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Graduate Students of Color: Race, Racism, and Mentoring in the White Waters of Academia

David L. Brunsma[1], David G. Embrick[2], and Jean H. Shin[3]

Abstract

The graduate student experience, for many, can be a time of great stress, insecurity, and uncertainty. Overwhelmingly, studies verify that good mentoring is one of the best indicators of graduate student success. In this literature review, we outline in detail previous research that attest to these experiences, and pay specific attention to the experiences of students of color. In general, our read of the literature suggests that academia, in general, and sociology, in particular, does not do a good job of mentoring graduate students of color. We begin our essay with an overview of graduate student experiences. Next, we discuss the mentoring side of the equation, addressing reasons that might explain variations in how students are mentored in higher education. Finally, we end with some thoughts on what faculty and departments can do to address the inadequate mentoring of graduate students of color.

Keywords

minority, pipeline, diversity, higher education, pipeline

> Through an effort initiated in 1974 by the ASA Caucus of Black Sociologists—now the independent Association of Black Sociologists—ASA began a predoctoral training program to support underrepresented minorities in sociology, the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP). . . . The objective of MFP has been to increase the number of minority scholars completing doctoral degrees in sociology, as a means both to address the severe underrepresentation of minority faculty as the student population has become more diverse, and to enhance sociological scholarship with the inclusion of the research perspectives and methods of minority scholars. (Hillsman and Shin, 2011)

> One of the most important resources within graduate departments is faculty mentorship. . . . Overall, students reported modest levels of mentoring that included opportunities to collaborate with faculty on research, co-authoring, developing research grants, and help applying for fellowships, and publishing. . . . Latina/o students reported lower levels of faculty mentoring than African American students. African American men reported higher levels of mentoring than African American women, and Latinas reported marginally higher levels of mentoring compared to Latino men. In addition, Latina/o students perceived less respect for students from faculty. (Segura et al. 2011:29)

[1]Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA
[2]University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA
[3]American Sociological Association, Washington, DC, USA

Corresponding Author:
David L. Brunsma, Virginia Tech, Department of Sociology, 560 McBryde Hall (0137), 225 Stanger Street, Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA.
Email: brunsma@vt.edu

INTRODUCTION

The life course of an *academic* discipline is undergirded by the pipeline that flows from secondary schooling through postsecondary education, stopping in the training ground of graduate school before it attempts to reproduce itself in the professorate. The life course of an academic *discipline* is also underwritten by the epistemologies of class, gender, sexuality, and most certainly, race (Rabaka 2010; Wyse 2014). The intersection between graduate training for the professorate and the institutional logic that seeks to make new wine using old bottles has left many academic disciplines sluggish, stagnant, and stubborn with respect to the variation of experiences it faces within its ranks—neither does any one graduate school socialization process fit all, nor does one epistemological perspective. Sociology is not immune to these realities.

The discipline of sociology has always resonated with those who have been marginalized in society, *and* it has also always contributed to their marginalization—both within and without its academic borders. Sociology confers bachelor's degrees to more racial minority students in postsecondary education than other disciplines (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). The pipeline into graduate study in sociology, as with all disciplines, is a trickle from its original fount but is also much more representative of the society from which it seduces the sociological imagination (see Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). However, the grip of graduate school (whether it is an epistemological stranglehold, or a series of experiential invalidations, or both) is often so tight for racial minorities in academia that they often leave, and those who stay are forever changed. The pipeline continuously flows, but it carries some along, forces others to swim against the current, and still others are washed down the drain. Nettles and Millett (2006) chronicled the 50 percent attrition rate of the graduate school experience across all disciplines in the United States—for minority graduate students, much higher, up to 70 percent. The path to full professor within our discipline for racial and ethnic minorities is littered with obstacles (Spalter-Roth 2013; Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007; for similar evidence in psychology, see also Maton et al. 2006). It is our contention that graduate school is the primary experience we should be investigating to understand this reality—a reality, an experience, apparently experienced by all but structured against some. We are interested in these experiences and the role of mentoring—especially for racial and ethnic minorities.

As the two opening quotes illustrate, in 1974, Black sociologists recognized the fundamental need to take conscientious and intentional action to provide support for those who were marginalized and underrepresented within the discipline through funded initiatives centered around the all-important function of mentoring. Such action eventually led to the birth of the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP). According to Segura et al.'s 2011 publication, *Report of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities (SREM) in Sociology: Results of the Graduate Student Survey*, not much had changed regarding the experience of graduate school for minorities in the intervening four decades—but mentoring continued to be a centrally important component, one that minimizes the detrimental effects of unsupportive and inhospitable departmental climates and cultures.

