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Cultivating Community Cultural Wealth and Pathways to the Professoriate: Mentoring
Relationships Between Faculty of Color and Graduate Students of Color

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Xiong Her

2026

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultivating Community Cultural Wealth and Pathways to the Professoriate: Mentoring Relationships Between Faculty of Color and Graduate Students of Color

by

Xiong Her

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Kevin Eagan, Chair

This study examines mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color at a public research-1 university in Southern California. Using Community Cultural Wealth as the guiding theoretical framework, this study explores how doctoral students of color characterize the advantages and disadvantages of having faculty mentors of color, how faculty members' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds inform their mentoring approaches, and how faculty of color understand their mentorship as contributing to the diversification of the professoriate. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with thirteen doctoral students of color and nine faculty of color across Social Science and STEM fields, the findings reveal that mentoring relationships are not only academic, but also emotional, cultural, material, relational, and intergenerational.

Graduate student participants described faculty mentors of color as critical sources of validation, advocacy, and holistic care in their journey. Their faculty mentors helped them navigate financial precarity, housing insecurity, departmental politics, racialized stress, research legitimacy, and professional development. Through these relationships, graduate students gained

access to community cultural wealth that supported their persistence, sense of belonging, scholarly confidence, and career development.

Faculty participants described their mentoring practices as deeply shaped by their own lived experiences, including family influence, negative graduate school experiences, racialized marginalization, community commitments, and disciplinary challenges. Many faculty of color participants approached mentorship as a moral, personal, and intergenerational responsibility to support students of color and contribute to the diversification and transformation of the academy. Their mentorship often involved helping students claim their scholarly voices, validate marginalized research agendas, and access professional networks.

The study concludes with implications for graduate education, including the need to build holistic mentoring ecosystems, provide culturally responsive mentoring training for faculty, formally recognize mentoring labor in institutional reward systems, increase the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, and create structures that support graduate students of color's academic and professional development.

The dissertation of Xiong Her is approved.

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2026

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Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Over the past two decades, higher education has seen an increase of racial and ethnic diversity in both students and faculty populations across the United States. The U.S. professoriate, however, has diversified at a slower rate than that of undergraduate or doctoral students. While the number of faculty of color has also risen, they remain significantly underrepresented across many academic disciplines. At the top 40 public institutions, faculty of color are still underrepresented, especially in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines (Li & Koedel, 2017). In the fall of 2022, a little bit over a quarter (27.6%) of postsecondary faculty were *nonwhite* compared to 47.7% undergraduate students of color in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023a). Students of color have increased by 18.9 percentage points (from 28.8% in 2001 to 47.7% in 2024), partially due to the increase of Hispanic students, as shown below, which has doubled in the past two decades. By comparison, full-time faculty of color increased by 12.7 percentage points from 14.9% to 27.6%, over the same period due to the rise of Asian American faculty followed by Hispanic or Latino faculty.

The gap between undergraduate students and faculty representation is particularly stark when considering individual racial or ethnic groups. For instance, Hispanic students comprise 21.5% of all undergraduate students, which is more than three times the proportion of Hispanic faculty (6.4%). Likewise, the proportion of Black undergraduates (13.2%) is more than double the proportion of Black faculty (6.5%). Even more concerning, both Native American students and faculty represent less than 1%, 0.7% and 0.4% respectively, at U.S. higher education

institutions. By contrast, the representation of Asian faculty (12.6%) has outpaced the proportion of undergraduates identifying as Asian (7.8%, not including Pacific Islanders) (NCES, 2023a).

The racial composition of doctoral students in the U.S. is also concerning. Over the years, the number of doctoral recipients of color has increased, providing a larger and more diverse talent pool from which higher education institutions could recruit to diversify their faculty members. In the 2021-2022 academic year, out of 203,884 doctoral recipients in the U.S., postsecondary institutions conferred roughly one third of doctoral degrees to students of color who were either U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Asian Americans have the highest representation of degree earners of color at 12.6%, followed by Black and Hispanic recipients at 10.4% and 9.9%, respectively. However, American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander population remain underrepresented, holding the lowest doctoral degree conferred rate of less than 1%—0.4% and 0.2%—respectively¹, while individuals identifying as two or more races accounted for 3.5% (NCES, 2023b).

This growing pool of doctoral recipients of color can contribute to faculty diversity if they are being recruited and retained by higher education institutions. Despite this increase, most underrepresented Ph.D. recipients pursue careers in the industry or other private sectors rather than consider or apply for tenure-track faculty positions (Gibbs et al., 2016; National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2023). Systemic barriers and structural challenges within academia are key factors that deter Ph.D. recipients of color from pursuing academic positions (Griffin, 2020). Institutions often fail to effectively recruit and retain faculty of color due to

¹ In the 2010-11 academic year, NCES created a new racial category for Pacific Islanders, separating them from Asian American. In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) split Asian American and Pacific Islander into two separate racial groups to recognize and collect data that capture the unique experiences and needs of Pacific Islander communities in housing, education, and employment among other issues, which are significantly different from Asian American. An Asian American is a person who has an origin from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, whereas Pacific Islanders include Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian and Chamorro (ObamaWhiteHouse, n.d.).

exclusionary hiring practices, implicit biases in the selection process, and a lack of strategic planning and targeted recruitment (Gibbs et al, 2014; Griffin, 2020). Moreover, the declining availability of research funding, the hyper-competitive nature of the academic job market, limited tenure track positions, the lengthy postdoctoral training before securing a faculty position, and the relatively low starting salaries compared to the industry collectively make faculty careers less attractive for Ph.D. recipients, generally, and Ph.D. recipients of color, specifically (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Griffin, 2020; Posselt, 2020). These systemic issues and challenges perpetuate the underrepresentation of faculty of color, affecting mentorship opportunities and institutional efforts to diversify the professoriate.

Research has pointed to better and more accessible mentorship of undergraduate and graduate students of color as a particularly effective long-term strategy of diversifying the faculty by strengthening the pipeline toward the professoriate (Patton, 2009; Zambrana et al., 2015). Academic mentorship facilitates students' success in higher education, as it nurtures students for the workforce and/or toward a career in academia (Zambrana et al., 2015). Having supportive mentors enhances both students' learning and well-being during their studies and beyond graduation. Academic mentors help students navigate the ins and outs of their academic journey as well as provide career advice and psychosocial support (Campbell et al., 2012).

