a harder time developing these networks because they may be first in their families to reach

these predominately white, male dominated spaces. Despite this, women have built their own networks as a strategy to deal with the “old boys’ network.” Through peer mentorship activities and newly formed networks, women faculty became stronger scholars by connecting with other faculty and producing more research and publications, which is an essential part of achieving tenure and promotions.

While addressing the ways in which mentorship is being employed by women in academia, each chapter speaks to the need for institutions to actively support mentorship practices. To correct the structural inequalities that exist in academia for marginalized people, academic institutions need to value mentorship by institutionalizing mentorship programs, but also by giving mentoring the same value that research gets when faculty are reviewed for tenure. Intersecting identities such as race, gender, class, nationality and age can interact in a way that lead women to experience systematic social inequality in academia. For that reason, unless academic settings are restructured, women will continue to face barriers.

This book helps to further an understanding of the unique forms of mentorship, and challenges a singular model that assumes all students benefit equally from similar mentorship styles. Clear examples of specialized and tailored peer mentorship were displayed by the way “older-than-average” graduate students and women faculty teaching in Jamaica peer mentored each other. A grassroots organization provided mentorship through various forms for new faculty by visiting their classes to provide teaching feedback, insight into internal departmental politics, and conversations over coffee. These informal mentorship experiences are often overlooked, making these narratives particularly enlightening for scholars interested in understanding the way that mentorship takes place.

In continuing the development of mentorship research in educational settings, there is space to further deconstruct traditional views and conceptualization of mentorship in this volume. Although the importance of reciprocal and equal relationships was expressed by several authors, terms such as mentor and protégé still carry hierarchical associations. Considering that most of the narratives in the book were by women, a more gender inclusive term could have been used in place of (men)tor. Although the notion of sisterhood as peer mentorship is mentioned in passing, not enough is given to the reconceptualization of mentoring relationships. In the spirit of fostering trust and acknowledging the racial and gendered inequalities that women in academia face, the concept of “femtorship,” where intersections and feminist ideologies are at the center of the guiding relationship, could have helped to further develop a more inclusive approach to mentorship (González Cárdenas, 2015).

The main take away from this book is the thorough examination of successful mentoring relationships built through reciprocity, vulnerability, and trust. This volume is an excellent examination of the role of mentorship in breaking the glass ceiling for women in academia. As such, higher education scholars, faculty members, administrators, and students would greatly benefit from reading this book. It is very comprehensive and applicable across disciplines, countries, and levels in academia. Given the discourse around the gender gap in academia, this book is especially timely and adds to our understanding of how to close the gender gap in higher education through a feminist mentorship model that contributes to existing literature on the subject.

References

- American Association of University Professors, "Table 11: Percent of Faculty in Tenure-Track Appointments and Percent of Faculty with Tenure, by Affiliation, Academic Rank, and Gender, 2013–14," *2013-14 Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession* (2014).
- González Cárdenas, E. (2015). Chicana/o Studies and its impact on Chicana and Chicano undergraduate students: The role of a culturally relevant education.
- Marina, B. L. H. (2015). *Mentoring away the glass ceiling in academia: A cultured critique*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.