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THE ROLE OF GENDERED INFORMAL NETWORKS IN THE CAREEER
ADVANCEMENT OF MBA GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role of informal networks in the career advancement of MBA graduates, specifically investigating whether the use of these networks contributes to gender variation in the career advancement of MBA graduates. Research data comes from in-depth interviews with forty MBA graduate students- twenty men and twenty women. The results support the importance of informal networks for career advancement, which indicates an area in need of further research. Moreover, the findings suggest that the presence of homophilic preferences in male-dominated fields have the potential to decrease female access to powerful informal networks and therefore inhibit opportunities for career advancement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Men and women experience different outcomes at work. This phenomenon is well-researched and widely acknowledged (Hewlett, 2007; Roth, 2006). Women systematically earn less money and experience fewer opportunities for career advancement as compared with their male counterparts (Hewlett, 2007). Prior research provides a variety of explanations for gender disparities in the workplace. Sociologists, economists, and historians have offered explanations spanning from early childhood socialization to outright gender discrimination. Despite decades of research spanning multiple disciplines, a *complete* explanation has yet to be formulated. This is because the factors influencing gender inequality are both widespread and nuanced.

This paper attempts to fill a gap in the research by delving into a relatively unexplored area. Specifically, I ask the question: can informal relationships at work impact the career outcomes of men and women? This paper will explore the career-related benefits of forming friendships at work and ask whether these friendships and their benefits differ between men and women. There is extensive research on the gendered differences of friendship, but these differences have rarely been applied to a workplace setting (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Yet friends, also referred to as informal peers, are the most plentiful type of workplace relationship (Porter &Roberts, 1973). Informal peers form widespread, unofficial, and powerful networks (Roth, 2006; Lincoln & Miller, 1979). Therefore, the potential influence of these peer networks in the career outcomes of men and women warrants further investigation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Although great strides have been made in the last half-century regarding female entry into the workforce, gendered career gaps still exist inside and outside the formal structure for career advancement. Female advancement has plateaued, and in some cases even reverted, in recent years (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008; Roth, 2006). Women rarely reach the upper echelon of corporate America, and when they do, they often operate in different social contexts than their male counterparts (Roth, 2006; Ibarra, 1977). Researchers have identified many potential sources of this inequality, including the division of household responsibilities, occupational segregation, the wage gap, and unequal human capital investment (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004; Biebly & Baron, 1986; Roth, 2006; Becker, 1975). Academics and organizations have spent decades exploring these subjects. There is no single explanation for the current state of gender inequality in the U.S. labor force. Rather, historical, social, and economic factors must all be taken into account. This literature review will summarize the most prominent explanations and explore previously understudied factors.

Established Reasoning Behind Workplace Gender Inequality

Division of Household Responsibilities

In the last century we have seen a diminution of the breadwinner-homemaker model and the rise of the workingwoman and dual-earner family. Stemming in part from the war efforts of

the 20th century and the feminist movement, 58.1 percent of women are now in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In 1967, 36 percent of married-couple families consisted of couples in which only the husband worked. As of 2011, this percentage was cut in half to 19 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The income of working wives now makes up 38 percent of their family's income (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). These trends led to increased autonomy for women, but has also contributed to the birth of the work-life dilemma. Despite the increasing presence of women in the labor force, females continue to hold a heavier burden than men regarding responsibilities in the home (Folbre, 2001). These responsibilities include cooking, cleaning, and, most significantly, child rearing. Because they perform a disproportionate amount of household labor and childcare, professional women are divided between the desire to be the ideal homemaker and their increasingly labor-intensive careers (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). Men do not experience the stress of these clashing demands to the same extent as women because they are not subject to the same physical or social responsibilities that accompany child rearing.

Occupational Segregation

Social expectations influence a woman's decision whether or not to enter a workforce and continue to exert influence after her entrance. Biebly and Baron point out that upon entering the labor force, women are subject to continual inequality by means of occupational segregation (Biebly & Baron, 1986). Simply put, occupational sex segregation infers that "most women and men work in jobs filled largely by persons of their own sex" (Okamoto & England, 1999). For example, just 14 percent of architects and engineers and 34 percent of physicians are women, whereas 61 percent of accountants and 82 percent of elementary and middle school teachers are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). This segregation can be the result of both

unconscious and conscious decisions. Some believe that women intentionally choose certain

career paths because they expect interruptions in their future labor force participation (Okamoto

& England, 1999; Roth, 2006). They may prefer jobs with "fewer penalties for interruptions and

more flexible hours" (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Roth, 2006). Women may sacrifice pay for

"mother-friendly" features of jobs (Okamoto & England, 1999). Others suggest that men and

women are socialized towards gender-appropriate careers and existing structures support this

(Roth, 2006). No matter the explanation behind it, occupational sex segregation is an important

piece of gender inequality at work because "predominantly female occupations offer lower pay

and less opportunity for advancement than occupations filled by men" (Okamoto & England,

1999; Biebly & Baron, 1986).

It is important to note that the wage and opportunity gap is present even when men and

women are performing the same work. Occupational segregation can also refer to situations

where men and women are executing similar tasks, but receiving different job titles and pay.

According to Biebly and Baron (1986), "when enterprises employ both sexes in the same

occupation, they typically assign them different job titles." These lower- wage roles also offer

fewer opportunities for "on-the-job investments in productivity-enhancing skills" (Biebly &

Baron, 1986). This limits not only current wages, but future wages as well.

Occupational segregation is yet another factor contributing to gender inequality in the

workplace because it reinforces gendered work norms that place female occupations and

workplace contributions at a lesser wage and status.

