

# Translational Issues in Psychological Science

## The Significance of Race in Cross-Racial Mentoring of Faculty of Color

Kelsie M. Thorne, Martinique K. Jones, Tangier M. Davis, and Isis H. Settles

Online First Publication, August 5, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tps0000286>

### CITATION

Thorne, K. M., Jones, M. K., Davis, T. M., & Settles, I. H. (2021, August 5). The Significance of Race in Cross-Racial Mentoring of Faculty of Color. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tps0000286>

## The Significance of Race in Cross-Racial Mentoring of Faculty of Color

Kelsie M. Thorne<sup>1</sup>, Martinque K. Jones<sup>2</sup>, Tangier M. Davis<sup>3</sup>, and Isis H. Settles<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology and School of Social Work, University of Michigan

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, University of North Texas

<sup>3</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Michigan

<sup>4</sup> Department of Psychology and Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan

Mentoring is an important aspect of workplace advancement, particularly for faculty of color (FOC). Due to low representation of FOC at higher ranks in many fields, FOC are often mentored by someone of a different race, typically someone who is white. Faculty mentors who differ from their mentee on race may be less equipped to support FOC in navigating the unique challenges they face within the academy (e.g., racism, tokenism, microaggressions), but may also use their racial privilege to support mentees. The current qualitative study examines FOC perceptions about how race affects their cross-racial mentoring relationships. We analyzed interview data of 56 tenure-track faculty from a large, predominantly white, Midwestern research university. Our analysis yielded three themes: (a) factors that shape how race affects the mentoring relationship, (b) racial difference as conferring benefits to the mentoring relationship, and (c) racial difference as irrelevant to the mentoring relationship. In our discussion, we highlight the ways cross-racial mentors can offer support to FOC, while also taking into account the limitations associated with these mentoring relationships. We conclude with recommendations for how institutions may enhance the mentoring of FOC.


### *What is the significance of this article for the general public?*

This study finds that although some faculty of color (FOC) report that race has no bearing on their mentoring relationships, other FOC note that race has implications for mentoring. Cross-racial mentors can offer support to them by demystifying academic norms and expectations. However, highly effective cross-racial mentoring depends on whether the mentor recognizes and values the unique experiences of their FOC mentee. Mentor training may assist with effective cross-racial mentoring and subsequently support FOC career success.

*Keywords:* faculty of color, diversity, higher education, race, cross-racial mentoring

Kelsie M. Thorne  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3481-5147>

Martinque K. Jones  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6406-237X>

Tangier M. Davis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6870-4835>

Isis H. Settles  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5015-7231>

Parts of this research were conducted by Isis H. Settles while in the Department of Psychology, Michigan State University and by Martinque K. Jones during a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Psychology, University of Michigan.

This research received funding from the ADAPP-ADVANCE office (National Science Foundation, Grant 0811205) at Michigan State University and from the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives at Michigan State University. We thank Paulette Granberry Russell for her support of this research project.

We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Isis H. Settles, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109, United States. Email: [issetles@umich.edu](mailto:issetles@umich.edu)

Faculty of color (FOC) remain underrepresented in the academy (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and face a number of challenges including discrimination (Zambrana et al., 2017), social, informational, and scholarly exclusion (Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Settles et al., 2020), and negative stereotypes about their competence and legitimacy (Constantine et al., 2008; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Due to the fact that mentoring is related to several positive psychological and career outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction; career advancement; Johnson et al., 2018; León & Thomas, 2016), it has been identified as a way to support FOC in overcoming the barriers undermining their advancement and success in academia. However, due to low numbers of racially marginalized faculty and women at the highest ranks, it is often the case that FOC are mentored by someone who differs from them along racial group membership. In order to maximize the potential of mentoring, we seek to understand the nature of cross-racial mentoring relationships, as well as the factors that may facilitate positive and healthy cross-racial mentoring relationships. To do so, we drew upon qualitative interview data from a sample of 56 FOC to explore the significance of race in their cross-racial mentoring relationships. Advancements in this realm may offer insights on how to maximize the benefits and mitigate the challenges of cross-racial mentoring of FOC.

### Mentoring and Career Outcomes

Mentoring is a relationship between a junior colleague and an experienced, senior colleague that focuses on the personal growth and professional advancement of the mentee (Eby et al., 2010). Mentoring has been categorized into two types: career development support or psychosocial support (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Career development support describes activities that help the mentee gain professional success by gaining relevant skills (e.g., sponsorship, coaching, and facilitating networks), whereas psychosocial support describes activities that aim to increase the mentee's personal development and sense of competence (e.g., offering counsel or role modeling; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The professional and socioemotional support offered by mentoring contributes to positive job and career outcomes for the mentee. Specifically, career support is more highly related to benefits such as compensation, promotion, and career

mobility, whereas psychosocial support is linked to outcomes such as higher employee satisfaction and commitment, and lower turnover intention (Allen et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2013).

