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Women mentoring in the academe: a faculty cross-racial and cross-cultural experience

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ABSTRACT

Two women faculty members, one White from the southeastern United States and one Black African from Zimbabwe, purposefully explored their informal mentoring relationship with the goal of illuminating the complexities associated with their cross-racial, cross-cultural experience. Concentrating on their four-year mentor-mentee academic relationship at a predominantly White institution (PWI), these women employed a dialogic duoethnographic methodology to uncover emerging, nuanced characteristics contributing to the positive nature of their mentoring experience. Calling upon a seminal nine-function mentoring framework focused on advancing mentee personal growth and professional advancement, the authors, engaged in critical interplay of dialogic considerations of their mentoring experiences, relationship, and literature. The authors revealed a distinct cross-cultural and cross-racial journey where each, as participant researcher, uncovered a deeper appreciation for the importance of engaged dialog. Emerging is a complex interplay of understandings about trust, care, and power dynamics as factors in defining mentoring relationships that work for good.

KEYWORDS

Cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring; women faculty; counter-storying; benefits of mentoring; duoethnography

The purpose of our paper is to share the mentoring experiences of two academic women from different racial, national origin, educational, and cultural backgrounds, which have heavily influenced our personal and professional understandings. We, as women working in an educational leadership program, offer unique insight into an informal mentoring experience between a Black African mentee and a White southerner mentor. Our study highlighted how our different cultural backgrounds shaped our mentor-mentee relationship and concluded with discussions of lessons learned from our complex intercultural experience.

Literature review

Mentoring is important for all new faculty in academia but is critically important for faculty of color (Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Thompson, 2008) as minorities are disproportionately represented and have often faced the most hostile working environments in academia (Han, 2014; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Sue et al., 2011). Under-representation creates challenges such as lack of same race mentors and lack of social and cultural capital, essential to building supportive networks critical for survival in academia (Chan et al., 2015; Han, 2014; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, women and faculty of color experience what Hirshfield and Joseph (2012) coined “identity taxation” (p. 213), referring to the extra burdens placed on historically marginalized persons. These burdens include faculty of color being perceived as de facto members of diversity committees, representatives of their race, and experts in teaching courses that include racial justice and diversity (Sue et al., 2011). Identity taxation presents challenges to women of color who have to grapple with “multiple marginality” (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012, p. 216), which refers to the intersection of marginalized identities of gender, racial minority, sexual orientation, social class, and culture. Multiple marginality exposes minorities to discrimination, racism, negative stereotyping and institutional bias, all of which have historically prevented job entry and advancement in organizations (Al Ariss & Guo, 2016). In academia, faculty interactions typically follow a homosocialization pattern, i.e., same race, same sex, same gender, and so do recruitment and promotion outcomes (Chan et al., 2015; Mowatt, Johnson, Roberts, & Kivel, 2016). There is only a small pool of minority faculty mentors who can engage in enculturation of other minorities in the mores of academia (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

Defining mentoring

Mentoring refers to a developmental, professional relationship between a more experienced and a less experienced individual where the expertise of the mentor is used to foster the career growth of a less experienced individual (Daniel et al., 2006). Involving a professional and personal commitment made between two and more people (Griffin & Toldson, 2012), the relationship, generally works best when there are shared interests, values and norms between the mentor and mentee (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). Griffin and Toldson (2012) refer to the relationship thus: [A mentor] “sees a glimmer of potential, and ... is willing to engage in a fine archeological dig” (p. 103). As the mentoring process unfolds, it typically follows four stages, similar to the hero archetype, that include initiation or courtship, cultivation or learning through career development, separation due to success or non-success of the relationship, and redefinition where both move to new projects on more equal terms as peers (Daniel et al., 2006).

Cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring

Ortiz-Walters and Fullick (2015) stated, “minority protégés are most often found in cross-ethnic [mentoring] relationships by mere virtue of the small numbers of minority mentors” (p. 159). When the relationship is managed well, it results in positive outcomes for both mentor and mentee; the mentor derives personal satisfaction and professional recognition while the mentee commits to stay in the organization. Despite the positive outcomes, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) argued that cross-cultural mentoring is complex since “what should be a simple matter of negotiations between two persons becomes arbitration between historical legacies, contemporary racial tensions and societal protocols” (p. 11). Considering that race influences the mentoring relationship, Thomas (1993) observed that both parties may choose to either deny and suppress racial differences or engage them head on. Both the mentor and mentee have to be aware of cultural perceptions that may build or destroy the relationship as cross-cultural. This also underscores that mentoring that is cross-racial and cross-cultural involves risk taking, exposes vulnerabilities and possible abuses by both mentor and mentee. High levels of trust and personal comfort need to be secured so that protégés can express opinions without repercussions (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

Several scholars gave advice on how to navigate this delicate process. The first step is to acknowledge that racial and cultural differences matter (Feroglia, 2011) and to acknowledge the existence of racism (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002), racial microaggressions, and subtle forms of racism (Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Han, 2014). In cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring, issues of race, gender, power and privilege influence the relationship and these have to be addressed (Feroglia, 2011; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004), and in most cases the mentor is White and male (Tillman, 2001). Part of the critical conversation between the mentor and mentee should be about how power and White privilege frame the relationship while, at the same time, learning to mitigate the challenges (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004). In fact, Mowatt et al. (2016) acknowledged the discrimination, stereotyping and marginalization of minorities and underscored “the persistence of ‘White’ as privileged in academia” (p. 41). Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2002, 2004), referring to their long mentoring relationship, acknowledged issues of race, White power and privilege but not without challenges, stating their relationship was tumultuous at the beginning.

