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STIMULUS ESSAY

# Advocate-mentoring: a communicative response to diversity in higher education

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## Introduction

Graduate programs throughout the United States have been plagued with the problem of fair and equal representation among both the student and faculty populations at predominantly white institutions (PWI). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2017b), in 2016, 64% of persons enrolled in graduate programs identified as White, 14% identified as Black, 10% identified as Hispanic, and 8% identified as Asian. The data on faculty of color employed as full-time professors, however, reveals even greater disparities in representation. U.S. Department of Education (2017a) data from 2015 on full-time professors show that 56% were White males, 27% were White females, and 7% were Asian males. Asian females, Black males, Black females, and Hispanic males each represented 2% of all full-time professors; Hispanic females comprised 1% or less of all full-time professors. In sum, the data on race and representation in postbaccalaureate education reveal two dominant trends: (1) higher education remains a predominantly white institution within society, and (2) there are not enough faculty of color (FOC) in academia to serve as role models, mentors, and advocates for graduate students of color (SOC); therefore, it is imperative that efforts are made to create a new mentoring model that addresses these barriers to academic and professional success for this very important population (Blackwell, 1989).

Having effective role models and mentors is of particular importance for graduate SOC because they report qualitatively different experiences within academia compared with their White counterparts. Graduate SOC consistently report educational experiences marred by racial microaggressions, which result in students being overlooked, disrespected, devalued, discriminated against, and feeling marginalized (Harris, Janovec, Murray, Gubbala, & Robinson, 2018; Jaeger & Haley, 2016; Lee & Hopson, 2018). Research suggests that campus climate, racialized faculty expectations, curricular issues, predominantly White student networks, and lack of institutional support for groups of color are all factors that serve as barriers to the academic and psychosocial success of graduate SOC (Gopaul, 2015; Howard-Hamilton, Morelon-Quainoo, Johnson, Winkle-

Wagner, & Santiague, 2009; Jaeger & Haley, 2016). Specifically, SOC express feeling disconnected from White faculty members. They describe their interactions with White faculty in terms of having to continuously prove themselves, defend their intellectual interests, and vie for opportunities to serve as graduate assistants or publish with advisors. These are but a few of the myriad of racialized structural and personal challenges graduate SOC face throughout their education careers. Since students experience graduate school differently based on their race (Gopaul, 2015; Howard-Hamilton et al., 2009), it is not surprising that racism has been viewed as a defining feature of educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), oftentimes resulting in marginalization and negative educational experiences for SOC.

Racial inequality in academia is perpetuated by the gross underrepresentation of FOC among the ranks of full-time professors and the racialized experiences of graduate SOC. By formulating ways to combat racism in higher education, we contend that graduate programs and institutions of higher learning must seriously consider the importance of faculty–student mentoring. Moreover, we draw special attention to the ways in which communication and instruction scholarship, as well as sociological frameworks, can help administrators, faculty, and students reimagine the faculty–student mentoring relationship in a way that positions faculty as more than just mentors. It is our belief that they must assume the role of *advocates* for SOC (and other historically marginalized students). As advocates for SOC, faculty should use their position to solidify the importance of having a diverse graduate community specifically and the value of diversity in academia more generally. Ideally, by affirming the presence of SOC in the academy, we will begin to see an increasing number of graduate SOC choosing to complete their degree and pursue careers in the academy, thereby increasing the number of FOC that can serve as role models and advocates for future graduate SOC.

We believe there is a moral imperative to fight systemic racism and other forms of oppression on behalf of those with limited or no societal power. While we assert that it is the responsibility of *all* scholars to create environments where scholars-in-training from historically marginalized groups (HMGs) can thrive, we believe that, in order for real institutional change to occur, scholars of privilege, namely White scholars, must be willing to wield their privilege to serve as outspoken advocates for SOC in ways that they may have never done before. Thus, we write this essay as a call to White colleagues throughout the country (and world) to take a more active role in mentoring and being assertive advocates for SOC at PWIs. To this end, we propose *advocate-mentoring* as a way to support professional success for SOC, and other marginalized people, in academia and beyond.

In a utopia, racial, ethnic, gender, class and sexual orientation differences would be celebrated; however, our society is plagued by complex histories of oppression, including White supremacy, cis/heterosexism, and patriarchy. As two Black women with advanced degrees from PWIs and faculty at different PWIs, the authors recall a common theme of being left out of both formal and informal gatherings, viewed as either "less than" or an "anomaly," and forced to regularly struggle with outsider status. These experiences provide us both academic and experiential knowledge of the politics of otherness in the academy. Social identities are framed as problematic for not conforming to the White, male heterosexual standard by which all others are measured. In a mentoring relationship, many protégés with membership in one or more marginalized social groups or microcultural groups (i.e., African Americans, women, LGBTQ+) might share similar experiences to ours: significant, intersectional barriers while acclimating to a new environment. Thus,

it is imperative that we, as social scientists, examine more closely this critical professional relationship through our scholarship and practices.

## Mentoring in academia

Mentoring is a symbiotic relationship that exists in various environments, including corporations, civic organizations, and academia (Harris, 2016). Kalbfleisch (2002) states that the mentoring relationship is a "personal relationship between a more sophisticated mentor and a less advanced protégé" (p. 63). Yang, Orrego Dunleavy, and Phillips (2016) add that it "is a conduit to guidance, training, feedback, and visibility in the community" (p. 182). In short, it is a professional relationship whereby the mentor uses their expertise, knowledge, and power to the benefit of the protégé (Kalbfleisch, 1997). Mentoring relationships encourage development and career advancement for early career professionals throughout their professional trajectory (Carpenter, Makhadmeh, & Thornton, 2015; Holmberg-Wright, 2014).

Academia (and, in particular, graduate education) is one organizational context where the mentor relationship has received considerable attention and critique. According to Yang et al. (2016), these mentoring relationships "form a cornerstone of the graduate student experience" (p. 182). In general, the process of acquiring the skills and knowledge of a given profession or discipline is difficult. It becomes even more so in the absence of an appropriate support system (McGaskey, Freeman, Guyton, Richmond, & Guyton, 2016). Taylor (2018) echoed this observation in his editorial on the legacy of mentoring in the communication discipline, noting that leaders have very likely not received formal mentoring or preparation, which is unfortunate given the benefits of such a relationship. In response to the need for more formalized mentoring, communication scholars are devoting more attention and resources to addressing mentor–protégé relationships (Ono, 2018).

Even without formal training in mentoring, faculty mentors function as master scholars or experts charged with the task of training novice scholars. They aid their graduate protégés in becoming experts in their own right by helping protégés both formally and informally navigate the academy. Faculty mentors serve as department allies for their graduate students; they sharpen students' intellectual skills, involve them in their research, and provide opportunities for pedagogical training. Similarly, mentors guide their students through university bureaucracy, help them secure fellowships and grants, provide opportunities for them to collaborate on publications, and recommend them for jobs (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985). In these ways, the training and exposure faculty mentors provide distinctly shapes graduate students' academic and professional successes.

Faculty mentors draw upon various mentoring models in their efforts to mentor graduate students. Buell (2002) identified four mentoring models from her research on graduate student mentoring experiences. The Cloning Model, while rarely used, involves a mentor's controlling approach to replicate themselves in their protégé. In contrast, the Nurturing Model describes the mentor as a parental figure who creates "a safe, open environment in which a mentee can both learn and try things for him- or herself" (p. 65). There is a mutual agreement between mentor and protégé that the protégé's goals are prioritized. There is also a desire for the protégé to be independent "once the more formal connections between mentor and mentee are cut" (p. 66). The Friendship Model involves a collaboration between the mentor and protégé in a cocreated relationship. The parties are viewed

as peers who "[consider] the relationship to be a friendship rather than just a professional relationship" (p. 67). Finally, the Apprentice Model is primarily about tutelage, wherein the mentor shares their skills and knowledge with the protégé in order to help them to also become an expert. The apprentice receives education and training in exchange for working for the mentor.