### Mentoring, Identity, and Power

Nevertheless, mentoring is inherently a relationship of unequal power, as mentors are presumed to have greater experience and expertise than mentees (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Vargas et al., 2021). Further, in mentoring dyads where the mentor and mentee differ along race, racial differences can be sites where power relations among societal groups emerge (Ragins, 1997). Faculty mentoring takes place within broader historical, societal, and academic contexts of white<sup>1</sup> supremacy which tends to minimize the intellectual contributions of FOC, and thus relegates them and their knowledge to the bottom of the academic hierarchy (Gonzales, 2018; Settles et al., 2020; Vargas et al., 2021). And, because racial inequality is part of "systemic racial dynamics," the subjugation of specific racial groups can persist regardless of the attitudes of individuals involved in an organization, or in this case, the academy (Salter & Haugen, 2017, p. 124). Such factors can prevent FOC from receiving adequate mentorship (Smith et al., 2000; Thompson, 2008). At the same time, effective mentors can help FOC navigate inequality and oppressive power dynamics by offering professional support, psychosocial support, and increasing feelings of belonging and inclusion (Jones et al., 2015; Thompson, 2008). For these reasons, effective mentoring of FOC is critical to positive psychological and career outcomes.

Due to the composition of the academy, many FOC are mentored by white senior scholars (who comprise 76% of all faculty; U.S. Department of Education, 2018), which can contribute to the reproduction of inequality and exacerbate the hierarchical and paternalistic nature of mentoring (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Tillman (2001) articulates that white mentors are less likely to be accepting, trusting, and supportive of their racially marginalized mentees as compared to white mentees. Furthermore, those from privileged groups (e.g., white men) may be less accepting of cultural differences (Diggs et al., 2009; Sadao, 2003). Thomas (2001) suggests that this is because in cross-racial dyads, both the mentor and mentee may be reluctant to be vulnerable

<sup>1</sup> We do not capitalize white to decenter whiteness.

with one another, thereby limiting the quality of the relationship. Overall, barriers to trust, acceptance, and vulnerability may be attributed to historical racial tensions that have contributed to the devaluation of the perspectives of, and academic contributions made by, people of color (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). For women of color, their marginalized race and gender may compound barriers to cross-group mentoring due to the intertwined nature of these social identities, as articulated in intersectionality theory (Bova, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Barriers to effective mentoring, and consequently negative mentoring experiences, undermine the typical positive benefits associated with mentoring and have been associated with poor career outcomes (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2004).

Despite the potential challenges of cross-racial mentoring, the social positioning of white mentors may make them well-suited to provide sponsorship and support FOC career development (Avery et al., 2008; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005). For instance, having a white male mentor has been reported to be advantageous for FOC and women mentees because of the power, influence, and access these group members possess in the dominant culture, as well as within organizations (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Ragins, 1997; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005). With increased social power, white people, especially white men, are often well-positioned to provide sponsorship and career development (Avery et al., 2008; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005). Thus, the literature suggests that despite potential challenges to successful mentoring of FOC, cross-racial mentoring can offer noted advantages. As FOC will continue to be mentored by white faculty, it is imperative to understand how race may shape mentoring experiences in order to promote positive outcomes for FOC and increase the likelihood that they will advance and remain in academia.

### The Current Study

The current study is an exploratory investigation of FOC mentoring at a single research-intensive institution, and specifically addresses the following question: *What is the significance of race in the cross-racial mentoring relationships of faculty of color?* We used qualitative methods to understand how racial differences between the FOC mentee and their mentor affect the relationship, and thus, center FOCs' experiences and the role of race and power in their mentoring relationships. Further, we capitalize on our diverse sample in order to build

