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## African American Doctoral Scholars' and Fellows' Professional Development Mentoring Experiences Toward Higher Education Professorship

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## AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORAL SCHOLARS' AND FELLOWS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MENTORING EXPERIENCES TOWARD HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSORSHIP

Crystal J. Bryant , Adriel A. Hilton, and Patricia A. Green-Powell

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### **Abstract**

This research examined the professional development mentoring experiences of African American doctorate recipients who participated in the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) Doctoral Scholars Program or the McKnight Doctoral Fellows (MDF) Program, and are currently employed as faculty at an American college or university. The purpose of this research was to identify the types of professional development mentoring opportunities that assisted SREB and MDF program graduates in their transition into the professoriate, and to determine if race or gender of the faculty mentor played a significant role in their preparedness for the teaching, research, and service tasks required of faculty. It was anticipated that the findings of this study would provide a better understanding of the types of professional development needed to bridge the gap that exists between doctoral education and faculty career preparation as well as increase the number of well-trained African Americans entering the professoriate. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine differences in the preparedness level of African Americans for the professoriate based on the race and gender of the faculty mentor. All tests were performed at the  $\alpha = .05$  level. The findings of this research suggested that involvement in a professional development mentoring relationship was beneficial to the preparedness of SREB and MDF doctoral graduates for the professoriate. The results also indicated no significant difference in participants' preparedness for the professoriate based on the race or gender of their faculty mentor.

### **Introduction**

The recruitment of faculty of color remains one of the most difficult challenges facing American higher education institutions. Faculty of color in general, more specifically African American faculty, are grossly underrepresented in the academic ranks. According to a 2010 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, African Americans represent 6% of the faculty in higher education. Research suggests that the underrepresentation of faculty of color in American higher education institutions may be as a result of unsupportive work environments and indifferent attitudes that make it difficult for faculty of color to develop working relationships with other faculty within their academic department (Williams & Williams, 2006; Antonio, 2002).

There is a widespread view held by large numbers of American academics that African Americans lack the ability and qualifications to hold important positions in academia,

particularly positions where they are entrusted with the teaching of White students (*The Snail-Like Progress*, 2007). Hence, it is imperative that African American doctoral students entering the professoriate are provided with professional development opportunities that will allow them to maintain a high level of research productivity, acquire independent teaching training, and gain experience in providing service to their institution and their discipline. Previous studies show that mentoring can be beneficial to the socialization of new faculty, breaking the barriers of isolation and indifferent attitudes they experience in their first faculty position (Schrodt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003). Professional development mentoring can serve as a means for doctoral graduates to obtain the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need for success as members of the professoriate. Although mentoring can be considered an effective component of professional development for future faculty, there exists limited research that investigates and clearly identifies specific professional development mentoring opportunities that have been beneficial to African American doctoral students in their preparation for the professoriate.

Mentoring is a term that has been used to describe a relationship between a more experienced person and a less experienced person where the more experienced person provides support, counsel, and guidance to the less experienced person in support of his or her professional development. Faculty mentors can assist mentees by performing a variety of functions depending on the goals identified for the relationship. The functions of a mentoring relationship can be classified as either psychosocial mentoring functions or career mentoring functions (Kram, 1983). The psychosocial functions of a mentoring relationship are designed to enhance the mentee's sense of competence and work role effectiveness (Tillman, 2001; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 1991). The career functions of mentoring are those functions of the mentoring relationship that are designed to enhance the career of the mentee as a result of the mentor's experience, protection, sponsorship, and influence. The primary goal of the career functions of mentoring are to provide mentees with access to career related services, to stimulate the acquisition of knowledge, and to make available training and instruction opportunities related to specific areas of job related tasks (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

Studying race and gender in mentoring relationships informs us as to who has access to mentoring, who act as mentors, and what types of functions the mentor provides. Race and gender in a mentoring relationship can affect how relationships are formed and the type of functions provided to the mentee. Hansman (2002) purports that the issues of race and gender "may affect how mentors and mentees interact and negotiate their relationship, both internally and externally, and ultimately affect the success of [the relationship]" (p. 40). Satisfaction with the mentoring relationship, along with overall perceptions of mentoring functions, may differ by race or gender of the mentee. Patton and Harper (2003) posited that participating in a same-race and same-gender mentoring relationship was important for African American women and other students of color. Schrodt, Cawyer, and Sanders (2003) indicated that gender was a critical factor in mentoring relationships that often influences both participation and benefits. Blake-Beard (2001) asserted that women are more likely to be involved in a cross-gender mentoring relationship since most mentors are men and in key positions within organizations.