Although these models account for interpersonal differences and preferences between mentor and protégé, they do not consider marginalized status as a factor in the mentoring process. Thus, we argue that further research (as well as proposed mentoring practices and models therein) must account for how racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered, and sexual identities influence mentoring experiences and the mentor and protégé communication therein. Why? Graduate school culture naturally breeds anxiety, uncertainty, and self-doubt. In addition to acclimating to an intellectually rigorous academic program and meeting other professional development demands related to research, teaching, and service, graduate students must also manage various relational dynamics with people in their department, at the institution, and within their personal sphere. Without the proper tutelage and social ties, learning how to manage each of these expectations can cause considerable stress that exponentially increases for graduate SOC who feel alienated, isolated, frustrated, and underappreciated within their departments. SOC are not always invited into professional and/or personal spaces typically occupied by the dominant group; consequently, they are not granted access to information, opportunities, and networks often times made readily available to their peers.

Additionally, as SOC are often the only minority student in a graduate program, or among only a few minorities in their program, their "outsider within" status (Collins, 1986) places them in the precarious position of living within the dominant (i.e., White) culture, while balancing their identity as an outsider. This status becomes magnified when they are at a PWI given, as mentioned, SOC have a completely different institutional experience than their White peers (Gopaul, 2015; Jaeger & Haley, 2016). Racial, gendered, ethnic, and homophobic biases of faculty, students, administrators, and institutions create an oppressive environment for them. Negative interpersonal experiences make it difficult for graduate SOC to form meaningful departmental mentoring relationships that positively impact their psychosocial well-being. Research suggests that, because of the impact of race on the SOC's experiences in graduate programs, mentor–protégé relationships form much more slowly, if at all, for them (Howard-Hamilton et al., 2009; Pruitt & Isaac, 1985). Thus, graduate SOC must additionally work hard to develop a unique set of coping skills as they adapt to their new environment.

Having a race concordant (i.e., same-race) mentor is one strategy that may alleviate academic stressors and provide a necessary form of social support. McGaskey et al. (2016) confirm that homophily or racial concordance is a driving force behind the mentoring relationships of some African American doctoral students at PWIs. The authors stated that,

> participants intentionally sought out faculty mentors with whom they had common identities. This allowed them to communicate their concerns and needs without fear of being misunderstood or penalized. Additionally, the interpersonal similarities between the participants and their supporters likely increased the willingness of the support network member to supply the needed resources." (p. 154)

Given the data on race and tenure track faculty members, SOC are usually in educational settings where having a race concordant mentor—particularly in their department—is not

possible (Jaeger & Haley, 2016). In these circumstances, race discordant (i.e., different race) mentors who are knowledgeable or at least willing to become knowledgeable about the unique challenges of being a graduate SOC must step forward to help students actively combat and survive racism in higher education (Crutcher, 2011). Although all issues might not be racial, those critical racialized moments are where SOC most need the support and guidance of a faculty mentor. Thus, we assert that an *advocate-mentor* is one reasonable solution to this pressing social and professional issue in academia and beyond.

## Advocate-mentor model

DiversiCare (n.d.) states that an "advocate is any person [one] choose[s] to represent [one's] interests and act on [their] behalf." Although this term is often used in healthcare and legal settings, we believe it captures the active role mentors must take on behalf of their SOC. An advocate is a person who speaks in support or defense of another person. An advocate is an intercessor, one who pleads for or on behalf of a less powerful person. Their interest must be genuine, and they must be willing and committed to assertively addressing situations and people when the SOC has unfairly been treated. Advocacy is a seemingly inherent part of the mentor's responsibilities to the protégé, yet there are many who lack advocacy skills and others who deem it insignificant to their mentor role. This is a problem for all protégés, and an even greater one for SOC who need faculty mentors to advocate for their very right to be in academic spaces. Thus, an advocate-mentor can serve to defend SOC's intellectual abilities, validate their research interest, affirm their value to the department, and champion for research and/or teaching opportunities that will enhance the protégé's' career advancement. An advocate-mentor should have compassion and respect for their protégé, which requires exercising racial, professional, and/or intellectual privilege to engage in activism on behalf of their marginalized protégé. Thus, advocate-mentors commit to challenging the department and/or institution to be accountable for and to their increasingly diverse student (and faculty) body, subsequently promoting equity, inclusivity, and systemic change.

The responsibilities, practices, behaviors, and characteristics of the advocate-mentor in racially discordant mentoring relationships are best understood through the qualities of an ally[1] (Kendall, 2003) and a feminist model of comentoring (Harris, 2016). Firstly, the advocate-mentor has societal privilege (i.e., race, gender, and/or tenure status in the department, to name a few), which is essential to the advocate-mentor's ability to intercede for SOC in meaningful ways. Thus, the advocate-mentor publicly and privately expresses alignment with SOC (and other historically marginalized students), while actively working to address their needs, which could feasibly be their *most* important characteristic. A protégé might need the mentor to demonstrate support or protection when either they or their interests are being attacked. this comes with risks, but the advocate-mentor is willing to take them.

Secondly, the advocate-mentor must verbally and nonverbally express a deep commitment to seeking social justice on behalf of SOC. This also requires a greater understanding of how privilege and oppression directly impact graduate SOC's educational experiences and lives in general. Much like an ally, the advocate-mentor is educated about SOC's marginalized identities and experiences, constantly challenges their own discomfort and prejudices while recognizing the ways they have benefited from systemic oppression, and learns and practices the skills of being an advocate (Kendall, 2003). Ultimately, the advocate-mentor's goal is to take action to create interpersonal, societal, and institutional change.

Third, as with all mentors, the advocate-mentor is will make mistakes, but actively works to avoid using these mistakes as "an excuse for inaction" (Kendall, 2003). The responsibilities of the advocate-mentor are too great to fall victim to inaction. Acting as both a parent and peer (Harris, 2016), the advocate-mentor helps students decode the hidden curriculum, develop as researchers engaged in a scholarly paradigm, and grow as professionals. Advocate-mentors also protect their SOC protégés from deficit views of their contributions, assist in the development of self-awareness, and educate protégés about program, departmental, and university policies and procedures. These advocacy behaviors create a mentor–protégé relationship that fosters an ethos of community, empowerment, caring, respect, accountability, and an appreciation for diverse knowledge (Harris, 2016, p. 43). Ultimately, advocate-mentors use their privilege to foster inclusiveness and take the associated risks in creating such change.

Finally, the advocate-mentor understands the importance of emotional safety in their role as mentor, advocate, and change agent. Emotional safety refers to a relational experience where both parties feel safe to be open, honest, and vulnerable with one another (Catherall, 2006). This experience is essential to the advocate-mentor and protégé because it establishes a genuine and meaningful connection. The mentor achieves emotional safety with the protégé by interrogating how their societal privilege cis both a shield and blinders for them (Kendall, 2003). To this end, the advocate-mentor embraces their own vulnerability, which requires becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable, and uncomfortable with being comfortable, the latter of which they must constantly work against. As such, the advocate-mentor safeguards the SOC's mental and social well-being, thus ensuring that the protégé's psyche and spiritual energy are intact enough to effectively utilize their academic skills to actualize a successful career (Taylor, 2018). This can only be accomplished by the advocate-mentor creating an emotionally safe environment that elevates support, trust, disclosure, belonging, empathy, and accountability. Such an environment is necessary for advocate-mentoring relationships among SOC to flourish. Though not addressed in ally scholarship, these advocate-mentoring characteristics are fluid, thus allowing the parties and their respective needs to determine to what task the advocate-mentor should attend at that moment in their relationship.

In addition to outlining the qualities of an advocate-mentor, we offer a practical recommendation for advocate-mentorships. Ideally, the advocate-mentor is a faculty member in the protégé's home department. Because the mentoring relationship serves career and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1983)—functions exponentially important for the SOC whose social identities render them as outsiders (Collins, 1986)—it is ideal that SOC be mentored by someone in their discipline who understands the structure of academia, in general, as well as the particular culture of their home department. This allows the advocate-mentor to actively work toward decreasing and/or eliminating marginalization experiences for SOC, especially within their home department. As such, the faculty member aids the SOC in connecting to and thriving in that particular program by creating a space in which the SOC receives appropriate tutelage for career success and continued assurance that they are valuable members of their intellectual community.

