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ABSTRACT

In order to reconceptualize the mentoring relationship in higher education, parallels to colonialist strategies of subordination are drawn. The objective is to stimulate renewed thinking and action more consistent with stated policy goals in higher education. One of the primary functions of a mentor or sponsor is to exercise personal power to ensure the allocation of organizational resources and rewards to a protege. Related to the colonial analogy is the competition among women and minorities that results from the scarcity of mentors from the organization's establishment who are interested in and willing to work with these particular newcomers. There is a point at which the severity of competition can undermine cooperative networking among colleagues. Another vestige of colonialism concerns the price to be paid for selection as a protege, since selection may be determined by the protege's willingness to subscribe to the social and intellectual legacy of the prospective mentor. In addition, socializing proteges involves subscribing to the "rules of the game" in academia, rules that may be questioned because of their historically discriminatory applications. The strategy of networking within the university and across institutions is also addressed. (SW)

COLONIALISM ON CAMPUS: A CRITIQUE OF MENTORING TO ACHIEVE EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Mentoring toward the Mainstream

To most observers of higher education it is readily apparent that colleges and universities have made relatively little progress toward increasing the number of women and minority persons on their faculties. Despite significant increases in the number of doctorates awarded to women and minority group members (McCarthy and Wolfe, 1975; Wilkinson, 1978), increases in female and minority representation on college faculties have been extremely small and limited primarily to the lower professional ranks (American Association of University Women, 1978; Equal Employment Opportunites Commission, 1980; Wilkinson, 1978).

The field of education is one profession that might be expected to vary from the norm of underrepresentation of minorities on college and university faculties. Education continues to attract close to 50% of all doctorates awarded to Blacks and these doctorates constitute approximately 8% of the total number of doctorates awarded in education (Astin, 1982). Despite these figures, there are other indicators that illustrate that Blacks in education are underrepresented in the academic's most prestigious and rewarding activities, scholarly research and publication. The American Educational Research Association has found a significant underrepresentation of women and minorities among authors of educational research publications (AERA, 1978). Although data regarding minority representation on faculties of education are not available,[1] it can be assumed that professional advancement associated with publication is less likely for minority groups and women faculty members in education.

Given the relatively adequate supply of women and minority persons with

doctorates in education, the depressed demand for new faculty in the field, and the underrepresentation of women and minorities among the producers of educational research, a sensible affirmative action goal in the field of education would be to improve opportunities for promotion and tenure among current women and minority faculty members. Although there are many conceivable barriers to the professional advancement of women and minority group members in academia, one burden in particular has received a great deal of attention recently: the absence of sponsors or mentors for these relative newcomers to the academic mainstream.

The significance of the mentor-protege relationship to the career advanement of the neophyte professional has been popularized by recent studies of career development of men and women in the corporate world (Levinson, et al., 1978; Kanter, 1977). The notion that a mentor or sponsor can play a pivotal role in the development of a person's career is not new (e.g. Turner, 1960). What is new, however, is the application of the mentor/sponsor construct to the more recent concern for providing equitable opportunities for the career advancement of women and minority group members.

Illustrative of the importance placed on mentoring as a means of career advancement for women and minority group members in education is a program sponsored by the National Institute of Education entitled Experimental Program for Opportunities in Advanced Study and Research in Education. This program, which was funded from 1978 through 1981, was designed to provide minority persons and women who had previous experience and expertise in educational research with additional training and experiences that would increase their scholarly productivity and thereby advance their careers and the quality of

educational research. One required component of proposals submitted for funding was the provision of mentors for all those served by the proposed program (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). Despite the experimental nature of this federal program, mentoring was considered an indispensable feature based on the prevailing assumptions and anecdotal evidence available at the time (Artis, 1979).

The one question that should be raised, however, regards the applicability of the mentoring construct to those individuals who have been traditionally excluded from the organizational mainstream and whose inclusion is expected to contribute unique and valuable perspectives to the organization's enterprise. Despite the growing number of advocates of mentoring as a means of upward mobility for women and minority professionals (e.g. Speizer, 1981; Campbell, 1982; Moore, 1982), there are indications that the cross race and/or cross sex nature of most of these relationships is associated with unanticipated negative outcomes (e.g. Goldstein, 1979; Watkins, 1980). Furthermore, there is also some evidence that the mentoring process itself may militate against diversity in the scholarly production of proteges, one of the expected benefits of integrating women and minority faculty members into the academic mainstream (Blackburn, 1981).

It is undoubtedly premature to weigh evidence to determine the efficacy of mentoring for women and minority persons in academia. As with many emerging social scientific constructs, mentoring has many different operational definitions among researchers and current evidence regarding its form and function reflects this initial disarray (Wrightsman, 1981). However, the near universal assumption that mentoring provides the same stairway to

success for minorities and women as it provides white males, conceals the potential costs of mentoring for proteges from these socially subordinate groups. Consideration of these costs should, in turn, qualify the expectations of policy makers and, perhaps, facilitate the development of alternative strategies for increasing the participation of women and minority faculty in institutions of higher education.