In fact, Spalter-Roth et al. (2013) explored the impact of cross-race "mentoring" (as defined by dissertation advising) using unobtrusive data to compare post-PhD career outcomes for groups of underrepresented minority and white PhDs in sociology. Their study found that having access during graduate school to both individual, instrumental mentoring *and* communal, psychosocial mentoring increased the likelihood of minority scholars (participants in the ASA Minority Fellowship Program with PhDs earned between 1997 and 2009) pursuing an "ideal" career trajectory at a research-extensive university. An especially interesting aspect of this finding was that the most successful instrumental mentoring, in terms of outcomes, came from white male dissertation advisors (a finding not corroborated in the literatures we reviewed).

Sociology is but one academic discipline, but more than others, it claims to be the bastion of progressiveness. Indeed, given its track record of being the more "diverse" discipline (not to mention the one with the critical tools to understand issues of intersectional experience in institutions of higher education), various disciplines often look to sociology to provide useful models of departmental organization, curricular development, and structures and processes of mentoring in order that they might "diversify" their own departments, colleges, and ultimately, disciplines. Yet, this raises important questions. Are we doing this for graduate students? Are we providing effective models of mentoring graduate students of color and those marginalized because of their epistemological, theoretical, methodological, or substantive approaches?

We review over 80 studies from the 1980s through 2010s in order to better understand and answer these questions. The research we examine is specific to the experiences of graduate students in

higher education with a focus on the process of mentoring. We pay particular attention to the literatures that shine empirical light on the experiences of graduate students of color. It is our hope to illuminate a continuing and significant issue (i.e., racial disparities in graduate student mentoring and training) in higher education and encourage discourse that may help us move forward in sociology.

THE EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There is no specific set of literature that systematically documents the contours of the graduate school experience. The scholarship one needs to assemble to glean this experience comes from multiple disciplines (e.g., education, psychology, geography, sociology, etc.), multiple methodologies (e.g., surveys, interviews, experimental, etc.), and multiple types of graduate education. Additionally, there is a broad swath of analytic foci used by researchers to understand this experience—the vast majority of it framing the experiences of graduate school as socialization into a discipline. By looking at why graduate students pursue graduate education, what they find once there, and how they question that experience, we can gain a glimpse of the general themes in the literature regarding the graduate school experience.

Why They Pursue It ("The Experience I Want")

In 1998, Melissa Anderson published an edited volume that provided an empirical overview of the experience of doctoral education using a nationally representative sample. This presented initial results from her longitudinal Academic Life Project, funded by the National Science Foundation that surveyed doctoral students in 1994 and has followed some 2,000 students every three years (indeed, sociology was one of the disciplines). According to the overview chapter, M. S. Anderson and Swayze (1998) find that most graduate students pursue graduate education out of a desire for knowledge in the field, to do research, to teach, and to benefit others through their work—in that order. The latter reason, benefitting others and/or one's own community through research, is more often cited by women and minorities (Solem, Lee, and Schlempler 2009; Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). Across the literature, there are data to suggest that these continue to be the primary reasons for pursuing graduate school in the contemporary moment.

What They Find When There ("The Experience I Get")

It is clear from the literature that graduate experiences change in waves, in a generationally and demographically delayed lock step with cohort-based practices within doctoral programs as well as in a complex interrelation with the demands of industry, the public, and research universities (Austin 2002). This is occurring at a time when, over the past four decades, faculty on tenure-track have increasingly been replaced by a largely contingent faculty. Largely mirroring the changing uncertainty and precarity of the professoriate at large, this experience of graduate school, in general, is marked by a disciplinary socialization for that very professoriate, learning to navigate significant levels of stress, anxiety, and pressure; a clear daily socialization into the *role* of graduate student; and a need to develop strategies of balancing work and life in a setting where the line between the two is incredibly faint. The overall impression from the literature is that the graduate student experience is one of differentially distributed funding levels, social integration, opportunities to publish with faculty, collegiality will peers, professionalization opportunities, mentoring, and of course, disciplining into the discipline (Gardner 2008). All of these experiences are affected by age, educational preparedness, family situations, locus of control, self-efficacy, levels of social networks, and disciplinary shape. Overall, the general literature shows that graduate students' view of departmental climate is largely positive; however, there are also significant disciplinary differences. Austin's (2002) report of her four-year longitudinal qualitative study of 13 disciplines singled out sociology as one of the disciplines where graduate students felt much less strongly that there was a community in their department and that collaboration was almost nonexistent.