Academia is not immune to institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, and cis/heteronormativism; thus, mentoring models and our understanding of them must be redefined in order to identify how our communicative practices explicitly account for this diversity. Protégés from HMGs, like SOC, will very likely be subjected to multiple layers of biases

and prejudices, which makes it even more important for varying levels of mentor activism while assisting the protégé in achieving their personal, educational, and professional goals. Naturally, not every historically marginalized protégé experiences overt or covert discrimination; however, their marginalized social identity suggests that they are more susceptible to experiences that render them an outsider—intentionally or unintentionally. The mentor–protégé relationship must foster advocacy, support, and collegiality, especially for SOC. This tripartite relationship is negotiated through effective communication strategies that center the importance of cultural sensitivity.

### Advocate-mentoring as a communicative process

According to Buell (2002), the mentoring process is perceived as a relationship where the mentor "transfer[s]" their "skills and knowledge" "to the mentee—a process that inherently involves communication" (p. 59). She expressed great concern that "*how* [italics added for emphasis] that transfer occurs is a relatively neglected aspect of the mentoring literature" (p. 59). This dynamic is definitely a principal area of communication research and for scholars invested in instructional work, especially when it comes to SOC.

Researchers note that conversations regarding issues of otherness and difference are uncomfortable for all members of society, albeit to different degrees (Bonilla-Silva, 2007); however, using a race-evasive scholarly approach to understanding the mentoring process is problematic. Though not writing about mentoring or allyship, Simpson (2011) argued that race-evasive approaches negate "the importance of raced experiences and holds everyone to a standard originally and primarily defined by Whites and biased in favor of the status quo" (p. 151). Regarding mentoring, failure to recognize the importance of otherness in both scholarship and practice limits the extent to which we can best understand effective mentoring strategies and communication practices between mentors and SOC protégés.

For example, research suggests that protégés can be very proactive in "direct[ing] their conversational goals and communication strategies toward initiating, maintaining, and repairing their mentoring relationship" (Kalbfleisch, 2002, p. 67). This, however, is a privilege and right for specific social identities (e.g., White, heterosexual, males). For SOC, there may be reluctance, uncertainty, and fear in addressing any concerns or needs related to otherness. This could be a result of the SOC's desires to avoid rocking the boat, others' experiences of discomfort with difference, and/or feelings of additional stress brought on by their otherness. Regardless, SOC might not enact behaviors associated with being a proactive protégé; instead, they may be unable to effectively communicate all of their needs as a protégé from a historically marginalized group.

Given SOC's precarious position, the communication behaviors and language choices of the advocate-mentor exhibits reflect an acknowledgement that racism exists and that the mentor is committed to protecting and fighting for social justice on behalf of the SOC. While there is no surefire template for how this aspect of the mentoring process will unfold, it is imperative that both the mentor and protégé have explicit communication about the topic of race, especially if the protégé has expressed the need to do so. There must be direct communication about the race-related needs of the protégé, which also includes discussion of the institutionalized racism to which the SOC is subjected in the department and elsewhere at the university. Additionally, the advocate-mentor shares their efforts to address social injustices impacting the SOC.

These culturally responsive communication practices between advocate-mentors and protégés must start with the development of relationship-specific rules that encourage open communication and dialogue. While all interpersonal exchanges might not warrant an explicit articulation of certain rules, the mentor and protégé should at least have some discussion of their relationship expectations. This is particularly important given that advocate-mentorships are most likely to be racially discordant mentoring relationships.

A primary goal must be to have (1) open communication about any race-related concerns or issues the protégé may have, and (2) a protégé-approved response to resolving any social injustices they may be facing. For example, a protégé may share a recent racial microaggression experience with the mentor. The protégé must have the freedom to determine the purpose of the disclosure, whether it is to seek emotional support or resolution, and the extent to which, or if at all, the mentor is to be involved (since a mentor intervention might result in negative consequences for the protégé; they may experience further alienation or be labeled as a troublemaker). Through such conversations, the advocate-mentor and protégé consistently negotiate racialized aspects of their relationship, thus recognizing "the critical importance of Otherness to the dialogic process" (Deetz & Simpson, 2004, p. 154) and the potential for transformative dialogue.

According to Deetz and Simpson (2004), transformative dialogue "becomes possible when interlocutors find their common-sense beliefs challenged as they encounter differences in interaction with an Other. These differences call into question and challenge otherwise unquestioned assumptions and open up the possibility of generative, productive change" (p. 154). Transformative dialogue is at the core of the advocate-mentor relationship. We do advise, however, that the advocate-mentor first establish emotional safety so such dialogue can occur. Doing so will ensure that the protégé feels comfortable and confident in the mentor's ability to provide professional guidance and serve as an advocate in the fight for racial justice should the situation arise.

As women of color who have served as protégé and mentor in numerous relationships throughout our academic careers, we are fully aware of the need for communication scholars, specifically, and social scientists, in general, to conduct research on the messages communicated and negotiated between mentor and protégé relative to their social identities. Kalbfleisch and Davies (1991) and Hao et al. (2012) are a few communication scholars that have studied race and mentoring. Not surprisingly, they found that race has a significant impact in mentoring relationships involving POC. We maintain that difference and oppression are also likely to have a substantial impact on mentoring relationships for SOC. Thus, future communication scholarship on mentoring should focus on identifying strategies that racially discordant mentor–protégé pairs employ to contribute to healthy communication, particularly with regard to discussions about race and identity. Such scholarship will aid in the ongoing development of a culturally responsive mentoring model that offers counsel for how faculty, departments, and universities can communicate affirmation of and appreciation for the students' historically marginalized social identities. Such a model can ultimately validate the SOC's accounts of otherness within the department and beyond.

## Final thoughts

Current mentoring theories and models fail to address how various social identities may impact the function, effectiveness, and stability of mentor–protégé relationships. Thus, we

argue for an advocate-mentoring model, whereby the advocate-mentor exercises genuine cultural sensitivity, while also assuming the role of a social justice activist. Advocate-mentors use their privilege and social status to leverage inclusiveness and are willing to assume the associated risks in creating such institutional change. The need for this kind of mentoring is vital, given our current sociopolitical climate. The U.S. is currently experiencing a severe regression in the area of racial and social justice for HMGs in every sector of society. Educational institutions serve as microcosms of the large society, which means HMS, faculty, and administrators are facing increasingly more oppressive educational and work environments; therefore, it is imperative that faculty become advocates to these valuable community members. The rise of social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, The Sanctuary Campus Movement, The Feminist Pro-Choice Movement, The Anti-Islamophobia Movement, and the LGBTQ+ Movement offer overwhelming evidence that large segments of the U.S. population are organizing against discrimination and marginalization. Advocate-mentors should join in this cause.

Our own experiences and those shared with us by others also from one or more marginalized groups (race, gender, LGBTQ+, low socioeconomic status, first-generation) have lead us to the conclusion that scholars from privileged positionality, particularly White scholars, must do more (and better) for the SOC in their graduate programs. Protégés are more likely to be in racially discordant mentor–protégé relationships (rather than racially concordant relationships) in the absence of a critical mass of senior faculty members who share their historically marginalized status (Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997). Thus, we implore White colleagues to share in the responsibility and privilege of mentoring SOC who are equally deserving of the attention, care, benefits, and opportunities afforded their White cohort members. These mentors must assume the role of advocate if they are to be a *true* mentor to the SOC protégé.

Communication remains a central feature of the advocate-mentorship relationship. Race discordant protégés and mentors must engage in culturally responsive dialogue that is transformative for their individual lives as mentor–protégé as well as for the universities and educational systems that are challenged, shaped, and impacted by the cross-cultural mentorship. We argue that faculty and administrators in general, and an advocate-mentor in particular, are directly responsible for facilitating the change we believe is required in response to the shifting cultural demographic of the academy. Considered collectively, scholarship on communication and mentoring (Cho & Yu, 2014; Kalbfleisch, 1997, 2002; Kalblfleisch & Davies, 1993; Yang et al., 2016) offers empirical practices and findings that further bolster our contention that current and future mentoring practices and scholarship adopt an advocate-mentor model to facilitate understanding of the interconnected relationship between socialization, mentoring, and intercultural competence.

