

# Barriers to the Successful Mentoring of Faculty of Color

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## Abstract

Mentoring is important for career success and has been suggested to promote the advancement of faculty of color (FOC). However, some mentoring experiences may be negative and impede faculty's success. Building upon social cognitive career theory (SCCT), the current study examines whether FOC perceive challenges around receiving mentoring and applies an intersectional lens to assess whether these challenges vary by race/ethnicity and gender. We interviewed 118 tenure-track FOC from a predominantly White, research-intensive institution. We found that FOC experienced four mentoring challenges: negative mentoring experiences, difficulty finding mentors, insufficient institutional support for formal mentoring, and lack of post-tenure mentorship among tenured faculty. We also found that Black and Latinx women were most likely to describe barriers to mentoring whereas Asian and Black men reported the fewest. We discuss the implications of our findings within the framework of SCCT, along with potential interventions that may increase positive mentoring experiences for FOC.

## Keywords

mentoring, faculty of color, higher education, diversity, mentoring challenges

Mentorship is a relationship between a senior and junior colleague that focuses on the career development (e.g., networking, coaching, skill development) and/or psychosocial support (e.g., counseling, being a role model) of the mentee (Bearman et al., 2008; Young & Perrewé, 2000). This relationship can be formal, in that the organization is involved in establishing or supporting the mentoring relationship, or informal, in that the relationship is chosen voluntarily by the mentor and mentee (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentoring is related to a number of positive outcomes (Johnson et al., 2018; León & Thomas, 2016; Loveless-Morris & Reid, 2018), and as a result, institutions have increasingly sought to formalize mentoring as a means of increasing faculty diversity.

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Like any other relationship, mentoring relationships are inherently shaped by power dynamics, in that there is a power differential between the mentor and mentee. As a result, there are often disparities in access to mentoring, such that people of color receive less mentorship (Bova, 2000). Further, mentoring is not always helpful and, in fact, may constitute negative mentoring, which is broadly defined as incidents and mentor characteristics that diminish the quality of the mentoring relationship (Eby et al., 2000). Individuals experiencing negative mentoring are not only hindered from accessing the benefits of mentoring (e.g., institutional and social support; Cole et al., 2017) but also report psychological distress and negative workplace attitudes (Eby et al., 2004; Ragins et al., 2000). A lack of mentoring, negative mentoring, and other mentoring challenges may therefore undermine the long-term success of faculty of color (FOC),<sup>1</sup> to the detriment of faculty diversification efforts. To that end, the current qualitative study sought to explore what, if any, mentoring challenges are reported by FOC and to investigate whether there are barriers to FOC's establishment of positive mentoring relationships. We approach this area of inquiry using the social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 2000) as a theoretical framework, and intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991) as an analytic framework, to understand unequal access to quality mentorship based on race/ethnicity and gender. Our findings have the potential to advance our understanding of the barriers that specific groups of faculty (e.g., Latinx women) may experience in their mentoring relationships and thus lend themselves to the development of meaningful mentoring interventions.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

The SCCT (Lent et al., 2000) has been used to understand the psychology behind the race/ethnicity and gender disparities we see in different occupations. Initially, SCCT proposed that cognitive-person variables, such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations, were the primary factors that influenced an individual's workplace outcomes (Lent et al., 2000). In later versions of the theory, contextual influences (e.g., physical attributes of the individual and environmental features) were theorized to be influential to career outcomes as well, as they have been found to have a reciprocal relationship with the cognitive-person variables (e.g., context and self-efficacy can shape each other).

Within the SCCT framework, access to mentorship has been conceptualized as a contextual factor that can influence outcomes for women and underrepresented minorities in the workplace (Bernstein, 2011; Fouad & Santana, 2017; Nolan et al., 2008)—thus, in the current study, we focus on mentorship as one consequential aspect of individuals' workplace context. Research finds that good mentors act as role models, support mentees in identifying their goals, and can share information about their specific work environment (Austin & Nauta, 2016). Without this support, an individual's potential for success is inhibited; for instance, Fouad and colleagues (2016) found that women who did not have access to a mentor were more likely to leave the workforce than women who did have mentorship. Thus, understanding the barriers that FOC experience in obtaining quality mentorship is essential to the advancement and retention of these underrepresented communities.

Women of color, marginalized in both race/ethnicity and gender, may be especially at risk of being denied quality mentorship. As a result, we use an intersectional lens in our analysis (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991) to consider how experiences of mentoring and access to mentoring may differ based on race/ethnicity and gender among FOC. Intersectionality centers the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups with the goal of social justice and equity (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017) and interrogates how systems of inequality work together to affect a person's experience (Collins, 2000). For FOC, racism, sexism, classism, and other systems of inequality shape their experience of academia, including those related to mentoring. As a result, in our analysis, we consider FOC holistically as a marginalized group within academia and also examine the ways in which mentoring experiences likely vary within the group "FOC," who are diverse along a number of dimensions of social identity. In our analysis, we take advantage of our large sample of 118 FOC to examine how social location based on

race/ethnicity and gender may differentially shape mentoring experiences. Finally, consistent with the call by Collins and Bilge (2016) to integrate critical inquiry with critical praxis, we offer practical suggestions to improve mentoring of FOC based on our findings.

