Advancing Women In Leadership

Mentoring Females and Minorities into Higher Education

Janice Patterson, Ph.D.
Karen Dahle, Ed.D.
Mary Nix, Ph.D.
Loucrecia Collins, Ed.D.
Gypsy Abbott, Ph.D.

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If I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. (de Beauvior, l952 p. xv.).

Whether we see through the lens of gender or ethnicity, the perception of self defines our work. The loss of women and people of color from tenure earning positions in higher education argues for more productive initiatives if we are to attract, retain, and promote female and minority faculty (Howard-Vital & Morgan, 1993). The literature overwhelmingly supports the benefits of mentoring in easing the loneliness and confusion that can derail women and people of color in higher education (Howard-Vital & Morgan).

Descriptions of mentoring in professional literature suggest that the relationships between individuals that perpetuate traditional academic culture. Professional guidance includes assistance with research and writing, teaching, service, and grant writing. Social support includes shared outings and recreational activities. Few empirical studies exist on mentoring among faculty in academic settings. Qualitative research offers thick descriptions of some programs, e.g., the work in Colorado that investigated faculty mentoring in schools, colleges, and departments of education (Goodwin, Stevens, & Bellamy, 1998) and the faculty-mentoring program at Montclair State University (Pierce, 1998).

Yet, research documents that the experiences of female and minority professors has been reported to be markedly different than their colleagues in terms of scholarship, advising assignments, teaching loads, as well as service to the community, profession, and institution. These professionals feel their load is skewed disproportionately toward advising, teaching, and service while the institution rewards research and publishing. Several researchers (Bensimon, Ward, & Tierney, 1994; Granger, 1993; Spann, 1990) report that faculty of color often have heavier loads of service and committee work than their colleagues. Too

often, faculty of color feel they cannot refuse an invitation to serve on a committee or to work in the local community for fear of reprisals from other faculty. Time spent in committees and other service activities are highly valued by many members of the faculty, particularly if the committee purpose is to address minority issues. However, the reality is that the time consumed subtracts from that available for research and publishing, the road to retention.

For women of color, the path is unusually thorny as they often find themselves outside the informal networks that may exist for other women. This isolation is particularly limiting, considering that association with senior colleagues is a major factor in junior faculty's success and tenure. For instance, Bjork and Thompson (1989, p. 350) affirmed the critical nature of establishing relationships with senior faculty "recognized for excellence in teaching, research, publishing, and service." Further, Granger (1993) reminded the reader that those who are mentored frequently gain access to resources and, indeed, even secure faculty positions.

Successful women establish mentoring relationships with both female and male mentors. Research by Ibarra (2000) of the Harvard Business School highlighted that many women were receiving "concrete, gender-related career advice" from more experienced women then they could get from men. Two factors appear important for success: (a) consistently exceeding performance expectations, and (b) developing a style with which males are comfortable (Duff, 1999; Garner, 1994).

In the quest to understand organizations, Burrell and Hearn (1989) argued the postmodernist perspective on a science that emphasizes logic, data, and other facets of a production model that are no longer relevant. Instead, postmodernism places emphasis on lived and "deconstructed" experiences, stressing a cooperative network and developing sources of data from nontraditional venues including metaphor, description, explanations, and action research. The postmodernism stresses sense making; thus, requiring cooperative work between two or more people. Gergen (1993, p. 214) argued "to control our own defining of what is truth, we must look to the practice of action research in which subjects speak for themselves and control their voices so that others do not manipulate them."

Purpose

Using postmodernist theory as a starting point, the junior faculty involved in the mentoring program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Education (SOE) began an action research project to investigate the perceptions of mentors and mentees in a sanctioned mentoring program. This paper presents a brief examination of those perceptions with a particular emphasis on mentees' experiences on relationship, gender, and race. The most unique feature of the program is that these new faculty members were mentored by a tenured faculty member through the publication process using their own experiences as mentees as the focus of the research.

Conceptual Model

Bolman and Deal (1997) discuss the value of using new "frames" and "lenses" as we stretch to see organizations in new and different ways. The more perspectives available, the more likely it is that a rich, complex picture will emerge. Bolman and Deal proposed four frames that people rely on when viewing organizational behavior: human resource, structural, political, and symbolic.