upon past autobiographical and case studies of cross-racial mentoring. We also focus on FOC as mentees, in contrast to most existing research which focuses on their role as mentors to students (e.g., Griffin & Reddick, 2011). In doing so, we offer insights into how to promote positive cross-racial mentoring relationships for FOC, with possible implications for their career advancement and retention (Stanley, 2006; Zambrana et al., 2015).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The current study presents the findings from a subsample of 56 participants who discussed having a mentor of a different race from their own and were drawn from a larger sample of 118 faculty of color (response rate for overall sample was 28%; for more detail on the method, see Settles et al., 2020). The composition of the faculty of color at the target institution was similar to rates of faculty of color nationally (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Within our subsample, over half of the participants were women ( $n = 32$ , 57.1%) and the sample was racially diverse: 44.6% Asian ( $n = 25$ ), 26.8% Black ( $n = 15$ ), 25.0% Latinx ( $n = 14$ ), and 3.6% Native American ( $n = 2$ ). More than half of participants were born outside the U.S. (57.1%;  $n = 32$ ). By discipline, just over half ( $n = 33$ ; 58.9%) were in STEM fields (e.g., natural sciences, social sciences, and agriculture and natural resources) and the remaining participants ( $n = 23$ ; 41.1%) were in non-STEM fields (e.g., arts and humanities). In terms of academic rank, the sample was 42.9% assistant professors ( $n = 24$ ), 32.1% associate professors ( $n = 18$ ), and 25.0% full professors ( $n = 14$ ).

Participants took part in 1- to 2-hr long, uncompensated, one-on-one, semistructured interviews about their "workplace and work-life experiences." Interviews were mainly conducted by graduate students with experience in qualitative methods who were matched with the participants according to race and gender (e.g., Black women faculty participants were interviewed by a Black woman graduate student). With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded, and audio-recordings were later transcribed verbatim and identifying information was removed. Interview questions covered the departmental environment, career challenges, and areas of (dis)satisfaction with the job. A section of the interview asked about mentoring (e.g., the types

of mentoring they received and desired) and most relevant to the current study were the following interview questions: Do you have any mentors who differ from you along gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, or citizenship? If so, how would you describe those mentoring experiences? Do these differences impact the mentoring relationship?

### Data Analysis

Considering the study aim was to understand cross-racial mentoring experiences among FOC, we employed a phenomenological research approach—a design of inquiry centered on examining individuals' lived experiences with a specific phenomenon, in this case cross-racial mentoring (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Prior to analysis, all data for the current study were transferred into NVIVO, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. Then, all data were analyzed via thematic analysis, which is an inductive, or data-driven, strategy for extracting and organizing patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Specifically, the first author began by reviewing all of the interviews and extracted all mentions of cross-racial mentoring. Then all authors (one Black woman full professor, one Black woman assistant professor, and two Black women doctoral students) familiarized themselves with the data, which involved forming teams of two and each dyad reviewing half of the data. Then, we engaged in open coding, or looking for meaning in each sentence or phrase, to generate initial codes. We met to discuss the codes and organized those that had similar or related meanings into themes. To be considered an independent theme at least 5% of the responses needed to align with that theme. Participant responses could be coded into more than one theme. Upon deciding on the themes, we proceeded to code the data. We read the interviews again and coded them into their appropriate theme; during this phase of coding we met regularly and discussed our interpretations of the data and came to consensus on the assigned themes.

An argued limitation to qualitative research is the extent to which authors' identity, background, and experiences may influence data analysis. As four Black women in academia, we are uniquely positioned to understand the mentoring experiences of FOC; however, we may not understand the experiences of all faculty (e.g., Latinx faculty). To ward against the potential for bias or misunderstanding, we bracketed our perspectives (Gearing, 2004;

Starks & Trinidad, 2007), setting aside our preexisting assumptions throughout data collection and analysis with the intention of focusing on faculty accounts of mentoring with an open mind.

### Findings

Our findings detail themes that emerged from our primary research question: What is the significance of race in cross-racial mentoring relationships for FOC? Three broad themes emerged: (a) factors that shape how race affects the mentoring relationship, (b) racial difference as conferring benefits to the mentoring relationship, and (c) racial difference as irrelevant to the mentoring relationship. We present the themes in conceptual order and illustrate them with quotations from participants. To protect their anonymity, we provide only the participants' gender and race—either Asian (which included Asian and Asian American individuals) or underrepresented racial minority (URM; Black, Latinx, or Native American) as the smaller numbers of URM faculty might otherwise be identifiable. Although we define all participants in our study as FOC, we created these two groups to reflect the fact that there is an overrepresentation of Asian/Asian American faculty but an underrepresentation of other faculty of color groups within academia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

#### Factors That Shape How Race Affects the Mentoring Relationship

The first theme that emerged was related to factors that shaped how racial differences affected the mentoring relationships of the FOC in our study. Three subthemes reflected participants' perceptions of the relevant factors impacting the cross-racial mentoring relationship: (a) the mentor's awareness of the mentee's cultural experience, (b) the mentor's open-mindedness, and (c) trust and comfort in the relationship. These three factors could help the cross-racial relationship when present, or harm it if absent.