### Negative Mentoring

Despite the numerous benefits associated with positive mentoring, research suggests that 50% of employees report having at least one negative mentoring experience during their career (Eby et al., 2000). Negative mentoring is defined as “specific incidents that occur between mentors and mentees, mentors’ characteristic manner of interacting with mentees, or mentors’ characteristics that limit their ability to effectively provide guidance to mentees” (Eby et al., 2000, p. 3). Based on a content analysis of qualitative narratives describing negative mentoring relationships, Eby et al. (2000) created a taxonomy that describes five ways in which negative mentoring typically occurs: (a) *general dysfunctionality*: The mentor has a personal problem or negative attitude; (b) *mismatch within the dyad*: The mentor and mentee differ in their values, workstyles, or personalities; (c) *lack of mentor expertise*: The mentor lacks the job-related knowledge or interpersonal skills to successfully advise their mentees; (d) *manipulative behavior*: The mentor misuses their position of power to take advantage of the mentee; and (e) *distancing behavior*: The mentor neglects or does not adequately fulfill the mentoring role. These specific negative experiences can occur in the context of overall positive mentoring relationships. However, because mentees often stay in the relationship, due to fears of retaliation or an inability to find another mentor (Burk & Eby, 2010), negative experiences may persist.

Negative mentoring experiences are related to many adverse work outcomes, including lower perceptions of support, lower job satisfaction, and higher turnover intentions, as well as psychological distress (Eby et al., 2004; Ragins et al., 2000). Further, in a nationally representative sample of professionals, Ragins et al. (2000) found that those with no mentoring reported more positive job and career outcomes than those with negative mentoring experiences. In other words, those who experienced poor mentoring relationships would have fared better had they received no mentorship at all (Eby et al., 2010). Although Eby and colleagues theorized about negative mentorship in a general organizational context, it is likely that this framework is also applicable to an academic context due to their structural similarities. Universities, like corporate organizations, have a hierarchical power structure, and it is understood that mentees can navigate the hierarchy with support of an individual who has power in that structure. Accordingly, consistent with the extant literature, negative mentoring experiences among FOC may be linked to negative workplace and psychological outcomes.

### Mentoring FOC in Academia

FOC, due to their low numbers and status, experience unique barriers to their career success, including clashes between their cultural values and the values of academia (Sadao, 2003; Turner et al., 2008; Wright et al., 2017), devaluation of their scholarship (Collins, 2000; Settles et al., 2020), exclusion from informal groups and professional networks that provide support (Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Tran, 2014), and discrimination (Zambrana et al., 2017). Mentoring may be an intervention that can offset these marginalizing experiences for FOC. Mentors can provide the mentee with social, professional, and institutional connections; provide access to resources; and increase feelings of belonging and engagement that are key to faculty success (Crawford, 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Thompson, 2008).

However, compared to White employees, employees from racially/ethnically marginalized groups experience more barriers to mentoring and are less likely to be mentored (Viator, 2001). For FOC, a lack of mentoring has been identified as one of several problems undermining their successful recruitment and retention (Turner et al., 1999). Further, even when mentoring takes place, racially/ethnically marginalized individuals are more likely to report negative and lower quality mentoring (Espino &

Zambrana, 2019; Walters et al., 2019). For example, Zambrana et al. (2015) found that although FOC recognized the importance of mentorship in their career, half of the faculty in their sample reported problematic experiences with their mentors, such as paternalistic attitudes, unsupportive behavior, and the devaluation of their research.

This disparity in mentoring quality is especially likely to occur when FOC have a mentor who belongs to a different race/ethnicity and/or gender group (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), perhaps because racial/ethnic similarity between a mentor and mentee can foster positive mentoring relationships (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). For people of color, mentors with a shared racial/ethnic background can facilitate more positive communication (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Smith et al., 2000), and for FOC, they can help to validate their distinct experiences within academia (Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013). However, at predominantly White institutions, FOC are likely to be mentored by someone of a different race/ethnicity (and for women, mentors are also likely to be a different gender in many fields), which may limit the quality of their mentoring (Ponjuan et al., 2011; Tillman, 2001).

When the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender is considered, women of color report even less access to mentorship and support from mentors than other groups (Bova, 2000; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). This may be due to negative stereotypes about their gendered-racial/ethnic group, or from their dissimilarity from both White people and men, who are the majority of senior employees in many workplaces. For instance, studies highlight how stereotypes of Black women as angry and threatening impede the establishment of mentoring relationships (Smith, 1999), and fewer mentoring experiences limit opportunities for both mentors and mentees to understand and appreciate their cultural differences (Bova, 2000). Although there is limited research on mentoring among FOC, existing evidence suggests that they may have more negative mentoring experiences and face barriers to receiving positive mentoring. Drawing upon SCCT theory (Lent et al., 2000), we conceptualize mentoring as integral to the development and advancement of FOC; thus, to draw on the promise of mentoring, our research aims to identify the ways in which it falls short (Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013).

