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Richard J. Reddick ^a

^a The University of Texas at Austin

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Intersecting Identities: Mentoring Contributions and Challenges for Black Faculty Mentoring Black Undergraduates

Richard J. Reddick
The University of Texas at Austin

This article employs an intersectional analysis of the experiences of Black faculty at an elite US university who have mentored Black undergraduates, and focuses on faculty's meaning making of their connection to their mentees, and challenges they face in these relationships. Findings reveal that faculty found their shared cultural background enhanced mentoring, and they worked hard to establish trust with their mentees, absent at times in mentees' relationships with White faculty. Participants shared barriers to engaging in mentoring relationships, with gender and age intersecting with race for unique challenges and benefits for the subjects. Policy recommendations are made to support junior faculty mentors in the tenure granting process, and produce incentives for all faculty to share the responsibility of mentoring.

Keywords: black faculty, intersectionality, mentoring

There is cause for optimism the regarding status of the Black academic community at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the United States – (a) a steady increase in Black faculty since the 1960s, (b) an establishment of a respected cadre of Black scholars, and (c) recruitment programs for Black faculty (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). Conversely, there are significant challenges confronting Black faculty. For example, the “Black tax” (Cohen, 1998, p. 821), the additional committee work and academic housekeeping around diversity that falls to Black professors, challenges them to balance their efforts on service responsibilities that carry insufficient weight in the tenure process. Blacks in US academia also are subjected to episodes of racial bias (Thompson & Louque, 2005), and are disproportionately repre-

Richard J. Reddick, Department of Educational Administration, The University of Texas at Austin.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to Richard J. Reddick, Department of Educational Administration, The University of Texas at Austin, Sanchez Building 374E, D5400, 1 University Station, Austin, TX 78712-0374, USA. Email: richard.reddick@austin.utexas.edu

sented among the junior ranks (Menges & Exum, 1983). This experience has been observed outside the US: more severe trends of isolation and marginality are evident in research on Black scholars in the UK (Phillips, 2004) and Canada (Wagner, Acker, & Mayuzumi, 2008), suggesting that internationally, Black faculty are grappling with these issues.

Black undergraduates have a similar narrative to their faculty counterparts. On one hand, Black undergraduate participation in US higher education increased from the 1970s to 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Despite this increase, Blacks trail Whites at all levels of degree attainment (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2006). Researchers have posited that one cause of this gap is the deleterious effects of hostile campus environments on Black students at PWIs, well documented in the US (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Similar challenges have been noted in studies of Black students in Canada (Hamilton & Shang, 1999; Henry & Tator, 2009) and Britain (Bird, 1996).

Of the many strategies employed to refute negative campus climate concerns, one of significant interest is the phenomenon of mentoring. Most extant literature on mentoring in higher education has focused on outcomes for protégés, rather than perspectives of senior participants in developmental dyads – a neglected aspect that mentoring researchers have noted as needed in the research literature (Johnson, Rose, & Schlosser, 2007). Another gap in mentoring research is the paucity of race- and gender-focus in analyses (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2007; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007). In this article, I explore how Black faculty mentors make meaning of their engagement with Black undergraduates at an elite US university, while also discussing impediments to establishing mutually beneficial relationships between faculty and undergraduates.

Conceptual Frameworks

One challenge in embarking on this research topic is that the literature is scant on theoretical models pertaining to mentoring relationships between faculty and undergraduate students, in addition to the cultural issues among Black faculty and students at PWIs. With this in mind, I conceptualized the issue with a constellation of theoretical perspectives: (a) the experiences of Black students and faculty at PWIs, (b) the concept of intersectional analysis, and (c) the theory of critical race pedagogy.

Black Faculty and Students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

Researchers have found that PWIs often present challenging climates for Black faculty and students (Feagin et al., 1996). Racial bias contributes stress for Black faculty, who often experience the challenges they help students cope with inside and beyond the institution (Tack & Patitu, 1992;

Turner, 2003), potentially limiting their ability to assist Black students. Black faculty must navigate these challenges, recognizing that their choices may reduce the time available to qualify for tenure, meaning that potential Black mentors for students are unavailable (Johnson, Xu, & Allen, 2007). Conversely, refusing extra demands could label Black faculty “race traitors” by others, while White faculty may perceive these actions as counter to the concept of service (Brayboy, 2003, p. 76).

As a result, Black faculty have occupied positions of low status among the professorial ranks and have reported low levels of job satisfaction (The Study of New Scholars, 2004). Despite this pressure, Black faculty have endeavored to mentor Black students (Frierson, Hargrove, & Lewis, 1994; Gregory, 2001), often experiencing “bittersweet success” (Turner & Myers, 2000, p. 112) as they work with students while navigating the often treacherous promotion and tenure path. Similar experiences can be found among Black undergraduates, who often balance academics, community service, work, and institutional diversity efforts (Turner & Myers, 2000; Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, Reddick, & Flanagan, 2005).

Black students (along with their faculty counterparts) often encounter microaggressive covert prejudice and discrimination (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Microaggressions are mitigated by a positive racial climate – an inclusion of experiences of people of color; support for recruitment and graduation of students of color; and an institutional commitment to diversity (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Inadequacy in any of these domains can lead to detrimental effects on the student’s psychosocial adjustment to campus.

Intersectional Analysis

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) has discussed how traditional legal discourses tend to frame identities through singular lenses – i.e., gender, class, or race. A more accurate rendering of the experiences of individuals who occupy multiple oppressed identities is the concept of *intersectionality*, which integrates these selves (Grillo, 1995). An additional factor is that of age, particularly important in academic settings where seniority bestows benefits, and youth can be a liability. Hence, the participants in this study cannot be viewed simply as young or senior professors, men or women, or Black people – these manifest characteristics interact in powerful ways that color perceptions of how individuals interface with society.