The influences of race, gender, power, and privilege provide lenses for mentor and mentee worldviews of looking at difficult situations. The underrepresentation of faculty of color, especially women of color, and particularly African American women, exposes them to hyper-visibility because in most departments they are the only person with their particular cultural background and are token hires (Chang, Welton, Martinez, & Cortez, 2013). Being the only person in a department presents challenges to minority faculty because they can be overly scrutinized and have the burden of representing their race together with the negative stereotypes

associated with that race (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Han, 2014; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). Minorities at predominantly White campuses are subjected to indignities or “a thousand little cuts,” a term used to describe the compound covert racial or gender-based insults termed microaggressions (Hunn, Harley, Elliot, & Canfield, 2015, p. 41). These racial microaggressions are brief, everyday occurrences – verbal or non-verbal, intentional or unintentional, derogatory, denigrating, disparaging racial attitudes and behaviors targeted at minorities (Sue et al., 2011).

Researching cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring

One has to question how scholars research such sensitive topics as cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring. Several researchers promoted qualitative research approaches. Grant and Ghee (2015), Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004), and Merriweather and Morgan (2013) offered examples of autoethnography and single case study; Chang et al. (2013) offered critical ethnographies utilizing multiple case study; Valentine, Prentice, Torres, and Arellano (2012) and McClellan and Sader (2012) wrote critical single case studies. There are no known cross-racial, cross-cultural mentoring studies involving women culturally identifying as we do using a duoethnographic methodology.

Furthermore, researchers tend to group the experiences of racial and ethnic groups in academia as monolithic. For example, the experiences of White Americans are different from African Americans although each group may share the same language, historical legacies and other cultural treasures and aspects. Similarly, there are differences in those who self-identify as Black. For example, several researchers looked at mentoring relationships between White and Black Americans (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Merriweather & Morgan, 2013). Chang et al. (2013) discussed an ethnographic study that included scholars with the dual roles of researcher and participant who self-identified as multiracial, Black, Latina. Notably absent in the literature were autoethnographic studies of mentoring relationships with a mentee who self-identified as Black and African in predominantly White institutions (Tillman, 2001) and even fewer addressed the mentoring needs of protégés who self-identify as Africans in American higher education (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004; Merriweather & Morgan, 2013).

Our duoethnographic study (Norris, 2008; Norris & Greenlaw, 2012; Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013) contributes to narrowing the literature gap through unveiling the voices of an African female mentee and a White female mentor in an informal mentoring relationship. These voices are important because they counter the metanarratives that tend to give voice to dominant groups in academia. Furthermore, this study contributes to closing the literature gap by providing a portrait of a cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring experience in educational leadership in predominantly White institutions.

Methodological conceptualizations: employing duoethnography

Breault (2016) defined duoethnography as “a relatively new research method in which two participants interrogate the cultural contexts of autobiographical experiences in order to gain insight into their current perspectives on and experience of issues related to personal and professional identities” (p. 777). In essence, duoethnographic research is emic, examining experience from the inside out rather than the outside in (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Thus, duoethnographic studies (Norris, 2008; Norris & Greenlaw, 2012; Norris et al., 2012) situate in *currere*, a critical autobiographical examination of the personal journey or curriculum of everyday life (Pinar, 1975). *Currere*, requiring deep engagement in meaningful dialog about the contexts of past influences on current experiences, results in generative, reflexive thinking about self, others, and culture (Breault, 2016).

In addition, duoethnography is polyvocal and dialogic, promoting *heteroglossia*, a term coined by Bakhtin (1981) who wrote of “double-voice discourse” representing “two voices, two meanings, and two expressions, ... all the while dialogically intertwined” (p. 324). The concepts of *currere* and *heteroglossia* work together to call for reconceptualization of meanings from previous experiences and beliefs (Norris, 2008; Sawyer & Norris, 2009). Thus, duoethnographic researchers often examine social constructs like race, nationality, and gender, as in our study, disrupting metanarratives of “the self at the personal level by questioning held beliefs” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 15) and by juxtaposing the one voice with the *other* where neither voice can claim dominance or universal truth (Muncey, 2010). The uncovering of difference is expected (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012; Norris, 2008).

Trustworthiness is found in self-reflexivity as researchers seek to get at “truth” through deep, juxtaposed conversations about experiences and personal beliefs; hence, the validity and trustworthiness in duoethnography are determined through the observation of rigor in the collaborative inquiry (Breault, 2016; Norris et al., 2012). Thus, we, as duoethnographers, sought, through studying our own mentoring relationship and individual, culture-laden experiences, to create better understandings of meaningful mentoring relationships. We sought to provide guidance for those who are easily marginalized, uninformed, and/or taken advantage of in academic situations laced with hidden power relationships and where tenure and other expectations are often not transparent.