## *The Current Study*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the mentoring challenges reported by FOC. More specifically, our research addresses the following questions: (1) *What are the barriers, if any, to effective mentoring reported by FOC?* and (2) *How may barriers in mentoring differentially emerge among racial/ethnic and gender groups (e.g., Black women and Asian men)?* Most of the existing scholarship in this area focuses on FOC as mentors to students rather than as the mentee (e.g., Griffin & Reddick, 2011). Thus, a contribution of this study is that by focusing exclusively on faculty as mentees, we expand our knowledge about what FOC perceive to be gaps in their own mentoring. A second contribution is that, by focusing on challenges to quality mentoring, our findings may help institutions to better understand why FOC may not be reaping the career benefits associated with positive mentoring (Stanley, 2006; Zambrana et al., 2015). Third, we use an intersectional lens in our analysis, as this approach allows us to pay particular attention to how mentoring experiences may be shaped by the systemic power afforded to individuals depending on their social location (e.g., race/ethnicity and gender; Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Finally, our qualitative methodology enables us to center participants' own experiences and perceptions in our analysis to understand nuances around mentoring challenges.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants were 118 FOC at a large, predominantly White, research-intensive institution who took part in a study of "workplace and work-life experiences." The racial/ethnic composition of faculty

employees at the institution from which our sample was drawn (14% Asian, 5% Black, 4% Latinx/Hispanic, and 0.7% Native American) is comparable to national rates of racial/ethnic minority faculty representation in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). All Black, Latinx, and Native American tenure-track faculty at the university ( $n = 176$ ) were invited to participate and 62 people did so (35% response rate). Because of their larger representation on campus, we employed a stratified sampling method to recruit Asian tenure-track faculty in order to obtain a final sample that varied by gender, nationality (U.S. born or not), and discipline (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics [STEM] or Arts and Humanities). Of the 244 Asian faculty invited to participate, 56 did so (23% response rate).

Overall, nearly half of the participants were women (47.5%), none identified as transgender, and we did not ask about nonbinary gender identification. The racial/ethnic breakdown was 48% Asian ( $n = 56$ ), 25% Black ( $n = 30$ ), 22% Latinx ( $n = 26$ ), and 5% Native American ( $n = 6$ ).<sup>2</sup> Just under half of the participants were born in the United States ( $n = 53$ , 45%), and there was fairly equal distribution across the academic ranks of assistant professor ( $n = 42$ , 35.6%), associate professor ( $n = 35$ , 29.7%), and full professor ( $n = 41$ , 34.7%). In terms of broad discipline, just over a third ( $n = 42$ , 36%) were from arts and humanities and the remainder ( $n = 76$ , 64%) were in STEM-related fields, such as natural sciences, social sciences, and agriculture and natural resources. Most participants were married ( $n = 87$ , 73.7%) and had children ( $n = 84$ , 71.2%), with an average of 2.01 ( $SD = .96$ ) children.

## Procedures

We conducted 1–2-hr, semistructured, individual interviews with participants regarding a variety of faculty work environments and work–life experiences. Interview questions were developed based on the extant literature on the work experiences of FOC and included areas of interest to the university, which included mentoring. The broader protocol asked questions about perceptions of campus policies (e.g., promotion and tenure), the climate within the department, and areas of job (dis)satisfaction. The section of the interview about mentoring asked about the presence of a formal or informal mentor (defined as “someone who gives you advice, offers support, advocates for you, etc. even if their role is not official”), mentor effectiveness, characteristics of a good mentor, mentoring across identities (e.g., race, gender), what type of mentoring was desired, and what type of mentoring would be most helpful in their career. At the time of the study, the institution was in the process of implementing a requirement for departments to develop a formal mentoring program for all assistant professors. As a result, there is variability in whether our participants were in departments with formal mentoring programs, what departmental formal mentoring programs entailed if they had one, and whether each participant had received formal mentoring.

To ensure their privacy and comfort, interviews were conducted at a location chosen by participants; most often, this was the faculty member’s office. Interviewers were primarily graduate students, most of whom had experience with interviewing and qualitative methods, and they were matched with the participants along race/ethnicity and gender. Graduate student interviewers were used because we felt their limited evaluative power over faculty would make participants more comfortable disclosing their workplace experiences (see Settles et al., 2020, for more details on the use of graduate student interviewers). However, seven participants chose to have a faculty interviewer, which was an option offered to all participants.

The third author trained interviewers on the study procedure and interviewing best practices. The training covered how to build rapport and trust and encourage candid communication through empathic, attentive listening, thoughtful probing of responses to yield more detail and elaboration, and an approach that is friendly and collaborative. It also discussed how to manage challenges that might arise, such as allowing participants to skip questions they prefer not to answer and being sensitive when participants display strong emotions. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’

permission. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim, transcripts of the recordings were checked, and then identifying information was removed from the transcript. Three participants did not wish to have their interviews recorded, so the interviewers' notes were used as data in the study.

### *Methodology and Data Analysis*

The current study sought to examine the mentoring experiences of FOC and thus employed methods informed by a constructivist worldview and phenomenological approach. Constructivism "seeks to theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). We paired this worldview with a phenomenological approach (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), which is a design of inquiry centered on examining individuals' experiences with a phenomenon. We selected this approach as it was our aim to gain a broad understanding of faculty experiences with mentoring and not an in-depth perspective of one faculty experience (e.g., ethnography). With this worldview and approach in mind, we initiated our study with the assumption that faculty perceptions of mentoring would be diverse and shaped by context (e.g., racial/ethnic and gender social positioning) and aimed to cohere narratives that reflect their general experiences of this phenomenon.