The human resource frame emphasizes the needs of individuals and the importance of a trusting, caring environment. Those who see through a structural frame stress a linear process - goals, efficiency, policies, a clear chain of command, and results. The political frame makes clear that the world has scarce resources and is composed of power and control; skills in conflict, negotiations, and compromise are key. Finally, the symbolic frame highlights meaning and symbols, rituals, stories, ceremonies, or other ways that faith,

hope, and meaning are communicated (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Mentees may only see the higher education institution through one frame unless encouraged to look more broadly. For instance, some mentors may advise mentees to approach tenure as though following a policy that establishes goals, standards, and other specifics in teaching, research, and service. Some may advise that junior faculty's work should revolve around individual needs, what can be contributed to the organization and to creating a caring, trusting environment. Still others may see the route to tenure as a political process based on the power and control exercised behind the scenes. Finally, some mentors and mentees may see the cultural or symbolic side of seeking tenure and emphasize actions that are meaningful to others, e.g., visibility in service or scholarship. Therefore, it is suggested that successful mentor/mentee pair could use the Bolman and Deal (1997) model as a framework for describing their experiences. This model is comprised of four frames: (a) human resource, (b) structural, (c) political, and (d) symbolic.Methodology

Context

The School of Education (SOE) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) is located in an urban setting. University faculty and administrative turnover in recent years has been high because of the large number of individuals who have either been fired or retired. These events have created a greater than usual amount of uncertainty for faculty members seeking tenure and promotion. The SOE has undergone considerable scrutiny by the UAB President; thus, forcing a mandated increase in undergraduate enrollment. The State of Alabama significantly reduced funds for education and the impact on faculty is no raises and insufficient faculty to cover required courses.

In addition, as is often the case in university settings, tenured faculty were engaged in their own activities and directed little energy toward the acculturation of new faculty. This resulted in many new faculty describing themselves as "feeling alone" and unsure how to become part of the SOE.

Although one department routinely assigned mentors to new faculty, new faculty was, generally, left to their own devices in establishing themselves. Although the university has been designated as a minority serving institution, few faculty in the SOE are of minority background. Retention of qualified minority faculty has been extremely difficult. Within this context, the SOE Faculty Development Committee began developing a mentoring program in fall 2000.

As a starting point, using postmodernist theory and the four frames as described by Bolman and Deal (1997), those involved in the mentoring program at the UAB SOE began an action research project to investigate the perceptions of mentors and mentees in this administratively- sanctioned mentoring program. This paper presents an examination of those perceptions with a particular emphasis on mentees' reports relative to relationship, race, and gender.

Population and Sample

All 14 nontenured faculty who had begun teaching in the UAB SOE during the 1999-2000 academic year were invited to join the mentoring program. There were five females and two males who chose to participate and they comprised the sample described in this study. The mentors included five males and one female.

Data Collection

There were four sources of qualitative data collected. First, mentors and mentees developed descriptions of their personal expectations of the mentoring process. Second, mentors and mentees maintained field notes on activities, assistance, and experiences that described the mentoring process. Third, detailed

group meeting notes provided rich descriptions of "confidential" issues and concerns not revealed in the other data sources. Fourth, written survey instruments, developed based on the theory of Bolman and Deal (1997), were developed for data collection (see Appendix A). Specific items on the surveys were created from a collective review of the field notes of the mentees. Questions about the mentoring experience were designed to capture the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of both mentors and mentees.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data from the responses of both mentors and mentees were analyzed using a phenomenological approach. Actual analysis of data was conducted using the matrix approach recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). This method provided a structure for analyses within the two groups as well as across the groups.

Initially, all data was put in the matrix format with the four dimensions of the theoretical framework across the top of the matrix and the concepts of relationship, gender, and race on the vertical axis of the matrix. Responses to items in each of the categories were recorded for use in content analysis. The purpose of the content analysis was to examine the data for emerging themes.

Findings

The results of this study confirm the position of Bolman and Deal (1997) that rich, diverse points of view emerge when multiple lenses are used to view organizational behavior. The co-mingling present in the findings confirms the efficacy of viewing the tenure earning process through all lenses available. Three of the themes that emerged were (a) relationships, (b) race, and (c) gender.