Investment in Human Capital

A third potential explanation for workplace gender inequalities can be supported by the

theory of human capital. Human capital is defined as "the accumulation of prior investments in

education, on-the-job training, health, and other factors that increase productivity" (McConnell, Brue, & Shulman, 2013). Individuals invest in their human capital with the expectation that the investment will result in future gains. These gains may manifest in the form of increased wages, promotions, or other economic and social benefits. Some economists attribute occupational segregation and wage inequality to differing investments in human capital on behalf of men and women in the workforce (Becker, 1975). The argument operates under the assumption that individuals make "rational decisions regarding their human capital investment based on future goals" (Becker, 1975). Because females are expected to bear the majority of the household responsibilities in the future, women may have less incentive to invest in the skills and education that ultimately lead to the success of their male counterparts (Becker, 1975). As previously mentioned, women may intentionally choose careers that offer flexibility in anticipation of their child rearing years (Roth, 2006). In contrast, men strive to maximize their earnings because they expect to remain fully committed to the paid labor force. As a result, men "invest more in their education, training, and job-related skills, which translates to higher productivity and higher pay" (Roth, 2006). In other words, this argument asserts that gender inequality is not the result of discrimination or observable wrongdoings. Rather, it is the result of rational decisions made by both men and women.

Roth (2006) points out that research indicates only 30-50% of the existing gender gap in pay can be attributed to human capital. Moreover, her 2006 study examines a group of individuals with seemingly equal investments in human capital. Gender aside, the participants each graduated from the same elite university with a similar work background. As Roth (2006) stresses in her analysis of elite MBA graduates that, "if any women were going to excel and keep up with their male counterparts, they were going to be from this group." Yet, gender inequalities occur despite this uniform human capital investment (Roth, 2006). This is further evidence that

factors beyond human capital are influencing the career advancement and outcomes of men and women.

The Current State

Education

Women have not only entered the workforce in great numbers; they have also increased their participation in higher education (Damaske, 2009). In 1971 just 9% of medical degrees, 7% of law degrees and 4% of M.B.A.s were awarded to women. Yet, 30 years later, the respective figures were 43%, 47% and 41% (Wallis, 2004). Statistics published in 2011 by the AACSB (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) state that women are currently earning 35.9 percent of MBA degrees attained in the U.S. every year (Appendix B). Although this isn't yet representative of the 50-50 gender make-up of our population, it is great progress since 1984 when women were earning just 20 percent of master's degrees in business or management (U.S. Census Bureau 1984). Female advancement in the academic world has been pervasive and impressive. Unfortunately, these gains have not been met with equal advancement in wages or opportunity.

Wage Gap

The earliest data from the U.S. Department of Labor regarding the wage gap between men and women begins in 1979. At that time, women earned approximately 62 percent as much as men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Through the 1980s and 1990s, the wage gap gradually

narrowed. As seen in Figure 2-1, the percentage peaked in 2005, with women earning 81% as

much as men but has decreased following years (U.S. Department of Labor 2008; Appendix A).

Figure 1 Women's earnings as a percent of men's, full-time wage and salary workers, 1979-2008 annual averages
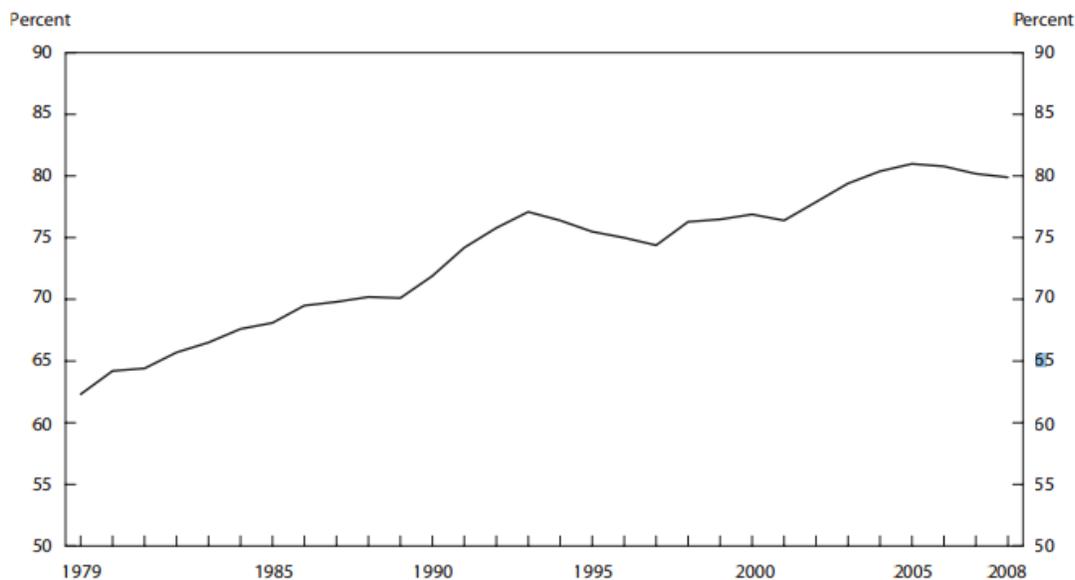
The most recent data from 2008 illustrates the average annual earning of women to be 79.9

percent of men. Moreover, as of 2006, men accounted for 92 percent of the top earners within the

Fortune 500 Companies (Hewlett, 2007; Cataylst, 2006).

Even after accounting for experience, time since MBA, industry, and region, a 2010

Catalyst survey found that women with MBA's make an average of $4,600 less in their initial

jobs as compared to men (Carter & Silva, 2010; Catalyst, 2012). These statistics provide

quantitative evidence of the persistent gender inequality in the business world.