To analyze our data, we used thematic analysis, which is a data-driven strategy for extracting and organizing patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although the large amount of data extracted in the current study may be considered a barrier to the synthesis of themes (Sandelowski, 1995), in this instance, we found the large data set beneficial in ensuring we reached data saturation and had sufficient data to conduct an intersectional analysis across racial/ethnic and gender groups. Prior to analysis, all data for the study were transferred into NVIVO, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Then, nine coders (the third author and eight graduate students in education and social sciences) read the interviews and began analysis.

Analysis involved several steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). We first engaged in open coding, looking for meaning in each sentence or phrase, to generate initial codes. Next, we searched for codes that had similar meanings and organized them into themes that encompassed their overall meaning. Finally, we refined the themes by combining similar codes and organizing them into higher order themes that represented abstract connections between the general themes. We tracked the development of codes and themes in a coding manual and met weekly to refine the themes and to discuss disagreements in the interpretation of interviews. Prior to establishing the final themes, we reviewed them to ensure that all the data were captured, each theme was sufficient as a standalone theme, and there was little to no conceptual overlap between themes; we also revisited the labeling of the final themes in consideration of previous literature and specifically the Eby et al. (2000) negative mentoring framework. Once completed, we performed an intersectional analysis that involved examining the frequency of themes across racial/ethnic–gender groups.

The authors of this study are four Black women in academia, and we acknowledge that our own positionality may affect our interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005). Because of our insider position, we are especially able to understand our participants' academic experiences; yet we might interpret the findings through the lens of our own experiences. Further, because we are all Black women, we know less about the experiences that are unique to faculty groups of which we are not members (e.g., Native American faculty). Accordingly, we bracketed our perspective (Gearing, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), meaning that we set aside our preexisting knowledge and assumptions with the intention of focusing on faculty accounts of mentoring with an open mind. We established trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) by having two team members code each transcript until coding agreement was met, keeping an audit trail that detailed each step of the study and noted any significant decisions that we made, and soliciting feedback from the participants by presenting the findings widely throughout the university.

## Findings

Our findings examined themes related to our research questions: What are the barriers, if any, to effective mentoring reported by FOC? How may barriers in mentoring differentially emerge among racial/ethnic and gender groups? Four themes emerged that related to challenges experienced by FOC: (1) negative mentoring, (2) difficulty finding mentors, (3) insufficient institutional support, and (4) lack of post-tenure mentoring (which was specific to tenured faculty). The themes (see Table 1 for theme definitions and examples) are reported in conceptual order rather than by the frequency of endorsement. We illustrate the themes with quotations from participants, but to protect their anonymity, we provide only an identification number, the speaker's gender, and their broad racial/ethnic group—either underrepresented minority (URM; Black, Latinx, or Native American) or Asian. Interestingly, although most of the discussion of mentoring challenges were about the participant's own mentoring experiences, occasionally their discussion was more abstract and presented in the third-person or described experiences they observed with other FOC. We include all of these responses in our analysis, because, consistent with our phenomenological approach, they reflect participants' perceptions of the ways in which mentoring is experienced by FOC.

### Negative Mentoring

Participants in our sample reported experiences that were consistent with the five dimensions of negative mentoring proposed by Eby et al. (2000). *Distancing* experiences occurred when the mentors neglected or did not adequately fulfill the mentoring role, such as when mentors did not provide the assistance they promised to their mentee. Participants noted that these distancing behaviors sometimes slowed their productivity and required them to take assertive steps to ensure that mentoring occurred:

... [M]y committee never met so I thought none of them met. But I started with two other guys ... [a]nd I would hear them talking about the advice the mentoring committee gave to them, that they met with them once a year, and I kept saying, "well my committee's never met." And so, I ended up really forcing my committee to meet after being here three years. (URM woman, ID #41)

Other participants described experiences in which mentoring took place but was problematic because of what transpired during the mentoring. For example, participants mentioned getting poor or conflicting advice, as in this example:

[My mentor] told me years ago, "You don't have to listen to anything anybody says. You just have to get a grant." Like all you have to do is just get a grant. This was in a year in which people were saying, "Never! Don't apply for any funding. Do these papers." ... So you hear these kinds of conflicting things and everybody [has] good intentions, right—they're speaking from their experience. But whose advice do you take? (URM woman, ID #36)

Because our data do not speak to mentors' motives, the reasons for this conflicting advice are unclear. Some participants explicitly named the *lack of expertise* of their mentor as an issue. For instance, one participant was unhappy with the formal mentorship program in their department because they felt some mentors were unqualified to give advice: "[They] have really iffy careers and they've given really crap advice to the junior faculty ... And I think it's really unfortunate because they're giving the junior faculty a lot of really bad advice" (URM woman, ID #16).

Some faculty also perceived *manipulative behaviors* from their mentors. For example, one participant feared that their mentor would discuss their weaknesses with administrators or other individuals with power and as a result said: "I didn't use that particular mentor very well" (Asian woman, ID #13).