## Note

1. We chose to not use the term *ally*, as it frequently carries romantic notions of oppressed people that allies seek to save/help. These are the ally "'saviors' who see victims as tokens instead of people" (Indigenous Action Media, n.d.). Furthermore, the term ally does not adequately capture all of the nuanced ways in which advocate-mentors must champion for SOC; nonetheless, scholarship on ally mentorship provides a starting block for understanding how mentors can move from ally to advocate.

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CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNICATION, TEACHING, AND LEARNING

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# Prosocial advocacy communication and mentoring in higher education

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The idea of a new approach to mentoring intrigues me. Through some of my own first personal experiences in higher education, I learned about the critical importance of strong mentoring on a young scholar's professional identity, confidence, and success. Yet, my earliest research exposed me to the difficulty that students appear to encounter

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in accessing potential mentors and building productive relationships with them. In fact, the lack of student mentees available to serve as research participants was one of the drivers behind a decision to explore communication strategies for initiating mentoring relationships in a 1997 study (developed with Victoria Orrego, Tim Plax, and Pat Kearney). Over 20 years later, students still report barriers to effective mentoring; thus, a new paradigm for mentoring could in fact be in order.

Back in 1997, I was eager to explore the nature of communication in mentoring relationships because mentoring had already had a significant impact on my decision to pursue graduate education and my early socialization in my M.A. program. Through mentoring relationships, I had acquired a vast amount of information that enabled me to hit the ground running as a competent graduate student. During the initial recruitment for the Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, and Kearney research , I was surprised and frustrated when we had difficulty finding graduate students of any race, ethnic background, or gender who identified themselves as someone's protégé using random sampling methods. We then turned to purposive network sampling, and relying on our very small random sample and the larger network sample, deduced empirically a profile of graduate student/faculty mentor pairs that were mostly white. Although female protégés outnumbered males, the majority of faculty mentors were male. Revisiting what is now very old study reminded me of the problems students appear to have locating mentors and how persistent these problems seem to be.

My experience may have been 20 years ago, but Harris and Lee recount a scenario that is not so different from the one our research team encountered in 1997. In their stimulus essay, Harris and Lee passionately articulate the issues surrounding lack of diversity in higher education and the resulting problematic conditions relative to the student experience. The authors use both data and experience as the rationale for consideration of a new mentoring model that addresses and helps obviate the barriers to achievement that students of color experience in college and graduate school.

In my essay, I will first share my reactions and reflections to the advocate model and suggest how I believe communication research might help advance it. Then, I will discuss some institutional approaches that might enhance the experiences of students of color (SOC), create opportunities for them to connect with appropriate mentors, stay in school, and consider graduate school. Institutional attention to SOC that involves strong mentoring at the undergraduate and graduate levels will hopefully build a pipeline of prospective faculty of color (FOC). More FOC to mentor future generations of scholars can potentially ameliorate many of the stunning difficulties Harris and Lee discuss in their essay.

## Advocate mentoring

In the rationale for their proposed model, Harris and Lee write:

> … we believe that, in order for real institutional change to occur, … White scholars must be willing wield their privilege to serve as outspoken advocates for SOC in ways they may have never done before … to take an active role in mentoring and being assertive advocates for SOC …

They reflect on graduate student of color (SOC) experiences as "outsiders within;" in which SOC feel (or may be explicitly) left out of opportunities, spaces, events, and

conversations important to their development as scholars; negative interpersonal experiences; and perceptions of information inadequacy. Communication researchers have an important opportunity to explore and address this issue by conducting research that investigates students' and faculty mentors' perceptions of mentor advocacy roles. Such research should uncover how both stakeholders in these important relationships define advocacy in the mentoring context, and the behaviors that operationalize this important mentoring function. Research questions and subsequent investigations of this nature could ultimately influence mentoring practices in transformative ways.

Graduate students have long been expected to maintain what is often only an illusion of confidence and stability as they navigate the difficult landscape of research politics, workload, interpersonal dynamics, and role management associated with their programs and their disciplines. Good mentors provide important psychosocial functions (Kram, 1988; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990) to enhance students' feelings of "competence, identity, and social effectiveness" (Kram, p. 32). However, students may be reluctant to reveal their lack of self-confidence and personal struggles to their mentors and to seek that type of support—especially when they feel dissimilar or race discordant. Students who enter school with confidence problems (due to any cause, including and perhaps especially racism) are already at a disadvantage in terms of their willingness to strategically prearrange working relationships with desired mentors, be aware of who the right mentors are for them, or seek frequent contact with target mentors. These and other active, assertive strategies that successfully mentored students use to connect with faculty (Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997) are difficult enough to employ for confident students with adequate levels of preparation and information about how to succeed in graduate school (conceptualized in the organizational assimilation literature as vocational and anticipatory socialization)[1]. Thus, the perceptions of disenfranchisement and diminished confidence and competence that Harris and Lee report students of color having are not difficult to imagine.

Effective mentoring must, then, involve the kind of advocacy that Harris and Lee outline; and the research bears this out, as well. My reading of the literature suggests that advocacy is an expected function of a skilled and helpful mentor. Good mentors are advocates to the extent that, behind the scenes, they provide their students with insights about department and discipline politics, unspoken rules and expectations, and key personalities important to the student's education and progress (Kogler-Hill, Bahniuk, & Dobos, 1989). Effective mentors do not deny their protégés access to these insights, which are so critical to graduate student development and success. Outwardly, as well, good mentors advocate for and promote their protégés. For example, they help them build their professional networks, make key contacts, and increase their visibility in ways that assist their students in becoming better scholars and obtaining desirable professional opportunities (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Moore, 1982).

Importantly, I believe effective faculty should engage in these active mentorship behaviors *consistently*. They should base their decision to promote and advocate for their students based on their beliefs in their individual protégés' competence and understanding of their skills and interests. Good faculty mentor advocates should not be biased in their willingness to provide such support once they enter into a mentor–protégé relationship. And, certainly, good mentors must be advocates when, as Harris and Lee argue, their protégés need "support or protection when either they or their interests are being attacked."

However, as Harris and Lee point out, not all faculty mentors possess advocacy skills and others view the profile of a good mentor differently. From a research perspective, I believe we would benefit in building a more robust, systematic understanding of faculty mentors' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. We also need to learn, empirically, what faculty need in the way of experience, training, and information, to better advocate for a diverse student population. Most research on mentoring in higher education reveals graduate students' perceptions of their mentoring experiences (cf., Bullis & Bach, 1989; Waldeck et al., 1997; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004; Yang, Orrego Dunleavy, & Phillips, 2016), but less explores the faculty point of view (Waldeck & LaBelle, 2016).

I think it would be helpful at this point to remember that although faculty are expected to mentor graduate students, the individual relationships they enter into are voluntary. Faculty members should not commit to mentoring a student they are not willing to advocate for in every needed way. However, they should not view their role as that of savior, even when students are in difficult and/or troubling situations. An effective mentor should support students' development and maturity as professional adults who will, regardless of identity, face biases and offensiveness. Thus, sometimes advocacy involves coaching a protégé to advocate effectively for him or herself. But faculty must be able and willing to provide this function on behalf of our students when necessary, and like Harris and Lee, I argue that incidents or situations involving overt racism require this type of advocacy.

Thus, a useful set of research questions might explore how professors make determinations about the mentor–protégé relationships they enter into, how they define their roles and what active and interactive strategies they use to advocate for their students professionally and personally (and when). Communication scholars could also determine how faculty members observe and make determinations about their students' needs, even when students do not explicitly bring their needs to their mentors' attention. In a 2016 essay in *The Atlantic* on the pressures that lead graduate students to leave their programs, Patterson interviewed many students who assumed their professors were uninterested in their personal challenges and expected them to conceal their weaknesses. Communication research could profitably explore what conditions and factors contribute to these student perceptions; in addition, researchers could investigate the faculty perspective on the role that mentors play (and behaviors they enact) in supporting students during times of difficulty.