We began our study by writing focused autobiographical statements emphasizing our early life experiences as they related to education, family, diversity, and nationality. We employed Kram’s (1985) two-category conceptualization of nine mentor functions to provide an organization to our dialogic narratives and to challenge us to engage in all aspects of our mentoring journey. From this juxtaposed dialogic activity, we gained deeper and more nuanced personal understandings about the experience of being a mentee and serving as a mentor with our differing cultural backgrounds in a predominantly White institution (PWI). We ended with individual participant statements about new understandings gained through

dialogic methods – a tenet of duoethnographic research (Breault, 2016; Breault, Hackler, & Bradley, 2012; Norris et al., 2012). As in most cases the research relationship continues beyond the initial written report.

Research questions

The purpose of our study was to share a cross-cultural and cross-racial mentoring experience between two female faculty members, one Black-African and one Anglo-American, working in a predominantly White institution (PWI). The primary research question was: *In cross-cultural and cross-racial, woman-to-woman faculty mentoring in higher education, what relational and functional factors provide meaningful support for mentees in educational leadership in a predominantly White institution?* A secondary question was: *What relational characteristics emerge and contribute to the ongoing nature of the relationship?* The mentee self-identified as female, Black, African, foreigner/immigrant, and international faculty from a culture that is high on power distance (Ramaswami, Huang, & Dreher, 2014), i.e., hierarchical, formal, respect for seniors and authority, modesty, less assertiveness for women in general, and accepting and expecting unequal distribution of power between seniors and juniors and supervisors and supervisees, mentors and protégés. The mentor self-identified as female, Caucasian, a Southerner, American and comes from a western culture that is low on power distance (Ramaswami et al., 2014), i.e., less formal and less hierarchical, accepting of a degree of assertiveness for women, less accepting of but expecting unequal power. In the next section we reveal excerpts from the focused autobiographic stories we wrote for one another. After writing, we discussed our stories from various cultural perspectives, striving to understand on a deeper level those cultural and biographical elements that contributed to our mentoring relationship.

Focused autobiographic storying

The mentee

I am an African woman from Zimbabwe. My education from the primary and secondary levels up to the undergraduate degree was based on a British model. During my primary and secondary education, a bifurcated colonial approach to education afforded the White minority the best education while Blacks received an education that served the colonial system, ensuring master and servant relationships continued. I characterize the education I received in Zimbabwe as traditional and Afrocentric compared to the Eurocentric or Western tradition I later received in graduate school when I relocated to the United States in my late thirties. Both these traditions offered me invaluable experiences and ways of thinking that I would not have experienced in only one tradition.

My culture, education and work experience were critical to shaping my career, work ethic and professionalism. One key cultural artifact that colors my judgment and perspectives is borrowed from my Zimbabwean concept of *unhu*-which emphasizes the preservation of one's character as exemplified by respect of self and others, respect for authority and seniors, integrity, hard work, dependability, inclusiveness, an emphasis on social justice, and other good characteristics of humanity. This has helped my socialization and level of conviviality with any group of people regardless of race. However, I am aware some aspects of my culture may be problematic in the Western culture.

My background is important because I am the only one in the department with such a background: African, a foreigner, and therefore perceived as *other*. I am the one who has to fit in the mainstream culture and I need all the support that I can get to remain functional, to contribute meaningfully, and yet still maintain my binary identity of African and *other* in a White culture. It is in the context of this emotionally evolving and yet rich and sometimes frustrating experience of surviving in the academy, in a culture different from mine while relegated to the position of *other* that I wish to share my mentoring experiences.

The mentor

I am a White woman raised in the southeastern United States during the cold war/ Civil Rights eras. I was born to a World War II Navy man, at a time close enough to the end of World War II to understand, in a child's way, the fear emanating from war atrocities and the anxiety associated with the dread of a nuclear attack. Most fathers of children in my school were like my father who had seen more than any young man should have seen and who felt a deep responsibility to remain silent about war experiences.

While an undergraduate, I participated in and served as president of a popular denomination's college student group supporting students from my private college as well as students from a rather large state university nearby. We planned frequent retreats and included students from the local historic Black private college of the same religious denomination. We, as a group, engaged in frank, sometimes difficult, conversations about race, and we formed fast friendships with our college friends of both races. There was one notable retreat planned and funded by White and Black members of our Southern denomination representing a three-city region. One aspect of this retreat was that each White student would stay overnight with a Black family in their home and vice versa. One valuable lesson I learned early was that stereotypes associated with Black families were inaccurate. I learned that in general all families desire the same things – love, understanding, support, respect, the right to be heard, the right to pursue meaningful lives, and to have good table conversation.