How They Question It ("The Experience I Need")

Given what graduate students desire when they decide to pursue graduate education and their general experiences once there, the literature also points to some key questions that arise for students both during and after their time in graduate school. According to Golde (1998), the central ones circulate around the following: Can I do this? Do I want to be a graduate student? Do I want to do this work? Do I belong here? Of course, for some students, this can also extend into deeper questions. What questions can be asked? What is truth? What can be known? Who can know it? What methods can be used in our search?

According to Austin (2002), in general, graduate students did not receive the mentoring they wanted. Over a third of students did not have faculty members who guided them carefully through the process (Davis and Fiske 2000 place this at 37 percent; others place it higher). When Austin (2002) asked graduate students what they most needed, they replied: (1) more mentoring, advising, and feedback; (2) structured opportunities to observe, meet, and talk with peers; (3) diverse teaching opportunities; (4) information and guidance; and (5) regular and guided reflection.

Whose Academia? Whose Disciplines? Whose Departments? Whose Experiences?

If we look across the studies that provide large-scale and somewhat comprehensive, multidisciplinary views of the graduate school experience (M. S. Anderson 1998; Austin 2002; Bieber and Worley 2006; Conrad, Haworth, and Millar 1993; Golde 1998; Lovitts 2001), we find a glaring black hole—an analysis of the organizing sociological principle of race in academic disciplines and departments. Austin's (2002) heavily cited overview of the graduate experience across 13 disciplines is overwhelmingly white, and there is no analysis of race. In fact, *none* of these sweeping reviews analyze race. Even Lovitts's 2001 book, *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study*, tiptoes around race although the author's central themes revolves around the "invisible problem" (the persistent 50 percent dropout rate). Without a race analysis, without a recognition that context matters, without "deeper" data with the voices of those who are marginalized within academia, one comes away with a whitewashed version of the experience of graduate school. The fact is, graduate students training in the "same discipline" do not all face the "same discipline" similarly, and graduate students studying within the "same department" do not all face the "same department" the same way. Certainly, when one looks at the studies that have centered on the experiences of graduate students of color, we find a different story.

THE COLOR OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

In M. S. Anderson's (1998) widely hailed volume, *The Experiences of Being in Graduate School: An Exploration*, there is no mention of graduate students' positionalities besides their own graduate student status. The overview introductory chapter (M. S. Anderson and Swayze 1998) for the volume does not mention race, ethnicity, gender, or any other positionality that may influence the kinds of experiences graduate students have. In fact, there is no engagement with these issues throughout the book—even the chapter on "student experiences" does not touch race. One of the first nationally representative samples that *did* acknowledge race and gender differences in experiences was from the 1999 Survey on Doctoral Education and Career Preparation that culminated in Golde and Dore's 2001 Pew Report, *At Cross Purposes: What the Experiences of Doctoral Students Reveal about Doctoral Education.* A massive endeavor that boasted a sample of 4,000 students across 27 universities and 11 disciplines (sociology was one), that report highlighted two primary findings: (1) The training graduate students get is not what they wanted or what they needed, and (2) a large proportion of students do not understand how to navigate the doctoral process effectively. Ok, this much we know—but what about race? A very small section, called "The Diversity Dilemma," represents their "race analysis." It focuses on the data that show that graduate students of color are less likely than white students to desire faculty careers in their discipline, in academia (58.4 percent vs. 62.4 percent). Their conclusion:

> These findings highlight, among other things, a profound dilemma. On the one hand, it is important to diversify the professoriate. There are too few faculty of color in all disciplines, and too few women in many fields. Our data suggest that the professoriate, particularly at research universities, where they are least well represented, is unappealing to women and students of color. It seems one solution, then, would be to both encourage more underrepresented students to consider faculty careers and to provide the additional supports and changes to make the profession more attractive. On the other hand, the number of students—of all ethnicities, national origin, and genders—desiring faculty positions is far greater than the available academic positions. The obvious solution to this problem is both to reduce the number of doctoral recipients and to encourage them to consider careers outside of academia. (P.)