The benefits of mentorship can be even stronger when the gender and/or racial identities of mentors and mentees match (Blake-Beard, 2011). Fairlie et al. (2014) found that students of color who are taught by faculty of color, or who racially resemble the students, can reduce class dropout rates and increase students' academic performance. Moreover, students of color with matched racial or ethnic identity mentors also report to have greater self-efficacy, an enhanced sense of belonging, and increased psychosocial support throughout their academic journeys

(Gilson, 2005; Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Syed et al., 2011). Faculty of color, drawing from shared cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, were able to tailor advice and support that address specific needs of students, foster deeper student campus engagement, and encourage students to pursue graduate and/or professional education (Chan et al., 2015; Holloway-Friesen, 2021). The presence of mentors who reflect students' racial and cultural identities not only increases comfort and trust within the mentoring relationship but also provides vital role models, helping students of color navigate the complexities of higher education and be successful.

Even though cultural and racial similarities can play a meaningful role in mentoring relationships, scholars also noted that they are not the only factors to consider (Okawa, 2002; Tuma & Dolan, 2024). The shared racial identity in a mentoring relationship is complex, and having a mentor of color is not always universally positive experiences for either graduate students or the faculty member. Faculty of color, especially women, are taking disproportionate roles and responsibilities within their institutions, but they are not accordingly rewarded or recognized in traditional tenure and promotional systems in many institutions (Lee, 2012; Zambrana et al., 2023). They are often being called to serve on diversity-related committees, advise many students of color, and become “departmental experts” on select racial groups or cultural issues (Domingo et al., 2022; Griffin, 2020; Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Padilla, 1994). Even though these responsibilities are important, they can place additional burdens on faculty of color, leading to professional strain and burnout (Griffin, 2020; Turner et al., 2011). These burdens and overwhelming responsibilities are often referred to as cultural taxation, in which faculty of color often must act as the voice for minoritized students or to represent specific cultural groups (Padilla, 1994). These commitments often add more stress to faculty of color,

undermining their services and efforts without rewards and recognition of their efforts (Lee, 2012).

Despite these challenges, faculty of color remain deeply committed to mentoring students of color, using their personal experiences to validate and encourage future generations of scholars (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022). This commitment highlights the importance of mentorship between faculty of color and graduate students of color, offering opportunities to build academic communities that validate their experiences, scholarships, and contribution (Montgomery et al., 2014). Mentoring is an act of service for faculty of color to uplift their communities and can be an important factor in increasing and inspiring more graduate students of color to pursue a career in academia, an effort toward diversifying the professoriate beyond representation.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of doctoral students of color when they have a faculty mentor of color (similar or cross-race matching). I utilized a qualitative constructivist approach to gain insights from Ph.D. students of color's experiences working and studying with their faculty mentors of color. The findings of this study aimed to advance theoretical and practical understandings of cultivating stronger mentoring relationships among graduate students of color and their faculty mentor of color as well as to create potential pipelines and/or initiatives toward supporting graduate students of color to become faculty. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do doctoral students of color characterize the advantages and disadvantages of having a faculty mentor of color in relation to their degree progress?

2. To what extent do faculty members' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds inform their approaches to mentoring graduate students of color?
3. How do faculty of color characterize the importance of their mentorship of students of color as potentially contributing to future diversification of the professoriate?

Background

Most higher education institutions lack diversity among their faculty, and research shows that the presence of faculty mentors of color can be transformative for graduate students of color, providing them with role models who understand their cultural, social, and academic challenges on a deeper level (Griffin et al, 2011). Faculty mentors of color often serve as sources of culturally relevant guidance, emotional support, and advocacy, which is crucial in environments where students of color may feel isolated or marginalized, especially in such specialized fields as a Ph.D. degree (Griffin et al., 2011; Zambrana et al., 2015). Faculty mentors of color provide insights into navigating institutional barriers and overcoming systemic biases, enhancing students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and resilience in the face of adversity (Syed et al., 2011).

Furthermore, faculty mentors of color bring unique perspectives to academic and professional development, creating a "counterspace" to help students of color, especially Black women, deal with daily challenges as well as encouraging them to pursue their own research interests, often aligned with issues relevant to their communities (Patton, 2009). These inspirations and mentoring relationships help demystify the academic journey, offering students of color more guidance on research, publishing, networking, and navigating academic hierarchies (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). This connection can also lead to expanded career opportunities, since

mentors of color are likely to open doors to networks and collaborations that might otherwise be inaccessible students of color.

Overview of Conceptual Frameworks

The Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, developed by Professor Tara Yosso, guides my analysis of the mentoring relationship between faculty of color and graduate students of color across various academic fields. This approach allowed me to capture the shared and reciprocal personal, cultural, and professional experiences of both faculty and graduate students of color in higher education. CCW is an element of critical race theory and an asset-based approach that centers on communities of color's values, voices, and experiences (Yosso, 2005). CCW challenges and reinterprets Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to validate the experience, knowledge, and place for people of color in higher education. In essence, CCW reframes scholars' focus as to whose culture has capital. Thus, CCW provides a holistic and asset-based approach to center and showcase people of color's cultural knowledge, experiences, and voices in higher education (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016).

CCW framework offers six types of capital to measure students of color's cultural wealth and capital: *aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigation, and resistance*. *Aspirational capital* is the ability to "maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). It portrays students of color's resiliency and aspirations to strive for the best and to create a brighter future for generations. *Linguistic capital* is the intellectual and social skills that communities of color gain through multiple languages and communication styles. *Familial capital* portrays the histories, traditions, and cultural knowledge that is nurtured within families and communities. *Social capital* focuses on the community of color's network and resources. *Navigational capital* relates to individuals' skills and talents to

thrive and succeed in higher education through a network of support. Lastly, *resistant capital* identifies the knowledge and skills developed to challenge inequity and oppressive structures (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016).

These different cultural aspects and capitals provide important perspectives for interpreting the positive and negative experiences of having faculty of color mentoring relationships in higher education, and how better to create supportive policies and inclusive learning environments to enhance graduate students of color's experiences. CCW serves as a holistic and counter-narrative approach to help us understand the social, professional, and academic relationships of mentoring. These capitals also capture experiences and insights into how faculty of color navigate institutional barriers, norms and policies to resist oppressive structures that perpetuate inequity in higher education. Lastly, CCW framework provides a multifaceted approach to understand both the advantages and challenges of having similar/race mentors in graduate education, and how various identities of faculty of color shape these outcomes to enhance current and future mentoring practices and policies beyond representation in academia.