In addition, I took part in a mission program during the summer after my junior year in college. This experience took me to Malawi, a southeastern African neighbor

of Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia. In Malawi I met students in the first university graduation class. I worked with elementary children, teaching English. I was impressed with the deep desire for an education on the part of everyone I met, and I was deeply impressed by the sacrifices of those families in the countryside who worked to send at best one child to school. The importance put on good education has remained with me as I have always seen education as the means to opportunity and to a life with more possibility for meaningful choices. Images of children, families, markets, food, music, work done by men and women, and the countryside, all remain with me. Perhaps my fondness for Malawi and remembered images aid my understanding, just a bit, some of the historical context of African life.

Our mentoring experience

Through the initial focus on the cultural backgrounds revealed in our selected autobiographical accounts above, we discussed similarities and differences in our cultural lives from race, gender, education, national origin and family perspectives. Following these autobiographical discussions, we explored our experiences and found it useful to employ the two major mentor functions of career and psychosocial development initially outlined by Kram (1985) and later explicated by Johnson and Huwe (2003). Kram identified nine functions under two major categories. Career functions, according to Kram, refer to those aspects of the relationship contributing to “learning the ropes and preparing for advancement” (p. 22) while psychosocial functions aid in the development of confidence, professional identity, and competence. Kram’s five career functions, are (a) sponsorship, (b) exposure and visibility, (c) coaching, (d) protection, and (e) challenging assignments, and the four psychosocial functions are (f) role modeling, (g) acceptance and confirmation, (h) counseling, and (i) friendship/mutuality.

In the spirit of duoethnographic research, we used counter-storying (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as a method of highlighting our cultural experiences and ordering our counter storying for Kram’s functions. Here we have included selected counter stories on seven of Kram’s career functions. In these, we engaged dialogically about our prior experiences, understandings, and implications for relationship. We concluded the paper by discussing new meanings gleaned from examining the mentoring experience together.

Career function: sponsorship

Sponsorship refers to the mentor sharing power and opening doors for the mentee (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Kram, 1985). However, the senior White faculty mentor must be committed and willing to share their power and privilege (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005).

Mentee

Ortiz-Walters and Fullick (2015) stressed the importance of cross-cultural mentoring, especially in cases where there is no access to mentors of the same race. Having no ethnic minority, let alone a Black mentor, in my department, I realized I needed a mentor who was well versed with the departmental and institutional culture and who could guide me to attain promotion and tenure. I had no other alternative but to work with a White mentor despite literature that states ethnic minorities report greater satisfaction in same race relations (Chan et al., 2015). I was the one at a disadvantage because of my multiple marginality (Evans & Cokley, 2008), evidenced by my race, gender, status as international faculty, accent, Black African, etc., and therefore classified as *other*. I learned protective silence as advised by Chang et al., 2013 for pre-tenured faculty so as not to put myself in any untenable situations.

I heard my mentor and another colleague say, “We need to help Precious and make sure she is tenured.” This was an informal conversation they had while walking in the corridor of our building. As program director at the time, she shared information and documents that exposed me to our program. She had also suggested possible projects on which we could collaborate.

Mentor

I felt honored that you chose me as your mentor. I had always thought of you as a colleague in our program, as an equal, not as a junior colleague to mentor. In my mind there was never an issue with your tenure. You were a colleague with many talents and experiences that should be recognized. I have enjoyed getting to know you and learning about growing up and living as a Zimbabwean woman, a very brave woman who raised her girls there and later here in the United States. Before I knew you had chosen me as a mentor, I had never considered the depth of trepidation you most likely felt as an untenured African woman in our university. Even at this early point, however, I took your journey towards tenure seriously, focusing on the importance for us of your contributions to our leadership work. Once I knew you had chosen me as your mentor, I took the mentoring responsibility seriously as I know just how important it is to have mentors who serve as sponsors in our professional lives. You had a great deal to offer us and our students. I felt it to be my professional duty to provide opportunities in terms of relationships and experiences. I also felt it to be my personal duty to welcome you into my community. I often nominated you for membership on committees that had nothing to do with diversity as I didn't think you should always have to carry the burden of program and college diversity representative.

Career function: exposure and visibility

This category refers to involving the mentee in experiences that highlight the mentee's strengths in a way that is noticed by those who have position to advance

the career of the mentee (Chan et al., 2015; Johnson & Huwe, 2003). The mentor took organized several opportunities for the mentee that included domestic and international travel and this commitment mirrors well with the advice provided by Stanley and Lincoln (2005) who stated, “cross-race mentoring requires assuming some responsibility for the mentored individual” (p. 49).

Mentee

My mentor has a very rich pedigree behind her. In her efforts to build my career she has often brought to my attention conferences where we might consider presenting together and opened opportunities for domestic and international professional travel. At one time she suggested a collaboration project where faculty from three program areas in the department took students to New York to learn about the impact of immigration. This is a trip that I had never planned to go on, but with her illustrious skills of persuasion and her desire to enculturate me in the mores of academia, I agreed to go. In a departmental meeting, my name was mentioned as an example of people who had taken students on short study tours during the semester. If it wasn't for my mentor, I would not have gone on this trip.