**Table 1.** Primary Themes, Definitions, and Exemplar Quotes.

Theme Subtheme	Definition	Example Quote
1. Negative mentoring		
a. Distancing	Mentor neglects or does not adequately fulfill the mentoring role	"I had a paper that was delayed by a few months because somebody was like 'Oh I'll read your draft, that will be no problem,' and then they didn't"
b. Lack of expertise	Mentor lacks expertise to fulfill the mentoring role effectively	"They gave me a mentor who hadn't ever published for a couple of years, and who made it to full professor with publishing articles"
c. Manipulative behaviors	Misuse of mentor power that harms mentee	"[know of other relationships . . . where the mentor is giving the junior faculty member bad advice . . . I think it stems from maybe just bitterness or hidden agendas"
d. Dysfunctionality	Problematic characteristics of the mentor that harm mentoring relationship	"I think there is sometimes a danger of [mentors] who are not being very productive, who have an axe to grind with the department and if you get caught up in that, that's not going to be very useful."
e. Mismatch within the dyad	Differences (based on approach or identities like race, gender, and nationality) between mentor and mentee that create challenges for the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, based on approach or identity differences	"If we speak [foreign language] then we can talk more freely and sometimes in more depth"
2. Difficulty finding mentors	Difficulty in finding and approaching suitable mentors, based on scholarship or identity	"It's taken a little while to build that network because I'm not very good at approaching people and asking them to be mentors"
3. Insufficient institutional support	Insufficient institutional support for formal mentoring and ways to increase such support	"I've gotten advice from plenty of people . . . they have absolutely no idea what my struggles are. I mean they say things that just would never work for me"
4. Lack of posttenure mentoring	Need for mentoring of tenured faculty	"I don't think it's valued and you know, it's an investment and a resource. I think it should be valued more" "I would like to have [mentoring] as an associate professor"

Note. Participants' responses could reflect more than one category of meaning.



Offering reasons for why mentors would do harm, one participant identified subtle sabotage in which their mentor was holding them back because they did not value their scholarship:

Sometimes people who are ineffective [mentors] are ambivalent in really how they feel about you . . . Maybe they think their job is to help you but they don't really think what you do is any good and [as a result] they're not gonna really be very helpful. (URM woman, ID #34)

At times, a negative mentoring relationship was present because of *general mentor dysfunctionality* or problematic characteristics of the mentor. One participant described this as a potential problem particularly with formally appointed mentors: "If the formal system means you're assigned somebody, that person could be racist or sexist . . . and then you're kind of stuck with that person" (URM man, ID #31). Other instances of dysfunction included experiences where the mentor had a difficult personality (e.g., "very quick to lose his temper . . . very demanding" [Asian man, ID #55]).

*Mismatch within the dyad* emerged in a variety of ways within the narratives. For instance, a participant noted that different approaches to the mentoring relationship could create problems:

What I have seen with some of my colleagues with very good intentions is that they, in essence, try to impose a style on the younger faculty that they're mentoring, and a style that works for them. But it might totally clash with somebody else's style and principles and values, and it creates more problems than it solves . . . . (URM man, ID #76)

Other participants described identity-based mismatches, such as when the mentor and mentee differed along race/ethnicity, gender, or nationality. For example, differences in language led some mentees to feel that they could not fully express themselves. Others described that senior scholars, who participants often noted were White people and/or men, were more comfortable mentoring others like them, resulting in less mentoring of FOC, and especially women of color. One participant expanded on this type of mismatch for her as a woman of color when working with male mentors, stating "I think that women of color specifically . . . they treat [us] like we're an exotic commodity, like a strange being . . ." (URM woman, ID #37). Finally, having a mentor who differed in their scholarly approach (e.g., empirical vs. theoretical) could create a mismatch.

### **Difficulty Finding Mentors**

For many participants, finding mentors was a challenge. For some, this was related to figuring out who would be a good mentor and how to end mentoring relationships that are not beneficial: "I had to just pick mentors myself. I therefore assumed the responsibility for deciding whether they were effective or not and moving people in and out of my life as I see them being effective" (URM man, ID #57). For others, the challenge was in approaching individuals to ask them to mentor. One participant said: "We have to approach someone if we wanted mentoring, and I personally do not approach people like that" (Asian woman, ID #49).

The challenge of finding appropriate mentors was also related to the inability to find a mentor with whom they shared an identity. This is related to the aforementioned negative mentoring that occurred due to identity-based mismatches in the dyad, but here the focus was on individuals' desires for identity-matched mentors. This challenge was particularly burdensome for women of color who have multiple underrepresented identities: "I mean I was hoping that I would be met with women [of color] faculty on-campus and they'd serve as mentors and I didn't find that" (URM woman, ID #98). Although some participants described solving this challenge by finding mentors outside of the university (e.g., other faculty they met at conferences), comments reflected individuals' desire for identity-matched mentors within the institution.

### *Insufficient Institutional Support*

The third theme described the participant's desire for formal mentoring and highlighted the value offered by formal mentoring programs. However, participants also described how insufficient institutional support contributed to a lack of formal mentoring:

When I got here I said, "I'd like to [have a] mentor. What's your mentorship program?" "Oh we don't do that," they said. *Now they do!* . . . I was a little disappointed. You know, I think it would be helpful . . . it would be *nice* to have someone I could go to. (URM woman, ID #96, italics represent participant emphasis)

As part of having a formal mentoring program, some participants described the need for institutions to play a continued role in these mentoring activities to ensure that all mentees receive the same benefits of mentoring, regardless of their specific mentor's skill and knowledge:

. . . One mentee will be okay, because they receive all the right faculty [mentors]. But suppose another mentee doesn't receive any [mentors], it's very difficult . . . That's why I say that you need university level train[ing] in mentoring, and . . . have time to invest in [training] and then bring people from the department with specific expertise. (URM woman, ID #73)

An evaluation of the mentors and their mentoring was discussed as a way to counteract the possibility that some people were not assigned good mentors; this could also ensure that when issues such as mentor bias emerge, there is an institutionalized way for the mentee to dissolve that relationship without any repercussions.