For instance, a Black female professor may experience subordination and discrimination not simply due to her race or gender, but due to the confluence of these two identities, and how Black women are stereotyped as Mammies, Matriarchs, Welfare Mothers, and Jezebels (Hill Collins, 1998) – aspects of which are intensified in a patriarchal, traditionalist milieu like academia (Margolis & Romero, 1998). She may experience sexism just as

White women do (St. Jean & Feagin, 1997), or racism as Black men do (Hill Collins, 2004). Historical factors (i.e., lynching) and cultural factors (i.e., the “double jeopardy” experienced by Black women as they deal with racism as well as cope with sexism from White and Black men) mean that the impact is quite different for both these populations (King, 1995, p. 296).

For instance, a Black male professor may experience extreme stereotyping and may not experience the typically privileged status of maleness, as he is the embodiment of many negative stereotypes in the US context (e.g., hypersexualized, threatening, and angry). However, the aspects of professorial rank, academic pedigree, and class may mitigate some of these damaging stereotypes.

When analyzing populations through an intersectional lens, common artifacts of institutional or disciplinary life take on a different meaning. For example, time constraints, while commonly experienced by all faculty, may have a differential impact on Black men and Black women in contrast to White male faculty due to stereotypes and assumptions about ability, privilege, and discrimination. In this study, I bring together the numerous dimensions of Black professors’ identities to present their meaning making of their mentorship of Black undergraduates and the challenges of this work.

Critical Race Pedagogy

To frame the experiences of faculty who engage in the mentorship of Black students, I examined the intersection of critical race theory (CRT) and education, termed critical race pedagogy (CRP) (Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Lynn, 1999). CRT is a legal discourse emphasizing that racial oppression is omnipresent in American life (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993), and opposes conceptualizations of neutrality, promoting a postmodern perspective valuing the importance of standpoint in thoughts and action. CRT acknowledges the experiences of people of color who have encountered oppression, and states that the consequences of racial oppression are linked to gender- and class-based bias.

CRP can be defined as an analysis of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination in education that relies on the perceptions, experiences, and counter-hegemonic practices of educators (Lynn, 1999). My study expands on CRP by applying its tenets to a university context, by shifting the unit of analysis from K-12 educators to college professors. I also strongly focused on teaching and learning *beyond* the classroom. This conceptualization of pedagogy centers on the understanding of teaching as a political act (Freire, 2000), and I examined how the dialogue between teacher and student goes beyond classroom interactions.

Methods

In order to answer two research questions – one, how do Black faculty at an elite PWI make meaning of their mentoring of Black undergraduates, and two, what challenges do Black faculty at an elite PWI face as they mentor Black undergraduates – I employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design, utilizing data collected from two samples of Black faculty at one US predominantly White institution over a three-year period. I conducted two-part semi-structured interviews with each participant, investigating faculty mentors' formative years, their experiences being mentored, and their perspectives on how they support a new generation of scholars through instrumental and psychosocial means. In a call for further directions in mentoring research, Johnson, Rose, and Schlosser (2007) emphasized the importance of context-specific, exemplar-based studies of student-faculty mentoring. Thus, the decision to interview mentors in one context, where participants are immersed in the same cultural, historical, and social milieu, provided the potential for in-depth, nuanced perspectives on the mentoring experience for participants.

The first sample was obtained through a list of Black faculty at Worth University (pseudonym), a highly selective college in the northeastern United States. Worth's status as a trendsetter in both United States and international higher education suggests that findings from my study can cast light on how mentors cope in a competitive, high-stakes environment. From this list, I purposefully sought faculty with tenure-track appointments, who had taught at Worth for at least one year, and taught undergraduate students, netting a sample of two men (assistant and associate) and two women (assistant and full).

For the second sample, also from Worth, I surveyed Black undergraduates to identify faculty mentors, in an effort to seek exemplar mentors. Such a purposeful sampling method necessitated a small sample, and falls in line with qualitative studies on faculty of color (cf. Erwin, Henry-Tillman, & Thomas, 2002; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009). From the student nominations, I selected a gender- and rank-diverse sample of three men (associate, and two full), and three women (assistant, associate, and full). I accessed and read their faculty biographical sketches to ascertain baseline demographic information and detail significant professional milestones (degrees conferred, areas of research, etc.) (See Table 1).

In both samples, faculty participants agreed to sit for two interviews. The first interview (ranging from 45–90 minutes among the sample) focused primarily on the participants' formative experiences and journey to the professorate. The second interview, conducted from one to five weeks after the first (ranging from 60–120 minutes among the participants) focused primarily on questions regarding how the faculty served as mentors to Black

Table 1
Faculty Respondents and Description

Name	Gender	Area of study	Rank	Age
Geneva Morris	Female	Humanities/natural sciences	Full	51
Willa Porter	Female	Social sciences	Associate	38
Linda Owens	Female	Liberal arts/area studies	Full	62
Vonda Williams	Female	Religion/area studies	Assistant	33
Michelle Womack	Female	Social sciences/area studies	Associate	40
Fred Benson	Male	Graduate studies	Full	51
Bernard Carter	Male	Humanities/area studies	Associate	37
Derrick Ellis	Male	Humanities/area studies	Associate	40
Kwame Farriss	Male	Humanities	Assistant	38
Michael Norman	Male	Liberal arts/area studies	Full	56

undergraduate students and their perceptions of the efficacy of their mentorship. The interview protocol was identical for both samples, and I asked participants for permission to follow up further questions by phone or e-mail; all agreed. All faculty were assigned a pseudonym and their specific field of study was purposefully stated in the broadest way possible to protect the identities of the participants.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol (see Appendix A), which I divided across two settings, was developed using Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interview structure, which combines aspects of life history interviewing and in-depth interviewing informed by phenomenology. Ideally, Seidman recommends three interviews focusing on (a) focused life history, (b) details of the experience, and (c) reflection on the meaning; however, this structure can be altered to suit the needs of the interviewer and participants (I. Seidman, personal communication, October 12, 2004). Given the numerous constraints on the time of tenure-track faculty at an elite institution, I modified this structure so that the first interview consisted of the focused life history with several questions on the details of the experience of mentoring Black students, while the second elicited further details of the experiences and reflections on their meaning. The specific questions in the protocol emerged from sample questions suggested by Seidman (1998) inquiring about formative life experiences and the extant literature on mentoring, particularly focusing on mentoring of minority populations (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2007; Kram, 1988; Thomas, 2001).