My mentor organized another trip, this time, an international trip to Chile where the department chair and my mentor allowed me to participate in the keynote address by presenting a section. My department chair and mentor had nothing but praise. In fact, they confessed that I took them by surprise as I am generally quiet in meetings on campus. Their comments truly massaged my ego and were affirmation that I was gaining confidence and my career was heading in the right direction.

Mentor

I am so very pleased you chose to take advantage of these opportunities. I have always felt that our students and other partners benefitted from your expertise. Remember that you, on your own, organized a very successful, widely attended university-wide presentation by the Brown sisters. Certainly, you have not needed me for exposure on campus. Primarily, I have felt in all cases mentioned above that you had expertise to offer our students, our colleagues, and the greater local and global academic community. I am pleased you were willing to be a part of these experiences with me. In addition, I am pleased that you are pursuing professional activities with me at national associations in educational leadership where I hope you will form more relationships in our field.

Career function: protection

Protection refers to the mentor shielding “the protégé’s reputation from unproductive criticism” (Johnson & Huwe, 2003, p. 19) and providing a way for the mentee to be seen as a professional in her own right. Criticism for minorities can be overt or open and can come from colleagues, students and administration. There is the

myth and assumption that the minority faculty member brings scholarly deficits (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005) that subjects minority faculty to over scrutiny not experienced by mainstream faculty (Han, 2014).

Mentee

My mentor protects me in so many ways in order to promote my professional growth. The norm and standard of a professor is White, speaks European American English and the dress code is familiar to students (Han, 2014). As a foreign professor who speaks English in an accent, students sometimes wanted to question my ability in teaching, the assignments I gave them, and even whether my directions I gave about the program were correct.

I remember inviting my mentor to come to my virtual class meeting to confirm what I had said to students. My mentor always supports me and sends the students back to me and encourages students to talk to me first as their professor before they check with other professors. Through all these efforts my mentor proved to me that she protected me from these nativistic forms of racism (Han, 2014), where anything foreign is viewed with deep suspicion and mistrust. In my culture, students rarely challenge a professor as my culture is high on power distance, i.e., formal, and accepting and expecting unequal power distribution between those in authority and their subordinates (Ramaswami et al., 2014). Sadly, African American/Black women faculty are the most vulnerable group and their ability is questioned in college classrooms because of historical legacy coupled with the myth of Black intellectual inferiority (Evans & Cokley, 2008).

Mentor

I truly believed you didn't need protection! However, when students came to me, I fully believed they needed to be sent back to you for answers. I don't believe in undermining or even appearing to undermine other professionals. Since our students plan to become leaders of many people, some with accents and others with a variety of cultural differences, they must learn to lead everyone and to talk with everyone. Communicating with people from various cultures and reaching deeper cultural understandings is very important to leadership in educational professions. I also believe that mentors and colleagues should squelch possible *group-talk* from students and other colleagues in an effort to minimize issues arising from misunderstandings of the cultures of those who are different from ourselves.

Career function: challenging assignments

This category refers to invitations from the mentor for participation in challenging projects that increase competence and skill levels of the mentee (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). A faculty member's long-term success, competence and confidence can be strengthened through challenging assignments (Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Kram, 1985).

Mentee

The last three semesters my mentor asked me to teach three courses that I had never taught before in our program. These courses were very demanding, full immersion courses with expansive projects that have to be completed for licensure. I felt very uneasy and very hesitant about this request and doubted my competence at teaching these courses. I was aware this would require a lot of preparation as is the case with teaching any new course. She assured me that she would help all the way in terms of organizing course materials and designing the syllabus. True to her word, we created blocks of time to design the syllabi and course materials. We now continue to share course materials and readings that we each discover.

Mentor

I find it refreshing to truly co-create projects and course products with others. Your perspective is always appreciated. I fully believe that all programs are stronger if people work together, sharing their expertise. Others see things that we don't immediately see on our own. By the way, you were really quite capable of doing this work on your own. However, I do believe it is more fun to work together!

Psychosocial function: acceptance and confirmation

This category, another psychosocial function, refers to being supportive of the mentee in such a way as to affirm and also provide confirmation that the mentee's choices are strategic ones. The importance of unfailing confidence in the mentee is confirmed through research by Kram (1985) and Clark et al. (2000). Good mentors attend to the psychological needs of their mentees and validate mentees' capabilities with reassurance that they belong to the institution and profession (Chan et al., 2015).

Mentee

Each time my mentor suggested that I volunteer to sit on certain committees, I took that as a sign that she was interested in my professional growth. Being a foreigner and not well versed with the mainstream culture, I found myself not comfortable at times going to certain gatherings and meeting unfamiliar people. She would remark, "Consider me as your possibility," meaning we would go together so that I would not be isolated and lonely at such functions. She would introduce me to people outside our department and who worked within the university.

Mentor

I'm really proud of the way you have held your own in these situations. You are receiving recognition in various ways, including being featured in our college's publications. I will always be pleased to go places with you as long as I am going as a friend and not as a mentor. I believe you have now graduated! Right?

Psychosocial function: counseling

This function refers to providing a safe space for mentees to explore personal and professional issues. Kram (1985) presented this function as three pronged: (a) developing confidence in protégé career choices, (b) demonstrating personal values and individuality into professional relationships, and (c) integrating career responsibilities with other areas of life.