Perhaps there is something else going on here related to what it might be like to swim, tread, or drown in

the white waters of academia? In a more recent systematic meta-review of 116 peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 1970 and 2008 on undergraduate and graduate women of color in STEM fields published in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Ong et al. (2011) found that the initial years of graduate school are a critical part of women of color's success—six elements are key: funding, mentorship and role models, graduate training and networks, faculty influences, faculty support, and the disciplinary and departmental climate. In their review, important because of its scope, its sample (STEM fields are very white spaces), and its focus on women of color, the authors find that the overwhelming experiences for these women over the past four decades has been one of isolation, racism, sexism, and problematic relations with faculty and peers—largely emanating from male peers and faculty (see also MacLachlan 2006) and *more* important than funding, departmental composition, and assistantships. Cole and Espinoza (2008) found very similar results for Latino graduate students in STEM fields. Looking at the literature, we find at least several thematic ways that "the experience" of graduate school is not the same for graduate students of color: (1) racism, discrimination, and racial microaggressions; (2) isolation and lack of integration and belonging; (3) mental health, stress, identity, and coping; and of course, (4) lack of mentoring.

Racism, Discrimination, and Racial Microaggressions

The literature makes one thing very clear: Graduate students of color face racism, discrimination, and daily microaggressions within their departments. Clark and colleagues (2012) looked at 400 school psychology graduate students and compared the experiences of majority and minority students' academic, social, and emotional experiences. The key element in these experiences was racial microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007). Students of color mention assumptions of criminality, treatment as a second-class citizen, underestimation of personal ability, and cultural/racial isolation (Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow 2010). Such findings have been detailed for African American (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007), Latina/o (Yosso et al. 2009), and Asian (Hwang and Goto 2008) students. Indeed, minority graduate students engage daily in active coping mechanisms to minimize the effects of such microaggressions. Scholars have also found that minority students are more likely to state that their departments are less equitable, with problematic and often hostile departmental climates as well as narratives of discriminatory practices (Solem et al. 2009; Turner and Thompson 1993). The career trajectories of scholars of color are deeply impacted by the existence of racism, discrimination, and microaggressions at every stage of the path, and graduate school is a very important moment (Solorzano 1998).

Integration, Belonging, and Isolation

Such disciplinary and departmental as well as campus and community structures for graduate students of color clearly led to various manifestations of isolation, a lack of supportive social integration, and an overall sense that one's body, one's experiences, and one's ideas do not belong. Gay (2004) found that minority graduate students often faced social, cultural, and intellectual isolation as well as benign neglect in their departments. In a fairly early study (resting on decades of, importantly, unpublished dissertation work in the area), Solorzano (1998), using a critical race theory lens to look at 12 Chicano/a Ford Foundation Predoctoral, Dissertation, and Postdoctoral Minority Fellows, found that these scholars consistently described feeling "out of place" in the academy because of their race and/or gender (for the Black experience, see Gasman, Hirschfeld, and Vultaggio 2008). While a supportive community is vitally important for success for everyone, it is deeply vital for graduate students of color; though, according to the literature, it is in a woefully inadequate supply for them.

Mental Health, Health, Identity, and Coping

Torres et al. (2010) looked at the effect of racial microaggressions on African American doctoral students' mental health and found that active/daily microaggressions faced by these students led to increased depressive symptoms and poorer mental health. Clark and colleagues (2012) found high levels of "negative race-related experiences" that led to higher emotional distress and weakened sense of belonging for minority students. These paths also led to less academic engagement and difficulties in completing their programs. Such experiences also significantly impact well-being and performance (Hyun et al. 2007). For example, Misra and Castillo (2004) argue that stress is a cultural reinforcement of competition for Americans whereas many international students come from cultures of communalism and cooperation. A similar argument has been made about students from communities of color. As a coping strategy, among many, much of

the literature finds evidence of a "fractured self" developing—a scientist identity and a social identity (Ong et al. 2011) or an identity within the department and one without (Joseph 2007). Hence, many students of color must deal with an ongoing, daily, active reality of double consciousness.