Scope of the Study

To address the stated research questions outlined above, this study employed a qualitative constructivist research design study relying on in-depth interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of both graduate students and faculty of color within a public Research 1 institution in Southern California (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study aimed to explore how graduate students of color and faculty of color's experiences reflect the broader dynamics within higher education institutions as well as to provide insights into the development of reciprocal mentor-mentee relationships. I conducted 60–90-minute semi-

structured individual interviews with both graduate students of color and faculty of color from the Social Science and STEM fields, capturing the diverse unique and nuanced perspectives on mentorship.

This study consists of 22 participants—13 Ph.D. students of color and 9 faculty of color—from the social science and STEM fields. Ph.D. participants of color were selected based on four specific inclusion criteria: (1) being a current Ph.D. student or candidate, (2) having completed at least one year of study in their respective Ph.D. program, (3) self-identifying as a student of color, and (4) having a faculty advisor or mentor of color. Based on the Ph.D. participants sampling pool, I recruited faculty of color to resemble as closely as possible the demographic and fields of study. Faculty of color were recruited based on three inclusion criteria: (1) self-identifying as a person of color, (2) have at least one Ph.D. mentees of color, and (3) holding a tenure track position or already tenured. To protect both graduate students and faculty of color's experiences and identities, the study avoided the direct pairing of mentor-mentee dyads, and both graduate students and faculty of color were recruited separately through snowball sampling. Pseudonyms are also used to protect the identifying participants' identities.

The interviews with graduate students of color participants cover topics such as factors that influence their decisions to work with their current faculty advisor/mentor; the advantages and disadvantages of working with a faculty of color; their experiences navigating institutional and personal challenges and ways that faculty of color help them to overcome; and how this relationship influences their future career aspiration in academia. Faculty interviews covered topics focused on their relationships and expectations working with mentees of color, mentoring styles, challenges and opportunities that they faced or offered to support mentees of color's

experiences in graduate school, and how their role serves as a potential factor to diversify academia within their fields.

I employed both inductive and deductive approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015) to analyze the interview datasets and to generate findings. The inductive approach provides analysis and interpretation of the datasets naturally without preconceived notions, while the deductive approach allows me to apply Community Cultural Wealth framework to look for specific themes within the datasets. By integrating both approaches, I hope to capture the lived experiences of both graduate students and faculty of color within their respective mentoring relationships. The study also investigates institutional barriers, challenges, and added values that influence these relationships, offering insights into developing effective strategies and practices to foster excellence, diversity, and inclusivity in academia. The findings of this study aim to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in higher education, highlighting real life implications for policies, practices, and future research. Lastly, this qualitative study offers new perspectives on how the unique backgrounds, education, and experiences of graduate students and faculty of color shape their interactions and aspirations, potentially informing initiatives and efforts that promote growth, development, and equity in academia.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the expanding literature on mentoring in higher education by offering new insights into the academic journeys and experiences of graduate students of color. While research highlights the positive impact and outcomes of mentoring on undergraduate students of color (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), limited studies exist that focus specifically on graduate students, particularly Ph.D. students (Brunsma et al., 2017; Zambrana et al., 2015).

Scholars across various disciplines acknowledge the critical roles that race and ethnicity play in shaping and contributing to the educational outcomes of students of color (Griffin, 2020; Okawa, 2002), yet few have investigated how these dynamics have an impact on and influence the mentoring relationship in graduate school contexts (Patton, 2009). Graduate students of color are often excluded from broader higher education discussions, even though they face similar institutional barriers and challenges like those encountered by undergraduates (McCoy et al., 2015). This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature and to encourage further inquiry into the experiences of graduate students of color, advocating for the increase of empirical research and support to help them thrive.

Beyond contributing to the literature, the study also seeks to provide university administrators, staff, faculty, and Ph.D. students/candidates with actionable tools and knowledge to improve institutional mentoring policies and practices. The research offers insights into how mentoring relationships function within broader institutional contexts that are often shaped by racialized structures and inequitable practices. Understanding these unique experiences of both Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color can help institutional leaders be more effective at allocating resources and implementing strategies and initiatives that address systemic inequities and discriminatory practices within academia's cultures and norms. The findings may inform policies related to graduate mentoring practices, faculty workload distribution, and institutional support systems that recognize and value the relational and cultural labor often performed by faculty of color.

At the same time, this study hopes to showcase and empower counter-narratives that highlight the strengths, resilience, and agency of both faculty and graduate students of color in higher education, particularly in the Social Science and STEM fields. These narratives may

resonate with current and aspiring graduate students of color by illustrating how mentoring relationships can serve as sites of support, knowledge sharing, and collective resistance against racial and structural inequities in academia. By documenting these experiences, the study seeks to encourage more Ph.D. recipients of color to consider careers in academia, where they may continue to contribute to the diversification of the professoriate and support future generations of scholars despite current sociopolitical challenges. Such contributions are particularly significant given the continued underrepresentation of faculty of color across many academic disciplines and leadership positions in higher education.

Furthermore, this study becomes even more pronounced and essential in the current sociopolitical climate surrounding higher education. Since the beginning of 2025, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and initiatives have faced increasing political scrutiny and legislative challenges in various parts of the United States (The Civil Rights Project, 2025; The White House, 2025). At the same time, the Trump Administration had terminated or froze billions of dollars in federal research funding, such as the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health, among others, as well as placed broader financial constraints on universities, e.g., Harvard, Columbia, Brown, UCLA, etc. (National Public Radio, 2025). These political actions have raised many concerns about the sustainability of schools and programs that support historically marginalized scholars (National Education Association, 2025; National Public Radio, 2025). These shifting policies and funding landscapes further exacerbate existing inequities within graduate education and academic career pathways. As a result, understanding how faculty of color mentor and support graduate students of color navigate these challenges in current sociopolitical climate becomes increasingly critical, as these relationships play a vital

role in helping and supporting graduate students of color to navigate institutional barriers, maintain their academic aspirations, persist in doctoral programs, and pursue academic careers.