Mentee

My mentor has provided the best counseling about my career goals. I remember while she was associate dean, she heard that I lost my father and she sent me a card. That gesture of kindness from somebody I hardly knew uplifted my spirits. She later sent a congratulatory e-mail when she learned of my first publication from the weekly dean's newsletter. I was naturally drawn to this caring woman. I consult my mentor a great deal to get clarity sometimes to my poorly conceived ideas. I sometimes consult her about personal issues, too.

Mentor

You are now tenured, and I still think about you when there are vacancies on committees. I do hope you have noticed that I also have consulted with you. You have several years of program history that I don't have occurring during the time I served in an administrative position with the college and this information helps shed light on current program decisions. And, I do have a commitment to endorsing you in the department and college so that you do not become "invisible," as I believe every faculty member is responsible for reminding others that there are a variety of perspectives and cultures out there. It's important for our educational leadership students to learn how to communicate, how to suspend judgment, and to work with everyone in ways that are understandable, caring and conducive to acquiring new meanings about others.

Psychosocial function: friendship/mutuality

According to Johnson and Huwe (2003) mutuality refers to an intentional, positive regard and trust couched in sensitivity to one another's personal and professional needs and aspirations. The relationship is further characterized by mutuality and care. We share life experiences that have consolidated our friendship and commitment to help each other as professional women. The joy of working alongside each other and the confidence of knowing that we genuinely care for each other's professional growth make our mentoring relationship worthwhile.

Mentee

Mitchell, Eby, and Ragins (2015) suggested that informal mentoring is successful when there is perceived familiarity between mentor and mentee. On a personal

level, my mentor and I share some very interesting life experiences. I am a mother to two daughters and she is a mother to one daughter and both my mentor and I are grandmothers. Our daughters are very ambitious, all having terminal degrees in their fields. The lives of our children and grandchildren provide fodder for conversation outside of professional work.

I trust my mentor with any piece of information, which supports that “ethnic minority protégés who share family and community concerns with their mentors are more likely to report greater satisfaction with their mentoring relationship than ethnic minority protégés who do not participate in such discussions with their mentors” (Chan et al., 2015, p. 602). When I am frustrated about anything I do not hesitate to call her even during ungodly hours. Initially I felt embarrassed calling her late into the night, but she told me that her husband urged her to pick the phone once they realized it was me. If she misses my calls, she will call as soon as she is able. If she does not hear from me for two to three days she will either send a text message or call. In fact, I call her “mother hen” because of her strong ethic of care and responsibility.

Mitchell et al. (2015) suggested, “In mentoring relationships, the securely attached mentor is likely to engage in appropriate caregiving toward his or her protégé, and the securely attached protégé is likely to expect and accept the support provided” (p. 3). Our relationship has moved to a stage where I can tackle complex projects and she provides expertise in sourcing resources on campus. One such project is a symposium that we planned for the fall 2016.

Mentor

I often wonder what our mentee-mentor experience would have been like had you been officially and formally assigned to me as a mentee. I think I would have worked harder at introducing you to people and at making sure you had the experiences I felt you needed. Perhaps, I would have worked more deliberately to ensure you had what you needed quickly, without consultation. In the long run, I’m not sure that I would have been as effective. I might have been too task oriented, and the “doing” of mentoring might have taken precedence over the “being” of mentoring. In our more informal relationship, where you had a choice about my place in your development, it is perhaps possible that you received at least most of what you needed on the career and psychosocial levels at the right time. I also feel that perhaps the relationship took precedence over the “tasks” of mentoring and that mutuality enabled you to trust me more quickly than you might have otherwise. I think you knew I genuinely supported you for no other reason than I recognized a good person and colleague who could offer a great deal to our program.

What we learned: dialog and next steps

The primary question for our study was: *In cross-cultural and cross-racial, women-to-woman faculty mentoring in higher education, what relational and functional*

factors provide meaningful support for mentees in educational leadership at a predominantly White institution? A secondary question was: *What relational characteristics and understandings emerge that contribute positively to the ongoing nature of the relationship?* Our work was a collaborative effort where we reconstructed our mentoring experience through writing. Evident were the positive outcomes of this cross-racial and cross-cultural informal relationship. Through efforts of the mentor, the mentee received the benefits of the mentor functions as outlined by Kram (1985) and explicated by Johnson and Huwe (2003). The result was the mentee was granted promotion to associate professor and tenure – a mutual goal for both mentor and mentee.

Not only do mentees benefit from the mentoring experience, mentors derive personal and professional satisfaction and increased productivity in mentoring a protégé achieve a career goal (Chan et al., 2015). Attainment of tenure and promotion in academia signifies acceptance and confirmation by colleagues and permanent membership in the academy (Chang et al., 2013). For minority faculty in a predominantly White institution, attainment of tenure and promotion also increases commitment to stay in an organization (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015). The mentee also expands his or her professional vision, acquires skills, and is exposed to opportunities and resources that boost career advancement.