#### Awareness of the Mentee's Cultural Experience

According to our participants, a major challenge in cross-racial mentoring relationships is the mentor's lack of awareness about the mentee's cultural

experience. A URM man mentioned, “I have always had to teach them about the experience of minority scholars in higher [education] institutions because sometimes they just are unaware.” Similarly, for FOC studying communities of color, white mentors did not always understand their scholarship; the result, for one URM man, was “a lot of time explaining and trying to focus on what should have been-, what for me was commonplace, but for them new information,” adding, “[you] can’t in my opinion create a sustainable research line if you’re constantly trying to help people understand what you’re doing.” In contrast, if mentors had a greater understanding of the FOC’s experience, the difference in the social locations could be minimized. A URM woman described her white women mentors as “really thinking about other kinds of inequality and so while they’re not [women of color], they get that there will be different kinds of challenges or they understand that being a [woman of color] is different from being a white woman.” Another URM woman described similar feelings about her white male mentors:

One thing that’s important for me is for them to acknowledge that I am [racial group] and that I am female. And both of the white male mentors that I have here do that. And they are very upfront with saying there are things that perhaps you *do* need to talk to a [woman of color] about. And so, that is always critically important to me—for people to acknowledge that perhaps there are limitations in how they might see a situation or respond to something.

### Open-Mindedness

Participants also described that racial differences between the mentor and mentee could be overcome when the mentor was open-minded. For example, an Asian man born outside the U.S. with a white American male mentor described him as “very open-minded so if race or my nationality or my place of origin, if any of this had any bearing in our interactions, it was always positive because they were curious to learn about the culture.” An Asian woman described her effective mentors as “progressive thinkers” who “are able to be sensitive [to] the issue” of race. This open-mindedness was perceived as important, particularly if the mentor was not familiar with the ways in which the experiences of the FOC differed from their own. An Asian woman said, “I’ve had some very good mentors who were white men and what makes them good mentors is the fact that when you tell them things

about what you experience, they don’t think you’re crazy. They actually try to understand it.” An appreciation of difference helped to bridge race-based experiences.

Whereas some mentors were open to thinking about their mentee’s experience as different from their own, other mentors were so unaware of their mentee’s concerns that they dismissed or invalidated them all together. For instance, before noting that such invalidations limited how much help her mentors provided, an Asian woman faculty stated:

I don’t think white people actually understand what us ethnically minority people experience. . . . If I bring up [the] possibility that I may not get fair treatment or I’m not happy with some comments that some other faculty made, if I bring it up to my mentor or some older faculty here, they get defensive. It makes them uncomfortable.

### Trust, Comfort, and Common Ground

Having a mentor from a different racial group sometimes led to feelings of discomfort and mistrust. For some this was due to cultural differences, as described by a URM man:

One of the tensions that I endured is one that is very common in [my] culture which is that your extended family expects you to do certain things that are impossible to do if you want to get tenure and you live several hundred miles away from where they are. Mainly they would love to have you there for every baptism, every wedding, every funeral, every graduation . . . I didn’t feel comfortable talking about that aspect of what I was experiencing . . . [my mentors] would see it as kind of silly . . .

Participants shared that one way to build trust in spite of racial differences was to find common ground, such as shared scholarship, personal experiences, or hobbies. A URM woman explained, “you need an anchor and I think that’s absolutely critical in any relationship. And so if it’s going to be a mentoring relationship, you *really* have to look at the common ground.”

### Racial Difference as Conferring Benefits to the Mentoring Relationship

The second theme reflected participants’ discussion of the benefits associated with having a mentor of a different race. Three subthemes emerged that reflected ways in which participants explicitly tied having a cross-racial mentor to career-related benefits: (a) knowledge of the academic system,

(b) advocacy and sponsorship, and (c) enhanced perspective-taking.

### Knowledge of the Academic System

FOC, especially those with white male mentors, felt that the mentor's insider perspective and greater experience helped them to understand the academic system. Such mentors supported faculty in identifying unstated norms and practices in their departments and institutions. For example, a URM woman with a white male mentor said: "there are certain things as far as how to navigate the department that he can be helpful with." Additionally, FOC gained access to their mentor's knowledge and informal professional networks. Mentors with administrative experience (e.g., department chair) were especially valuable in their ability to share important information with their mentees, as illustrated by an Asian woman with white male mentors who said "the thing that they've been most helpful with . . . is giving me the language to translate the things I'm seeing into sort of . . . what I call, white man administrator language (laughs)."

### Advocacy and Sponsorship

FOC also felt that their mentor's social power and capital could be helpful when mentors served as advocates and sponsors. Participants described that such mentors could offer positive representations of them within and beyond their department: "I know of some people who have had very, you know, high status white male mentors and they do very well because those white men aren't afraid to advocate for their protégés" (URM woman).