Advocacy can be a risk for faculty, as Harris and Lee point out. I contend that it should not be, but recognize that for many it is. The practical reality of some academic environments makes advocacy a difficult exercise for faculty who (a) are marginalized themselves by their professional status (i.e., they are untenured) or gender identification/race/sexuality/ethnicity; (2) lack perspective-taking abilities and/or empathy; or (3) simply lack the experience or training on how to best advocate for students facing unjust, unfair treatment. I also have observed graduate students, who in an effort to connect with faculty they perceive as similar (e.g., in age), sometimes connect with ineffective or inappropriate mentors who are not experienced enough or who may encounter too much risk attached to advocating for their students and consequently avoid doing so. Here, I do not mean to suggest that there is an abundance of indifferent, inattentive, bad, or bigoted people guiding our graduate students. Rather, I am arguing that it would be rare or impossible for all faculty to have the experience

or knowledge/training base to truly understand a dissimilar student's experience and advocate for them appropriately. Given that, there are many times that faculty are likely not as empathic or understanding as they should be in relation to a student, because they simply have not lived their experience. But they should be motivated to try their best and engage in the kinds of dialogue and education that create the understanding and skills that they lack. Here again, research on the faculty perspective is sorely needed. Such research would highlight a greater clarity on how faculty members' struggle with understanding their students' lived experiences. Instructional scholars could study the kinds of dialogue and key turning points in mentor protégé relationships (cf. Bullis & Bach, 1989) in which they discover elements of understanding or need for greater understanding. Research highlighting the processes and situations through which mentors discover their perceived inadequacies and explore their understandings of their diverse students' experiences would uncover opportunities growth and development. These opportunities might include formal training and or dialogue that would build mentors' confidence in advocating for SOC and diminish their perceptions of risk associated with advocacy. Scholarship in this area might also begin a conversation that leads to faculty being more comfortable with these forms of advocacy, and mentor advocacy becoming more culturally normative within academia.

## Institutional and pedagogical approaches

At the essence of the problem Harris and Lee describe is a system in which not enough students of color enter college, are able to succeed there, go on to graduate school, and later become faculty mentors themselves. This is not a new problem. Historic barriers between populations of color and higher education have led us to the status quo, where both undergraduate and graduate programs have difficulty retaining SOC, and where there is a woeful lack of faculty of color to mentor both white students and students of color (Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, & Vick, 2017; Carver-Thomas, 2018; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). We have a responsibility, though, as individuals and institutions, to do what we can to change this. I argue that advocacy, as a prosocial communication experience, is one way to do this. As a prosocial behavior, advocacy has the potential to lead to conversation that promotes civil connections rather than aggressive, confrontational divisions.

In addition, institutional advocacy could involve partnering with programs like the McNair Scholars and their lesser-known national, regional, and local counterparts that serve important roles in the vocational and anticipatory socialization of young students of color (and other vulnerable groups) so that they might arrive on campus best positioned to succeed. Our institutions should be partnering actively with these kinds of programs to enhance the benefits they offer. We know that students with a solid vocational and anticipatory socialization foundation are more likely to persist in college than those without this background and preparation (Corbett & Huebner, 2007). If our institutions were to work consistently and productively with programs like McNair on recruiting and college preparation initiatives, students would be likely to find themselves on better footing when they arrive in our classrooms and offices. The earlier on in the recruiting and socialization process that students learn the value of connecting with professors of all races, gender identities, and diverse cocultural backgrounds, the more proactive and skilled they will be in doing so.

Regardless of our institution's affiliations with organizations such as McNair, I believe it is important for individuals to engage in pedagogical outreach. For example, several years ago, I was asked to offer a half-day communication workshop for an ethnically diverse group of urban at-risk K-12 students with college potential. These students were enrolled in an institutional partnership program institution with the goal to help prepare for college life. This opportunity to help young people build their skills and confidence at a time that they were making decisions about pursuing higher education was, for me, a key act of mentoring and service. These forms of early instructional outreach are critical for recruiting students from all backgrounds and socializing them as to the importance of competently building relationships with faculty members, and how to establish connections in the academy.

Further, we need to encourage students from all backgrounds to seek and accept mentoring advice from a diverse array of scholars. Once we recruit students into our programs, we should work hard to socialize them about the best people to work with in terms of scholarly interests, personal needs, and temperament/disposition. At times, graduate students need help identifying and selecting mentors appropriate for their needs; they are new members of our institutions and some do not have the same information about or access to prospective mentors as others. In fact, the scholarly conversation on mentoring might benefit from exploring how students identify potential mentors: I predict we could be surprised at the criteria many of them use and will discern new issues and foci for student socialization.

Additionally, we must work hard to enact advocacy within departmental and classroom socialization processes. Here, I believe that basic good manners and civility, immediacy behaviors, and affinity-building communication can serve us all well. As a prosocial communication experience for all involved, advocacy can lead to learning and growth for mentors, other faculty, and students—not more division, negativity, or misunderstanding. To mentor well, we must listen well, be alert to micro- and macroaggressions against our students, and possess the confidence to confront them in socially appropriate ways (or guide our students to do so). No student, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic should feel degraded, oppressed, or demeaned within our halls—and especially one to whom a seasoned mentor has committed.

Toward that end, in advocating for our SOC, I believe that faculty mentors should rely on what our own field teaches us about communication competence, and that scholarship could fruitfully explore the competence construct as a predictor of prosocial advocacy mentoring effectiveness. With the goal of increasing understanding and fostering positive relationships where there may currently be misunderstanding and fracture, our advocacy could emanate from the two general criteria that Spitzberg (1983) articulated: effectiveness and appropriateness. In the context we are discussing, effectiveness may involve listening style flexibility (Bodie & Worthington, 2010), immediacy (Andersen & Andersen, 1979), situationally appropriate use of instructional power (Plax, Kearney, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1986), and politeness (Park, 2008) to achieve influence in advocacy situations. The research on power has been consistent for many decades: prosocial forms are more effective than antisocial forms in terms of achieving influence and building positive relationships (McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985). Appropriateness is the extent to which communication is adapted to the context, culture, expectations, and needs attached to the situation and its communicators. In advocacy mentoring, competent faculty members will be able to assess the situation and make determinations about what will best serve each student in that particular situation—recalling the goals of building understanding and

positive departmental relationships that will nurture, rather than damage the student's development. In this way, the advocate mentor might be called upon to appropriately challenge the kinds of institutional norms, damaging practices or structures, and isolated incidents of bias that may impede graduate student success and confidence.

A critical facet to being appropriate is being *ethical.* The National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication (1999) states that ethical communication "is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships […] enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others." Further, the Credo recommends that communicators "strive to understand and respect others before evaluating and responding to their messages" and build "communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators." Within these particular portions of the Credo, I believe, is a framework for advocacy that will help build understanding and positivity. Good people face ethical choices every day, and the ways in which they apply ethical codes such as NCA's Credo are interpretive; however, keeping these points I have drawn from the Credo in mind is a starting point for prosocial advocacy.

In addition to advocacy, faculty mentors must make conscious and strategic efforts to contribute to graduate student socialization. Research suggests that students with formal and informal institutionalized socialization to higher education are much more likely to graduate, pursue advanced degrees, and enter the academy than those who do not (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). When students of color persist in graduate school and perceive faculty support, as a result of individual and institutional efforts to socialize, recruit, retain, support, and advocate for them, they will be positioned to provide strong mentoring to a new generation of scholars. It must start with us, though. In addition to the career mentoring most faculty members are quite comfortable engaging in, we must remember the psychosocial, interpersonal functions of mentoring most relevant to the issues Harris and Lee discuss: acceptance, confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1988).