I validated the protocol by first piloting the questions with two Black faculty not included in the sample. I asked for feedback regarding pacing, content, and sequencing, and made adjustments to the protocol based on their recommendations. I further employed a validation technique employed by Papadopoulos and colleagues (2002), asking four colleagues to identify

descriptors from pieces of raw data from three transcripts, and then combining these descriptors into themes. When these colleagues completed these tasks, we met and discussed the process, in which we reached consensus in the meaning of the themes.

Data analysis. My analysis of the data was informed by the aforementioned theories discussed in the study's conceptual frameworks. As my study moved beyond the realm of these frameworks, I integrated an etic approach to understand how faculty mentors connected to Black students. In this analysis, I reviewed transcripts from interviews using an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) with Atlas.ti software, which allowed me to capture novel aspects of the mentoring relationship as seen from the perspective of Black faculty. In a subsequent round of coding, I delineated differences and similarities in how faculty are motivated to mentor along gender and rank lines, mindful of the intersectional nature of my research (Crenshaw, 1991; Grillo, 1995). I wrote analytic memos to compare and contrast individual experiences and make comparisons to the literature, further reviewing memos in light of how faculty discussed their mentoring.

As the only difference in data collection was how I selected the participants, I used the same analytic strategy for all interviews. I employed a cross-sectional code and retrieve method (Mason, 2002; Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2007), which involved creating codes from an initial reading of the data and applying these codes across all of the interview data. Specifically, to understand how faculty engaged with their protégés, and the challenges they encountered in the process, I focused primarily (but not exclusively) on data collected in the second interview. In a subsequent round of coding, I categorized responses along the dimensions previously mentioned, using Patton's (2002) method of seeking indigenous typologies (those which participants themselves created), but I was mindful of other emergent patterns. I also accessed the analytic memos written after each interview, which in conjunction with field notes, allowed me to compare and contrast individual responses as well as make comparisons in how faculty have worked with their mentees in confronting racial microaggressions.

Validity. I addressed validity – the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings from the study (Johnson, 1997) – by utilizing several strategies recognized in qualitative research (Johnson, 1997; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1998). To address interpretive validity (Maxwell, 2005) concerns, I triangulated data by utilizing several data sources (interviewing multiple participants, reading faculty bios online, conducting multiple interviews, asking clarifying questions via e-mail and phone). Another strategy to enhance interpretive validity was to present my analytical findings to a research study group, as described in the Methods section, and faculty advisers throughout the study. Sharing transcripts, matrices, codebooks, and memos with this

community presented alternate interpretations and challenged my assumptions.

For descriptive validity (Johnson, 1997), I recorded all interviews and had the tapes transcribed, described by Johnson (1997) as “the lowest inference descriptor of all, because the participants’ exact words are provided in direct quotations” (p. 285). Throughout the study, I believe my social location as a Black graduate teaching assistant at Worth investigating issues of race may have led to depths and nuances in interviews: the participants felt comfortable speaking in the vernacular and discussing challenging racial situations. However, I endeavored to not assume I understood the participants’ experiences by asking them to explicitly describe experiences of racism, and utilized techniques recommended by Kvale (1996) to establish rapport with subjects, such as asking short questions and eliciting long answers. I assured theoretical validity in this study through my examination of data discrepant to the prevailing theoretical context regarding mentoring relationships between Black faculty and Black undergraduates. Discrepant data suggested opportunities to modify and seek out alternate explanations for the phenomena I observed and presented potential new contributions to the research literature.

Findings

My analysis revealed five major themes explaining how Black faculty made meaning of their mentoring, and the challenges these professors encountered to their mentoring of Black undergraduates. The emergent themes are (a) sharing a cultural identity and having a common experience of being a minority at a PWI, (b) the centrality of trust in the mentoring relationship, (c) dealing with time constraints imposed by tenure and promotion processes, (d) working through issues of distance between faculty and students in academia, and (e) concerns about appropriate levels of intimacy between students and faculty. In the following section, I discuss these themes in greater depth with representative quotations from the participants.

Shared Cultural Identity and Common Experiences of Minority Status

Participants stated that they had a heightened level of concern for Black students. They were careful to note that Black students did not solely approach them with problems; however, the professors did take special note of young Black scholars. From their collective perspectives, these professors felt a responsibility to make themselves available to all students, but as Willa, associate professor stated, “I have an obligation to students of color.” Michelle, an associate professor who attended Worth as an undergraduate, linked to a sense that many Black mentees felt insecure about their status and merit as Worth students:

This experience can be wonderful, but it can also go wrong, if a student doesn't feel like they deserve it. And too many [Black students] don't feel that way. You hear a lot about entitled, aggressive, [Worth] students, but a considerable amount don't feel that way.

Having navigated these same feelings of insecurity, Michelle drew upon her common cultural and academic experiences with Black Worth students, validating their presence individually and also for the benefit of their families and other Black undergraduates.