Organization of the Study

The accompanying chapters include a review of the literature, theoretical frameworks, methodology, findings, a discussion of those findings, implications of those findings, and a conclusion. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature around mentoring and mentorship and its impact on academic success in higher education for students of color. This chapter also investigates Community Cultural Wealth, a critical theoretical framework that guides the study. Chapter 3 describes the research methodological approach, focusing on the study's design, data collection, and analytical processes. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the experiences of both graduate students of color and faculty of colors, highlighting key insights from their mentoring dynamics. Lastly, Chapter 5 offers an in-depth discussion on major findings to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of the mentoring relationship between faculty and graduate students of color and discusses implications for research, practice, and policy to enhance institutional initiatives and efforts toward supporting graduate students of color in higher education.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This dissertation examines the dynamic, multifaceted, and reciprocal relationships between faculty of color and Ph.D. students of color, offering a deeper understanding of how to create supportive learning structures and environments that will enable graduate students of color to succeed and thrive in graduate school, personally and professionally. By centering the lived experiences of graduate students of color and faculty mentors of color, this study explores the nuances of power dynamics, the complexities of working relationships, and the shared struggles and successes that shape the mentoring processes and experiences from both points of view. These narratives contribute to the relatively limited body of literature on the experiences of graduate students of color in higher education, underscoring the need to improve mentorship practices and initiatives to address the unique challenges graduate students of color face.

This literature review discusses both conceptual insights and practical applications from previous scholars to enrich an understanding of mentoring relationships in higher education. The review begins with an overview of mentorship literature, highlighting its significance within academia and how it enhances both students' and young professionals' career development, personal growth, and academic success. Next, I explore the role of racial and gender identity in mentoring relationships, examining how shared racial and gender backgrounds of faculty of color influence students of color's learning, sense of belonging, and academic satisfaction and outcomes in higher education, mostly from the undergraduate student experiences. By addressing the importance of representation and cultural alignment in mentoring, this dissertation sheds light on the ways racial and ethnic identities shape relational dynamics in profound ways. I also

recognize and address various social and institutional struggles or barriers that students of color face in higher education, showcasing the importance of having a diverse professoriate to navigate those challenges. Throughout this review, I identify ways that my study could contribute to our understanding of the importance of having relevant representation in faculty mentorship in higher education. Lastly, I present a conceptual framework, Community Cultural Wealth, and the various capital that are used to analyze and interpret the results of the study.

The Evolution of Mentoring Models and Its Role in Higher Education

An Early Focus on Unidirectional Mentoring Relationships

Mentorship models and practices have evolved significantly over the past few decades, shifting from traditional, hierarchical approaches toward more culturally responsive and supportive frameworks to meet the diverse needs of students and young professionals in both academia and the workforce. Before the 1980s, mentorship was predominantly conceptualized as a unidirectional process, rooted deeply in the business and professional development sectors. Early scholarship of Kram (1985;1988) highlights the significance of senior employees' training, guiding, and mentoring of junior colleagues to improve their skills, professional competencies, and long-term career development. This early model focuses on an experienced mentor/senior as the primary source of knowledge who provides guidance to a less experienced protégé (Kram, 1983; 1985; 1988).

Early mentoring practices and relationships focused on two main categories, career development and psychosocial support (Jacobi, 1991). In terms of career development, mentors were expected to provide information and external brokering to support the mentee's job and career prospects, preparing them for the hierarchical advancement within the organization. This relationship includes mentorship behaviors such as "coaching protégés, sponsoring their

advancement, increasing their positive exposure and visibility, and offering them protection and challenging assignments” (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5) throughout the process. At the same time, mentors also develop and engage in emotional and psychosocial support with mentees, building trust, providing emotional encouragement, and cultivating interpersonal bonds to recognize mentee’s self-worth and self-efficacy (Jacobi, 1991). Having strong psychosocial support enables mentees to have new role models for support as well as to receive confirmation and acknowledgement of their successes and failures (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Kram, 2007). These two functions—career development and psychosocial support—of mentorship serve as foundation mentoring models and practices, strengthening the relationship between mentors and mentees to advance mentees’ career development.

In higher education, these models continue to influence how mentorship is enacted to facilitate students’ academic success as well as provide a basis from which more inclusive and culturally informed models to emerge. However, scholars critique the unidirectional relationship dynamic as it reinforces unequal power structures, positioning the mentor as the sole authority and the mentee as a passive recipient of knowledge (Campbell et al., 2012; Zachary, 2000, 2002). While this traditional approach may offer various learning benefits, it fails to recognize the mentee’s potential contributions to their relationship, such as providing new perspectives, lived experiences, and innovative ideas that could also shape the mentor’s views on certain ideas and issues. These perspectives emphasize a unidirectional relationship between mentors and mentees, characterized by “hierarchical transfer of knowledge and information from an older, more experienced person to a younger, less experienced person” (Zachary, 2002, p. 28), and neglect the reciprocal learning opportunity from the mentees that shape and improve the mentor’s learning and growth, creating a missed opportunity for mutual enrichment (Campbell et

al., 2012; Zachary, 2002).

Although traditional mentoring practices could highlight parallel struggles within the academic space, this unidirectional mentoring model has not yet fully captured the unique experiences of faculty-students' mentoring experiences in academia, especially with race and racism issues, marginalized students of color, as well as institutional barriers and challenges (Patton, 2009; Zambrana et al., 2015). Despite the limitations of early conceptualizations of mentorship, this antiquated model still establishes strong foundations for scholars to build on and create new initiatives, strategies, and models to improve mentoring practices and models for academic settings (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

A Shift toward Developmental Mentoring Model: Mutualistic Career and Psychosocial Development

Scholars improved and shifted from this traditional, unidirectional mentoring relationship to focus on developmental mentorship by emphasizing collaboration, shared goals, and mutual benefits. Developmental mentorship is rooted in the idea that both mentors and mentees engage in critical reflection, challenging each other's perspectives and learning from their shared experiences (Daloz, 2012; Zachary, 2002). This approach not only acknowledges the dynamic contributions of both parties but also positions the relationship as a two-way process of growth. While mentees benefit the most in a mentoring relationship, it also stimulates mentors' intellectual curiosity on social issues and cultural awareness or humility, especially by working with students from diverse backgrounds (Zambrana et al., 2015). The developmental mentoring model has shown to increase scholarly collaboration and production, bringing new ideas and technical skills to improve the research projects (Crisp & Cruz, 2009), and enhancing mentors' professional satisfaction and legacy building within academia and the larger community (Daloz,

2012). Framing mentorship as a long-term, relational process allows scholars to move away from traditional, hierarchical notions of mentorship that focus solely on a mentor imparting knowledge and values to a mentee, a method of indoctrinating young minds into societal values and knowledge (Griffin, 2012; Kram, 1988).