The commitment of a faculty member to developing a meaningful mentoring relationship with a student that facilitates academic progress and promotes professional development is an important element of a doctoral student's success (Mullen, 2006). It offers students invaluable resources for the purposes of adjustment, socialization, support, and degree completion. As higher education and responsibilities of faculty become more complex, professional development mentoring is a training mechanism that can be used to assist new faculty in meeting an expanding set of expectations required for faculty.

In order to study the issue of mentoring and its application to the professional development of future faculty, the researchers studied the professional development mentoring experiences of Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Doctoral Scholars and McKnight Doctoral Fellow (MDF) Program graduates employed as faculty in the American higher education system. Both the MDF and SREB Programs offer multiple layers of support to program participants, such as financial aid, mentoring and professional development, in an effort to address society's need to produce more minority PhDs seeking faculty positions (SREB, 1999; FEF, n.d.). The MDF Program, also referred to as the McKnight Program, was established in 1984 with the aim of increasing the number of African Americans earning PhD degrees, especially in fields where African Americans are underrepresented (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006). The SREB Program, modeled after the MDF Program, was initiated in 1993 as an effort to increase the number of minority faculty throughout the 16 member state SREB region by bridging the gap between graduate training and the duties of junior faculty. The MDF Program and the SREB Program both provide traditional funding and resources to address academic, social, and motivational needs of African American doctoral students. The MDF Program has sustained its success by contributing to the production of approximately 230 doctorates, with a retention rate of nearly 90 percent (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006). The SREB has also experienced the same success with the production of approximately 300 doctorates and a 90 percent retention rate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although students of color have made significant gains in college enrollment at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, African-American students still lag behind their White peers in the rate at which they enroll in college (NCES, 2009). Nevertheless, American colleges and universities have witnessed steady growth in the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population; however, a similar diversification among college faculty has yet to be achieved. Despite the efforts of many colleges and universities, racial and ethnic minorities remain grossly underrepresented among the faculty (NCES, 2010).

Doctoral programs are structured around the assumption that an individual will ultimately pursue a research-based career in an academic setting (Wolyniak, 2003). Presently, doctoral education does not provide students with exposure to a broad range of experiences that will prepare them for a faculty career; as a result, "doctoral students must seek out opportunities to augment the traditional PhD curriculum with career experiences that [will] allow them to become a more skilled [faculty member]" (Wolyniak, 2003, p. 229). Professional development mentoring is an approach that can be utilized by faculty mentors to improve the effectiveness in retaining and graduating students, which will in turn contribute to the number of students who attain the doctorate degree and pursue a faculty career.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to identify the types of professional development mentoring opportunities that prepared African American SREB and MDF graduates in their transition into the professoriate, because of their participation in a mentoring relationship. This study also analyzed the preparedness level of the participants based on the race and gender of their faculty mentor.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it begins to fill a void in the mentoring literature related to the professional development of graduate students and the role of race and gender in mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students. It was anticipated that the findings of this

