

Chapter 12

Black Women Scholars in Academia: Mentorship and Microinvalidation

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ABSTRACT

Education emphasizes the importance of mentorship in K-20 spaces, concerning the success of instructional scholars. In one regard, when mentorship is disaggregated by race, White scholars are often privileged to receive consistent, organized mentorship to professionally maneuver through instructional pipelines. In another regard, Black scholars, specifically Black women scholars, do not receive the same level of mentorship support as their White counterparts. The notion that approaches to mentorship can differ based on race and or gender can become a destructive form of microinvalidation. This narrative centers Black female scholars' journeys regarding their ethnographic mentoring experiences. Thus, the authors of this work define and describe mentoring using microinvalidation as a conceptual lens to frame their experiences. Further, recommendations are provided for mentoring frameworks that might encourage the academy to reimagine mentoring processes for Black female instructional scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Being a powerful instructional leader was never a professional goal. However, for Shelly and me, it is a calling. Our calling to the teaching profession has come with many different experiences that have in one way or another directed us to our acknowledged professional purposes. Before accepting academic roles in higher education as faculty members in our respective colleges of education we both taught in the K-12 setting. Within the secondary educational setting, we learned of our shared interest in training talented educators that could go into classrooms and be developed into pedagogic leaders. Although we taught

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in nearby counties in Central Florida, our paths did not intersect until we were doctoral students at the same university. Additionally, our bond continues as skilled academics navigating our new professional roles as college professors. In American higher education, teaching, research, and service traditions are well-known (Beard & Hartley, 1984; Hannan & Silver, 2000; Kezar & Sam, 2010). Diversifying faculty in higher education, on the other hand, has been problematic since many postsecondary institutions do not reflect the diversity of their student populations and/or do not mentor minoritized students, staff, or faculty to parity (Kayes, 2006). That withstanding, while the number of faculty members at US post-secondary institutions have steadily increased, disaggregated data based on race and gender reveals an alarming statistic: there have been little progress in diversifying the professoriate among African Americans (5%) and, more specifically, African American women (3%), (McFarland, et al., 2018). Contextualizing the aforementioned critical facts, this chapter is written to explore the process and possibilities of mentoring female academics within a racialized context. That is, while race and mentoring might be overlooked regarding mentoring faculty this work centers on these characteristics. We then synthesized, through our own lived experiences, utilizing an auto-ethnography approach, insights about our transition from schoolteachers to scholars to examine the mentoring needs of Black female faculty.

Preparing Black Scholars for Higher Education

Despite considerable research conducted on mentorship, little is known about mentoring frameworks that work to support Black instructional scholars. Further, even less is known about how to support Black instructional scholars who work at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Rockquemore (2016) asserted that,

If you ask 10 different faculty members what mentoring is, how it works, what it looks like, and how to tell if it's effective, you will get 10 different responses ranging from once-a-year coffee date to a quasi-parental lifelong relationship. (p. 1)

The influence of skilled mentoring is restorative. As such, within today's academic and political climate, it is imperative to cultivate a space that allows mentorship programming initiatives to foster overall growth and support.

For equity to be eminent and for students to have quality academic interactions with their instructors, it is necessary for female faculty members to have access to mentorship-related resources that contribute to their success. There is a dearth of Black and other minority researchers in higher education which adds to the lack of diversity, inclusivity, and equitable practices that have been heavily debated in recent years. According to the United States National Center for Education Statistics (2020), in the Fall of 2018 roughly 40% of full-time faculty at degree-granting post-secondary institutions were White males, 35% White females, 12% Asian/Pacific Islanders, approximately 3% Black males, and 3% Black females. Given the underrepresentation of Faculty of Color in academia, many Black academics seek cross-racial mentors as they progress through the tenure process. Further, there are limited human resources who can mentor the large dearth of minoritized faculty (Felder et al., 2014; Martinez-Cola, 2020). However, there are exceptions to the aforementioned notion when considering minority serving institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). HBCUs are believed to play a major role in mentoring these students and staff since they often provide more nurturing and supportive environments (Arroyo et al., 2016; Commodore et al., 2016).

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