Faculty Support and Mentoring

One of the key elements in the experiences of graduate students of color is the disconnect between the importance of mentoring in graduate school and the lack of mentoring for students of color. In an early study, Turner and Thompson (1993), looking at the socialization experiences of minority women in graduate school, found very weak mentoring, problematic perception of departmental climates, and experiences of discrimination. Other research (Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove 2013) finds that students complete graduate school at higher rates and more quickly if, and only if, their advisor is supportive, they feel a sense of belonging, and they have a high academic self-concept—they cite a mountain of evidence of the importance of the advisor/advisee relationship and the role of mentoring. Mentorship for women of color in graduate school is rare but tremendously valuable (Brown 2000) and is vital (Gasman et al. 2008) for graduate students of color across all disciplines. However, graduate students of color consistently share their experiences that bear witness to the lack of this fundamental building block of academic socialization and success. In fact, according to Spalter-Roth and Erskine (2007:6):

> When asked in an ASA survey of newly minted Ph.D.'s whether or not they received faculty help in publishing, the key measure of academic productivity, there were statistically significant differences among race and ethnic groups. Only 33 percent of African Americans and 36 percent of Hispanics answered in the affirmative compared to 56 percent of whites and 48 percent of Asians. This finding is important for understanding later career leakage since graduate school and early career productivity has long-term implications for academic careers.

It is to this fundamental experience that we now turn.

MENTORING: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

> In order to be a mentor, and an effective one, one must care. You must care. You don't have to know how many square miles are in Idaho, you don't need to know what is the chemical makeup of chemistry, or of blood or water. Know what you know and care about the person, care about what you know and care about the person you're sharing with. (Maya Angelou[1])

Thus far, we have covered some of the major hurdles faced by graduate students in their experiences in the academy. According to most research on the subject, these experiences vary by departmental culture and resources as well as student demographics and academic life histories. Within sociology specifically, we find that graduate student experiences are less satisfactory in comparison to other social science and science fields. Related to concerns about their career trajectories, graduate students in sociology departments often felt less connected to their departments and less engaged in community professionalism that encouraged collaborative research. Graduate students of color face similar experiences as their white counterparts but must additionally deal with structural and systemic racism within higher education and in the larger society as well as the day-to-day racial microaggressions. Given the data on experiences of graduate students, and in particular graduate students of color, what do we know about the mentoring process for them?

The Importance of Mentoring

Although mentoring is not the only variable that explains graduate student success, it plays a major role in determining the likelihood of success in a graduate program, landing a job in the academy, and earning tenure and/or being in a position that offers long-term job security. So, what exactly do we know about mentoring? In general, extant research on the subject highlights that strong mentorship positively correlates to increased productivity, self-efficacy, and career satisfaction (Baker and Griffin 2010; Dawson 2014). Indeed, students who are mentored, in general, report positive mentoring as *the* most important factor in achieving end goals such as degree attainment (Pfund et al. 2016). Such students are more likely to publish their research, are more optimistic about their career prospects, report higher career satisfaction, and feel better about the support they received during their graduate years. On the other hand, a group of psychology scholars found that while mentoring "is associated with a wide range of favorable behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career

outcomes," the effect size is small (Eby et al. 2008:254). However, they also noted that larger effect sizes were found for academic and workplace mentoring. The bottom line is that mentoring matters; in the academic world, it matters a lot.

What Makes a Good Mentor?

According to *Best Practices in HR* (Courtesy of The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership and the Business and Legal Reports, Inc 1999), being a mentor does not require a special skill set. Rather, mentors possess qualities typical of any good role model. These qualities include characteristics such as being a good listener, being a guide rather than an enforcer, being accessible, being supportive and caring, and even being practical. In a 2014 article published by *Forbes*, E. Anderson suggested that there were five main qualities one should look for when seeking a good mentor: curiosity, discretion, generosity of spirit, honesty, and self-reflection. Possessing these five characteristics can mean the difference between having a good mentor or having a great mentor. Noy and Ray (2012) describe six advisor types that they label as: affective (therapist), instrumental (practical), intellectual (feedback), available (helpful), respectful (interpersonal), and exploitative (abusive). They note that with the exception of the latter, each of these advisor types provides different levels or forms of support for graduate students. Baker and Griffen (2010) argue that mentorship are emotional commitments that extend beyond the mechanical and often impersonal specifics of obtaining one's advanced degree in higher education. Good mentorship involves long-term caring toward a mentee's personal and professional development (Schnaiberg 2005). Hence, great mentoring goes beyond helping students to graduate; it involves helping students to develop their confidence, teaching, networks, and long-term career ambitions. Learning is a social process that requires commitment and attention throughout a student's career. To that end, Baker and Griffin (2010) advocate for faculty to include in their roles that of "developer." The idea here is for faculty to attend to their student's future outcomes as a long-term strategy or goal. Thus, the foundation for successful mentoring lies in the formation of a sustained relationship between mentor and mentee.