We learned to navigate culture specific challenges as related to our age and generational differences. Merriweather and Morgan (2013) stated, “from an Africentric perspective, the term elder is synonymous with wisdom” (p. 9). The mentee, being significantly younger than the mentor, initially found it disrespectful to call the mentor by her first name or to challenge or confront her as the mentee comes from a high power distance culture. This is consistent with the mentee’s upbringing that stresses a high power distance culture (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015) that is characterized by formality in communication patterns and accepting and expecting inequitable distribution of power between mentor and protégé and respect for authority. The mentor indicated she preferred the mentee to be assertive as expected in mentor’s western culture that is low on power distance (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015; Ramaswami et al., 2014). It took some time for us to adjust to the cultural shift and the new power balance. This undoubtedly caused both of us to grapple with this new power dynamic.

Although the mentor was open to various ways the relationship could unfold, the mentee adopted a hypervigilant stance so as not to offend the mentee in any way. Chang et al. (2013), reporting the experiences of a female pre-tenured minority, stated, “some ... White colleagues with tenure were ignorant to the fact that as an untenured, racially underrepresented female faculty member, others either silenced her or she often purposefully chose to protectively remain silent” (p. 108). Both the mentor and mentee must understand each other’s positions regarding the privilege of a White tenured professor and the vulnerability of an untenured ethnic minority. This stance of mutual understanding underpins self-discovery and considerations about each other’s culture and positionality as critical advantages

of autoethnographic research (Chang et al., 2012; Merriweather & Morgan, 2013). During the process the mentor was able to explore, in more depth, the concept of privilege, especially its effects on those with less perceived privilege.

We both discovered the epistemic advantage brought by cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring. Learning about each other's worldviews – how we think, how we know what we know as professional women with different identity markers of race, culture, language, historical heritage, etc., provided an invaluable experience. It widened our perspectives and added to our stock of knowledge that would not have been gained without this mentoring relationship. We both lacked an understanding of the lived experience of each other's culture. This experience provided a rare opportunity of adding our understandings about who we are as individuals and as professional women from different races and cultures. Examples range from acceptable manners in one's culture, our sense of professional dress, food preferences, to professional research interests, all of which contribute to a depth of understanding we lacked previously.

Not only did our relationship result in positive professional outcomes for both, it also resulted in building a personal relationship outside the professional domain. We shared stories about our children, pain, fear, anxieties and triumphs. Through this journey we built mutual trust and allowed ourselves to be vulnerable with information we shared as we engaged in self-questioning about our assumptions, beliefs and values. We felt connected as colleagues and as women, and our relationship transcended into friendship. Corroborating this possible outcome is Chan et al. (2015) who asserted that minority protégés who discuss family and community concerns with their mentors are more likely to report greater satisfaction with their mentoring relationships than those who do not.

As a duoethnographic analysis representative of our mentoring journey as participant researchers, we departed from the normal research expectation of concluding with sections on findings and discussion. Writing from an emic perspective with the goal of increasing our personal understandings, we engaged in self-reflexivity focused on personal change grounded in a real world context. The goal was to record a reflexive journey that presented itself as believable to our readers and that resonated as trustworthy with honest inquiry into the social justice aspects of mentoring. Trustworthiness of data was upheld using several data triangulation methods and frequent discussions about the meanings unfolding in our writing. It is our hope that others who participate in faculty-to-faculty mentoring in higher education, especially those who participate in cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring, will learn from our experiences and approach their own mentoring relationships with inquiry and self-reflexivity centered on imagining a meaningful, critically examined way to engage in a mentoring experience.

Our lived experience of *currere*

One of the major tenets of duoethnography is that each participant researcher, as a result of having participated in the research, documents the importance of *currere*, the journey of lived curriculum. What new self-knowledge did we each acquire as we counter storied our experiences, engaged in dialog about the meaning in our stories, and interacted with mentoring literature? How has our personal and professional knowledge changed?

Precious, the mentee

The basic tenets of duoethnography are that participants are both researchers and research sites. The experiences of being a participant, researcher and research site were cathartic and transformative for me because I initially entered this relationship guarded, naïve and had internalized feelings of inferiority. Breault (2016) stated, “In the best duoethnographies, there is the intimate conversational flow of two trusted and trusting critical friends” (p. 785). Catharsis occurred because I could discuss my personal and professional fears, concerns and anxieties without dread of reprisal. Indeed, conversations were protracted at times and fun, and other times outright challenging perhaps due to the currency of language and meaning attached to words in one’s culture. The value of creating safe spaces in mentoring relationships marked by trust, authenticity and mutual purpose and comfort with each other cannot be underscored. I found that the interrogations we had with self and with each other spurred self-introspection, curiosity, clarity of ideas and reconceptualization, and understanding.