Taking Michelle's point a step further, Willa discussed how she validated students through research opportunities, stating that helping them to accrue valuable research experience (as she had as a student) was a way to enhance their relationship, and learning: "Part of me feels there's this moral aspect, like 'You need to cultivate these young people.'" Willa's feeling that her mentoring of Black students came from a moral direction was a sentiment also shared by Linda, a full professor. "It helps specifically Black students at these institutions, 'cause I can give them perspectives on how to survive it," Linda opined, reflecting on her experience as a student and professor. "But, here, I do feel a duty to help Black students." Fred and Michael, full professors, agreed, noting that they advised students in dealing with racial microaggressions in much the same way they were advised by older students during their undergraduate years. Though faculty unfortunately saw students facing similar challenges to those they met years ago, those memories also provided a reservoir of experiences that faculty could draw upon when discussing issues confronting their mentees in the present.

Bernard and Kwame, associate and assistant professors respectively, discussed how their shared cultural commonality with Black students benefited both student and professor. In particular, Bernard linked common experiences with Black politics and culture as a method of establishing trust in the relationship, stating, "I think the rapport there tends to be a kind of ease of interaction that you can use to build trust." Similarly, Kwame felt that shared experiences with Black students created an understanding absent from initial encounters with others:

There are things that Blacks can talk about with each other that we don't necessarily feel as comfortable talking about with other people... There are conversations about the experience of living in a raced world, and a raced institution, that I can speak to with African-American students that may not come up with other students.

Kwame further noted that such an understanding did not result in anger, but a type of "gallows humor": "The nice thing is to have conversations with people where they can be funny, where it can be funny that I'm asked for my ID more often than other people." For both men, the cultural commonality between themselves and students served as a bridge in establishing rapport.

While Geneva (full professor) and Vonda (assistant professor) spoke of cultural commonality with Black students, they did so in a way that prioritized the necessity of this link for the student. Unlike male professors, who presented cultural commonality as an equal exchange, the women tended to express that they were in role of empathizing with the student. In Geneva's case, the fact that she shared the experience of attending Worth with her Black undergraduate protégés made her particularly invested in helping them feel a sense of belonging:

I was a graduate student here. I know how it can feel like a very unwelcoming place. So, personally, I would like my presence to make it possible for Black students to feel that this is a place that they belong, that they can thrive, and develop their fullest potential.

Rather than feeling that her experience at Worth was a vestige of the past, Geneva made it clear that feelings of exclusion have not "changed significantly at all. I think many students of color experience it." Vonda echoed Geneva's empathetic response – in her view, it was an expectation of students that she felt she must respond to with understanding:

Black students expect me to understand where they're coming from, and I don't pretend as if I *don't* know where they're coming from. Black students bring up issues and expect you to understand issues in a way that they don't expect from other White professors.

Vonda's comment suggests that not all Black professors embrace the cultural commonality with students; Black faculty are often burdened with expectations from campus and community constituencies that they reject at their peril (Banks, 1984).

The study participants stated that shared cultural bonds with Black undergraduates allowed a level of insight and empathy into the issues confronting their mentees. These commonalities also provided a basis for conversations that helped foster strong bonds between mentor and mentee. They also found that their own experiences as students in similar environments provided a reservoir of understanding regarding many of the racially microaggressive situations that their mentees experienced in the present day.

The Centrality of Trust in the Mentoring Relationship

Mentoring scholar W. Brad Johnson (2007) stated that trust in mentorship "hinges on a series of positive, reliable, and protégé-promoting professional behaviors" (p. 174). Linda and many participants discussed the significance of trust: without it, mentors would not hear student concerns about racism: "If students feel that they can trust you, they come to you with racial stories... it's important to be able to discern when it's not, but sometimes it obviously is." Bernard conveyed a similar sentiment:

There's got to be enough of a rapport to create a certain kind of implicit trust, so the person can give what you are saying a certain amount of weight... A lot of it is just that kind of ineffable sense of "we're kind of on the same page, I understand you..."

As Kwame noted, the result of an established, reliable relationship produced a greater investment from the professor: "They continue to need that letter, so they keep coming back." Geneva discussed trust in the form of honesty: "Central to my mentoring practices, I try to have an honest relationship with the students, acknowledging that I'm not in the same place they are." Vonda also discussed trust, but a key difference was that her discussion situated students as the parties extending trust to her, evidenced in her discussion about the challenge of grading papers:

If I've given a grade, I've given it based on reading their paper in the context of all the others. I've had more of those kinds of challenges from White students. Whereas Black students, when they've approached me, they've presumed my grade to be legitimate, and have wanted to know what they could've done to make their paper better.

The idea that students have a responsibility in establishing trust arose when participants discussed their relationships with protégés. As a condition of their closeness, the professors expressed that they held their protégés to high academic standards in these settings. Vonda provided this example from a class populated with "all Black women," many of whom she considered protégés. "It was still a very rigorous course... they didn't cut out on work just because they were in a more comfortable environment." Bernard shared a similar sentiment referring to Black students he mentored: "It's important for them to recognize that I am a professor, and that I'm gonna be holding them to high standards... I might have a little more interest, but I'm going to demand just as much." In some instances, Black professors had to establish trust because it was absent in relationships between Black students and White faculty. Geneva detailed the work of building trust with a Black student:

My White colleagues were saying, "[He's] terrible!" In this case, [the student] thought *I* was the problem. "Well, I got a 'B' on this paper!" I said, "But it's a 'C' paper. They gave you a 'B,' but this person told me that it's a 'C' paper." The young man was angry at me, when it was really my colleagues' inability to tell the truth. It's a liberal, racist guilt. If they aren't doing what they should do, help 'em, but don't lie.

Geneva suggested that in some cases, low expectations and unclear messages from White faculty toward Black students complicated relationships with Black faculty wishing to build trust with Black mentees. Linda shared a parallel experience that had occurred many times in her career: informing Black students that the neutral to positive signals they received from White faculty in terms of feedback and grades was in fact, veiled negativity.

Showing a flash of emotion about being placed in this awkward position, Linda shared her anger:

You shouldn't be the one to tell them, especially when nothing looks wrong. I've seen that lots... You kept giving the person A minuses, or even give an "A", but you know this student really isn't gonna meet your standards. You're not gonna hire that person if that person wants to come back as a faculty member. To me, that's a form of racism.