Further, there are data that suggest that good mentorship impacts both mentees and mentors in that both parties are able to reap some of the benefits discussed previously, in particular, increased productivity (Pfund et al. 2016; Thomas, Willis, and Davis 2007). Mentors, and good mentors in particular, are able to develop leadership skills, contribute to their respected fields, and tap into future networks (Holloway 2001; Huhman 2011).

Reasons to Explain Bad or Mediocre Mentoring

Given the plethora of data that argues for the need for better mentoring, what do we know about current limitations of graduate student mentoring in academia? Our reading of the literature provides a handful of reasons to explain the continued lack of good mentoring in higher education: careerism/time constraints, narcissism/conflicts of interest, poor training, and department culture and/or other structural explanations. We expand on these reasons in the following.

- Careerism/time constraints—Faculty today face new demands on their time. In addition to growing service demands (e.g., service to the department, college, university, discipline, etc.), there are also increased demands for faculty to be hyper-productive in their research, grant writing, publishing, and even teaching. Such demands place time constraints on mentoring (Williams, Thakore, and McGee 2016a).
- Narcissism/conflicts of interest—Faculty may or may not be interested in serving as mentors, or they might have conflicts of interest. Such conflicts of interest may include navigating between their own research or grant-writing interests and students' career interests, but it may also include the dilemma of competing with their students on the job market, for example. Some faculty may look at mentoring as important only insofar as it helps to promote their public image as a good Samaritan (i.e., savior complex; Kardos and Johnson 2010; Williams et al. 2016a).
- Poor training—Sociology, and most academic fields in general, offers little training (if any) on *how* to be good mentors. We talk a lot about how important mentoring is yet spend very few resources on developing or professionalizing good mentors. Thus, many faculty are clueless about what it means to be a good mentor and where to get information that will help them to become better mentors (Holloway 2001; Thomas et al. 2007).

- Department culture or other structural issues—Our disciplines and university, college, and academic environments are built around tenure and advancement policies and practices that privilege research productivity over student interactions. This creates an environment of learning and training that is less conducive to mentoring and student demands and/or needs (Schnaiberg 2005). There may also be some disconnect between the academic needs of students versus the realities of what departments are able to offer. For example, students wanting to engage in fields of study in departments that do not offer expertise in those fields may find themselves at a disadvantage. Similarly, departments that claim to offer unusually large areas of study may find themselves unable to collectively offer guidance to students looking to become experts in particular areas of interest.

We do not claim the aforementioned reasons to be the only reasons that explain why bad or inadequate mentorship persists in higher education. Rather, we offer them as some of the larger points that have come up in our review of the literature on mentoring in general.

On Matters of Race and Racism

When it comes to mentoring students of color in higher education, the data are clear. Underrepresented minorities in academia do not receive good mentorship in comparison to their white counterparts (Noy and Ray 2012; Segura et al. 2011; Spalter-Roth et al. 2013). They are less likely to receive adequate support for their research, be taken seriously as academic scholars, and be included in collaborative projects with faculty and even their white peers. Further, students of color often exist in racial isolation in their departments, colleges, and universities. Although some scholars have found that ethnic or racial matches between mentors and mentees are not necessary for building effective relationships (Burney et al. 2005), we also know that students of color seek out faculty of color mentors who are able to better relate to their racial experiences, off or on campus and/or throughout their life course (Thomas et al. 2007). Yet, there are also data that suggest that students of color, when properly mentored, are able to reap the rewards that stem from that mentorship (Dixon-Reeves 2003). So what explains the general lack of mentorship for students of color in higher education?

- Lack of faculty of color in higher education—According to a number of scholars (Thakore et al. 2014; Thomas et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2016b), there is a dearth of faculty of color in academia, especially in the sciences and social sciences. There are, of course, reasons to explain why departments, particularly in places labeled Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs), lack adequate representation of faculty of color. Even though departments may espouse a desire for diversity, there is little to indicate any serious attempts to recruit or retain faculty of color (see Embrick and Rice 2010). According to Gasman (2016), departments do not want faculty of color. Of course, excuses abound as to why departments do not hire minority faculty (e.g., they are not qualified—namely, they did not get mentored by a prominent "white" person in the field). Gasman notes that such explanations are a product of racialized thinking (see the third reason listed in the following—racism).
- Lack of students of color in higher education—Being the only student of color (or one of a few) in a program comes with both physical and mental costs. According to Segura et al. (2011:28), the perception by students of color that white students enjoy advantages in graduate school is grounded historically and in social interaction. Historically students of color have had unequal access to economic, social, and political resources including the graduate education and the professoriate. Perceptions by white students that students of color enjoy discriminatory advantages in access to, and resources within graduate school may be accurate or may reflect resistance by some of these students to acknowledge white privilege.
- In fact, Yosso et al. (2004:7) define this dynamic as "a system of advantage resulting from a legacy of racism and benefiting individuals and groups on the basis of whiteness."
- Racism—While a number of explanations have surfaced to explain lack of mentorship for students of color in higher education, less discussed are issues of individual prejudice and discrimination and structural/institutional racism. Students of color consistently deal with everyday racial microaggressions that range from being the target of