Daloz (2012) elaborates on mentoring relationships as a development journey through the relational lens (e.g., mentor-mentor collaborations) based on his practical experiences and expertise in adult learning and scholarship. Daloz (2012) emphasizes that “mentors are guides. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way” (p. 18). This account describes the reciprocal nature of the mentoring journey where both mentor and mentee navigate challenges, set goals, and achieve meaningful development together. For instance, in higher education settings, faculty and graduate students engage in mentoring and advising activities such as career advice, networking opportunities, research collaboration, dissertation guidance, and psychosocial support during personal crises (Griffin, 2012). Even though Daloz’s (2012) work emphasizes the value of developmental and relational mentorship growth and collaboration, it does not fully account for the realities of marginalized students in higher education. Campbell et al., (2012) expand on developmental mentoring by highlighting students of color identity development, resilience, and leadership. However, these frameworks place disproportionate emphasis on mentor benefits, reinforcing a hierarchical and power dynamic to some extent. Moreover, their mentoring models overlook how critical factors, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic background, shape mentorship dynamics that disproportionately impact students of color, particularly Black and Latina/o students, in higher education (Zambrana et al., 2015). For example, research has found that both faculty and students of color, especially Latinas and Black

women, have difficulty finding mentors who are knowledgeable about their educational needs and situations, leading to feelings of incompetence, invisibility, isolation, devaluation, and self-doubt in higher education (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017). While developmental mentoring recognizes the importance of reciprocal learning, its lack of critical engagement with cultural and social identities makes it insufficient for addressing the complex and racialized mentoring needs of students and faculty of color in higher education.

Moving toward Culturally Aware Mentorship Model: Incorporating Cultural Norms into Mentoring Practices

Prior to the incorporation of cultural awareness practices in mentoring, scholars and practitioners have been using the Culturally Relevant Framework (CRF), also known as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), developed by Ladson-Billings (1995), as a response to traditional deficit-based educational models. CRF argues that the U.S. education system failed to recognize the cultural strengths, knowledge, and lived experiences of marginalized students of color in the classroom, particularly within the K-12 educational context (Ladson-Billings, 2014). The framework emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process and environment rather than requiring students to assimilate into dominant academic norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings' work primarily focuses on teachers' pedagogical approaches, encouraging them to utilize students' cultural knowledge and backgrounds as an asset to enhance their educational experiences.

Traditional mentoring models in both the workforce and academia often assume a unidirectional flow of knowledge from faculty to students, overlooking the unique cultural backgrounds and reciprocal learning potential within faculty-student relationships (Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1988). CRF principles challenge this traditional approach by reframing mentorship as a

dynamic, culturally affirming process that values the racial and ethnic identities of marginalized students of color and faculty in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Museus, 2014). This asset-based perspective highlights the importance of awareness of different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and struggles that shape relationships to foster a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

By increasing critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness, CRF enables both faculty and graduate students of color to critically examine and challenge institutional policies and practices that perpetuate systemic inequities in academia. Museus (2014) expands on CRF by emphasizing the role of institutions in creating culturally engaging campus environments that affirm and validate students' identities. His work highlights the importance of implementing initiatives and programs that actively foster cultural inclusion and provide spaces where students of color feel recognized, valued, and empowered. Such initiatives not only enhance student engagement and academic participation but also create opportunities for faculty-student collaborations aimed at addressing structural inequities while mitigating the burden of cultural taxation often placed on faculty of color (Museus, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994) is the additional burden that is placed on faculty of color in academia by administration, assuming that faculty of color are "best suited for specific tasks because of [their] race/ethnicity or [their] presumed knowledge of cultural differences" (p. 26). Faculty of color and women frequently shoulder a greater burden of teaching, mentoring, and advising responsibilities (Griffin, 2020; Lee, 2012) compared to white and/or male faculty. The idea of "tax" comes into play given that institutional reward systems, particularly at research universities, which prioritize research productivity over teaching, mentoring, and service. As faculty of color and women faculty have additional mentoring, teaching, and service burdens

placed on them, they often have less time to devote to producing publications or securing extramural funding to support their work (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Lee, 2012; Padilla, 1994; Williams & Williams, 2006).

Growing Student and Faculty Diversity Requires New Approaches to Mentorship and Mentor Training

With the growing numbers of students of color in higher education, traditional mentoring practices and models are being challenged to incorporate additional factors, such as race, gender, and cultural background, among other intersecting identities, to address the needs and challenges that students of color face (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017). Addressing these social and cultural identities led to the creation of culturally awareness mentoring (CAM) model that recognizes the complexity of power dynamics inherent in mentoring relationships and addresses the growing cultural diversity matters within academic and professional contexts, especially in STEMM disciplines (Pfund et al., 2016; Pfund et al., 2022). Culturally aware, or culturally responsive, mentor training plays a critical role in equipping faculty with skills and strategies to recognize the unique experiences and cultural differences that each student brings into the academic space and to be intentional during their engagements with students, especially with marginalized students of color.

Given the limited number of faculty of color to mentor and support students of color, scholars implemented cultural awareness/relevant mentoring practices to train and equip faculty mentors, across all racial and ethnic groups, to more effectively support and address the needs of students of color (Byars-Winston et al., 2018; Pfund et al., 2022). Womack and colleagues (2020) implement CAM model in faculty and administrator training programs aimed at improving engagement with students of color in STEM. Their findings highlight that CAM

participation improved mentors' intrapersonal awareness (reflecting on their own racial and ethnic identities), interpersonal awareness (recognizing of diverse cultural identities, stereotypes, and biases), and skill-building to enhance their critical thinking and communication with minoritized students. Faculty mentors who actively developed cultural awareness demonstrated stronger mentoring relationships and provided more holistic support for students of color, particularly when addressing social and race-related issues (Womack et al., 2020). Suiter and colleagues (2024) also highlighted the impact of mentorship training workshops aimed at fostering a culturally responsive research environment in the biomedical sciences at Vanderbilt University. Their findings revealed that faculty participants became more comfortable and confident at addressing cultural diversity issues, while students also noted an increase in faculty's behaviors that acknowledged and responded to their specific needs.

Similarly, Cobian and colleagues (2024) examined how 10 colleges and universities integrated cultural awareness mentoring practices within STEMM fields. Their study highlighted how these efforts contributed to raising awareness about campus climate and advancing diversity-related initiatives that affect students of color, encouraging more institutional support for marginalized students pursuing STEMM education and careers. White-Lewis and colleagues (2022) also investigated the implementation of culturally aware mentoring practices in STEMM and found that while faculty often faced challenges in adopting and sustaining these practices, due to balancing commitments and competing responsibilities such as grant requirements and research obligations, they still gained a deeper understanding of their mentees' experiences. These faculty mentors reported developing new strategies to effectively support students and to appreciate cultural differences within their mentoring relationship. These practices highlight the value of culturally responsive mentorship training in expanding faculty's abilities, capacities, and

commitments to creating more inclusive, affirming, and supportive environments for students of color in STEMM disciplines.