Senior white women could also provide important support in this way. An Asian man mentioned that during his postdoctoral training a white woman mentor advocated for him and that was critical for him securing a faculty position:

[She] stood up for me. I guess she advocated for me in her department . . . and let me teach graduate classes. I didn't understand the importance of this at the time . . . but this is hugely important when you're applying for a faculty position . . . she became my champion.

### Enhanced Perspective-Taking

Participants also valued that mentors different from them in terms of race were able to help them assess situations from a new perspective. For

example, a URM man paired with mentors who racially differed from him mentioned:

It's easy for you to look at the world through the lens of your own ethnicity . . . So by having mentors, by having intimate relationships with people who are different gender, different ethnicities, different whatever, it allows you to compare and contrast some of these experiences . . .

For this mentee, hearing about others' experiences in the academy broadened his perspective, while also serving as a metric by which he could evaluate his own experiences.

### Racial Difference as Irrelevant to the Mentoring Relationship

The third theme reflected participants' sense that race did not affect their mentoring relationship. This theme emerged for about one third of our sample. Interestingly, although there were no racial or gender differences in endorsement, tenured faculty and faculty in STEM fields were relatively more likely than untenured and non-STEM faculty, respectively, to say that race was not relevant to their mentoring. Further, although all responses within this theme shared the view that race was not relevant to their mentoring, participants offered different reasons for this perspective.

One perspective was that other characteristics of the mentor are more important than race. Many FOC who deprioritized their mentor's race instead valued the personality (e.g., warmth, caring, good listener) and instrumental skills (e.g., information, negotiation tips, career-related skills) of their mentors instead, as illustrated by an Asian woman faculty paired with a white male mentor:

I don't look at gender, or ethnicity, as a factor in mentors and relationships. I mean of course there should be chemistry but I think that chemistry has to do with the mentor's compassion and caring to guide and mentor the mentees. And that is what I look [for] in those individuals.

A second perspective offered by participants was that the identities of their mentor did not matter for *their* relationship but agreed that it might be relevant for other FOC, with one person noting in their department, mentor race "wasn't as crucial. But, if you're an engineer, for example, that might have more of an impact." A third perspective was that due to the unlikelihood of finding a mentor who shared a racial background, identity congruence was not an element they sought in their mentoring relationship.

## Discussion

In this qualitative study, we sought to understand faculty perceptions of the significance of race in the context of cross-racial mentoring, and identify factors that can facilitate positive cross-racial mentoring relationships. We identified three major themes: (a) factors that shape how race affects the mentoring relationship, (b) racial difference as conferring benefits to the mentoring relationship, and (c) racial difference as irrelevant to the mentoring relationship. Overall, our findings indicated that cross-racial mentoring is primarily tied to instrumental forms of support, and shed light on how mentors, in particular white mentors, can better support FOC mentees.

The first theme highlighted factors our participants perceived to be building blocks of strong mentoring relationships, particularly across race. At the core, trust was critical to positive cross-racial mentoring and could be developed in different ways (e.g., candidly conversing about race without being defensive). Yet because of the negative racialized experiences FOC often face within academia (e.g., Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2017), trust may not be automatically granted in cross-racial relationships. Therefore, participants emphasized that it was important for mentors to understand the unique challenges of being a person of color in a white environment. Mentors who were able to do this could then tailor their mentoring accordingly or acknowledge where they were unable to offer support due to gaps in their own knowledge. Mentors who did not have this awareness of difference often invalidated FOC, and in turn, contributed to FOC feeling as if they had to explain their cultural experience, creating emotional labor. FOC often experience invalidations and other forms of racial mistreatment, and are taxed with additional labor and service in their professional lives (Turner et al., 2008); having these demands be part of mentoring relationships likely creates additional stress and undermines the potential career benefits of mentoring. Our findings suggest that mentors without awareness of the specific challenges faced by FOC could still offer support if they were open-minded and willing to learn. Studies have also highlighted how mentors can learn about cultural and structural differences through their URM mentee, particularly in regard to white privilege (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005).