stereotypes to being ignored. Further, students of color who hope to become future race scholars have to deal with a discipline that routinely treats sociology of race and ethnicity as second-class sociology (see James and Valluvan 2014).

HOW CAN WE CLEAR THE MURKY WATERS OF ACADEMIA? PAVING THE WAY TOWARD BETTER MENTORING

What can faculty mentors and mentees do to address the inadequate mentoring of graduate students of color? What can departments do to support them? Mentors should recognize that there is often a large difference between instrumental (focused on research, teaching, and other professional success) and psychosocial (focused on building confidence and emotional well-being) mentoring and the fact that these efforts may need to come from multiple people. And these multiple people may not necessarily be in the same department or even in the same institution and can be from various career stages. Spalter-Roth et al. (2013) described mentoring in the context of individual versus communal relationships, another way of categorizing these two types.

Mentees may seek out mentoring from faculty of similar backgrounds to them, broadly defined but often based on race, ethnicity, gender, or another status. While this is not a wholescale solution to all mentoring concerns, it is understandable in certain contexts because of the experiences described in our review of the aforementioned extant literature. Departments and the potential mentors within their halls must realize that both the aforementioned types of mentoring are necessary for success in the academic world because the rules (formal and informal) of professional socialization impact students differently based on identity, social capital, and networks. The formation and encouragement of professional networks and scholarly ties is one of the most important aspects of mentoring—introducing students to potential future colleagues and even evaluators—for jobs, tenure and promotion, awards, and research funding. Mentors should also see mentoring as multilayered; that is, they might encourage advanced students to help with early-stage ones (this is true not just for graduate students but for undergraduates as well). Ultimately, the first years of graduate school and the mentoring that is received is more important than the first faculty position for scholars of color (Austin 2002).

For departments and especially department chairs, it is important to encourage, train for, and expect excellent mentoring; recognize good mentoring; reward it publicly and privately; and also prepare mentors to interact with diverse populations of mentees. Departments have to make resources of all types available to mentors to make mentors want to invest their time and effort. These resources can be financial or temporal, but in either case, mentors should be encouraged to do both in-person and virtual mentoring on a regular basis—as a central part of their jobs as professional faculty members. Departments should also connect mentoring with other aspects of daily and weekly life, including the graduate curriculum, student culture and climate, the recruitment of new graduate students of color, and the support of graduate students who teach their own classes. This last aspect is not trivial because graduate students of color often find themselves teaching about race and ethnicity or dealing with students who have not had teachers of color in the classroom.

As an example of departmental initiatives, for eight years during the 1990s, with funding from the Ford Foundation, ASA ran the innovative Minority Opportunities through School Transformation (MOST) Program for undergraduate sociology departments. MOST was built on the premise that progress toward greater inclusiveness requires an intentional, academic department–wide commitment to change. Eighteen departments of sociology were competitively selected by ASA to participate in MOST. They were PhD-granting institutions, MA-granting institutions, and BA-only institutions. Within these departments, creative changes were made in four areas: curriculum (increasing research experience and quantitative competency; integrating substantive studies of race, ethnicity, class, and gender throughout the curriculum; etc.), mentoring (enhancing social and intellectual skills, developing commitment to education and professional identity), climate (creating a departmental climate sensitive to issues of diversity and multiculturalism), and pipeline (committing as a department to increase the number of scholars of color throughout the academic pipeline and preparing minority students for future leadership roles in the academy or beyond). The results of the MOST Program were stunning (Levine, Rodriguez, and Howery 2002) and could be implemented at the graduate level with attention paid to the mentoring structures described previously—if departments in

our discipline did their part here, we could see exciting results for the discipline writ large and for our students and colleagues of color whose continued marginalization is unacceptable.