Of utmost importance was the personal and professional growth I experienced during the mentoring process. Some of my beliefs and perspectives were challenged and others invalidated and others affirmed during our mentoring experience. What was challenged were my internalized feelings of self-doubt and whether I would thrive in an environment where I was categorized as *other*. I wrestled with the idea of whether I would get tenure in a predominantly White institution, particularly in a department where minorities had never been granted tenure. I learned the value of being proactive in these environments and sought a mentor whose professionalism and values I admired and cherished. My mentor’s confidence in me made me feel that I was a bona fide professional who brought alternative capital and perspectives that benefitted students, college and our university. The lesson for me is: There are still caring and committed professionals who can mentor junior faculty into the mores of academia regardless of race, culture or gender. Good mentors can help with navigating a career and show possibilities of career trajectories.

The invalidation of my beliefs came in the form of my tendency to leap into judgment and make assumptions about issues and people. I learned to be more patient and suspend judgment. What left unchanged and affirmed was my basic belief

that people deserve respect and dignity, a tenet deeply rooted in my cultural value of *unhu*. Working together in a cross-racial and cross-cultural informal mentoring relationship demands respecting each other's perspectives, an open mind and acknowledging that "the frames [we] hold are inadequate and the Other can assist in a reconceptualization of self" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 25). I learned that we all bring cultural deficits to the mentoring relationship and it is prudent to learn from each other to produce a beautiful tapestry of a learning experience. It is my hope that "our stories will precipitate other stories and ... will invite others to explore their own stories" (Breault, 2016, p. 779). The mentoring relationship boosted my personal and professional efficacy. I feel equipped and ready to mentor others.

Roma, the mentor

More than ever, I understand the basic importance of engaging in an ethic of care in my work (Noddings, 2003). Living with the deeper questions about how to care for those around me in the academy has become a way to engage others and affirm them as meaningful parts of our work. Everyone wants to know that someone cares about them and that their work-life is important. I have come to understand the crucial importance of mentoring for those who are new to the profession and most especially for those who are minorities in our higher education academic community. It is remarkable just how daunting it can be to exist as an untenured person, most especially as someone who sees herself as *other* in a culture where there are unwritten understandings about requirements for tenure. The idea of living with hypervigilance for a lengthy period of time has to take a great deal of energy away from life in general. It is important to have safe places to ask the unaskable questions, to relax, and to "try out" new ideas and ways of "becoming faculty and researcher." I am committed to providing those spaces.

Throughout this mentoring relationship and inquiry, I called upon my deep personal commitments to two beliefs: everyone deserves opportunity for developing a meaningful life and we are all enriched by true inclusion of everyone into our work and personal lives. Through these commitments, I was able to enter into questioning for deeper understanding about how I might live these commitments. I reaffirmed that true understanding comes from an ethic of care, continuous engagement, suspending judgment, and entering into difficult conversations, some of which involve challenging and circuitous discussions using language carrying different meanings for those involved. Sometimes understanding requires creating new language. I cannot underestimate the importance of entering into continuous conversation about problematic issues and of engaging in redefining words to find ways to translate true, thoughtful meaning for those involved.

Sometimes conversations about meaning can be fast and sometimes these conversations must be slow, taking weeks or months to reach mutually beneficial conclusions. Understanding has to become a way of life, especially in relationships. In the end, understanding takes time, commitment to true knowing, and desire for

a better way of living in community with others. It is impossible to understand or appreciate the experiences of others without these types of commitments, which guard against interpreting someone else's life through one's own experiences rather than through theirs. I have a deeper commitment to a life of open questioning and reexamination and an ever deeper commitment to living with the ethic of care (Noddings, 2003). I also have a profound appreciation for Precious' determination to do good work. There is deep, mutual confirmation that the value of our work together lies in its potential for common good.

Conclusion

In predominantly White institutions there are few females and minorities who can serve as mentors for minority faculty. The lack of same race, and sometimes same-gender, mentors results in cross-racial and cross-cultural mentoring relationships to facilitate the career development of minority protégés. However, cross-racial mentoring is a complex dance as argued by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) but can yield very positive outcomes such as ours. Our experiences show this complexity to be consistent with the literature reviewed. Consequently, we took our mentoring relationship as a learning opportunity in terms of our racial identity, cultural perceptions and experiences (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). We learned of the subtle forms of microaggressions (Constantine et al., 2008) that take place, which we were both oblivious to. Interestingly, we also learned that we handle racial differences in very dissimilar ways. For example, in our e-mail exchanges and long face-to-face conversations, it was apparent that we differed in world views about certain events and incidents in our work. Sometimes the conversations were uncomfortable for both of us. We remained committed to the importance of having candid conversations. If left unaddressed, issues can create tension causing denial or suppression leading the mentee to develop coping mechanisms that may be too heavy to shoulder or for the mentor to assume that the relationship is a success or a failure for unknown reasons. Genuine connectedness, mutual trust, and the desire to learn were the most critical elements in building our mentoring relationship.

There was such transformative learning and evolution where we both demonstrated commitment to learning about each other and respecting our differences. We did this by first sharing our selected autobiographical backgrounds and then moving through seven levels of mentor functions exploring our experiences. We gave voice to a line of research that is missing, i.e., experiences of Caucasian mentors and African protégés in educational leadership in predominantly White institutions. We hope there will be further research involving cross-cultural, cross-racial situations to add to the body of literature on this very important topic.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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