Our second theme concerned ways in which mentors from other racial groups could provide

effective mentoring. Our findings are consistent with previous research by Li et al. (2018) which noted that a benefit of mentoring across difference was self-reflection and perspective-taking, such that mentees in cross-race dyads were able to use their differences to learn and grow as individuals and as scholars. Above and beyond enhanced perspective-taking, our data also showed that aspects of mentoring, such as knowledge of the academic system and advocacy and sponsorship, were integral forms of instrumental support offered by white mentors. In fact, these were ways in which white mentors, and often white men specifically, could use their cultural capital in service of supporting FOC. For instance, white mentors can vouch for the capabilities of faculty of color, whose potential is often doubted. Additionally, white mentors, especially those in administrative roles, have access to unspoken knowledge about the norms and expectations of academia and their university. White faculty who willingly share this information are using their privilege to create a more inclusive culture by demystifying academia for FOC (Gonzales, 2018). These examples also imply that FOC mentees would benefit from white faculty mentors who regularly leverage their privilege and initiate unsolicited assistance. Future research could engage in in-depth study of successful cross-racial mentoring pairs to better understand how to promote positive cross-racial relationships.

Our third and final theme comprised FOC who did not perceive race to be relevant to mentoring; this theme was most commonly endorsed by tenured and STEM FOC. Because tenured FOC have successfully navigated the academic system, mentors who support them as racialized individuals may no longer be needed. Further, the tendency of STEM fields to espouse values of objectivity and neutrality may minimize the centrality of race for STEM FOC. Within this theme, some FOC held more “colorblind” perspectives (Neville et al., 2013), denying the relevance of identity-based factors, such as race, in mentoring. Yet others were aware of race as a potentially important factor in mentoring, but dismissed its relevance either because it was not a concern in their personal relationships or because they knew it was unlikely that they would find a same-race mentor. Across these three rationales, FOC focused on ways in which cross-racial mentors provided them with valuable career assistance through sharing their skills, knowledge, and networks which were facilitated when their mentors were warm, caring people.



These findings align with previous scholarship that suggests that positive and beneficial mentoring relationships are predicated on personality match between the mentor and mentee, as well as the mentor's ability to lend their expertise and advice to the mentee (e.g., Diggs et al., 2009; Li et al., 2018). Future research might examine whether FOC endorsing race-neutral attitudes experience different career outcomes than those for whom the race of the mentor was important so as to disentangle subjective mentoring perceptions from objective career outcomes. At the same time, these results speak to the critical need for diversification of the professoriate, so that FOC can obtain same-group mentorship if they wish, as mentors with a shared racial background can serve as role models and validate their cultural experience within the academy (e.g., lack of belonging; Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013; Tillman, 2001).

Participants in our study described that cross-racial mentors offered them instrumental support; yet, psychosocial support (e.g., role modeling, emotional support) did not emerge as a benefit of cross-racial mentorship. This is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that mentees receive less psychosocial support from cross-racial mentors (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). However, given the importance of psychosocial support to enhance inclusion and job satisfaction for FOC (Allen et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2013), it is essential that white mentors develop this skill through self-awareness of their power and positionality, by learning about the experiences of FOC, and by being intentional in offering psychosocial support (e.g., verbally praising and encouraging their mentee).

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although the study had a large and diverse sample, the faculty were from one large, predominately white research-intensive institution. Therefore, the applicability of findings to FOC at other types of institutions remains unclear. Faculty at minority-serving institutions, such as historically Black colleges or universities, may have greater access to same-race mentors, and thus be protected from the challenges of cross-racial mentoring. Accordingly, future researchers may consider investigating the nuances of the mentoring experiences of FOC across institution types (e.g., predominantly white vs. minority serving; research- vs. teaching-focused). Additionally, these data were part of a larger

study focused on workplace and work-life experiences in which we asked FOC to reflect on their mentoring experiences generally but did not query them on specific mentoring relationships. Therefore, the amount of information we have regarding cross-racial mentoring, and the demographics of their cross-racial mentor, varies among our participants. Future studies focused solely on cross-racial mentoring could probe more deeply about FOC's different mentoring dyads and investigate other types of identity differences (e.g., sexual orientation, religion) that may affect mentoring relationships. Furthermore, the retrospective nature of reflecting on mentee experiences that may have occurred years before completing the interview may have influenced what some faculty were able to recall. Finally, self-selection bias may have contributed to faculty with certain types of mentoring experiences being more inclined to participate than others. Nevertheless, the invitation to the study was worded broadly with the intention of capturing FOC with a wide variety of workplace experiences.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

We draw upon our findings to offer a number of recommendations. First, it is imperative that institutions recognize the utility of faculty mentoring and seek to connect faculty with mentors who are invested in fostering positive and supportive mentoring relationships. For some faculty in the study, it was this investment that superseded any potential challenges associated with mentoring across race. Second, considering the potential benefits associated with same-race mentoring dyads (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Thomas, 1990), institutions should also continue their efforts to diversify the professoriate and support career advancement, thereby increasing the numbers of senior FOC able to mentor junior colleagues. Simultaneously, graduate admission boards should continue their campaigns to increase the number of graduate students of color, who will be mentors to future generations of faculty.