study would provide a better understanding of the types of professional development mentoring activities that are needed to a) bridge the gap that exists between doctoral education and faculty career preparation, and b) increase the number of well-trained African Americans entering the professoriate in the U.S. higher education system. This research will be beneficial to academicians in higher education who are responsible for doctoral education curriculum development and to graduate students who are interested in pursuing a faculty career. This study will also be beneficial to department heads, deans, vice president of academic affairs and faculty who are responsible for identifying and recruiting a pool of qualified and well-trained African Americans into the faculty ranks.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF graduates for the professoriate based on the gender of the faculty mentor.
2. There is no significant difference in the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF graduates for the professoriate based on the race of the faculty mentor.
3. There is no significant interactive effect between gender and race of the faculty mentor on the preparedness level of African American SREB and McKnight graduates for the professoriate.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a causal comparative research design in order to draw conclusions about the influence of race and gender on the professional development mentoring opportunities doctoral recipients received in preparation for their transition to the professoriate. The researchers developed the Faculty Mentoring Questionnaire (FMQ). The FMQ was developed to identify the type of professional development activities that prepared current faculty for the professoriate as a result of their participation in a mentorship during their matriculation in a doctoral program. The questionnaire uses a Likert-type response format (very prepared to very unprepared) as well as open and close ended questions. The overall inter-item consistency of the FMQ using Cronbach alpha was 0.929.

In this research, data were grouped into two categories based on race and gender. Data from the questionnaire completed by the participants of the study were used to gather descriptive statistics and to test the hypotheses. The data were compiled by race, gender, and types of professional development mentoring opportunities participants experienced relative to teaching, research, and service. Descriptive statistics were employed to organize, summarize, and interpret the numerical data in this research. The types of statistics computed included mean and standard deviation. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the inferential statistics utilized to determine if the gender or race of the faculty mentor played a significant role in the preparedness level of African American doctorate recipients for the professoriate.

The participants of this research included ninety-six African American faculty who were employed at an American higher education institution, and who had participated in the SREB or MDF program, and had attained a doctoral degree. Sixty-six percent of the participants were female (n=63) and thirty-four percent were male (n=33). Majority of the participants, 49.5% (n=47) ranged from 35 to 44 years of age, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Age of Participants*

Age	N	%
25-34	30	31.5
35-44	47	49.5
45-54	10	10.5
55-64	7	7.4
65 and over	1	1.1
Total	95	100

Thirteen of the participants received their doctorate in the field of psychology (13.7%) and twelve (12.6%) in education. Table 2 offers additional information regarding the doctorate degree field of study reported by the participants.

Table 2  
*Participant Characteristics by Field of Study*

Field of Study	N	%
Agriculture	1	1.1
Biological and biomedical sciences	7	7.4
Business	11	11.6
Computer/information sciences	1	1.1
Education	12	12.6
Engineering and engineering technologies	6	6.3
English language/literature/letters	6	6.3
Health professions/clinical sciences	5	5.3
Mathematics and statistics	3	3.1
Physical sciences/science technologies	3	3.1
Psychology	13	13.7
Social sciences and history	11	11.6
Visual and performing arts	2	2.1
Other	14	14.7
Total	95	100

Characteristics of the participants' professional development mentoring relationships were also analyzed by the race and gender of the mentee and the faculty mentor. As shown in Table 3, the majority of the respondents reported being involved in cross cultural professional development mentoring relationships.

Table 3  
*Professional Development Mentoring Relationship Dyads*

Mentoring Dyad	N	%
Based on Gender		
Female Mentee/Female Mentor	31	32.3
Female Mentee/Male Mentor	32	33.3
Male Mentee/Female Mentor	8	8.3
Male Mentee/Male Mentor	25	26.1
Based on Race		
African American Mentee/African American Mentor	26	27.1
African American Mentee/non-African American Mentor	70	72.9

The participants also provided demographic information about their faculty mentor who provided professional development opportunities that assisted them in their preparation for the teaching, research, and service tasks required of faculty. Fifty-nine percent (n=57) of the participants reported being mentored by a male faculty mentor, and 73% (n=70) reported the race of their mentor being non-African American.

### Results of the Study

Three research hypotheses were identified for this study to determine the role of a mentor's race and gender on the types of professional development activities that prepared African American SREB and MDF doctoral graduates for the professoriate. The first hypothesis, hypothesis 1, addresses the difference between the preparation levels of African American respondents for the professoriate based on the gender of the mentor:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF doctoral graduates for the professoriate based on the gender of the faculty mentor.