As a postscript to my response, I share my own mentoring experience. I set out on my faculty path as a result of a mentoring relationship. The consistency of my mentor's career and psychosocial support, the network she helped me build, and the ways in which she advocated for me helped me create a foundation on which the rest of my career was built. I hope that at one time, the mentoring experiences of all SOC will mirror mine in relational tone and outcome, and the barriers to accomplishment will be fewer. Research and instructional efforts such as those I have proposed here, as well as a renewed commitment to competent communication, ethical collegiality, and understanding, are starting points. As well, I am proud of the initiatives of our National Communication Association and the good work that prominent programs in our discipline are doing to encourage students of color to not only persist but flourish (e.g., caucuses and interest groups related to activism, social justice, feminism, LBGTQ, Latinx, and disability issues; travel grants, fellowships, research awards, and scholarships for SOC). As senior scholars from diverse backgrounds, we must follow Harris and Lee's charge and have the courage to advocate for our students. More importantly, we must be willing and motivated to engage in the kinds of dialogue that will help us learn how advocate effectively—for students who are like us, and especially for those who are not.

## Notes

1. Miller (2008) refers to *vocational socialization* as the occupational information that individuals receive from childhood through early adulthood from family members, schools and education-related activities, peers, the media, and part-time work experiences. People evaluate what they learn about career and advanced education through the lenses of their self-concept and make decisions about what to do. In the educational context, vocational socialization, in essence, helps young people develop an ethos for the importance of higher education and learn the behaviors of successful students – including the importance of a mentor and the appropriate ways to seek one. *Anticipatory socialization* refers to how people collect information and develop a repertoire of appropriate behaviors specific to a particular industry or organization. In the educational context, anticipatory socialization involves how prospective students learn about their programs, faculty, and the norms for success within their disciplines and programs. First-generation students, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, or students who face barriers of any sort to the kinds of informative experiences that contribute to vocational and anticipatory socialization may be underprepared and lack confidence to assertively pursue and initiate mentoring as undergraduates or graduate students.

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# Suitcase, crockpot, car: mentoring relationships, cultivating confidence, and challenging workplaces for the emerging professional

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A conversation between a mentor and mentee:

> Mentor  When do you plan on moving to Los Angeles?
>
> Mentee  I moved back home to Chicago to work and save some money. My family is worried about L.A.—I know I won't be able to land a freelance job until I am physically there, but I don't think I have enough saved to cover an apartment, especially if I am not able to find a job for a few months.

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| | |
|---|---|
| Mentor | How much money do you think you'll need? Have you created a budget? |
| Mentee | Not yet. I'm waiting until I've saved more. |
| Mentor | Have you decided on West Hollywood for sure? |
| Mentee | Yes, for sure. |
| Mentor | I know an alum who lives in the area. I will put you both in contact to see if you can couch surf for a few weeks until you get a job, maybe as a server, which will allow you to apply for freelance gigs. Definitely create a budget that includes any expenses you might need and send me a spreadsheet when you're finished. |
| Mentee | That sounds great, but I know my family will still worry. |
| Mentor | Do you have a car? |
| Mentee | Yes. |
| Mentor | Pack one suitcase, a crockpot, and drive to California tomorrow. |
| Mentee | Tomorrow? I can't leave tomorrow. I have a date tomorrow. |
| Mentor | Is your dream job in California? |
| Mentee | Yes … |
| Mentor | Are you planning a life there, or planning a life here? |
| Mentee | There … |
| Mentor | Then go get that job. |
| Mentee | What if I don't get hired? |
| Mentor | If you never leave, you will never be hired. You have to physically be there for the jobs in media you want. |
| Mentee | That's true … |
| Mentor | You have been talking to me about this dream since your first semester on campus. I know you can do this. You have worked hard to get there, and now is the time. The only one preventing you from your dream right now is you. |
| Mentee | What if I fail? |
| Mentor | Then you'll fail. The unknown is scary, but if you never try, you will always wonder what your life might be like had you taken this chance. You can do this. |
| Mentee | Thanks for believing in me. |
| Mentor | Now suitcase, crockpot, and car. |

*

This is a typical conversation we have with mentees around/after graduation, and a conversation that illustrates concerns some mentees may have with their transition into a career. These conversations are especially appropriate for those entering *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000), a period ranging from the late teens through the early twenties and a time when emerging adults turn away from their adolescent and teen support networks and toward "people outside of the family" (Dykas & Siskind, 2018, p. 1). As college faculty, we can comprise part of this new support network as "mentors"—new, trusted, and safe sources of support. Even for students who are (in years) well into adulthood, the transition into a professional career can involve unique concerns and the need to expand their support network.

At its core, mentoring is relational, firmly making it a communication issue. Mentoring must be desired by both mentor and mentee, and requires commitment from each. In other words, a mentoring relationship is not a dynamic that can, or necessarily should, occur between an instructor and all of their students. Mentors should be invitational with their assistance and not assume others want help. Conversely, mentees must be open to listening and should not demand, or feel entitled to, assistance. Mentors and mentees, together, must cultivate a supportive relationship, acknowledge privileges and

limitations, and feel mutual respect (see Ellis et al., 2009). These characteristics contribute to the conditions for successful mentorship.

There is an extensive and growing amount of scholarship about how faculty can mentor students (see Harris and Lee's essay for review). Most of this literature assumes a teleological goal—that once a student graduates or moves onto a graduate program, then the mentor's work is complete. Implicit in much of this literature is that instructor-mentors hand off mentees to new mentors (whether within academia or beyond) for socialization into the next step of their lives. However, our experiences lead us to believe that such a model is inadequate for understanding how mentoring relationships form within, and persist beyond, the college context. Mentoring relationships can be maintained for years, sometimes decades, beyond the time when instructors and students share the same classrooms.

In this essay, we focus on—and emphasize the importance of—mentoring that can still occur beyond graduation. We discuss a mentor's role and importance of maintaining mentor/mentee relationships, how to cultivate confidence and curb insecurities in mentees, and how we help mentees navigate unknown and challenging workplaces. We also describe how mentors too also can become mentees in these relationships.

## Nurturing a postgraduation mentoring relationship

Mentoring relationships often happen in the process of students taking courses with, or being advised by, faculty members where there is frequent contact, a shared interest, and a passion for teaching and learning. However, after graduation, continued mentorship requires a different type of effort and approach. For example, without the regular contact that formal coursework offers, it can be difficult to sustain the same quantity and quality of communication between mentors and mentees. The loss of regular contact suggests the need for using other mediums of communication, such as text messages, emails, regular mail, and social media. One way to ensure that mentors remain in close contact with mentees is to set reminders for themselves over the course of the year. Doing so prevents mentors from forgetting to reach out to those mentees who, unlike their current students, are not sharing classroom spaces and being a bodily reminder by their mere presence to interact with them.

A delicate part of part-graduation mentoring is the redefinition of the roles between the mentor and mentee. In the context of higher education, the mentor–mentee role is influenced by the hierarchical nature of the teacher–student dynamic. However, post-graduation, this dynamic will change. Will the mentee continue to call the mentor "professor" or "doctor" for the coming years? Given the lack of frequent in-person contact, what new communicative activities might the mentors–mentees need to do? For example, although Skype or FaceTime may have never been used before, these technologies might be used more now, especially with physical distance. Or if mentor–mentee visit each other, will they continue in their roles especially if they are no longer teacher–student? Changes to the relationship may be new sites of struggle, not only with the logistics, but also related to the kinds of communication possible given those changes.

Another potential dilemma can happen when mentors also become mentees. As mentees develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes based on their professional status, they will become experts in their area. Mentors will have to make themselves vulnerable to

the idea that they may no longer have the expertise to guide the mentee. Mentors also should realize that they can learn new tasks and techniques which, in turn, will help them help nurture future students. In other words, the mentor–mentee relationship can be viewed as cyclical, with mentor and mentee changing roles at various times, leading to growth and renewal for both.