These vignettes revealed an unusual role for Black faculty mentors – translating inauthentic feedback to mentees beguiled by grades from faculty who fear presenting Black students with truthful comments on their work. Such a role placed faculty mentors in the firing line of their mentees' frustration – an uncomfortable and unfair position.

It may be unsurprising that trust was proffered as such an elemental aspect and cornerstone of mentoring Black students by Black faculty. Indeed, the reciprocal nature of trust in mentoring dyads links to Willie's (2000) dictum that "teachers cannot educate students in whom they have no confidence, and students cannot learn from teachers whom they do not trust" (p. 255). Given the frequent assault described by Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) on Black students who feel they constantly need to prove their worth to White peers and faculty at PWIs, receiving "false feedback" from White faculty represented a "double threat." Hence, the role of trust took on an added dimension of importance for these mentors, entrusted to tell truths and critique with love – a discomfiting position, but a critical one for the development of their mentees.

Time Constraints Imposed by Tenure and Promotion Processes

The faculty shared associate professor Michelle's view that time was the foundation of effective mentoring with Black undergraduates: "Just to have somebody listen to you, it makes a huge difference... sometimes you need somebody who smiles at you." However, the multiple demands on their time – inherent at institutions of the caliber and research intensity of Worth – meant that participants faced difficult decisions about how to allocate time for mentoring.

Among no subset of the sample was this tension more evident than junior women faculty, who noted the intersectionality of race, gender, and age as they navigated academia. On their own volition, the junior women participants volunteered fears that family concerns as well as the tenure clock were compromising their ability to mentor. As Michelle noted:

Time is limited. So, peak childbearing years collide with peak work and productivity years, if you want to get tenure. And, you know, women have babies. And I have yet to meet the man, the father, who does as much work as the mother. [Laughs.]

Willa noted that the intersectional nature of gender stereotypes placing women as nurturers and the paucity of women of color in her department led to a higher mentoring and advising load for female faculty: "Female faculty have some different issues. Women and people of color will come to us disproportionately more than they will go to White male faculty, for mentoring."

Interestingly, for at least one professor, it was a supportive population of Black women students that made it possible for her to endure the responsibilities of balancing work and family. Though she acknowledged the heightened visibility she had as a woman of color in her department, Vonda, an assistant professor, shared how a special class lightened her load considerably when she planned a wedding:

That class was all Black women, and gelled, like no other class I've ever taught. They knew that I was planning my wedding for June, and they held a wedding shower for me... What would have made this class different, if there was a different [racial] dynamic?

Vonda's question may be answered if one considers that the women in her course that semester might have had a keener understanding of the intersectional challenges of managing a professional career with a marriage, a particular challenge to professional Black women (Kaba, 2005).

The tenured women participants discussed mentoring as central to their work, and related vivid reflections of serving as mentors. For Geneva, it meant returning to her alma mater, a women's historically Black college, to speak with aspiring scientists. In Linda's case, it was assisting students in job searches and graduate school, even years after they left Worth. However, she, too was aware of the aforementioned pressures on women:

I've heard women of all colors say that they are expected to do a bit more than men... not only mentoring, but certain types of departmental housekeeping... I've heard that from so many women that I do think there is a gendered division of labor on college campuses. But there are always exceptions; there are wonderful men who are great mentors. I had one. But I think it's presumed that it's going to be women doing this kind of thing.

This dynamic was similarly observed among at least one of the male participants, Derrick: "There is a gender dimension to this, obviously. I think for some of my female colleagues, they are sort of expected to be the nurturer – and so they find themselves in it more often, and they just take up the role." This comment meshed with my observation about the women in the sample. I detected tension between their desire to define themselves as strong academicians and exemplary mentors to their students, oftentimes acknowledging the intersectionality of being people of color and female in fields where both identities are underrepresented.

Among the junior men, however, the data revealed less of an internal rift: achieving tenure supplanted the goal of serving as a mentor. While men

expressed discomfort to this state of affairs, there was a realization that mentoring efforts expended would be moot if they left academia. In Kwame's words, "If I don't spend time on publishing, I'm not going to be around to mentor *anybody*." Relating his experiences with his own mentor, Kwame observed that "I'll be more useful to my mentees with the accolades [Kwame's mentor] has." The greatest frustration emerging from the data was the gap in understanding concerning faculty responsibilities between professors and students. "I need to do my research," Bernard stated. "Students don't fully understand that you have to be so occupied with your research, but you're working for your professional survival." Bernard described this impasse as "burdensome." He further related, "I know they're disappointed, and maybe even regard it like I don't care."

Derrick, a junior professor, challenged this issue by fashioning himself as a conduit for his mentees, helping them to connect to other resources at the institution. "I'll try to put them in contact with people who would be helpful. You get to a point where you know people, not just here, but as they move on. You can say, 'Here's somebody you can trust.'" Confronted with time constraints, Derrick decided to allot time directing mentees to sources of support, while maintaining balance in his professional life. He predicted a future where he would devote more time to mentoring: "I suppose if I had tenure, I would do a lot more."

The tenured male faculty took more of a father-like approach to mentoring, likely because their age placed them precisely where undergraduates might see them as such. This apt positioning was evidenced in Fred's comment about the impact of his mentorship:

I once had a fantasy about changing the world... I can't tell you that if I have moved forward because the world around me is moving as well. But I can tell you if I've changed someone else. And when a student comes and says to me the most important thing they want to have happen at graduation is to bring their parents by, and the parents come in and thank me for being their kids' father away from home – that's the payoff.

Michael, a popular mentor among students, similarly discussed how he assumed a paternal role in "encouraging more Black students to work in academia." The stereotype regarding Black men as threatening appeared to recede with age, as the senior professors took an avuncular mentorship approach – suggesting that age is a mediating intersectional factor in contrast to race and gender. This finding connects to existing research that suggests that younger Black males are viewed with greater scrutiny than older Black men (Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998).