In addition to training, some participants stressed the need for institutions to show that mentorship was valued by providing financial resources to support mentoring activities. As one person stated:

I have approached some people but I often feel like it's not as in-depth as I would like, but I think part of the problem there is the time. I think that mentoring is not a rewarded activity. It's something that a lot of senior faculty do on top of everything else. (Asian woman, ID #114)

Resources typically included compensation to mentors for mentoring activities or money being set aside to support different types of mentoring activities, such as conference travel where a mentor would introduce the mentee to important people in the field. Because the people most sought after for mentoring were busy, successful, senior individuals, compensation was perceived as important to offset the additional demands on their time that mentoring required.

### *Lack of Post-tenure Mentoring*

The need for mentoring of tenured faculty was only raised by associate and full professors. It was often tied to their changing work demands, as reflected in this quote: "I definitely think there's this element of 'you're tenured, you don't need mentoring anymore,' which is funny because in many ways, your job changes pretty dramatically when you're tenured" (URM woman, ID #92). Tenured faculty noted that finding mentors at this level is difficult because the pool of mentors at or above your rank is more limited (e.g., ". . . You're already full professor . . . it is difficult to figure out who should mentor you. You're already at the top" [URM man, ID #57]), and because mentoring may be around more specialized issues, such as directing a center or program, or holding other administrative roles.

### *Intersectional Differences Across Themes*

Because mentoring typically involves a relationship between a more senior and a more junior individual, power is inherently involved in the relationship. As a result, we used an intersectional framework (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991), which attends to the role of power linked to individuals' social locations, to consider the types of mentoring experiences faced by faculty from different racial/ethnic-gender groups. Due to differences in status, numeric representation, and marginalization, some groups may experience negative mentoring or specific types of mentoring challenges more than others. Thus, we examined patterns of endorsement across groups. Nevertheless, our group comparisons reflect *relative* differences in rates of endorsement rather than statistical differences. In addition, although our primary focus was on race/ethnicity-gender group differences, because we observed rank differences in endorsement of the need for post-tenure mentoring (only mentioned by tenured faculty), we examined the remaining themes for rank differences; however, none emerged.

In our race/ethnicity-gender group analyses, we present the findings for Native American faculty, but we do not make comparisons between them and other groups because of their small representation within our sample ( $n = 6$ ). Although we were able to recruit one third of the Native American faculty on the campus to participate in the study, when we further examined responses by gender ( $n = 2$  women,  $n = 4$  men), the representativeness of our participants' experiences is unclear. This compromise (presenting intersectional patterns but not making comparisons to other groups) is intended to allow the full inclusion of the experiences of Native American participants while limiting the possibility of our drawing inappropriate conclusions. We found that most of the Native American men reported negative mentoring experiences, and half reported difficulty finding mentors and perceiving insufficient institutional support for formal mentoring. Further, one Native American woman discussed insufficient institutional support for mentoring, but no other themes emerged for the Native American women in our sample. We discuss the possible reasons and implications of these patterns in the discussion.

For the other race/ethnicity-gender groups, we found that overall, Black women and Latinx women were especially likely to describe all four types of mentoring challenges—negative mentoring, difficulty finding mentors, feeling that formal mentoring is insufficiently supported by the institution, and lack of post-tenure mentoring. Asian women and Latinx men had similar patterns of theme endorsement to each other. Both of these groups were likely to report experiences of negative mentoring, but there was more variability around the endorsement of the other three mentoring challenges. In particular, for both groups, there was moderate endorsement of difficulty finding mentors and perceiving insufficient institutional support for formal mentoring. However, the lack of post-tenure mentoring did not emerge for either group. Overall, Black men and Asian men were generally less likely than other groups to report experiencing all of the mentoring challenges with one exception: Among tenured Black male faculty, the lack of post-tenure mentoring emerged for a moderate number of participants.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the current investigation was to examine what, if any, mentoring challenges FOC faced and to assess whether there are specific barriers that these groups experience around establishing positive mentoring relationships. SCCT proposes that contextual factors can affect the success that an individual has in their field, especially when they are an URM within that field (Flores et al., 2017; Fouad & Santana, 2017). Our findings support the emerging literature that examines mentoring as one such contextual factor (Fouad & Santana, 2017); specifically, although many FOC perceived mentoring as an important means of countering experiences of marginalization and promoting career advancement, our participants reported experiencing barriers to receiving supportive mentoring. Further, findings derived from our intersectional analysis suggested that systems of power operate

differently for groups based on their social locations, thereby contributing to disparities in positive mentoring across racial/ethnic–gender groups.

Our first theme indicated that the faculty in our study reported instances of negative mentoring similar to those proposed by Eby et al. (2000). Faculty described being ignored, poorly advised, treated badly, and matched to a mentor who was a poor fit in terms of style, area of scholarship, and/or identity (e.g., language/nationality, race/ethnicity, or gender). These negative experiences may be indicative of how systems of power (e.g., racism and sexism) and inequality manifest within the mentoring relationship. Mentors may engage in negative mentoring and, because of the power they hold, incur little consequence. Yet, for FOC, poor mentoring creates barriers to the support and information necessary for their professional advancement (Zambrana et al., 2015). Further, negative mentoring experiences may also erode faculty members' sense of efficacy and desire to persist in their work environment (e.g., Lent et al., 2000).