Finally, to enhance the benefits and mitigate the barriers of mentoring across race, faculty should be trained to mentor effectively in order to understand mentees' experiences that do not mirror their own. This training may include learning about common experiences among FOC (e.g., exclusion, tokenism, and discrimination) and coaching on basic

interpersonal skills (e.g., active listening, rapport building). The training can also focus on preparing potential mentors to engage in cross-race interactions, such as imagined contact, where the privileged member of the group practices having discussions about power and privilege with a marginalized peer; doing so has been shown to make individuals more willing to engage in intergroup relationships and address unequal power structures (Lytle, 2018). In sum, given the likelihood that FOC will experience cross-racial mentoring, it is critical to minimize the challenges and optimize the benefits of such relationships. Doing so may promote career advancement and retention of FOC in academia.

### References

- Allen, T. D., Eby, L. T., Poteet, M. L., Lentz, E., & Lima, L. (2004). Career benefits associated with mentoring for proteges: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*(1), 127–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.1.127>
- Avery, D. R., Tonidandel, S., & Phillips, M. G. (2008). Similarity on sports sidelines: How mentor–protégé sex similarity affects mentoring. *Sex Roles, 58*(1-2), 72–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9321-2>
- Blake-Beard, S., Bayne, M. L., Crosby, F. J., & Muller, C. B. (2011). Matching by race and gender in mentoring relationships: Keeping our eyes on the prize. *Journal of Social Issues, 67*(3), 622–643. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01717.x>
- Bova, B. (2000). Mentoring revisited: The Black woman's experience. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 8*(1), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713685511>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Carter-Sowell, A. R., & Zimmerman, C. A. (2015). Hidden in plain sight: Locating, validating, and advocating the stigma experiences of women of color. *Sex Roles, 73*(9), 399–407. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0529-2>
- Constantine, M. G., Smith, L., Redington, R. M., & Owens, D. (2008). Racial microaggressions against Black counseling and counseling psychology faculty: A central challenge in the multicultural counseling movement. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 86*(3), 348–355. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2008.tb00519.x>
- Craig, C. A., Allen, M. W., Reid, M. F., Riemenschneider, C. K., & Armstrong, D. J. (2013). The impact of career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring on affective organizational commitment, job involvement, and turnover intention. *Administration & Society, 45*(8), 949–973. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399712451885>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(1241), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Diggs, G. A., Garrison-Wade, D. F., Estrada, D., & Galindo, R. (2009). Smiling faces and colored spaces: The experiences of faculty of color pursuing tenure in the academy. *The Urban Review, 41*(4), 312–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-008-0113-y>
- Eby, L. T., Butts, M., Lockwood, A., & Simon, S. A. (2004). Protégé negative mentoring experiences: Construct development and nomological validation. *Personnel Psychology, 57*(2), 411–447. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2004.tb02496.x>
- Eby, L. T., Durlley, J., Ragins, B. R., & Butts, M. (2010). Are bad experiences stronger than good ones in mentoring relationships? Evidence from the protégé and mentor perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77*(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.02.010>
- Gearing, R. E. (2004). Bracketing in research: A typology. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(10), 1429–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304270394>
- Ghavami, N., & Peplau, L. A. (2012). An intersectional analysis of gender and ethnic stereotypes: Testing three hypotheses. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 37*(1), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312464203>
- Gonzales, L. D. (2018). Subverting and minding boundaries: The intellectual work of women. *The Journal of Higher Education, 89*(5), 677–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1434278>
- Griffin, K. A., & Reddick, R. J. (2011). Surveillance and sacrifice: Gender differences in the mentoring patterns of Black professors at predominantly white research universities. *American Educational Research Journal, 48*(5), 1032–1057. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211405025>
- Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. M. (2004). Mentoring in black and white: The intricacies of cross-cultural mentoring. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 12*(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361126042000183075>
- Johnson, J. M., Boss, G., Mwangi, C. G., & Garcia, G. A. (2018). Resisting, rejecting, and redefining normative pathways to the professoriate: Faculty of color in higher education. *The Urban Review, 50*(4), 630–647. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0459-8>
- Jones, B., Hwang, E., & Bustamante, R. M. (2015). African American female professors' strategies for successful attainment of tenure and promotion at predominantly white institutions: It can happen. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 10*(2), 133–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197915583934>