For male faculty, the data suggested that junior faculty pursue the goal of tenure with zeal, a marked difference from the challenges junior women faced between family, professional identity, and the need to connect to their student counterparts. This finding is reinforced by other studies about the

perspectives of faculty on the tenure process (Gunter & Stambach, 2003). Post-tenure, age and experience prepared them to assume the role of father figure for many of their mentees.

Issues of Distance Between Faculty and Students in the Academic Realm

Faculty reported that sometimes students were unavailable for mentorship because Black students in particular felt they needed to mask their insecurities when interacting with Black faculty. The experience of being a visible minority in an elite institution may exacerbate the “imposter syndrome,” where students doubt their abilities and worth. This is particularly prevalent among students of color (El-Ghoroury, Salvador, Manning, & Williamson, 2000), who may adopt an attitude masking their concerns and challenges as a way of coping. Acknowledging this perception, Michelle, a junior professor, simply took the approach to extend and expand the content of her conversations with students, allowing them to share their experiences. Michelle described the mindset of many Worth students: “Some students who I think could really use mentoring, can’t really fully take advantage of it because they are so busy performing,” she recounted. “You can’t convince them, because they won’t come see you – they are afraid they have to have all their ducks in a row, because they don’t want to look bad.” She worked to eradicate this mindset among her mentees by encouraging students to share their lives:

If it’s the first time a student comes to see me, I will ask them to tell me about themselves. I might say, “Where are you from again? How do you like it here? How has your experience been?” By opening up that space, they sometimes let their guard down.

Derrick reinforced this issue when discussing how he often needed to “dig deeper” to reveal concerns with mentees: “Students here are very self-conscious, and they want to make the grade and impress, so you have to keep that in mind while you are looking to see if they do need more.” Both comments suggested that support meant providing a place where Black students can be authentic. By relating feelings of dissonance as Blacks at an elite school, and relating those feelings as a motivation for their support for Black mentees confronting similar circumstances, Michelle and Derrick at times embraced and encouraged their mentees to relate their own insecurities, so that they could assist their students in their psychosocial adjustment to college.

A contrast emerged among male faculty; a feeling that they needed distance to maintain credibility as mentors. Bernard stated, “The challenge is to maintain authority while building rapport, which requires a certain distance.” Bernard felt the combination of youth and race made this challenging: “Black students see you as someone they can come to... it’s important for me, as a young professor, to keep a certain distance. I don’t want it to blur

into socializing.” In order to maintain his role as a mentor, Bernard felt it necessary to keep his distance from students to a degree. Kwame expressed a similar sentiment, seeing this “downside” as a necessary obstacle to the mentoring relationship. “You have to have students engage with you personally, but not so much that they don’t understand that you’re the teacher, and they’re the student.”

Kwame felt that this affected Black students and faculty differently than Whites. “Oftentimes, with White students, they’ll respect a professor who’s distant even more. Students of color don’t necessarily respect a professor who’s distant. They expect more of a personal connection.” While this concern about distance with students was strong with the men in the study, it also existed to a lesser extent with Vonda. As a young professor, Vonda noted “the students call me Vonda, for the most part. Some of them call me Dr. Williams.” She further commented, “The culture of Worth is informal. I’m cautious about establishing boundaries.”

In contrast, senior faculty often discussed close relationships with students over time. The distance in age and proximity to parenting roles for those mentors may have alleviated any concern about familiarity between them and their mentees. Conversely, for junior faculty, the mantle of mentor-as-parent was soundly rejected. The general sentiment from the more junior participants, who ranged in age from the mid-thirties to early forties, resembled this comment from Willa, an associate professor: “[Being a mentor], it’s being a supporter. It’s being a friend, and I don’t want to say ‘mother,’ ‘cause I don’t want to age myself *that* much.”

Clearly, bridging the gap between professor and student was of importance – their efforts to mentor were at times thwarted by students’ desire to “save face.” To counter this tendency, professors shared their own academic and microaggressive struggles as undergraduates. Some found that the investment in mentoring provided reciprocal benefits that aided their work and psychosocial adaptation. Junior women faculty found greater opportunities to mentor, often because of stereotypical beliefs about nurturing. Junior men faculty struggled with choices to erect barriers between themselves and students, ultimately choosing to invest more time in research, knowing their existence at Worth was contingent on promotion. Senior faculty did not report this challenge, and tended to fall into roles as surrogate parents in their mentorship, without much concern about the distance between themselves and Black undergraduates.

Concerns about Appropriate Levels of Intimacy between Students and Faculty

A significant finding from my data analysis regarded concerns about maintaining appropriate proximity to mentees, especially female students, among

junior male faculty. Bernard recognized that his male mentees were better able to relate to him because of his comfort meeting with them outside of class: “They have an advantage, because I’m comfortable going to dinner with them.” Bernard stated that he declined invitations from women because “I don’t want them to lose sight of the nature of our relationship... I feel bad about that, but it’s tricky.”

Kwame’s comments were more direct in reference to the hazard of even the suggestion of inappropriate relationships with students confronting Black men in higher education:

It’s especially tricky for Black men in university situations... because if someone leaves the door, and tells a story, it’s more likely to be believed – because our authority is already compromised by the fact that we’re young Black males.

Kwame clarified Bernard’s insinuation: the risk of a misperceived comment could be career threatening. The implications from these experiences were a heightened sense of surveillance for Black male professors as well as limited opportunities for Black women to establish beneficial, appropriate relationships with Black male professors. As Derrick, junior professor, mentioned, female students received subtle and overt messages that Black men might avoid them – working exclusively with males, meeting with women only in campus offices and with their doors open.