Higher education institutions often assume that faculty members are naturally trained and prepared to mentor and supervise graduate students, particularly with those from marginalized backgrounds (Manathunga & Goozee, 2007). This assumption overlooks the critical need for structured training that equips faculty with the tools to become culturally responsive, empathetic, and equity-minded in their mentoring practices. Addressing these institutional barriers and shortcomings requires more than individual goodwill and effort; it demands institutional commitment to equity, inclusion, and accountability at all levels. Institutions must take active steps to cultivate environments where students of color feel seen, supported, and valued, ensuring that the burden of navigating systemic inequities does not fall solely on their shoulders once they first step into their respective doctoral programs (Slay et al., 2019; Posselt, 2018).

Culturally aware mentoring fosters environments where both mentors and mentees are empowered to learn, reflect, and grow, enriching the mentoring quality relationship and advancing equity within academia. These evolving mentoring frameworks inform my research study, as they provide critical insights into how faculty of color engage with and support students of colors in their respective mentoring relationship.

Empirical Findings on the Benefits of Mentoring in Higher Education

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the critical role mentorship generally plays in shaping undergraduate and graduate students' academic success and satisfaction as well as in enhancing their confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Phinney et al., 2011; Garcia and Henderson, 2015). Mentorships contribute significantly to students' intellectual growth, leadership development, and self-confidence in both their personal and professional contexts,

equipping them with the skills and abilities to succeed in higher education and beyond (Dominguez & Hager, 2013; Lunsford et al., 2017). These relationships also foster a sense of belonging, a key factor for academic success, particularly among marginalized and underrepresented student populations (Holloway-Friesen, 2021). A sense of belonging, defined as feeling valued and included within an academic community, is particularly important for students of color, who often must navigate predominantly white institutions where they may experience marginalization (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; O'Brien et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). Research indicates that students of color who have a strong sense of belonging also report feeling more satisfied, have improved mental health outcomes, and persist to later years of college at higher rates (Strayhorn, 2012). However, many students of color struggle to cultivate this sense of belonging in PWIs due to a lack of representation among faculty and peers, experiences with microaggressions, and the absence of culturally responsive practices (Curtin et al., 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lunsford et al., 2017).

Having effective mentoring relationships not only strengthens students' sense of belonging but also empowers them to develop the confidence to engage in critical discussions, collaborate with peers, and persist academically both inside and outside of the classroom (Rudolph et al., 2015). Curtin et al. (2016) and Sowell et al. (2015) found that strong mentor-mentee relationships enhance students' comprehension and retention, as well as their academic self-confidence, ultimately increasing graduation rates among both domestic and international graduate students. These studies reinforce the importance of mentorship in fostering a community and support (e.g., faculty, staff, and peers), which are essential to students' persistence and success in higher education.

Mentorship Dynamics & Racial Complexity: When Mentees and Mentors Share Similar Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds

While mentoring scholarship has shown positive impacts on students' academic achievements and outcomes generally, specific studies have examined racial and ethnic matching in mentoring relationships that remain limited and produce inconsistent and mixed results. Ortiz-Walters and Gilson's (2005) research on doctoral business students of color show students receive more psychosocial and instrumental support from their faculty mentors of color. These doctoral students of color felt more comfortable and satisfied with the overall mentoring relationship. In a related large-scale study of more than 1000 racially diverse undergraduate and graduate students in STEM fields, Blake-Beard and colleagues' (2011) results aligned with previous scholarship, confirming that individuals in same-race mentoring relationships are associated with stronger psychosocial and career supports. However, Black-Beard et al. (2011) also noted that these students of color do not outperform other students in terms of academic outcomes, such as increasing GPA or self-efficacy.

Syed and colleagues' (2012) short-term (four weeks) longitudinal study that focused on underrepresented STEM adolescents found that these students often preferred mentors who shared similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the context of limited diversity in STEM fields, having mentors of color was associated with increasing students of color's academic confidence, motivation, and personal fulfillment compared to peers who do not have a match-ethnic mentor (Syed et al., 2012). Building on this, Holloway-Friesen (2021) found that Hispanic graduate students with racially or ethnically matched mentors are more likely to have a higher level of sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy compared to those without such mentors. This finding highlights the importance of recognizing and acknowledging cultural identity, familial

expectations, and community support in shaping the experiences of marginalized students of color in higher education. Collectively, these studies underline the nuanced role of racial and ethnic similarity in mentoring relationships, increasing our understanding of different social and academic factors that contribute to students of color's academic success.

Mentors who share similar lived experiences can better understand and address specific challenges faced by students of color, including systemic racism, microaggressions, familial obligations, and societal expectations (Chan et al., 2015). As a result, students with mentors of similar backgrounds not only receive academic guidance but also invaluable emotional and social support which enhances their overall educational experience. Students of color whose racial or ethnic identities match those of their mentors persist in college at higher rates, remain engaged on campus, and even have greater likelihoods of pursuing graduate and advanced degrees or teaching credentials (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Holloway-Friesen, 2021). Mentors of color serve not only as guides but also as role models, providing inspiration and motivation for students to envision and work toward a brighter future.

While there are benefits for same race or ethnicity mentoring relationships, scholars have also shown that racial or ethnicity matching in mentorship pairs is not necessary for improving students of color's learning experiences and academic outcome. Tuma and Dolan's (2024) findings show no additional advantage for students' academic performance whose mentors shared their gender, race, or ethnicity. Instead, students of color who shared similar attitudes, beliefs, and values with their mentor, or with mentors who are more culturally aware, tended to receive more support, resulting in higher quality of mentoring relationships. This finding highlights that students' success is not due to similar racial background and identity but instead the kind of training that faculty mentors received. Moreover, faculty of color and women are

more likely to participate in mentoring training opportunities, which result in more successful mentoring relationships and stronger support for students of color (McCreath et al., 2024).