Career advancement

Women are losing in pay and in opportunities. They are not reaching the upper echelon of the world's most powerful organizations. According to Catalyst, a research group focused on women in leadership, only 14.4% of Fortune 500 companies have females in executive officer positions (Catalyst, 2010). In a survey of global MBA graduates, they also found that women lag behind men in job level and salary starting from their first position and do not catch up (Carter & Silva, 2010; Catalyst, 2010).

This snapshot of the current state of the U.S. labor force illustrates that gender inequality persists, even in 2014. The division or household responsibilities, the presence of occupational segregation, and the theory of human capital all offer insight into the reasoning behind this persistent inequality. Yet, despite decades of research, the problem is still not fully understood. The remainder of this paper attempts to offer further insight into the continuing presence of gender inequality in the American labor force.

Gender and Informal Networks

The Power of Informal Networks

Professionals and researchers alike place significant emphasis on the importance of networking as a tool to aid in an individual's entrance into and development within the workforce. Workplaces are strongly influenced by two types of networks: the formal networks and the informal networks (Lincoln and Miller, 1979; Machewitz & Devine, 2000). Formal networks are composed of official and involuntary relationships, such as the manager-subordinate relationship. Literature often refers to these ties as "instrumental ties." These are the official

associations that are set up by an organization in order to reach organizational goals (Lincoln and Miller, 1979). A company's authorized communication structure and strategy is based on instrumental organizational networks. Because of this unmistakable influence, the majority of prior research has focused on the formal relationships (Kram and Isabella, 1985). Yet, authorized or not, an alternative communication channel exists. Informal ties are the most common relationship formed in the workplace and, in turn, create a powerful informal network (Porter& Roberts, 1973).

Informal networks influence the workplace in multiple ways. Friends at work provide emotional support and offer an intrinsic reward. They give one another support, influence one another's decisions, and enhance each other's commitment to the organization (Lincoln &Miller, 1979). Informal networks are a key piece of an organization's socialization process (Fritz, 1997). This network of informal peers is the most available source for information and clarification, particularly to a new employee. Furthermore, friendships at work have also been shown to reduce employee stress and job dissatisfaction and increase employee engagement (Kram &Isabella, 1985; Crabtree, 2004). While all of these influences are significant, this paper will focus particularly on the ways in which informal networks provide career advancement by means of communication and information sharing.

Multiple researchers speak to the power of informal networks on an organization's channels of communication. Sias, Smith, and Avdeyeva (2003) state that informal networks "serve as informal communication systems, providing employees with information about career advancement opportunities, policy changes, and other organizational news." Lincoln and Miller (1979) echo this argument:

> *"Friendship networks in organizations are not merely sets of linked friends. They are*
> *systems for making decisions, mobilizing resources, concealing or transmitting*

information, and performing other functions closely allied with work behavior and

interaction."

Both of these statements argue that friendships at work underpin vital processes in a workplace including decision-making, information sharing, and communication. Communication is a particularly important factor when we consider the concept of *network distance*. This refers to the number of relationships through which a piece of information must travel to connect two individuals (McPherson, Miller, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, pg 416). It points out the importance of not only participating in networks, but also maintaining broad and expansive networks with key organizational players. For example, it is preferable to have minimal network distance to individuals with power to assign career advancement opportunities. Based on "the interconnected resources necessary to accomplish tasks in the business world," it is not surprising that individuals also operate outside of the formal structure established by an organization (McPherson, Miller, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, pg 418). Yet, men appear to be operating outside of the formal structure at a higher rate than women.

Implications for Gender Inequalities

Informal networks have the potential to wield significant power in a workplace setting. However, this power is only enjoyed if exercised correctly. Research suggests that men and women perceive and enact workplace friendships in different ways. As a result, males may enjoy more of the career related benefits of informal networks as compared to their female counterparts.

In order to explore this phenomenon, I will first briefly summarize research regarding the general friendship tendencies of men and women, both inside and outside of the workplace. Various studies suggest that women's friendships are more communal and are characterized by shared feelings and expressiveness (Morrison, 2008). They include greater amounts of self-

disclosure, emotional supportiveness, and complexity than those of men (Machewitz & Devine, 2000). Men's friendships are characterized by shared activities and common interests (Machewitz & Devine, 2000). They are more likely to include the exchange of rewards and favors (Morrison 2008). These relationships are action-oriented rather than person-oriented (Machewitz & Devine, 2000). Ibarra (1997) raises a significant point: "Because women are socialized to emphasize relational over instrumental concerns, their approaches to network development may not be geared toward success in the male business world." It is important to recognize that the friendship behaviors exhibited by men and women are not necessarily conscious. Potentially, they are deeply embedded socialized behaviors.

Research regarding tie strength is also relevant when considering the different ways men and women perceive and enact friendships in the workplace. Tie strength refers to the "closeness" of a relationship within a network. It determines what information is communicated to whom (Lincoln & Miller, 1979). Several studies have operationalized the concept of relationship strength to a series of categories that vary by closeness (Ibarra, 1997). Sias, Smith and Avdeyeva (2003) assessed tie strength based on what they referred to as relationship transitions. These transitions are acquaintance-to-friend, friend-to-close friend, and close friend-to very close/almost best friend (Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003). As a friendship progresses through these stages, the breadth and depth of communication increases, so that relationship partners discuss a greater variety of topics at a more intimate level (Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003).