- Kelch-Oliver, K., Smith, C. O., Welkom, J. S., Gardner, N. D., & Collins, M. H. (2013). Exploring the mentoring relationship among African American women in psychology. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 33, 29–37. <https://doi.org/10.18738/awl.v33i0.98>
- León, R., & Thomas, N. D. (2016). Critical race theory and the cultivation, mentorship and retention of Black women faculty. *American International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(1), 9–16.
- Li, S., Malin, J. R., & Hackman, D. G. (2018). Mentoring supports and mentoring across difference: Insights from mentees. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 26(5), 563–584. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2018.1561020>
- Lloyd-Jones, B. (2014). African-American women in the professoriate: Addressing social exclusion and scholarly marginalization through mentoring. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 22(4), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2014.945737>
- Lytle, A. (2018). Intergroup contact theory: Recent developments and future directions. *Social Justice Research*, 31(4), 374–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-018-0314-9>
- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 9(3), 3351–33514.
- Neville, H. A., Awad, G. H., Brooks, J. E., Flores, M. P., & Bluemel, J. (2013). Color-blind racial ideology: Theory, training, and measurement implications in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 68(6), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033282>
- Ragins, B. R. (1997). Diversified mentoring relationships in organizations: A power perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(2), 482–521. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9707154067>
- Ragins, B. R., & Cotton, J. L. (1999). Mentor functions and outcomes: A comparison of men and women in formal and informal mentoring relationships. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(4), 529–550. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.4.529>
- Sadao, K. C. (2003). Living in two worlds: Success and the bicultural faculty of color. *The Review of Higher Education*, 26(4), 397–418. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2003.0034>
- Salter, P. S., & Haugen, A. D. (2017). Critical race studies in psychology. In B. Gough (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical social psychology* (pp. 123–145). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1_7)
- Sanchez-Hucles, J. V., & Davis, D. D. (2010). Women and women of color in leadership: Complexity, identity, and intersectionality. *American Psychologist*, 65(3), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017459>
- Settles, I. H., Jones, M. K., Buchanan, N. T., & Dotson, K. (2020). Epistemic exclusion: Scholar(ly) devaluation that marginalizes faculty of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000174>
- Smith, J. W., Smith, W. J., & Markham, S. E. (2000). Diversity issues in mentoring academic faculty. *Journal of Career Development*, 26(4), 251–262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089484530002600402>
- Sosik, J. J., & Godshalk, V. M. (2005). Examining gender similarity and mentor's supervisory status in mentoring relationships. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 13(1), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361260500040138>
- Stanley, C. A. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominantly white colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(4), 701–736. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043004701>
- Stanley, C. A., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Cross-race faculty mentoring. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 37(2), 44–50. <https://doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.37.2.44-50>
- Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10), 1372–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307307031>
- Thomas, D. A. (1990). The impact of race on managers' experiences of developmental relationships (mentoring and sponsorship): An intra-organizational study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 11(6), 479–492. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030110608>
- Thomas, D. A. (2001). The truth about mentoring minorities. *Race matters. Harvard Business Review*, 79(4), 98–107.
- Thompson, C. Q. (2008). Recruitment, retention, and mentoring faculty of color: The chronicle continues. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2008(143), 47–54. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.312>
- Tillman, L. C. (2001). Mentoring African American faculty in predominantly white institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 42(3), 295–325. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018822006485>
- Turner, C. S. V., González, J. C., & Wood, J. L. (2008). Faculty of color in academe: What 20 years of literature tells us. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 1(3), 139–168. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012837>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Population estimates*. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/U.S./PST045217>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2013). *Digest of education statistics*. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt1\\_315.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt1_315.20.asp)
- U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *Digest of education statistics*. Institute of Education Sciences,

- National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_315.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_315.20.asp)
- Vargas, J. H., Saetermoe, C. L., & Chavira, G. (2021). Using critical race theory to reframe mentor training: Theoretical considerations regarding the ecological systems of mentorship. *Higher Education, 81*, 1043–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00598-z>
- Zambrana, R. E., Harvey Wingfield, A., Lapeyrouse, L. M., Dávila, B. A., Hoagland, T. L., & Valdez, R. B. (2017). Blatant, subtle, and insidious: URM faculty perceptions of discriminatory practices in predominantly white institutions. *Sociological Inquiry, 87*(2), 207–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12147>
- Zambrana, R. E., Ray, R., Espino, M. M., Castro, C., Douthirt Cohen, B., & Eliason, J. (2015). Don't leave us behind: The importance of mentoring for underrepresented minority faculty. *American Educational Research Journal, 52*(1), 40–72. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214563063>

Received October 15, 2020

Revision received March 26, 2021

Accepted March 30, 2021 ■