On the other hand, women faculty, both junior and senior, had far less concern about possible misinterpretations of the nature of the mentoring relationship between their Black undergraduate mentees and themselves, even in cross-gender relationships, echoing previous findings on cross-gender mentoring (McKean & Bujaki, 2007). Geneva, a full professor who mentored Black men and women, even labeled the nature of the relationship as one based on love:

I think of [mentoring] as a reciprocal relationship between student and teacher; the teacher should get as much out of it as the student. Ultimately, it’s a relationship that’s about love. The best mentoring is an expression of love between student and mentor.

Similarly, Linda, a full professor, discussed staying in touch with mentees and how she considered herself a “mother” to them, helping with professional endeavors and life challenges, such as job setbacks, or even the dissolution of a romance. This, too, resonates with findings in the literature suggesting that female mentors tend to provide more psychosocial support to mentees, in contrast to men (Tharenou, 2005). As Willa noted, it was perhaps because of the stereotype of women as nurturers that female mentors could lend support with impunity, in sharp contrast to men, who had to consider the community’s interpretation of their approach.

Again, this challenge appeared to be the domain of junior males in particular, as Fred discussed how he felt he was “a father away from home” for many of his students. His reflection on how he interacted with his mentees, male and female, starkly contrasted with the concerns expressed by his junior counterparts Kwame and Bernard:

[I’ve had] conversations with my mentees that have to do with race, or gender, or both. It’s ranged from “Do you engage in cross-racial dating?” to “How do you deal with the fact that seldom is the explanation for why something did or didn’t happen is just race?”

In Fred’s example, the advantages of rank and age made such conversations possible without fear of misinterpretation by others in the community. Given Bernard and Kwame’s comments above, it is difficult to imagine such topics being broached in a conversation with their mentees.

Among the professors in the study, the junior Black men were concerned about maintaining appropriate boundaries with students, especially women. This concern was not rooted in vanity; rather, the possibility that their mentoring might be misinterpreted as an inappropriate relationship – hazards discussed in the literature (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007). As a result, the junior male faculty limited their contact with women students, regardless of shared interests or career objectives. Conversely, women faculty did not see similar barriers in cross- and same-gender mentoring relationships, and tended to embrace the totality of the mentoring relationship. Senior male faculty also expressed a sense of comfort with proximal relationships with their mentees, especially when they view themselves as “father figures” to their students.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the phenomenon of mentoring by Black faculty at one research site, a unique elite institution in US higher education. A valuable contribution in future research would be to expand the study design to encompass multiple institutional contexts. Additionally, the composition of the sample featured faculty primarily in the liberal arts and area studies; a future direction for forthcoming studies would be the inclusion of participants from the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Furthermore, an analysis of mentoring experiences in international contexts would greatly contribute to our understanding of Black faculty mentor experiences in academe.

Discussion

In this article, I contribute to the limited literature on Black faculty mentors. The prevailing research on mentoring in higher education has analyzed mentor–mentee relationships in graduate school, or among senior and junior

faculty (Dixon-Reeves, 2003; Tillman, 2001), while in this article I respond to the call for research into mentoring processes from perspectives other than those of protégés (Johnson et al., 2007). The findings from my analysis of the data present perspectives of faculty and their interactions with Black undergraduates – a novel addition to the body of research on Black faculty and students at PWIs. As previous researchers have found, Black faculty balance service such as mentoring alongside their research and teaching responsibilities (Turner & Myers, 2000; Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, Reddick, & Flanagan, 2005); however, my findings suggest that Black faculty at an elite research-intensive institution approached the role of mentor to Black undergraduates in different ways, according to faculty rank, age and gender – meaning that intersectionality augments how the phenomenon of mentoring is experienced by Black faculty (Turner & Myers, 2000). The application of a CRP analysis (Jennings & Lynn, 2005) to my findings detail how Black faculty work with Black undergraduates in a racialized consciousness; however, the work of mentoring allowed these faculty to guide and direct a new generation of Black scholars, as they simultaneously sheltered their protégés from racial microaggressions while weathering these harms.

Given the familiar parent–child dynamic, it seems logical to leverage the experiences of senior and emeritus faculty as mentors for Black undergraduate students. Levinson and colleagues (1978) suggested that the middle adulthood years can be the most fertile for developmental relationships, with reciprocal rewards for both parties. Senior faculty in the study reflected this sensibility, reflecting on their mentoring of students by recalling letters and mementos much like a parent.

Junior faculty experiences echo the need for tenure reform as articulated by the American Council on Education (2005) and the American Association of University Professors (West & Curtis, 2006). Surely, faculty engaged in the process of developing a new generation of scholars should be rewarded as those who advance the field via publications and research. In the interim, however, greater transparency about the professional obligations of faculty needs to be communicated to Black undergraduates, as well as the benefits of alternate forms of mentorship, such as helping students not only through relating similar experiences on a personal level, but also by encouraging students to meet with faculty and administrative colleagues that may have similar interests or expertise – a strategy employed by Derrick which reinforces the concept of “constellation mentoring” (Johnson & Ridley, 2008, p. 70).

In this article, I additionally exposed the troubling consequences of stereotyping on the experiences of Black men and women mentor professors. The men in the sample expressed concerns about hypersurveillance and perceptions, both from students and colleagues, that their relationships (especially across gender lines) may be inappropriate. The women discussed enhanced expectations for nurturing and psychosocial support from

colleagues and students. Age and rank factored heavily into these stressors, with young Black men and women challenged to dismiss stereotypes about their ability and trustworthiness, while older professors appearing to be somewhat armored with the advantages of age and rank – though they retained memories of discrimination from their own experiences in PWIs. Their intersecting identities present a complex portrait of experiences.