The two way ANOVA was employed to analyze differences in the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF doctoral graduates ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) for the professoriate based on the gender of their mentor, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Mentor Gender: Means and Standard Deviations*

Mentor Gender	M	SD	N
Male	3.43	.850	56
Female	3.60	.709	40
Total	3.50	.795	96

The gender of the faculty mentor was not significantly related to the preparedness of African American respondents for the professoriate ( $F(1, 92) = .117$ ,  $p = .675$ ). The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5  
Two Way ANOVA Based on Race and Gender of Faculty Mentor

Source	Df	F	$\eta^2$	p
MtrGender	1	.117	.00017	.675
MtrRace	1	1.872	.00197	.175
MtrGender*MtrRace	1	.151	.00015	.698
Error	92			

R squared = .032 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)

Hypothesis 2 addresses the difference between the preparation levels of African Americans for the professoriate based on the race of the mentor:

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF doctoral graduates for the professoriate based on the race of the faculty mentor.

The two way ANOVA was used to analyze if there was a difference in the preparedness level of African Americans (M = 3.50, SD = .795) based on the race of their faculty mentor, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6  
Mentor Race: Means and Standard Deviations

Mentor Race	M	SD	N
African American/Black	3.70	.823	27
Non-African American	3.42	.775	69
Total	3.50	.795	96

The analysis revealed no significant difference ( $F(1, 92) = 1.872, p = .175$ ) in the preparedness level of the respondents for the professoriate based on the gender of their faculty mentor (see Table 5). For this reason, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

The final hypothesis in this study, hypothesis 3, addresses the interaction between the mentor's gender and race on the preparedness of African American respondents for the professoriate:

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant interactive effect between gender and race of the faculty mentor on the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF graduates for the professoriate.

A two way ANOVA was used to determine if there was a significant interactive effect between the race and gender of the faculty mentor on the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF graduates for the professoriate through their participation in a professional development mentorship with their faculty mentor (see Table 5). The ANOVA revealed no significant interactive effect ( $F(1, 92) = .151, p = .698$ ) between the race and gender of the

mentor on the preparedness level of the African American respondents for the professoriate; therefore, the hypothesis was not rejected.

### **Conclusion**

The involvement in a professional development mentoring relationship appeared to be beneficial to the preparedness of SREB and MDF African American doctoral graduates for the professoriate. This study sought to determine if the gender and race of the faculty mentor influenced the participants' preparedness level for the professoriate. The data indicated no significant difference in their preparedness level for the professoriate based on the gender of the faculty mentor. These findings are contradictory to previous research (Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006) that suggests mentoring experiences of men and women result in different outcomes depending on the gender of the mentor. It has been proposed that male mentors provide more career-based mentoring or professional development mentoring to their mentees as oppose to female mentors who tend to provide more psychosocial mentoring functions (Chandler & Kram, 2005).

In determining the preparedness level of African American SREB and MDF graduates based on the race of their faculty mentor, the results of this study indicated no significant difference. These results are supported by the findings of a study conducted by Diaz-Barriga, O'Connell, and Fermin (2004), which revealed that the race of the faculty mentor was not an important factor for minority graduate students. The researchers concluded that minority graduate students selected a faculty mentor based on research interests, accessibility, and professionalism.

The analysis also revealed no significant interaction between the mentor's gender and race on preparedness levels for the group being studied even though the majority of the African American participants in this research were mentored by non-African American males. Research suggests that the majority of mentors are White males, which may be as a result of the "old boy network" and the history of White males in positions of power. It appears that the professional development mentoring opportunities provided by the faculty mentor were more of a critical factor in the preparedness of African American doctoral graduates than the race or gender of the mentor.

### **Implications**

The results of this study imply that the African American participants in this research appeared to be as prepared for the professoriate in the areas of teaching, research, and service. The findings also suggest that the race and gender of the faculty mentor did not have a significant impact on the types of professional development mentoring activities that African Americans received to prepare them for the professoriate. Since the doctoral experience is the first stage of a graduate student's academic career, professional development mentoring is a process that can be employed to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and career preparation. It is apparent that the Southern Regional Education Board States Doctoral Scholars Program and the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program recognizes the importance of mentoring in the academic and professional development of doctoral students. It is also evident that the two programs understand the need to increase the number of African Americans represented among faculty employed in American institutions of higher education.

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