THE WHITE WATERS OF ACADEMIA

In 1998, a significant paper was published in the *Harvard Educational Review* by sociologists Eric Margolis and Mary Romero—a qualitative look at how the hidden curriculum worked for minority women of color in sociology PhD programs, growing out of the Social Issues Committee of the organization Sociologists for Women in Society. They found both weak and strong forms of the hidden curriculum. There are the weak forms:

> The absence of formal structures to assure that mentoring takes place leaves students to develop their own resources. This may have been appropriate when graduate education was essentially middle-class White males teaching other middle-class White males. At that time a certain homogeneity of cultural capital could be assumed, and if a student could not marshal that capital to network, find a mentor, and compete vigorously for a position, one might conclude that the "bizarre" student would not make a good sociologist. The old model implied "reproduction" of sociologists and mainstream sociology. This message was embedded in the everyday experiences of the women we interviewed: the "ideal type" of sociologist is a European American, heterosexual, middle-class male. White males, fathers of the discipline, became established historically as the ideal type, and this is maintained through various practices, including the exclusion of others. (Margolis and Romero 1998:10–11)

Then there are the strong forms of the hidden curriculum: "stigmatization, blaming the victim, cooling out, stereotyping, absence, silence, exclusion, and tracking" (Margolis and Romero 1998:12–14). These were painfully documented by Margolis and Romero then and are painfully experienced by graduate students of color now. Ultimately, here we stand, almost 20 years later, and not much has changed. Indeed, as of this writing, a Black, male, PhD candidate in sociology at Northwestern University, William J. Richardson, has initiated a Twitter campaign, not unlike the many campaigns before it, calling on his academic brothers and sisters to tweet and share their experiences of racism in the academy with the hashtag #TheseAcademicHands (Zamudio-Suarez 2016). The response has been quite overwhelming—we should be listening.

There is an irony in stating that sociology is a discipline that attracts members of historically underrepresented groups and yet identifying a disciplinary problem with regard to the recruitment and retention of graduate students of color. Sociology is deemed to be better than some disciplines with regard to recruitment and retention of graduate students of color but given its large base of graduating majors could also do more to assure representation and more importantly, career success—the graduate student experience is fundamentally central to this endeavor. Sociology also has much to offer with regard to providing substantive and methodological support to other disciplines (both within and outside of the social and behavioral sciences) as they assess their own mentoring efforts; however, we must also take an honest look at the waters of our own discipline and each of our part in the ways that we individually and our departments collectively structure the experience of graduate training where some students swim freely, others tread perilously, and still others drown.

As such, we need a sustained effort to serve and support minority and underrepresented minority graduate students. We need to be intentional about this. We need to ask the tough questions. We need to deal with the daily realities that our students face in our classrooms, our departments, our offices, on our campuses, and in our communities. The epistemological, theoretical, methodological, empirical, pedagogical, and engaged public outreach benefit of creating such support on the discipline is immense. We need to research these experiences in sociology. We need to recognize and support efforts like the Latina/o Criminology Working Group, the Preparing Future Faculty Program, the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, and the ASA Minority Fellowship Program as well as other successful organizations, initiatives, and networks. We invite readers to honestly consider what the discipline would look like if it were not for programs like the MFP. We also invite readers to consider what the discipline is going to look like without a revolution in graduate mentoring in sociology.

NOTE

1. For more information, see: https://sites.sph.harvard.edu/wmy/celebrities/maya-angelou/ (Harvard T.H. Chan. School of Public Health).

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

David L. Brunsma is professor of sociology at Virginia Tech. He is currently executive officer of the Southern Sociological Society and Founding Co-Editor of *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*.

David G. Embrick is associate professor in the Sociology Department and Africana Studies Institute at the University of Connecticut. Formerly, he spent a decade at Loyola University Chicago. He received his PhD from Texas A&M University in 2006. He is a former ASA Minority Fellow, Past-President of the Southwestern Sociological Association, and current Vice President-Elect of the Society for the Study of Social Problems and President-Elect of the Association for Humanist Sociology. He also serves as Founding Co-Editor of *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*—the ASA-sponsored journal of the Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities—and Associate Editor of *Social Problems*.

Jean H. Shin is director of the Minority Affairs Program at the American Sociological Association. He joined ASA in 2006 from McDaniel College, where he was Associate professor of sociology and associate dean for first year students. At ASA, he directs the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) and provides support for the Honors Program, Student Forum, and High School Sociology Program. A founding member of the Collaborative to Enhance Diversity in Science (CEDS), he has also been a co-PI on NSF-funded projects studying the links between teaching innovation and social networks as well as the impact of mentoring on early-career faculty.