Relationships. The mentor/mentee relationships were based on prior research; therefore, the mentees selected mentors using expert status and prior relationships as the primary criteria. Two of the mentees were assigned a mentor within their department. These mentees were pleased with the mentor assigned and they maintained that mentor for this study. Four of the mentees approached the selection of an expert mentor based on the structural lens and their perspectives of what it would take to achieve tenure. One mentee reported, "I knew that I needed to publish nationally to get tenure. I wanted a mentor who could guide me effectively in conducting research and getting published quickly. I also wanted someone who was active in national and international organizations." One of the mentees selected a mentor based on shared professional interests.

Mentees used the human resource (HR) lens to guide their selection as reflected in the importance they assigned trust and confidentiality. The HR lens manifested a trust that the mentor would be emotionally and physically available and conversations between the mentor and mentee wereconfidential.

Because of the newness of some of these relationships, there was a natural wariness in some cases that changed as the relationship matured. Several mentees echoed the voice of one who said, "I wanted someone who would become a colleague, whom I could trust with any issue… Confidentiality, lack of gossip and politics is important to me." In some cases, confidentiality was not addressed directly but was assumed, as with the mentee who said, "We never really addressed it. I just have trust and honor in my mentor and it's never been an issue for me. I would not hesitate to raise the issue if a question ever arose that brought that trust under suspicion."

Other mentees reported a more direct approach; "Initial promises were made on both sides that our conversations are held in confidence. I absolutely believe that is the case." Another mentee said, "[Confidentiality was] addressed at the beginning…actually before this process began. I have full confidence in our agreement."

An unanticipated dimension of trust was expressed by one mentee who addressed the research component of the mentoring program, "Because of the emphasis in the mentor project on research, I also wanted someone who would keep commitments and be interested and supportive of the research component [of the mentoring project]."

At the symbolic level, mentees reported the financial and political commitment provided to the group. The Dean provided funding for lunches for group meetings and transportation for mentees to present the findings of this project at the Mid-South Educational Research Association.

The symbolic aspect of the mentor/mentee relationships reflected trust in a different sense. The mentees saw symbolic value in the mentors being available or communicating faith in their abilities (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Because each of the mentors was professionally active and engaged, mentees recognize that time was a precious commodity and, when shared, symbolized the value placed by the mentor on the relationship. One mentee was very explicit about the symbolic message she received from her male mentor: "My mentor said that women professors couldbecomenomads wandering from university to university. My mentor is taking careful steps to guide me so that I will not become a nomad."

Without exception, mentees' reported successes as a result of the mentor's guidance. Responses included improved writing skills, grant work, publications, as well as presentations at regional and national meetings. Another mentee pointed to specific acts by the mentor, " …two quick publications (single authorship) and another article that we're currently doing together …introductions to key players at national meetings, a safety net from getting involved in internal politics, wise counsel about the steps necessary to get tenure." One respondent pointed to the value of the mentor's activities in assisting the mentee progress toward tenure, "I have written two chapters for a book he is editing for spring release in our field; assisted with additional writing contract and suggestions for journal articles; provided a sample of his own resume; very articulate regarding the tenure process." Other examples included a mentor who "connected" a mentee with a publishing company for a proposed book contract. One of the mentor/mentee pairs focused on teaching and the use of technology in higher education. Finally, mentees reported that their feelings of isolation were being suppressed and friendships were forming as a result of the mentees connections with their mentors as well as other mentees.

Race. Race, a theme that emerged from these data, has been described as issues for minority faculty across the United States (Alger, 2000). Too often, we educators examine dominance and social injustices in history and fail to consider current inequities that may be perpetuated in our own institutions. Those of us from dominant racial groups must look inside ourselves and our workplaces and be aware that these processes are not always comfortable.