Kram and Isabella (2004) formed a similar model. After interviewing 25 pairs of individuals, they identified 3 types of relationships: informal peer, collegial peer, special peer. This typology "reflects a continuum, in which level of commitment, intensity, trust and self-disclosure varies from low (information peer) to moderate (collegial peer) to high (special peer)" (Kram& Isabella, 2004). They then applied these categories to the workplace environment and outlined the associated functions of each friendship form. Each form provides career-enhancing

benefits but in differing means. The Information peer shares information and contributes to job performance. It is the most common in the work setting. The Collegial peer offers career-strategizing, job related feedback, and friendship. The Special peer provides confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship. The Special peer relationship develops over several years and is relatively rare in the workplace.

Although the authors did not directly analyze sex differences associated with these patterns, they predict that women's friendships may be more likely than men's to fall into the "special peer" category (Kram & Isabella, 2004). Burt (1992) claims women require strong ties out of necessity. Under the assumption that women are not fully trusted in organizational inner circles, Bert (1991) states the strong ties are needed to signal legitimacy and initiate career advancement. Meanwhile, it is the use of weak ties that fosters men's mobility and career advancement (Bert, 1991). Some research suggests that weak ties are instrumental in finding jobs (Ibarra, 1997; Blau & Alba, 1982). They claim that men enjoy the career advancement benefits of informal networks due to their many weak, broad ranging ties (Ibarra, 1997; Blau & Alba, 1982). This may leave women in a Catch 22: they require strong ties to gain legitimacy, but weak ties to enable career advancement. This research aims to investigate these conflicting assumptions by further examining how tie strength influences the career advancement of both men and women.

Homophily in Network Composition

Multiple authors point to homophily as a central concept to network composition. In essence, the concept of homophily implies that "similarity breeds connection" (McPherson, Miller, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). In other words, individuals "automatically and unconsciously prefer to associate with others who are similar to themselves (Roth, 2006). Just as

any bias does, homophily "limits people's social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience" (McPherson, Miller, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The homogeneous nature of friendship networks have the potential to be more detrimental for women than for men for many reasons. In male dominated spheres of management, men tend to control the promotion decision- making process (Brass, 1985). Roth (2006) found that the "workers who were in the minority [i.e. women] became isolated through the same process that offered comfort and support to those in the majority [i.e. men]" (Roth, 2006). This may explain reluctance on behalf of management to make significant efforts to closing the gender gap. Sociologists have found that "people in control of important job networks have often reinforced inequalities" (Damaske, 2009). Some organizations recognize this and attempt to alter formal power structures as a result. For example, some have made significant attempts to bring more women to managerial levels in organizations. Yet, the power of informal networks tells us that formal structures are not the only the only structures that require attention.

Women as less attractive associations

Homophily explains why peer networks may subconsciously become gender exclusive, but Ibarra (1993) points out that in an organizational setting, individuals may be inclined to make *strategic* choices about whom they choose for membership in their networks and how much they invest in this tie. Although women make up approximately half of the U.S. labor force, their representation is not as strong in many industries in the business world, particularly at the managerial levels of these companies. The majority of individuals interviewed for this study worked in male-dominated workplaces. According to Ibarra (1993), the numerical minority of females is one of three factors that make women less desirable members of friendship networks

(Ibarra, 1993). A second factor is the sex-role stereotypes that lead to "unfavorable attributions about work-related competencies" directed towards women (Ibarra, 1993). In other words, females may be viewed as less competent. A third and final explanation offered by Ibarra (1993) is the belief that females are generally lower status than males in North American society. Combined, these three elements lead both men *and* women to "seek men as network members in order to enhance career advancement and job effectiveness" (Ibarra, 1993).

When women are excluded from powerful informal networks, they may be forced to rely (less successfully) on formal application processes for promotions, while men 'tend to take advantage of informal connections for faster and more frequent job promotions' (Machewitz & Devine, 2000). Women, therefore, may become particularly disadvantaged in informal, friendship networks rather than formal, instrumental organizational networks (Machewitz & Devine, 2000).

The accumulation of this prior literature suggest that questions remain regarding the understanding of gender inequality in the workplace: Why are men and women with equivalent human capital investments receiving unequal career advancement? Who is controlling the opportunities for career advancement and who is receiving them? How does network composition (i.e. gender, tie strength) influence career advancement?

Chapter 3

Methods

Sample and Setting

The data for this analysis was collected from a broader study conducted in 2008-2009 by an individual working towards her Ph.D. dissertation. The intent of the study was to investigate gender variation in the career trajectories of MBA graduates. The researcher aimed to unravel the paradox of female's rising education yet stagnant job attainment in the business field.

Seventy-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women who earned MBA degrees between 1996 and 1998 (approximately 10-12 years prior to interviewing). Twenty-eight interview participants were female and forty-five were male. The in-depth interviews typically lasted 1-2 hours and were conducted both in person and over the phone. The questions were presented in an open-ended format. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim for the purpose of coding and analyzing.

This study was conducted with graduates from a prestigious business school in New York City. At the time of interview, the majority of participants held over 10 years of post-MBA business experience. Individuals held positions in a wide range of industries, including finance, consulting, banking, manufacturing, and additional professionals. The sample was intentionally composed of a combination of men and women with similar credentials and background characteristics. In order to gather a sample, the researcher acquired alumni lists from 1996-1998 from the selected institution. Participants were then chosen randomly from these lists.

At the time of the data collections in 2008 through 2009, the US was nearing the depth of an economic recession. Because this study is focused on a career trajectory over a span of years,

we do not expect this externality to have a significant influence on the data. However, this broader economic circumstance is worth noting because female senior leaders are three times more likely to lose their jobs due to downsizing or closure (Carter & Silvia, 2009; Catalyst 2009).