As mentors begin to explore the new relational dynamics with their (former) mentees, it is important to remember how small gestures can be incredibly important and affirming. For example, when a mentee posts a new job opportunity on social media, we offer congratulations; or, when a family member passes away, we offer condolences. Sometimes a simple birthday greeting can turn into a meeting for coffee. Sometimes a text message about a new job is a way to talk about strategies for achieving future goals. These unplanned moments allow us to check in on mentees' path to determine if they are losing their way, or if they need encouragement to step outside of their comfort zone. Simply being present in their day-to-day social media lives creates opportunities for face-to-face conversations. These interactions can be important for helping them develop their confidence and encourage them to reach for their hopes and dreams.

## Cultivating confidence in postgraduate mentees

Regular contact and a commitment to each other introduces the next tasks for a mentor: cultivating confidence and curbing insecurity in mentees. Many of my (Anji) students travel from Peoria, Illinois to New York, California, or Chicago for jobs in the film, television, and entertainment industry. However, they are often leery of doing so because they have grown comfortable with the emotional and/or financial support of living with friends and family. They may also face financial and familial pressures to save money before leaving, trying to find a job while living thousands of miles away from where they want to work, or stress that their intended career is far from their close relational others. A mentor has the ability to instill confidence and talk through the fears that prevent students from working toward their goals.

One way to help graduated mentees develop confidence is to ask questions, without judgement, about their life plans and goals. I start by asking the mentees if they're happy and if they're living the kind of life they want to live. If the answer is "no," I ask more questions and try to determine where they find their joy. For example, I ask "Is it important to you to live near your friends and/or family? Is having a large home or property important to you? What kind of lifestyle do you want to live?" If the answer is "yes" to these questions, then we work through how they can channel their passions into a career that is closer to where they want to be located geographically, financially, and/or familially. If the answer is "no," then we work through whether or not a direct flight (or car ride) away is important, the size, location, and type of their first living space (with or without roommates), and whether their chosen career allows them to follow the path that is important to them in the areas they have defined for themselves. Regardless of their answer, the mentee is able to define what is most important to them and find confidence in their decision to pursue a career that is important to them. Additionally, the mentee is able to decide with confidence to take/not take that job in Los Angeles, because it will lead them to/away from where they want to be.

Another way to promote confidence is to offer practical advice on day-to-day issues. I often work with students to address potential job responsibilities, ability to spend time with friends and family, and how much will they get paid. I run budget calculations with them, and circle back to a discussion of joy and passion. Important, here, is to give them the tools for understanding the everyday barriers they will encounter (i.e., emotional, financial, and relational). Some emerging professionals are often surprised at the cost of living on their own, or the fact that they are probably not going to be able to go on vacation, or even take time off work from a new position when they feel they may need a break. A working budget follows their decisions on location and lifestyle, followed by the realities of working for a company that does not offer fall or spring break. These types of conversations often occur organically following discussions of happiness, or even asking the aforementioned questions. It is critical to be direct regarding the realities of accepting, keeping, or even quitting a job. We discuss what it means to show up on time (always be early!), how to dress professionally (if required for the role), and how nonverbal and verbal choices impact others' perceptions of them.

The most difficult conversations for mentees can be how their behavior and socialization outside of work hours with coworkers (and/or management), or even their life on social media has the ability to impact their life during work hours, because self-disclosure about their personal lives in a social environment is not presented within the context or interpersonal "norms of the workplace" (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018, p. 649). Mentees are often surprised by how someone they perceived as a "friend" communicated dislike or even talked negatively about them to someone who has the ability to either promote or even fire them for (perceived or real) offenses that did not even occur during work hours. We talk about finding/maintaining a friend circle outside of their working relationships to allow them to be whom they are without feeling inhibited interpersonally. Additionally, we discuss how their words about themselves have the ability to shape their reputation among coworkers and managers. I encourage them not to vent their frustrations at work, or even put themselves down. I encourage them to discuss the positive aspects of what they are working on with others rather than focusing on what they may not be doing right (because they are learning a new role). I tell them not to talk about others, as this is usually the fastest way to feel the deep burn of embarrassment. For example, one of my mentees was fired from a job for talking about a coworker who they perceived to be incompetent. Unfortunately, the employee (incompetent or not) was related to the manager. I remind them that these are important lessons (e.g., drinking around coworkers, talking about someone, showing up late) to learn early on in their careers because it can help them understand how to comport themselves while on the job while also separating their personal from their work life.

Finally, mentors may need to tell (and retell) mentees that they have the abilities and ambition to be successful in pursuing their passion. For example, simply saying to a mentee,

> You're doing a great job! I'm happy you are enjoying your work. I would enjoy Skyping you into my class when we discuss your [line of work]. My current students would love to hear about how you're doing, how you got there, and the type of work you're doing.

I find it important to remind mentees they are well trained to think, write, and speak, and they have practiced learning how to learn. I also remind them that it is okay to fail, and

that failing is sometimes where we (myself included) learn our greatest lessons. I often share personal stories of how I felt I had failed, I was embarrassed, I made a poor decision, and how I learned from those mistakes through reflection. I share how these failures helped to shape me into who I am today, and why I feel it is important to develop a life outside of work. I remind them that we often spend more hours of our lives with people we work with than we spend with our friends and family. This disparity in spending time with people we care about, people who are important to us, is a key reason not to build an identity that is rooted solely in their job. Navigating early career jobs as a mentor means figuring how to communicate that a job can bring a mentee joy and be fulfilling, while also instilling in them that a job is only one part of their life. Relationships that we build outside of work can sustain us long after our careers end.

## Challenging postgraduate mentees to actualize inclusive workplaces

I (Tony) often teach courses about identity, communication, and diversity. In these classes, I remind students that unless they pursue further education, rarely will they ever spend extensive time and a shared physical space to explore these topics. After graduation, they may encounter organizational policies about diversity (e.g., equal hiring practices or codes of conduct) and maybe the occasional training regarding difference or sexual harassment, but they may never again have focused discussions exploring the connections between culture and power. As such, I note that although instances of blatant harm, such as the use of hateful language or inappropriate touching, are often easy to identify and challenge, microaggressions—those subtle, latent, and seemingly innocent instances of discrimination—are difficult to explain or prove. Examples of microaggressions include poor treatment by management or coworkers solely because of a person's race, sex, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity; when procedures and policies privilege some identities over others (e.g., racial, gender, and ableist biases of dress codes; see Yoshino, 2006); or when someone, when confronted about a microaggression, denies that they have committed an offense or that an act could ever be interpreted as such (Nadal, 2013). Equipped with this knowledge, students can then, post-graduation, challenge injurious organizational policies and practices, and even serve as "advocate-mentors" in future workplaces (Harris & Lee, 2018).

The first issue that many post-graduation mentees will encounter is the loss of professional resources that explicitly or adequately address issues of inclusivity beyond higher education. Students may lose access to university libraries and databases, and will not have the formal structure of the classroom to introduce them to new or challenging texts, examples, or stories. For example, although there is a great deal of research, across a variety of disciplines, about microaggressions, most popular culture portrayals of microaggressions are erroneous and riddled with bias (e.g., microaggressions are a form of victim mentality). Providing accurate, reliable information about microaggressions, communication techniques they can use to challenge harmful statements, policies, or practices, and the workplace protections they have for doing so, are key to developing inclusive workplaces. As such, the mentor may need to find ways of sharing information about inclusion with their mentees. This might involve relaying to them contemporary discussions about inclusion, what words are becoming appropriate or injurious, and strategies for addressing and remedying harm (e.g., apology, corrective action, and/or forgiveness).

Mentees also may obtain professional employment in an organization that is not interested in improving its workplace policies of inclusiveness. For example, recent discussions with mentees have included concerns about an organization embracing—or refusing to embrace—the use of the singular "they" in everyday discourse or concerns about an organization's bathrooms becoming—or not becoming—gender neutral. For mentees who want to challenge the organization's use of gendered language and bathrooms, we tend to discuss strategies for doing so. I stress the importance of using "I" language (rather than "you" language) that claims responsibility for our concern and hurt; a positioning that can help to ease others' defensiveness, and that they should be able to explain why the gendered language and bathrooms can cultivate unease among employees and customers. A mentor's role may even consist of directing mentees to professional organizations (e.g., the American Civil Liberties Association) that can help them articulate a new institutional culture, maybe through effective handouts or consistent, quality trainings about diversity.