Of the 10 mentors/mentees members who answered questions about race, nine were White and one was Black; therefore, we believe that a discussion of White privilege is merited. Fox (2000) defines White privilege as "pervasive and systemic ways that being white confers unearned advantage in U.S. society," and she argues, "white privilege is often blatantly obvious to targeted groups but nearly invisible to whites until its various manifestations are pointed out" (p. 47). Examples of White privilege mentioned in our data were the freedom from being used as a token on committees and the privilege of publishing comfortably in a broad array of journals. A mentee wrote, "My colleagues of color at other institutions tell me that they're often placed on committees as token minorities. They feel particularly overwhelmed with committee work. As a White woman, that is not a dilemma that I face." She also wrote, "While I have published in several African American studies journals and not had anyone question the quality of that scholarship, one of my Black colleagues says that she has to limit the number of African American journals that she publishes in so critics (largely Whites) won't say that she's not a true scholar." Biased faculty members may cloak their biases by criticizing minorities who publish in minority journals for "lack of rigor." Consequently, minority professors may feel constrained in the area of publishing. Alger

(2000) espouses that the traditional criteria applied in evaluations for promotion and tenure often appear to be neutral, but in practice they can have disparate effects on minority scholars. He argues, "In analyzing research, reliance on narrow definitions of 'merit' that emphasize publication in traditional journals may limit new or emerging areas of scholarship or practical applications of theory to real-life problems" (p. 160). Similarly, Garza (1993) maintains that institutions "need to assess what constitutes rigorous and legitimate scholarship, and its relationship to institutional barriers that may help maintain ethnic division" (p. 40).

The nature as well as the extent of committee work may also be called into question. All committee work may not be valued equally when tenure and promotion decisions are made. In their book chapter entitled "Developmental Relationships of Black Americans in the Academy," Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, and Williams (1993) warn,

> Service on minority-related committees is often pushed on minority faculty, yet those activities are often not as valued as other activities in tenure decisions. Untenured faculty may well receive a mixed message if senior faculty encourage them to fulfill certain roles but later do not reward them for those efforts. (p. 36)

Bowman and colleagues conclude their chapter with the following words of caution. "Mentors should understand that the adjustment issues of the typical new faculty member will probably be exacerbated for new Black American faculty members" (p. 41).

Recognizing the issue of "white privileges" for the first time can generate emotional responses such as guilt or sadness on the part of Whites. When analyzing our data on race and discussing privileges, one White woman expressed her regret saying, "I never thought about these things before." Thus, participation in the mentor/mentee study served to highlight ways in which minorities in academia are sometimes regarded.

Our research supports the findings of Gregory (1995) who concludes "it is evident that we still have much work to do to encourage the permanence of Black women scholars. Regardless of their talent, a faculty member cannot reasonably function in an inhospitable academic environment" (p. 96). He also purports that departments can promote the careers of African American females by (a) encouraging service activities with system wide visibility and providing faculty incentives and rewards for service overload; (b) accepting differences in teaching styles and research emphasis; and (c) encouraging collaborative projects by providing resources and funding.

Gender.The literature consistently highlights the differences in the mentoring process for females and males (Duff, 1999; West, 2001). However,in this study, gender was not identified as a salient issue across any of the conceptual areas.

The composition of the SOE programs and departments was either predominantly male or had only one full female professor in a tenure earning track. Because the ultimate goal of the mentoring program is to achieve tenure and promotion, it is not surprising that with the single exception, all mentees selected a male mentor because of their availability, proven track record, and tenured status.

McGuire (1993) identifies instrumental and socioemotional support as two types of support which mentors can offer their mentees. Examples of socioemotional support include challenging assignments, increased exposure, and leadership opportunities. Typically, women receive more socioemotional support in the mentoring process than do their male colleagues (McGuire). Once again, gender differences were not demonstrated by the responses illustrated in these examples. Every mentee reported increased opportunities for publishing, presentations at national and international conferences, and

recommendations for appointments to national organizations.

McGuire (1993) noted that males typically receive more instrumental support as defined by the political construct in this study. However, respondents reported no difference in female and male mentees level of instrumental support. Their mentors were described generally as "both powerful and nurturing, depending on the circumstance." Mentees believed that mentors used their power and influence to protect them. In addition, mentees stated that their mentors showed confidence in them by extending formal praise, both publicly and privately, and "asking for [my] perspective on issues." Finally, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the administrative and final support for this project that the mentoring program has received from the male Dean's office.