Similarly, Padersen et al. (2022) highlights that Hispanic undergraduates in STEM who were matched with Hispanic faculty mentors did not necessarily receive better quality mentorship support compared to other Hispanic undergraduate students who were matched with mentors from different ethnicities. However, these same race-matching mentees did report that they have more access to scholarly opportunities, such as coauthoring publications, than their other peers, which influences their likelihood of pursuing a STEM research career. In terms of aspiration to pursue graduate schools, Moreles et al. (2021) found that Latinx undergraduate students with non-Latinx mentors demonstrated a stronger intention to pursue and enroll in graduate school compared to those students mentored by Latinx faculty. The study highlights that faculty mentors who were culturally aware and intentional about their engagement and interaction with Latinx students tend to inspire their students to pursue graduate degrees. These mixed findings regarding same race or ethnicity mentoring suggest that, while cultural alignment can provide certain relational or academic benefits, it is not the only factor contributing to effective mentoring. My study aims to contribute to this conversation by further exploring the nuances of cross-racial mentoring and the specific practices and strategies that support the development of graduate students of color in higher education.

Gender Concordance in Mentorship: Exploring the Dynamics of Alignment

Similar to the literature on same race or ethnicity in mentoring, research on gender influences in mentoring relationships also present mixed and inconsistent findings about its effectiveness and impact. Some scholars found that same-gender mentoring relationships offer greater psychosocial and academic support compared to cross-gender relationships, largely due

to interpersonal comfort stemming from shared experiences and challenges in navigating academic spaces (Allen et al., 2005; Lockwood, 2006). For instance, Hispanic and Black undergraduate students reported higher satisfaction when they were paired with faculty mentors of the same gender (Hernandez et al., 2017; Padersen et al., 2022). These studies highlight the benefits of female students of color mentored by female faculty, suggesting that shared gender can enhance relational trust and support.

While these studies show positive impacts and greater satisfaction with matched gender mentoring, scholars offer contrasting results. For instance, Morales et al. (2021) found that Latina undergraduate students with male mentors expressed a higher intention to pursue graduate education, particularly in STEM fields, compared to Latino male counterparts, regardless of gender matching. However, the authors also acknowledge that Latina students with male mentors were less likely to present their collaborative research at academic conferences, which could limit Latina students' scholarly productivity and professional development (Morales et al., 2021). Similarly, Tuma et al. (2021) examined the negative mentoring experiences of doctoral students in the life sciences, highlighting power dynamics, the undermining of students' research abilities, and the interpersonal mismatches that hindered students' access to key academic and professional opportunities. The study also noted that cross-gender mentoring relationships tend to be more formal, with both mentors and mentees often limiting their social interactions to maintain professional boundaries and development, which may have shaped the nature of support provided (Tuma et al., 2021). Earlier research has also shown that in some cross-gender mentoring relationships, protégés received greater amounts of psychosocial support from their mentors than those in the same-gender dyads (Campbell & Campbell 2007; Sosik & Godshalk, 2005). Even though my study does not examine gender-matching mentoring, these studies

provide significant insights to understand the nuance dynamic between same and cross gender mentoring relationship, offering useful context for understanding the diverse ways mentors and mentees engage across gender lines in higher education.

Examining Graduate Students' Experiences in Higher Education

Discrimination, Isolation, and Satisfaction

Graduate schools operate within a complex system of expectations, institutional structures, and varying levels of support that can either facilitate or hinder students' academic success. For students of color, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, this system often presents unique and compounded challenges, including conflicting academic expectations, inequitable access to resources, disparities in funding and fellowship opportunity, and insufficient institutional support. Slay et al. (2019) highlighted this tension through a case study that examined the aggressive recruitment efforts of preliminary white institutions aimed at increasing the enrollment of students of color in their Ph.D. programs. While these recruitment efforts were framed as diversity initiatives, they often failed to provide promised resources and structural support, leaving students of color to navigate graduate school environments that were ill-equipped to meet their needs. This lack of institutional accountability exacerbates the pressure to persist and succeed that students of color, who are often in isolation, feel.

Extensive scholarship has well documented the multifaceted challenges faced by graduate students of color, particularly those from marginalized communities. These students of color often reported feeling of isolation, invisibility, and difficulty adapting and navigating institution cultures and norms (Lewis et al., 2004). Many students of color also experienced heightened levels of discrimination, both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as tokenized or subjected stigmatization. These experiences impose additional burdens for marginalized students

of color, including the pressure to confront racial stereotypes and to address microaggressions (Brunsma et al., 2017; Gonzalez, 2006; Wilson, 2000). Such experiences contribute to the decreased levels of satisfaction with graduation programs and lower rates of persistence and success among graduate students of color.

In terms of academic satisfaction, Tram et al. (2023) found that faculty mentoring, financial support, academic expectations, and departmental cultures in graduate schools, particularly in psychology programs, were significantly interrelated in shaping the satisfaction and accomplishments of underrepresented doctoral students from marginalized backgrounds. Among these factors, faculty mentoring may be the most influential component of improving students of color's satisfactions because of the support they received, aligned with the literature on the benefits of racial/ethnic matching in mentorship. Also, most students of color in the study are first generation students and come from lower-social economic status, making financial support a critical factor in alleviating financial stress and promoting persistence. Scholars have shown that lack of financial resources is a major barrier to academic success and satisfaction among students of color, often preventing them from pursuing their academic aspirations (Clark et al., 2012; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

These intersecting concerns and factors—mentorship, finance, institutional culture, and academic expectations—highlight the complex realities that marginalized students of color often must face and navigate in graduate schools. By recognizing and addressing multifaceted needs, faculty mentors can be more effectively support and work with students of color, contributing to their academic growth, well-being and overall success in graduate programs. These findings reinforce existing scholarship on the important role of mentorship in advancing the learning and development of graduate students of color in higher education.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

In connection to the academic challenges discussed above, mental health has emerged as a critical and prominent concern for students of color in higher education. Scholars have consistently shown that students of color often report experiencing negative racial encounters, which contribute to high emotional distress as well as a diminished sense of belonging (Clark et al., 2012). These social and emotional burdens of students of color lead to academic disengagement, lower performance, and reduced interactions with peers and professors. A common psychological consequence of these experiences is imposter syndrome, or imposter phenomenon. Imposter phenomenon is characterized by the feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and the persistent fear of being exposed as a “fraud,” even when students of color have achieved high levels of academic success (Holden et al., 2021; Posselt, 2018). These feelings are often compounded by the underrepresentation of students of color in graduate programs, which can lead to isolation, depression, heightened scrutiny, and the pressure constantly to prove themselves in predominantly white academic spaces.