Because our study extends the typology delineated by Eby et al. (2000) to the academic context, we found some differences from the original framework. For instance, although we did find mismatch within the dyad, responses from the faculty indicated that in the academic context, the perceived mismatch between mentor and mentee was often related to their having a different cultural background or scholarly interests, in addition to the shared personality or workstyles as posited by Eby et al. (2000). The difference likely emerged because of our focus on FOC, who are especially prone to experiencing mismatches with their mentors due to their underrepresentation in the academy, as this limits their access to mentors with whom they share an identity.

In addition to negative mentoring, several other mentoring challenges emerged, specifically difficulty finding a mentor, insufficient institutional support for mentoring, and a lack of post-tenure mentoring. However, not all mentoring experiences or challenges were of equal concern to all groups of faculty. This is consistent with intersectionality theory, which proposes that experiences of marginalization may depend on one's particular social location (Cole, 2009, Crenshaw, 1991). Overall, Black and Latinx women most frequently reported experiencing all of the barriers to mentoring. This may be because Black and Latinx women are especially underrepresented in the professoriate (NCES, 2018), and their race/ethnicity and gender are both stereotyped as anti-intellectual and unintelligent (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Pittman, 2012; Sue, 2010). Given that most faculty are White and male (NCES, 2018), coupled with people's tendency to be most comfortable with similar others (Byrne, 1961), there may be fewer senior individuals seeking out junior FOC, especially Black and Latinx women, to offer mentorship. It may be that Asian women and Latinx men are able to find more suitable mentors than Black and Latinx women because Asian people and men are perceived to be intelligent (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Sue, 2010). Thus, Asian women and Latinx men faculty may experience privilege along one identity dimension (race and gender, respectively) that facilitates their access to mentoring.

Black and Asian men were less likely than other groups to report barriers to supportive mentoring. Whereas Asian men may benefit from positive stereotypes about both their racial and gender groups (e.g., strong work ethic and intelligence; Wong et al., 2012), and from overrepresentation of their group in academia (NCES, 2018), it is unclear why Black men experienced more positive mentoring. It may be the case, similar to Asian women and Latinx men, that this group experiences some access to effective mentoring due to their gender privilege, despite occupying a devalued racial group. Black men in academia may be seen as an "exception to the rule" for challenging (false) notions of anti-intellectualism applied to Black Americans. For this reason, mentors may perceive Black men as more deserving of their support. Alternatively, Black and Asian men may experience barriers to mentoring but be less willing to discuss them because they perceive mentoring as a weakness or sign of needing help, and male norms proscribe such behaviors (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Finally, although based on a small number of participants, most of the Native American men in our study reported experiencing three of the four mentoring challenges, whereas Native American women only endorsed the lack of institutional support for mentoring. Given that Native American faculty are

so few in number, it is likely that some issues raised by other groups, such as those related to mentor mismatch along race/ethnicity and a lack of shared cultural experiences, are intensified in this population; this assertion is supported in recent work that shows Native American faculty are indeed challenged with difficulties establishing mentoring relationships and experience low-quality mentoring (Walters et al., 2019). Therefore, we hesitate to extrapolate that the low endorsement of mentoring concerns for our two Native American women participants reflects a lack of mentoring challenges for this group, given other research on the challenges Native American women face (Tippeconnic, 2005; Turner, 2002; Walters et al., 2019). Our findings *do* highlight the need for more research on mentoring of Native American faculty and larger numbers of Native American faculty as members of the professoriate.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Although the current study offers an in-depth examination of the mentoring challenges faced by FOC, this study has its limitations. First, faculty were sampled from one large, predominately White, research-intensive public university; therefore, the wider applicability of our findings is unclear. In fact, we cannot determine with certainty whether the findings derived from this study reflect the mentoring challenges reported by FOC more broadly or if instead these are the mentoring challenges specific to FOC at that institution at that time. We expect that there may be variability in the specific types of mentoring challenges that depend on institution type. For instance, faculty at teaching-focused institutions may be able to secure mentoring around general pedagogical issues; however, those who teach about race, gender, inequality, and so on may find it difficult to secure mentoring about teaching those topics. Faculty at minority-serving institutions may find it easier to find mentors who share social identities but may still face barriers related to negative mentoring or post-tenure mentoring. Future researchers should investigate the nuances of mentoring across institution types.

A second limitation is self-selection bias, which may have resulted in faculty with more negative workplace experiences being more inclined to participate in the study than others. To this, we note that the invitation to the study highlighted its focus on “workplace and work–life experiences” among FOC, which might have been perceived as positive *or* negative experiences. Further, our interview protocol asked faculty about both positive and difficult work-related experiences. Third, our definitions of racial/ethnic and gender groups have some limitations. Specifically, our study did not assess nonbinary gender identification and, in doing so, reproduces false perceptions of gender as dichotomous. Considering previous research (Brassel et al., 2020) and intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991), it is likely that individuals outside the binary (e.g., gender nonconforming individuals) may experience even more challenges to accessing effective mentoring. Additionally, our definition of “FOC” included both racial and ethnic minorities, which limits our ability to disentangle effects along these dimensions (e.g., unique experiences of Latinx faculty who are racially White). As such, future research on these issues is also needed.