Unanticipated Outcomes

We did not anticipate the extent to which the mentoring program would provide a forum for connections among the mentees and with other faculty members that led to new opportunities. We were particularly surprised by the productive relationships developed among five of the mentees, all females. They reported protecting each other, including their mentee colleagues in presentations, writings and publications, and teaching experiences. Because the mentees are based in different departments, the relationships would have been unlikely without the mentoring program. This yields further evidence for Bolman and Deal's (1997) argument that multiple lenses are needed; the group now looks through multiple frames during their monthly social meetings. The leader of the mentoring program, a tenured full professor, is included in the monthly social meetings. Finally, other faculty in the SOE has offered unsolicited support for the mentoring program whether they are tenured professors or new faculty. Several said, "I wish I had a mentoring program."

Conclusions

Mentees reported that they gained significant tacit knowledge that helped them understand and negotiate the particular culture of the university through the four lenses posited by Bolin and Deal (1997). These lessons came from both direct instruction and modeling. They included specific knowledge about research, teaching, and service, as well as the more elusive aspects of professionalism, integrity, and the ability to get along with other colleagues and professionals. Of course, the ultimate "result" will be the number of mentees who are retained and obtain tenure at the university. To date, two of the five mentees have submitted their professional portfolios for the mid-tenure review process. Both mentees have received positive feedback and encouragement from their department chairs.

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Appendix A

University of Alabama at Birmingham
School of Education

Faculty Professional Development Committee

Mentor Survey

Instructions: Please respond to the questions below in narrative form. If you do not wish to respond to a particular question or the question is not applicable to your mentor/mentee relationship, please record NA. Your confidentiality will be guaranteed by Dr. Abbott who will be assigning ID numbers before analysis begins. Please return the survey to Dr. Gypsy Abbott by 5 p.m. Wednesday, October 10, 2001. Your response can be done by either e-mailing it to gabbott@uab.edu or printing and completing the response and placing it under the door in EB230. You can look forward to a review of our findings at an upcoming faculty meeting. Thank you for your response.

1. How was your mentor/mentee relationship structured?
2. How were meetings structured (both formal and informal)?
3. What expectations did you have for the mentoring experiences?
4. In what ways were the needs of the mentee met? Give specific examples, e.g. progression toward tenure.
5. In what ways were the needs of the mentor met? Give specific examples, e.g. additional travel funds awarded from SOE.
6. How did your mentee convey appropriate gratitude or disappointment with the relationship?
7. Did your mentee demonstrate any feelings of vulnerability or insecurity? Please explain.
8. How was the issue of confidentiality addressed and how confidant did you feel about it?
9. How did you feel that the relationship was valued by your mentee (importance as measured by things such as attendance at group meetings, keeping scheduled meetings, etc.)?
10. What message about your mentoring did you receive from your mentee's behavior?
11. In what ways did your mentoring relationship reach beyond the formal mentoring relationship?
Other Comments:
12. In what ways were meetings structured to create equal/unequal power?
13. How powerful do your anticipate your mentee becoming and did that influence your agreement to mentor the mentee?
14. How was failure addressed and/or success celebrated?
15. How did having a mentee impact your relationship with other faculty?
16. Was there ever competition between you and your mentor? If yes, please explain.
17. Was there sexual tension in the relationship between mentor/mentee?
18. What actions has your mentee taken to demonstrate confidence in you to others?
Other Comments:
19. Was race a factor in your agreement to become a mentor?
20. Did race influence the power relationship between you and the mentee?
21. Did the mentoring program create a culture of acceptance for ethnic minorities? If so, describe the process.
22. Did the mentoring program influence minority faculty retention?

23. Does the mentoring program provide guidance toward tenure and promotion for ethnic-minority faculty members? If yes, please explain.

24. Have you taken any steps to network an ethnic-minority mentee with other ethnic minorities in your profession?

25. As an ethnic faculty member, did participating in this program impact your relationship with other staff members?

26. Did you and the mentee discuss issues of diversity regarding the tenure promotion process?

27. Was race a source of conflict between you and the mentee?

28. Was race a source of conflict between the mentee and other mentees of the mentoring group?

29. Did the mentoring process provide support for exploring minority research issues?

Other comments:

Authors

Dr. Janice Patterson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Karen Dahle is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Mary Nix is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Loucrecia Collins is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Gypsy Abbott is a Professor of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.