This qualitative data was originally collected to broadly investigate the gender variation in the career trajectories of MBA graduates. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to specifically focus on the relationship between composition of informal networks and career advancement.

I randomly selected 40 of the 73 interviews (20 male and 20 female) to code and analyze. Because I did not conduct the interviews myself, the first step was an initial read-through of each interview. At this point, I identified trends in questioning and responses that were relevant to my focus of study. Next, I developed and classified codes based on the prevalent trends, using guidance from related qualitative studies. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into a qualitative data analysis software called Dedoose. Within this software, I was able to make virtual excerpts and assign codes to these excerpts. After coding within Dedoose, I exported the data into a streamlined Excel document. I used this excel document to create the figures needed for the final analysis.

Measures

Dependent Variables

The primary dependent variable assessed in this study was Career Advancement. First, I determined whether or not an individual achieved career advancement as the result of an informal network. If yes, I totaled how many times this career advancement occurred and whether help was offered from a male or female in their network. If assistance was provided solely by males,

the career advancement code was classified as "M." If it was provided solely by females, the career advancement code was "F." If it was provided by both men and women, the career advancement code was classified as "B" for both.

Ultimately, participants were categorized as possessing accelerated or stalled careers. Stalled careers included individuals who had exited the workforce entirely or had become 'sidelined' or 'plateaued' in their career advancements. Characteristics of accelerated careers include a steady and quick move up in salary and title. This acceleration could exist in both internal and external role changes.

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study address the composition of participants' networks, including the predominant gender and tie strength present in each network. Independent variable also identify the predominant method of career advancement used by participants.

Gender composition in a network was operationalized as "Predominantly Male" "Predominantly Female" or "Co-Ed" in nature. While there was no overt question regarding the gender composition of each interviewee's network, I determined this variable based on the evidence provided within responses from participants. The majority of participants consistently mentioned both male and female ties. The composition of these networks was coded as "Co-Ed." Individuals were classified as "predominantly male" or "predominantly female" when one to zero mentioning of the opposite gender as present through the duration of the interview.

Tie Strength was operationalized as the proportion of "Weak," "Moderate," and "Strong" ties. The classifications were determined using the descriptions provided by Kram and Isabella (2004). These friendship forms vary based on level of "closeness." It "reflects a continuum, in

which level of commitment, intensity, trust, and self-disclosure caries from low to moderate to high" (Kram and Isabella, 2004). The breadth and depth of communication speaks directly to the strength of a tie. In a work context a relationship of 'low" or "weak" tie status is characterized by acquaintanceship and general information sharing. A "moderate" tie is characterized by friendship, assistance in career-strategizing, and the delivery of job-related feedback. "Strong" ties at work are displayed in individuals who go far beyond "co-worker" status. These relationships persist throughout the career, despite job changes. They provide emotional support, personal feedback, and close friendship (Kram & Isabella, 2004).

Methods of career advancement were categorized as internal mobility within or external mobility away from the individual's current organization. In other words, if the majority of an individual's career was spent advancing within a single organization, the career advancement was classified as "I" for internal. On the other hand, if an interviewee moved between organizations throughout their career advancement, it was classified as "E" for external. When available, opinions and perceptions of this mobility were also coded. For example, I searched for examples of "Expression of Company Loyalty." Below is a prime example of such an expression:

> "*Somewhere along the way I guess something clicked in my head that I was doing a lot of things for the firm, not just running jobs and showing work, but also had a lot of responsibility to a lot of people. Not only my project teams, but doing this committee, running this committee or, you know, doing this or that for the firm to better the firm. I had all these other responsibilities that you know when I think about it now, I can't quit. 'Cause all these other things would then not get done. So, I felt a responsibility to the firm.*"

Next, a participant's method of career advancement was categorized as using formal channels, informal channels, or both. Formal channels include the HR established process for recruitment and hiring, which includes career fairs, resume submissions, and formal interview

processes. Informal channels essentially include all career advancements made *outside* of the

formal structure. This includes individuals who were hired or referred by friends and family.

Individuals who utilized both of this channels were classified as "b" for both.

Chapter 4

Results

The Power of Informal Networks

These results illustrate the importance of informal networks for career advancement. Approximately 82.5 percent of participants mentioned the use of these networks as a source of career advancement in their post-MBA career. The significance of informal workplace relationships is anecdotally supported and explained by interview responses. Participants spoke to both the personal and professional support offered by informal ties within their network and explained under what circumstances these ties contribute to career advancement. For example, when asked if friendship is an important factor in a workplace, Douglas responded:

> *"Absolutely. Because you need somebody to talk to, share experiences and sometimes that person turns into a mentor of sorts. You know how to navigate the company- are they reading the tea leaves like you're reading the tea leaves?"*

Douglas is describing a moderate tie in which individuals benefit through career-guidance and support. When discussing mentorship, Nicole responded in a similar manner:

> *"My closest friend is from business school. I will always pass anything by her, like any new contract. Anything. I always get her opinion. And then I have another friend from college who I always pass things to. So I would say my peers more than mentors. They've become my sounding board, like "does this sound like a good job to you?" And even with things that I do every day- they're the people I talk to."*

The longevity of Nicole's relationship points towards a strong tie. A high level of trust is clearly present. Douglas and Nicole both stressed the importance of friendships at work in providing career-related support and advice. Other participants pointed to more direct methods of career advancement as a result of informal ties. For example, Chad explains the power of personal relationships by comparing the informal and formal methods of career advancement in the financial world:

> *"You know, it, there's two ways that these things can happen. We have this process that we call People Plan Development or Action Plan where you say, more or less, what you want to be doing, and then your boss or HR tells you "OK, well yes, I think that you could be doing that because you have the skills" or "No, you need to be doing more of this to be able to get there". Or, you know, "this is the gap you need to be filling." Or, (laughs) it happens because you know somebody and, as I said before, by personal relationships, people that have worked before with you want to continue working with you. You know? This is the thing that happens. When you have a working relationship with someone that likes to work with you (and that person can pull you) then he pulls you, you know?"*

The first portion of Chad's statement reflects the formal channels of career advancement as established by HR. The second is a closer reflection of promotion decisions made in Chad's firm. Chad enjoyed an accelerated career at his investment firm. Tracey, a woman in the financial industry, also enjoyed an accelerated career at her firm. Her statement expands upon the notion posed by Chad:

> *"The best jobs are the ones that … aren't written down yet and aren't posted yet. By the time you've posted it, it's too late. People - the smart managers- they're thinking five steps ahead. By the time they've posted it they already know the person they're hiring into it, and then it's too late to try to interview for that. Things always happen in the*

hallways on the executive floor. So it's all at the back, the hallway chat, 'Well who do you

think is the right person,'' or "can she do it?'' There's a lot of -----, you know? and that's

really built through the years within the organization.''

Tracey's statement asserts that individuals relying on formal methods of career advancement are "too late." When "smart managers" view job postings as merely a formality, individuals who are not visible to the managers miss out on opportunities. Tracy was not the only participant to describe hand-picked promotions. Multiple participants spoke about the formation of teams or special project groups in which the participants were selectively chosen. Holly states:

"They picked exactly who they wanted in the group. Which is a very typical thing that

happens at Eagle Bank. Somebody forms a new group -- usually new groups are formed

because it's like a hot desirable thing and they pick all the best people because there's

focus on the group so they get to choose who they want. And I was fortunate enough to

be the analyst who was selected to work in this group.''

These findings add to a great body of research which suggests that subjectivity may often surpass objectivity in career advancement decisions. Kimberly expresses the thought rather bluntly:

"Well, I mean the workplace isn't this great fair place where the smartest and most

capable of people get ahead. I mean, that's just not the way it works in all places, and

whether you say that's because of discrimination or something else, I mean, it just kind of

is what it is.''

The business world, and particularly the financial industry, often describes itself as a meritocracy in which the best performers are rewarded with career advancement and compensation. Yet, it appears that social visibility and likeability also play a significant role in opportunities for career advancement. Ronald summarizes the requirements for career advancement with one word-trust:

"You have to get exposure, people have to know who you are, they have to trust you and

then they have to - I guess when they know who you are and they trust you, that's when

things go your way because then you get the assignments. So that's what this program is

all about. It's to get people to know you and to trust you."

Of those who experienced career advancement, 57.5% were the direct result of informal channels. 30% were the result of both formal and informal channels. Of the five individuals who attempted career advancement purely through formal channels, four had 'Stalled' careers with little career advancement. The lack of advancement among those who relied solely on formal channels is not surprising based on anecdotal responses provided by participants regarding the promotion process. Tactics used by these participants included career services centers, on-campus career fairs and interviews, and resume submissions.

Network Composition and Career Advancement

Now that we have established the influence of informal networks on career advancement, we can explore whether or not the gender composition of these networks influence career advancement. The majority of participants (n=25) had co-ed networks. Of the remaining, 5 females possessed predominantly female networks and 10 males reported predominantly male networks. No respondents reported having exclusively opposite gender networks.

No direct relationship emerged among women in terms of the gender composition of their network (female vs. co-ed) and their career advancement through networks. In other words, women with co-ed networks did not appear to experience significantly more or less career advancement than women with all female networks. However, a relationship did appear among men. Of the 10 men with predominantly male informal networks, 100% reported career advancement through these informal networks (as compared to an 89.9% average use of informal networks among men with co-ed networks and a 82.5% average use of informal networks among all 40 participants). Moreover, men's interviews suggest that men are providing career

opportunities to one another. When asked how he got his first internship out of MBA School, George responded:

> *"What happened was; one of my friends had gotten an internship with the group that sat next to this group when we were in Midtown. He knew that I hadn't gotten an internship yet and he heard that this woman was going on maternity leave and they said, 'Do you know anybody'. And he said, 'Yeah, I absolutely know somebody, you should definitely interview him'. And that's how I got it. So yeah, it really fell in my lap."*

Justin had a similar experience in which a male friend also recommended him for a job:

> *"The internal recruiter that had handled his move from New York came in and said, 'Hey, we need somebody with oil and gas experience. Do you know anybody?' He said, 'Well yeah, I have this friend Justin who's up in New York.' So Big Oil called me and then pursued me and then I took the job and came down to Houston."*

In both of these cases, participants received active assistance in career advancement directly from males in their informal network. In some cases, females also reported opportunities for career advancement as the result of a male tie. For example, Denise explains how she connected with a friend of a friend who offered her a great job:

> *"A friend of mine from graduate school was very good friends with a guy named Jim who owns this start-up consulting firm focused on meeting entertainment in the New York area…which is where I ended up going. What I loved about what he was doing was he was more focused on marketing strategy, which was my background, so it was almost a no brainer. When I met him, I met a few of the board members and resigned from Consulting America. And joined him"*

Of the total sample, 35 percent of participants reported direct career advancements as the result of help from men in their informal network and the remaining 65 percent received career

advancement from both men and women. None of the 40 respondents reported network advancement *exclusively* from female members of their network.

Of the 40 participants interviewed, 11 experienced "stalled" career advancement- seven women and four men. Among these seven women, five operated within co-ed peer networks and two within exclusively female. Among the four men with stalled careers, two held co-ed networks and two held exclusively male networks.