One means of re-conceptualizing the mentoring relationship is to consider its parallels with aspects fo colonial education. The usefulness of this approach is revealed by the remarkable extent to which features of the mentoring relationship parallel colonialist strategies of subordination. These similarities should serve as a stimulus for renewed thinking and action more consistent with stated policy goals.

The Mentor as Gatekeeper

One of the primary functions of a mentor or sponsor is to exercise personal power to ensure the allocation of organizational resources and rewards to a protege. For women and minority persons, the scarcest and most valuable resource is often the availability of a mentor within a particular organization. While organizational ideals may espouse that proteges are selected by mentors on the basis of the protege's performance, it is likely that mentors select proteges on the basis of their similarities (Kanter, 1977, p. 184; Alvarez, 1979, p. 15). This tendency diminishes opportunities for selection for those members of groups that have been traditionally excluded from the organization.

These ecological conditions create a very different climate for women and minority entrants than it does for those newcomers who share more

qualities with the organization's establishment. Those women and minority newcomers who feel and believe that sponsorship is essential to their success may actually have to solicit that sponsorship in order to attain it. However, professional achievement through sponsorship is more highly valued when the conditions for success are underplayed. Therefore, self-solicited sponsorship is likely to tarnish the protege's subsequent achievements. The potentially negative ramifications of this dilemma for women and minority proteges have only recently been considered (Alvarez, 1979, p. 48).

More related to the colonial analogy, however, is the competition among women and minorities that results from the scarcity of mentors from among the organization's establishment who are interested and willing to work with these particular newcomers. The competition among Black faculty for recognition and selection by mentors is greater than the competition among neophyte white faculty for similar recognition and selection. There is a point at which the severity of competition can undermine cooperative networking among colleagues. This particular dynamic parallels colonialist strategies that undermine the solidarity of subordinated groups by limiting resources that are eventually fought over by the colonized. Although the colonial strategy entails an exploitative intent, an intent that is presumably absent in higher education, the outcomes of the two processes may be very similar.

Reliance of mentoring to achieve professional advancement places members of underrepresented groups in the position of fighting over the few majority group mentors willing to work with them. Regardless of individual intentions, these ecological conditions place potential mentors in the role of institutional gatekeepers. In addition to the conflict that scarcity

generates among members of subordinated groups, another vestige of colonialism regards the price to be paid for selection as a protege. That selection may be determined by the protege's willingness to ascribe to the social and intellectual legacy of the prospective mentor. This price is especially high for those who have suffered historically under this legacy.

Mentoring and Maintaining the Status Quo

Socializing the protege to the organizational "rules of the game" is another function of the mentor. However, to the extent that certain of these rules have served to undermine the status and concerns of women and minority faculty, they are likely to reject them. Still, adherence to these rules may be the price expected for being selected by a mentor and receiving resources from that mentor. These circumstances can create unique conflicts for women and minority faculty.

There are a number of "rules" that can generate this kind of conflict. For example, many senior faculty expect an allegiance to a specific discipline or professional association to override a commitment to a problem-centered paradigm or community or minority interest group perspective. Although the latter paradigms and perspectives may contribute significantly to the intellectual diversity within a department, failure to conform to the informal rules of the game may jeopardize one's selection as a protege.

There are several rules regarding what it takes to make it in an organization that a prospective protege is expected to learn and respect. However, many of these rules have been used to discriminate against women and minority faculty. For example, one is expected to learn that collegiality is important to one's success and legitimate basis for decisions regarding

retention, promotion, and tenure. While this rule is learned easily enough, it is difficult for women and minority faculty to respect it given its historically discriminatory applications. Yet, to question this social convention of the academy is to question the validity of the success of one's mentor.

Another rule one is expected to acknowledge is the notion that one's race and sex are not relevant factors in decisions regarding retention, promotion, and tenure. That is, while these factors are appropriate considerations for hiring decisions regarding one's career advancement. Of course, this rule is part of an overall self-perception by the academy that its rules for making it are equitable and nondiscrimatory. The difficulty for women and minority proteges is that they are expected to share this belief-system.

Adherence to these beliefs as a price for selection and progress as a protege is analagous to colonialist strategies that require the colonized to abdicate their identity, their history, and their commitment to oppressed compatriots in order to receive colonial favors apparently crucial to their survival. The costs of establishing a professional identity forged in such a context needs to be acknowledged and assessed.