Even under the constraints of the current system of promotion and tenure, deans and senior faculty can demonstrate the importance of mentoring undergraduate students. In this study, I reiterate recommendations by Johnson (2007), who stated that an appreciation for mentoring can be developed through providing faculty role models through senior administrators and faculty. The situation is even more dire in other national contexts, such as the UK, where less than 2% of faculty are ethnic minorities and few Black professors advance in academia (Major, 2002). Research on Black student experiences in Canada confirms their concerns about the paucity of Black faculty in Canadian institutions (Gosine, 2007). Given these challenging circumstances, it seems to be all the more essential to ensure that Black faculty receive adequate support and direction so that they can progress in their academic careers, where they are so desperately needed. Financial incentives and release time from teaching duties are but two possible incentives to encourage faculty to invest time and energy in mentoring relationships.

Most significantly, this work casts light upon Black faculty perspectives on the mentoring relationship with Black students. My findings reify previous research emphasizing the importance of mentor–protégé bonds between Black faculty and students (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). Though less heralded than research in many institutional contexts, this service to Black undergraduates and to academia helps to increase the number of Black scholars in the pipeline. By embodying the folk saying, “Each one, teach one,” these Black faculty were working to ensure that their students’ dreams came to fruition despite their own race-, gender-, and rank-based challenges.

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Appendix A

Protocol for First and Second Interviews

First Interview

Professor's Name:
Rank:

Date:
Area of Study:

Thank you for participating in this study. As you know, I am interested in understanding how professors who identify as mentors to African American students assist them in understanding and responding to experiences of racism on campus. In this interview, however, I want to know about your history and how you decided to become a professor. Additionally, I would like to know if you experienced or witnessed incidents where you or another person was confronted due to a marker of difference, such as race, religion, or gender.

[Show Letter of Informed Consent]

Before we begin, I want to assure you that your anonymity will be upheld. I will not identify you by name either verbally or in writing in my analysis and reporting. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[Begin tape recorder]

Before I ask specific questions about mentoring African American students in the latter part of the interview, I have a few questions about your life and how you arrived at your position as professor at this institution.

- Tell me about yourself. What influenced you to attend college taking in to account individuals and circumstances, and how did you become acclimated to college life?
- In terms of identity, how do you describe yourself in terms of race and ethnicity? Are there other aspects of your identity that are important to you? If so what are they?
- Did you encounter challenges as a college student due to a marker of difference? A marker of difference might be race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social class.
- If so, how did you face this challenge? Did people (peers, administrators, faculty) help you? How did they help you?
- How would you classify your academic performance in college, and why would you characterize your performance that way?
- How did you come to be a professor? Were there key reasons and/or experiences that led you to this profession?

- What is your definition of “mentoring?” What are the essential components of mentoring? Which of these components describes your mentoring relationships?
- Were you mentored yourself by someone as a high school student? Undergraduate? As a graduate student?
- Are there instances where you have experienced discrimination based on a marker of difference that you could share? Has this experience happened throughout your life or just on one occasion?
- In the previous situation, or thinking about future instances in which you might experience discrimination based on a marker of difference, how would you deal with the issue?
- Have you experienced discrimination due to other aspects of your identity? If so, was this an isolated situation, or have you dealt with it repeatedly in your life?
- If not, why did you choose to mentor an African American student? Do you feel this is linked to any events or experiences in your past?
- You were recommended to me as a person who has mentored an African American undergraduate student in the past. How did you decide to mentor this African American undergraduate student?
- In what ways do you provide assistance to your African American mentee? What things do you do to help him/her?

Second Interview Protocol

The questions in this interview are going to focus specifically on the experience of mentoring African American undergraduate students, and how you have, or would, assist those students if they experienced a situation they would describe as racist.

First, I would like to follow up on a few questions I asked you last time. (At this point, if there are unclear aspects of the previous interview or clarification needed, I will ask those questions.) Thanks – now we’ll move on to the second part of the interview.

- How did you become a mentor?
- Was it a part of a program or did it happen informally? Who initiated the relationship: you, the student, or another person?
- As a potential mentor, do you seek out a certain type of student? If so, what traits do you look for?
- Is there a difference in how you mentor undergraduate students writ large compared to how you mentor African American undergraduate students?
- In the previous interview, you described yourself as (insert answer from interview 1, question b here). Suppose you meet a student who

also identifies as you do. Would a mentoring relationship with such a student be different than one with an African American student? If so, how would it be different? If not, how would you respond if a student said they sought you out because of the similarity between your identities?

- Among the student(s) that you mentor, what relationship exists between you and those students (e.g., advisor–advisee, professor–student, friend–friend, or a connection made outside of the classroom and/or institutional structures)?
- Do you have experience discussing issues related to racism with your protégé(s)? If so, what was the specific incident you discussed? How do you feel this situation affected the student? How did the topic come up? Who brought it up as a topic of conversation? Did you agree with the students' assessment of the situation? Why or why not?
- If not, do you sense that racism has affected your mentee(s)?
- If so, in what way has racism affected your mentee?
- Using the previously mentioned incident as a reference point, how did you frame this and subsequent conversations with the student? For instance, did you make a point of relating it to similar experiences you have had (if any)?
- Did the student ask you for assistance dealing with the situation? If so, what did he/she ask you to do? Did you take action in any way on your own volition?
- How would you say that situation was resolved? Was the student satisfied with your response? The response of others involved?
- Do you think the student would come to you again based on your response to the situation?
- In what other ways do you mentor your students? Do you think these other efforts assist them in combating racism? Why or why not?
- What are the fulfilling aspects of mentoring African American students?
- What are the disappointing or challenging aspects of mentoring African American students?
- How important do you feel your support is to African American students? Who else supports students in this manner at Harvard?
- What have you learned from assisting African American undergraduate students understanding and responding to racism? What will you do differently, if anything, in the future?
- What advice would you give to a fellow faculty member concerning mentoring undergraduate students? Would that advice be different depending on the race of the faculty member?
- What should faculty who do not mentor African American students know about your experience?

Close

Thank you very much for your time. Do you have any questions for me at this point? Is it okay if I call you if I have any follow-up questions? Thank you again for your time!