Tie Strength

We can also examine the eleven "stalled" career individuals based on the strength of relationship ties. When looking at the same seven women, the findings show that 1 held weak ties, 4 held moderate ties, and 2 held strong ties. Among the four men, three held moderate ties and 1 held strong ties. These numerical findings do not indicate a relationship between tie strength and career advancement. Rather, the findings concerning tie strength simply support previous research regarding relationship forming tendencies of men and women. Women exhibited behavior of strong ties twice as often as men. This relates to previous research which emphasizes that women's friendships are often characterized by shared feelings and expressiveness and include greater amounts of self-disclosure, emotional supportiveness, and complexity than those of men (Morrison, 2008; Machewitz & Devine, 2000). These behaviors were expressed by many female participants and are all characteristic of strong ties. Nicole's description of her closest friend from business school (described above) is an example of this. Melissa offers another example:

> *"I have a couple of close friends here. Actually one of them whom I went to business school with and then another woman that I met when I was – we sat next to each other when we were directors and she's still in the company and we've been friends since ... It's*

a big company and we're all in different areas. So at times it's good to call and say,

'What do you think about this' or 'What are you guys doing' or 'How much was your

bonus' ... You know, that sort of thing. So it's good to have someone to just bounce things

[off of]."

Melissa's strong ties are characterized by trust and information sharing. Prior research asserted that women need strong ties to signal legitimacy in a workplace. Meanwhile, men supposedly experience greater mobility and career opportunities through a wide network of weaker ties. These findings neither support nor contradict prior research regarding tie strength and career advancement.

How Powerful is Homophily?

The power of informal networks in the promotion process is not necessarily problematic on its face. Rather, it may be a combination of informality and homophily that has the potential to result in adverse impact on minority groups in a given work environment. Multiple statements of homophilic preferences were expressed. First, from Justin who works in investment banking:

"Ever since I've been in the position to choose my employees or my reports, I've been

extremely selective, not only on just sort-of what I thought was intelligence and work

ethic and all the usual stuff, but also what kind of person are they. Are they somebody I

can hang out with and have fun with because hours are going to be a little bit long. And

frankly, as I've gotten older, I just don't want to spend time around people I don't like."

It is important to note that Justin makes no mention of preferring men over women. Rather, he states he prefers to work with people he can "have fun with" and not to spend time with people he doesn't like. While Justin's preference appears to be reasonable, the theory of homophily

suggests that there may be consequence for highly qualified women of hiring preferences such as these.

Unlike Justin, some interview respondents did show clear preferences for one gender over another. The consensus among this group was summarized by one participant who noted: "there's an element of certain political aspect removed when you're of the same gender" as a boss or peer. Edward, for example, is a male professional who openly expressed discomfort with working with women:

> *"I've asked fewer questions, just about how someone is doing personally, how they're feeling about things or if there's stuff going on in their lives… I tried to keep that separate with women. I don't want to have any kind of misconstrued comments or anything like that by the conversation that I might have with someone."*

Edward's comment brings up an interesting point regarding political correctness. This topic was addressed on multiple occasions throughout the interviews. Benjamin acknowledged his attempts to maintain formality with females:

> *"I'm a little bit less friendly with my female subordinates. I try to be a little bit more formal with them. So, for whatever reason, nothing gets misinterpreted in this environment."*

Regardless of underlying motivation, this behavior has the potential to inhibit women from joining their informal networks. As explored in the literature review, trust and self-disclosure are key pieces in the formation of friendship. With this gender barrier in place, women do not have the opportunity participate in the informal communication channels or to benefit from the information acquired in these channels, such as opportunities for career advancement.

Women may also have gendered preferences. April, for example, is a female professional who openly expressed a preference for working with other females:

"I definitely felt a little bit more candid with my female managers, like about whatever my situation is from a family perspective, work-life balance perspective. I think I felt more guarded with male managers. Women probably relate to my situation a little bit more than men."

These three individuals all hold same-gender preferences, but April's preference may not be as powerful as Edward's or Benjamin's. April's exclusion from the dominant male network is likely to cut off more opportunities than the reverse scenario.

April's expression of homphily comes from a desire to relate to others in similar situations. Homophily is not always gender-related. Feelings of similarity or difference may arise from a number of circumstances. For example, multiple respondents expressed similar feelings of exclusion when they considered themselves to be of a different age bracket from their peers. Age, race and gender are often immediately visible traits that can "affect friendships, trust, and the sponsorship of others" (Roth, 2006; Ibarra 1997). In a male-dominated work environment, where individuals supposedly have an "unconscious preference for people like themselves" it is unsurprising that women are not benefiting from these informal channels to the same extent as their male counterparts (McPherson, Miller, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Moreover, the potential issue is highlighted when we begin to look at the seemingly negative stereotype attributed to highly qualified women

Qualified Women as less attractive network associations

As previously mentioned, Ibarra (1993) identified three factors which potentially reduce women's desirability as members of friendship networks: women's numerical minority, women's unfavorable work-related stereotypes, and women's lower societal status. An additional factor she did not address may be the socially negative stereotype associated with high-powered women.

Never having worked directly for a women in his male-dominated field, Paul chooses his works carefully when asked about the perception of women in the workplace:

> "I think that they would be considered to be tough negotiators – very smart and very savvy but tough negotiators. Generally I think they probably would be perceived by their employees as hard to work for."

The idea that women are "hard to work for" was mentioned repeatedly. Similar to Paul, Denise also comes from a male-dominated field. Her comments offer further detail behind the negative perception of women:

> "I've noticed my organization doesn't have a lot of female executives. The ones that we do have are very type A. They are very dominant personalities, almost masculine in their approaches, and they don't have children. So what's actually interesting is the one who is probably the most demanding about asking me to do late night calls and come in earlier, is the woman, not the men."