Mentoring and the Colonization of Knowledge

In addition to socializing proteges to the "rules of the game", mentors also guide proteges toward fruitful activities by imparting the intellectual legacy of their academic discipline to their proteges. A problem arises, however, when the intellectual legacy, like the "rules of the game", is perceived as incompatible with one's group and self-interests. In many

instances, women and minority faculty find themselves confronting paradigms of the world that, if not intending to subordinate them, certainly have this effect, ultimately.

One popular illustration of an intellectual legacy that perpetuates such subordination in the educational profession is the concept of general intelligence and the means of its assessment. From its origins in the craniometry of the 19th century to current theories of its inheritability, intelligence has been used to rationalize social inequities in society. Social rewards are viewed as the just outcomes of intellectual ability which, in turn, are viewed as a function of race, sex, or national origin, depending on the context of the prevailing social order at any given period of history.

Contemporary concerns over the validity of specific intelligence testing instuments of reservations over science's ability to disentangle the relative contributions of environment and heredity, still do not question the use of intelligence tests to distribute or to justify previous distribution of social rewards. This preoccupation with designing and justifying the social order has oversahdowed questions concerning the nature of intelligence. Recent emphasis, however, on the nature of intellectual capacity has shifted the purpose of intelligence testing away from simply determining and labeling the learner's status toward a more dynamic enhancement of the learner's performance (Feurestein, 1979, 1980).

The modifiability of the learner's performance during assessment and subsequent instruction provides a new paradigm for intelligence and its assessment and a new role for testers - both of which are gaining increased acceptance among black educators and psychologists.[2] Previous use of IQ

theories to justify subordinating relationships in society may be one reason that black educators are so underrepresented in those professions (e.g. school psychology) that are very dependent on those theories (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1977). Of course, the relationship between young minority scholars and practitioners and the paradigms advocated by prospective mentors in their disciplines deserves empirical investigation.

Alternative and Complimentary Strategies

The problems just illustrated should not be interpreted as a blanket condemnation of mentoring as a means of career advancement for women and minorities in higher education. It is hoped, however, that problems previously ignored are made more apparent by the colonial analogy. The unusually intense competition among these proteges for the few mentors available to them and the pressures to ascribe to institutional and intellectual conventions are regressive features of the mentoring process that qualify its usefulness for women and minority faculty. These qualifications should lead researchers and policy makers toward alternative strategies that may be especially appropriate for women and minority faculty.

Although it is acknowledged that women and minority faculty have significantly fewer mentoring relationships than white male faculty (e.g. Freeman, 1977), little has been done to identify alternative strategies that are used by the upwardly mobile members of subordinate groups. Still, it is possible to consider such strategies. For example, peer networking, in which minority or women colleagues establish alliances within a particular institution or across institutions, is likely to provide its members a power base and access to more resources than would be available to any individual

member.

University policies and practices can significantly influence opportunities for networking among minority or women faculty. Most obviously, universities facilitate networking by offering orientation, on-going training, and resources for junior faculty to establish and maintain professional contacts. Although financial pressures on the university are considerable and growing, reductions in travel funds and expenditures on inter-office communication are especially harmful to these faculty most dependent on networking as a means of developing their careers. Also, the frequency and regularity of formal interdepartmental contacts is likely to influence opportunities for networking among women and minority faculty at a particular institution (Kanter, 1977, p. 67).

Networking among women or minority colleagues across institutions can create alliances that are potentially more powerful and resourceful than those created within a university. Cross-institutional networks can more easily serve as advocates of their members and provide access to a wider range of resources. Such networks are typically organized around a particular profession, discipline, or university function which maximizes resource sharing, cohesiveness, and, ultimately, the potential power available to the group. Unlike intra-institutional networks that are susceptible to backlash pressures from disgruntled constituent groups within the university, inter-institutional networks can become sufficiently powerful to exert their own sanctions in their advocacy role for individual members (Alvarez, 1979, p. 18). The role that such alliances have played in professional development and the promise they offer junior women and minority faculty deserves

investigation.

Networking within and across institutions of higher education appears to be a strategy that avoids those problems identified with the mentoring relationship. It is doubtful, however, that the resources available through networking are sufficient to replace those benefits associated with being the protege of an effective mentor. Still, the relative benefits and costs of mentoring and networking for women and minorities have yet to be compared. Although policies proceed as if the mentoring process is clearly superior, researchers and policy makers should attend more seriously to the potential costs that mentoring relationships exact on women and minority proteges.

Footnotes

1. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education is currently collecting this data. The results of their survey should be available by early 1983.
2. Recent workshops and symposia on Feuerstein's approach to assessment conducted by Dr. Edmund Gordon (Yale University), Dr. Asa Hilliard (Georgia State University), and Dr. Trevor Sewell (Temple University) demonstrate current interest in this emerging paradigm among black educators. Although this approach has also received critical scrutiny, its reconstruction of the relationship between tester and learner and the function of testing has been well received by black educators and psychologists (e.g. Sewell, 1979; Hilliard, 1982).

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