Finally, mentees may find themselves isolated in their ethical stances toward oppression and privilege and may need guidance and counseling from their mentor to stand up to peer pressure. Although I emphasize the importance of maintaining productive relations, I encourage mentees to stay committed to conversations about inclusivity and adversity and remind them that full inclusivity can rarely be accomplished; there will always be challenges. The best we can do is listen to and believe others when they claim a policy or practice has inflicted harm, and to use our various privileges and resources (intellectual, financial, social capital) to cultivate equitable and acceptable change.

## Conclusion

Graduating students and emerging professionals are often in a period of their lives where they will experience great change at a rapid pace (Dykas & Siskind, 2018). The mentor/mentee relationship has the ability to focus and refocus the goals of former students. There will be long conversations about passion, vision, and work–life balance, determinations about what brings mentees joy, and guiding mentees in creating the kind of life they want to live.

We imagine most of our readers work in academic contexts rather than the specific industries of our students/disciplines. As such, as mentors, we need to do our best to acknowledge our limitations and lack of familiarity with the everyday practices of these industries if our students move on to workplaces outside of academia. We can reach out and network with industry professionals. We can instill confidence and talk through the fears that prevent others from working toward their dreams. We can equip mentees with the ability to recognize instances and abuses of privilege, identify and question microaggressions and systemic instances of discrimination, and understand what it may mean to be "advocate-mentors" to others in the workplace (Harris & Lee, this issue). We can offer kindness, make ourselves available for feedback, find resources that might enhance mentees' well-being, and offer advice for navigating contexts riddled with uncertainty and fear. We can encourage mentees to get out of their own way, become uncomfortable, and choose a path that may be met with passion and resistance. In short: we can support mentees with finding joy and purpose, even (and especially) after they graduate.

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EDITORS' REFLECTIONS

Check for updates

# "Yes, and …*": continuing the scholarly conversation about mentoring in higher education

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> I just want to recover. I want a reset button. It is one thing feeling like you do not belong in graduate school. It is another thing being told you do not belong here by the person you moved across the country to work with. Yes … mentoring can be powerful.

Molika (pseudonym) was a second-year Ph.D. student involved with my (Dannels) college-wide graduate student peer mentoring initiative. We were at the initial summer retreat doing a gallery walk; students were presenting posters they had created at the retreat that displayed visuals of the most powerful mentors they have had—at our institution or elsewhere. Molika's picture was a hand-drawn, bright red and orange phoenix, emerging from a flame. There were two words on the page, in addition to the poster-sized phoenix. The word above the phoenix was "belief." The word below was "shame." Molika proceeded to share her experience with a mentor who did not believe in her and who outwardly shared concerns about her to her; a mentor who—whether

intentionally or not—shamed her in the name of "pushing you to be better" (her rendition of the mentor's words). She did not experience the words as supportive or helpful to her scholarly development. She hoped she could be the phoenix, but she was not sure she could actually recover. She was in tears.

When we designed the activity, we did not expect students to identify powerfully bad mentors. Yes, mentoring can be powerful; for good, and for bad.

<div align="center">***</div>

Every year about 20 million students will interact with approximately 1.6 million faculty in the roughly 4,6000 institutions of higher education in the United States (NCES, 2016, 2017, n.d.). Through those interactions, instructors will exert a great deal of influence on students' identity, intellectual, and skill development, and the relationships that they form with them are a key component of student success. Although instructors may influence the lives of all of their students in ways large and small, there remains a specificity to the quality and depth of a mentoring relationship. A mentor goes beyond being merely a content expert, shoulder to cry on, or institutional guide; rather, the relationship encompasses all of these components within an ethic of professional care and love (Calafell, 2007; Harris, 2016; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997). To establish, maintain, and nurture such a communicative relationship can be a messy, frustrating, but ultimately rewarding experience for both parties, signifying its place as a "wicked problem" (Rittel & Webber, 1973).[1]

Mentoring is a key component in the socialization process for individuals into an institution, providing them with a guide to accruing the cultural and social capital that characterizes the particular field of experience (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Indeed, it is the connection between mentoring and students' material realities that makes the relationship not simply personal, professional, or optional, but, rather, a central component in creating inclusive and just institutional cultures. Mentoring relationships help sensitize students into institutional rules, codes, and norms, such as what to wear, how to interact, and how to dissent within an organizational structure. Furthermore, mentors seek to connect protégés to those who can best support their professional goals and ambitions (e.g., scholars in the same field or alumni for professional employment). Students within mentoring relationships, by receiving mentors' time, attention, and advice, can find success that actualizes (or even exceeds) their talents. As such, it is important that mentors are reflective in who they choose to mentor and how because the time, energy, and advice they give is often all-too-easily—sometimes out of ignorance other times due to discrimination—withheld from students from traditionally underresourced groups. At a systematic level, then, these types of microlevel interactions shape and constrain students' navigation of higher education, (re)producing systemic-level inequality.

Essays within this forum address the connections between the personal and the cultural, highlighting the potential and pitfalls of mentoring. Harris and Lee's essay points to how historically marginalized student in general, and students of color in particular, are often excluded from the types of mentorship that would support their inclusion into academia and society. Being an advocate mentor, particularly for those scholars who identify with dominant groups, is a necessary step in addressing the interlocking institutional and cultural system of oppression that affect marginalized students. Furthermore, such an ethic would ensure that academia, and institutions beyond, begin to actually reflect the diversity of the U.S. population thereby taking diversity beyond sloganeering, university mailers, and brochures. Waldeck marshals literature from

organizational communication as well as communication and instruction to offer a portrait of how a good mentoring relationship can enhance student outcomes. Importantly, she offers that even the smallest of acts—civility, immediacy, and affinity seeking—can have profound effects on the retention and support of students. Finally, Adams and Phillips offer insights into a rarely examined component of mentoring—how to be a mentor when a student has moved beyond the confines of the academia. Professional employment, moving to a new geographical area, budgeting, and a host of other practical, emotional, and relational concerns face students as soon as they graduate. Their work suggests that instructors can help protégés support inclusiveness within and beyond academia by modeling ethics of care and empathy.

The essays in the forum offer concrete ways that communication and instruction scholars can provide discipline specific ways to enhance the mentor–protégé relationship. As noted, there remains a dearth of communication and instruction scholarship identifying the communicative components of a mentoring relationship, and how to best foster students' professional and personal ambitions. As such, we encourage scholars in our field to begin programs of research to better understand how to initiate, maintain, cultivate, and dissolve a mentoring relationship, and how it may serve as a foundation for other types of relationships. We draw upon Craig's (1999) seven traditions of the communication discipline to generate research questions that future scholars and teachers can pursue

(1) How can scholarly debates about what constitutes good mentoring reveal ideologies or discourses that inform its practice?
(2) How can mentors and protégés create shared systems that enhance mentoring practices?
(3) How can mentors and protégés resist the hierarchical structuring or a mentoring relationship through dialogic contact?
(4) How can institutional members create clear, consistent messages to students, instructors, and administrations about what constitutes (un)healthy mentoring practices?
(5) How can information concerning students', instructors', and administrators' sociopsychological traits provide strategies for creating mutually beneficial matches between mentors and protégés?
(6) How can rituals of mentoring provide insights into the potentially constraining and liberating institutional cultures of academia as they relate to mentors and protégés?
(7) How can instructors understand mentoring behaviors as ways to socialize traditionally marginalized groups into the logics of the current system; then act to disrupt those hegemonic practices?

Yes, and …

## Note

1. A central rule for improv—to not stop the flow of the performance—is to respond with "yes, and … " (instead of "no" or "yes, but") to lines that comes before you. The idea is to create an environment where all become involved in keeping an idea or storyline alive and evolving; encouraging players to make associations and to connect things in innovative ways (Liu & Noppe-Brandon, 2009).

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