Among all the interviews, it was actually a female who held the harshest opinion of senior women in business. Holly states:

> "I think women who don't have a family tend to -- and I know plenty of women who don't have a family and they're very happy or whatever, but the women I work with don't have a family and are extremely successful like very senior in a business, tend to have -- I don't know if bitter is the right word but it comes across as bitter. Everything about them is all business, their lives are all business, they can't understand that there's a human component to work and things like that. They're much more sharky."

Consistent throughout the analyzed interviews, high powered women were described as "bitter," "sharky," "unhappy," "Type A," and "dominant." They were regularly referred to as "hard to work for" or "irrationally demanding." In multiple cases, these descriptions were particular to women who do not have children. With informal channels dominating the career advancement

opportunities, and men *and women* displaying overtly negative feelings towards highly qualified

women, it is not surprising that gender inequality in career advancement have persisted.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Conclusion

These results build off previous research to further illustrate the importance of informal networks for career advancement (Lincoln and Miller, 1979; Machewitz & Devine, 2000; Kram and Isabella, 1985; Porter& Roberts, 1973; Fritz, 1997). I find that formal channels for career advancement are often bypassed in favor of advancement through informal network ties. As a result of the use of informal networks, it appears that social visibility and likeability also play a significant role in opportunities for career advancement. This becomes problematic when we see that women continue to operate in male-dominated atmospheres. Interestingly, no relationship was found among women in terms of the gender composition of their network and their success. Yet, such a relationship did appear among men. Men with predominately male networks were more likely to report career advancement as the result of informal networks than men with co-ed networks. This finding speaks directly to the influence of gendered networks on the career advancement of participants.

In their research regarding homophily, Miller, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2011) describe how homophilic tendencies have the potential to "limit people's social worlds." Damaske (2009) takes the topic further by suggesting that individuals in control may have the power to reinforce inequalities. This study found a significant presence of homophilic preferences expressed by both men and women. This is substantial because it led to men intentionally maintaining formality with their female counterparts and women seeking out other women for social support, ultimately

resulting in women not benefiting from informal channels to the same extent as their male counterparts.

Furthermore, these results expand on Ibarra's (1993) research that deemed women less attractive network ties. She identified three potential reasons behind this: women's numerical minority, women's unfavorable work-related stereotypes, and women's lower societal status. This research builds on Ibarra's work and offers a fourth explanation for the unattractiveness of women as network ties. Findings indicate that both men and women expressed socially negative stereotypes associated with high-powered women. Women were consistently described as "bitter," "sharky," "Type A," and "dominant." These results are significant because they provide evidence for attitudes and behaviors which result in exclusion from the informal networks that provide career advancement.

Limitation and Future Research

There are some limitations to this study. Interviews were conducted by a 3rd party without this particular research question in mind. As a result, I was unable to include specific and pointed questions regarding the composition of participant's informal networks. I was also unable to respond in real-time in order to ask for elaboration on particular answers. Because of the time-intensive single-interviewer design, the sample size is relatively small. The in-depth interview offers some unique advantages over a large-scale survey with exclusively fixed-choice answer categories (Roth, 2006). Open-ended questions have the potential to explore participants thinking process, to permit creative responses, and to discover unanticipated findings. However, future research would benefit from a larger sample size in order to examine the generalizability of these findings and their prevalence among the population at large.

The sample used for this research was composed of highly educated, professional employees. This sample was purposely selected for these characteristics, it should be mentioned that these results may or may not generalize to the wider population. For example, individuals in non-business related fields may not emphasize the need for networking to the same degree as business professions. Furthermore, because the participants attended business school specifically between the years of 1996 and 1998, these results may be subject to a cohort effect

Implications

Gender inequality persists in the workplace despite decades of attention from the media, organizations, and academics. While undeniable gains have been made in the last century (namely, women's increased workforce participation and increases in education), statistics show that improvement has slowed and even reversed in some cases. This warrants continued attention from media, organizations, and academics, until the gender gap is closed. These results affirm that men and women continue to operate in differing social contexts at work. With the information provided here, organizations can respond by recognizing the influence of informal networks, rather than continue to solely focus on formal channels of communication. The first step is recognizing the power of these informal networks. The next is to address and alleviate the gendered advantages in these networks. The method for remedying this is cause for future research.

Appendix A

Women's earnings as a percent of men's, full-time wage and salary workers, 1979–2008 annual averages

Year	Women's Earnings as Percent of Men's
1979	62.3
1980	64.2
1981	64.4
1983	65.7
1984	66.5
1985	67.5
1985	68.1
1986	69.5
1987	69.8
1988	70.2
1989	70.1
1990	71.9
1991	74.2
1992	75.8
1993	77.1
1994	76.4
1995	75.5
1996	75.0

1997	74.4
1998	76.3
1999	76.5
2000	76.9
2001	76.4
2002	77.9
2003	79.4
2004	80.4
2005	81.0
2006	80.8
2007	80.2
2008	79.9

U.S. Department of Labor. 2008. Highlight of Women's Earnings in 2008. Washington, D.C.

Appendix B

Women's Share of MBAs Earned in the U.S.

Year	Percent MBA Degrees Earned by Women
2002-2003	34.5
2003-2004	35.1
2004-2005	35.1
2005-2006	34.7
2006-2007	36.1
2007-2008	35.5
2008-2009	36.3
2009-2010	36.9
2010-2011	36.8
2011-2012	35.9

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