Fourth, our study took place during a time when the institution was transitioning into universal formal mentoring for assistant professors. Because departments were developing and discussing formal mentoring, participants may have been considering how institutions could best support faculty mentoring prior to our study. This may have led the theme of insufficient institutional support to emerge in our findings but also may have provided thoughtful insights that can be useful as universities develop or revisit their formal mentoring programs. Additional research on perceptions of institutional support for mentoring, as well as future studies that explore the relationship between different types of mentoring challenges and faculty outcomes, would help identify where intervention efforts might be most effective.

## **Recommendations**

Drawing on our findings and SCCT (Lent et al., 2000), we offer several recommendations that are rooted in the need to create a context in which mentors can support FOC in achieving their goals and feeling they have the knowledge and skills to do so. As emphasized by SCCT, individuals can best achieve their desired career outcomes when external obstacles to career advancement are removed (Fouad & Santana, 2017; Nolan et al., 2008). Therefore, our mentoring recommendations include institutional strategies to enhance positive mentoring experiences and reduce barriers to effective mentoring for FOC.

The negative experiences reported by FOC first necessitate a paradigm shift in terms of how institutions understand mentoring—all mentoring is not good mentoring. Accordingly, training faculty about how to be an effective mentor is critical to the success of both formal and informal mentoring relationships (e.g., Lumpkin, 2011). Further, due to the racial/ethnic and gender bias in society and higher education, a discussion of implicit bias should be embedded in this training. Training could also address how to facilitate positive mentoring relationships across dimensions of difference, as many FOC will have mentors who differ from them along race/ethnicity and possibly gender.

We also recommend that institutions create formal mentoring programs, as our findings found that FOC, particularly Black and Latinx women, have difficulty finding mentors. These formal programs could match faculty with mentors based on the mentees needs and desires to increase feelings of “fit,” include metrics to ensure that mentees are receiving quality mentorship, offer mentoring for tenured faculty, and create networks of mentors to address the fact that no single mentor is likely to meet all of an individual’s needs (e.g., Darwin & Palmer, 2009). Further, considering the prevalence of mentoring challenges reported by Black and Latinx women, it may also be useful to provide mentoring spaces and networks specifically for these women. We acknowledge the investment of time and resources that such an endeavor requires, but it is likely less costly than the loss of talent that may occur when supportive mentoring is not present.

Lastly, participants often tied mentoring challenges to structural problems that created barriers to mentoring, such as a lack of diverse faculty representation to permit identity matching and limited institutional support for the facilitation of formal mentoring relationships. In contrast, negative mentoring experiences were more often located as a problem of the mentor, with participants focusing on the mentor’s deficits or character flaws. In pairing these findings together, we suspect that there may be structural problems that contribute to mentor deficits (e.g., because of unclear requirements for tenure, mentors may give poor advice regarding the requirements for promotion). To remedy this concern, training could also be offered to decrease structural barriers to positive mentoring (e.g., providing workshops to senior faculty regarding the current standards for promotion). These trainings could be offered alongside those previously suggested (e.g., how to approach mentors) to address mentoring barriers at both the individual and structural levels.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, our study highlights that all mentoring is not good mentoring and, specifically, that FOC experience a number of barriers to securing positive and supportive mentoring relationships. Such challenges span across faculty from minoritized racial/ethnic and gender groups. In interpreting our findings using an intersectional lens, we found that these experiences are most present across Black and Latinx women and less prevalent in groups of Asian and Black men. Our investigation of mentoring challenges suggests several avenues for intervention, ranging from mentor training to the development of formalized, institutionally supported mentoring programs. Taken together, we encourage administrators and faculty to consider how the experiences of cultural subgroups of faculty necessitate

distinct interventions. In that way, we can advance the effectiveness of mentoring programs in a way that enhances such programs' inclusivity and relevance to FOC.

### Authors' Note

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

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### Notes

1. We use the term faculty of color to refer to faculty who racially or ethnically self-identify as African-American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander, or Native American. Further, we use the term "gender" to refer to those who self-identify as man or woman, while also recognizing this labeling may not be representative of those who identify beyond the gender binary.
2. While our number of Native American participants was small, it is important to note that our sample included 33.33% of all Native American faculty on the campus. The underrepresentation in this study is a reminder of how essential it is that we increase Native American representation in the academy.

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**Isis H. Settles**, PhD, is a professor of psychology and Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan. She received her BA from Harvard College and her PhD in psychology from the University of Michigan. Using an intersectional framework, her research focuses on the experiences, perceptions, and consequences of unfair treatment directed at devalued social group members (e.g., racial minorities, women) and strategies they use to counteract experiences of marginalization. Outside of work, she enjoys reading, gardening, gaming, and spending time with her family.

**Paulette Granberry Russell**, JD, received her bachelor of arts degree from Michigan State University and her Juris Doctor from Thomas M. Cooley Law School and is a licensed attorney with the State of Michigan. She joined Michigan State University in 1998 as its senior diversity officer and the director of the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives. She retired from this role after 22 years in August 2021, as Senior Advisor to the President for Diversity, Emerita. Her research interests include gender equity in STEM, campus culture and its impact on marginalized communities, and strategies for dismantling structural racism to create more equitable experiences for faculty, students, and staff of color. She is a sought-after presenter on DEI issues in higher education, and in her free time, she is completing work on her family's genealogy tracing her ancestral lines to the “shores of Ghana.”