Furthermore, students of color often internalize stereotypes about their intellectual capacities, making it more difficult for them to engage fully in their academic work or to seek the necessary support, leaving them to fail and drop out of their doctoral program (Jaremka et al., 2020). In addition, students of color often encounter microaggressions, subtle and often unintentional discriminatory comments or behaviors within predominantly white academic spaces which undermine their sense of belonging and academic confidence. These microaggressions may manifest in classroom discussions, interactions with peers and faculty, or through institutional policies that fail to consider diverse perspectives or address historical and current social and racial issues that students of color face daily both inside and outside of the

classrooms (Sue et al., 2007). The cumulative effects of these experiences can undermine students' mental health and well-being, contributing to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout compared to their white peers. Such realities call upon faculty, especially senior faculty members to step up and share the responsibility of addressing these issues, advocating for more inclusive practices and actively supporting the well-being and success of students of color (Harris & Lee, 2019).

Supportive faculty mentorship plays a critical role in helping graduate students of color navigate the academic and personal challenges they often encounter in higher education. However, access to such mentorship is inconsistent across institutions, often leaving students of color without the guidance they need to thrive in their doctoral programs. While faculty members demonstrate excellent research capabilities, they often lack the training and skills required to effectively mentor and supervise students of color (McCoy et al., 2015; Tuma et al., 2021). Davis and colleagues (2022) further highlight that faculty of color frequently encounter institutional barriers and insufficient support, which not only negatively affect their professional experiences but also hinder their ability to provide meaningful mentorship. The challenges indicate the need for institutions to invest resources and long-term commitments to institutionalize culturally responsive mentoring initiatives to equip faculty with knowledge to engage and address various social and cultural needs of students of color (Byars-Winston et al., 2018). Moreover, effective mentors normalize the struggles students face, foster a growth mindset, and actively affirm students of color's intellectual abilities and potential (Posselt, 2018). Culturally aware and responsive faculty mentors can create spaces where students of color feel seen and heard by acknowledging personal, social, and cultural dimensions of their experiences. These mentors not only offer guidance but also engage in open, intentional dialogue and advocate on behalf of their

mentees—serving as an essential source of support throughout their academic journey (Pfund et al., 2016; Pfund et al., 2022; White-Lewis et al., 2022; Womack et al., 2020).

Contribution to the Literature

While a significant body of literature exists on mentorship frameworks and their role in fostering students of color's academic success, professional development, a sense of belonging and satisfaction within higher education, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mentoring relationships between graduate students of color and faculty of color. Much of the existing research on graduate students' experiences (Curtin et al., 2013; Posselt, 2018; Slay et al., 2019; Suiter et al., 2024) has predominantly been framed through quantitative approaches, which, while valuable, often overlook the nuanced and relational dynamics that shape mentoring experiences throughout the process. These studies tend to focus on broad trends and generalized outcomes, but they fail to provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences of graduate students of color, particularly in their interactions with faculty of color and to how faculty's own experiences shape their mentoring styles and their students' outcomes. As a result, a significant gap persists in the literature regarding how these mentoring relationships directly influence the academic and professional trajectories of graduate students of color, as well as their overall experiences within academia.

My study contributes to the literature by examining the direct and reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships between Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color, with a focus on understanding the unique factors that contribute to or hinder their success in their doctoral programs. By exploring both graduate students of color and faculty of color perspectives of mentorship and their experiences navigating higher education barriers, this research will provide a more holistic view of how these relationships influence the academic journey of graduate

students of color. In doing so, the study will also highlight the institutional barriers and support structures that either facilitate or impede the success of graduate students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds. The findings of this research have the potential to inform institutional policies and initiatives aimed at improving mentorship practices and addressing ongoing inequities in higher education and ways to diversify the professoriate. By contributing a more nuanced understanding of mentorship from both the graduate student of color and faculty of color perspectives, this study can help institutions better support graduate students of color, ultimately fostering greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within academia for years to come.

Framework: Community Cultural Wealth

I rely on the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework to guide my analysis of the mentoring relationship between faculty of color and graduate students of color in higher education. This framework allows for the capture of the shared and reciprocal professional, personal, and cultural experiences of faculty and students of color in higher education. CCW is an element of critical race theory and an asset-based approach that centers on communities of color's values, voices, and experiences (Yosso, 2005). CCW challenges and reinterprets Pierre Bourdieu's, a French sociologist, cultural capital theory to validate the experience, knowledge, and place for people of color in higher education. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (CCT, 1986) has significantly influenced multiple higher education disciplines and scholarship in explaining social reproduction and orders, playing a vital role in measuring students' educational success and outcomes over the last few decades.

A Review and Critique of Bourdieu's Perspective on Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) believes that capital is the foundation of social life, dictating one's position within social orders. The more capital a person has, the more powerful a position one

occupies in social life and the social hierarchy. Moreover, capital goes beyond the economic aspect and has transcended into the more symbolic realm that also affects people's social and cultural lives. Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory (CCT) provides an insightful perspective into individual and institutional relationships that reveal the power dynamics among different parties. There are three fundamental forms of capital within CCT—economic, social, and cultural—and they influence one another to shape an individual's status and position in society. Economic capital is directly tied to an individual's money and wealth, such as owning and having property rights. Social capital is people's networks and connections that provide leverage and access to opportunities, which can be converted into economic capital. Lastly, cultural capital is people's values and qualifications, such as their levels of education, which can also be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) perceived that cultural capital shapes an individual's social status as well as educational outcomes, which represents more of a deficit view that neglecting students of color's knowledge and experiences (Yosso, 2005).

For the last few decades within the higher education context, CCT argues that students who have more forms of capital (e.g., economic, cultural, and social) are more likely to succeed than those who do not. However, Bourdieu's (1986) approach does not acknowledge the unique cultural experiences of students of color whose experiences, knowledge, and skills have been overlooked and do not fit within the "traditional" capital framework. Thus, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) expands on Bourdieu's CCT to highlight the knowledge, strength, and resources within marginalized communities. CCW provides a more holistic and asset-based approach to center and reveal people of color's cultural knowledge, experiences, and voices in higher education (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016).

Applying Community Cultural Wealth to a Study on Mentorship

The Community Cultural Wealth framework offers six types of capital—*aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant*—that reflect the cultural assets and strengths of students of color. These forms of capitals are interrelated, but each offers a distinct perspective on how students of color navigate and engage with different social and educational settings, offering critical insights to understand how such mentoring relationships foster support, guidance, and resilience within higher education.

Aspirational capital refers to students of color’s ability to “maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This concept highlights the resilience and optimism of students of color as they pursue educational and life goals despite systemic barriers and obstacles, showcasing a “culture of possibility.” Holland (2017) illustrates how first-generation, low-income, minoritized students, particularly African American students, demonstrate strong college aspirations, with families, peers, and communities serving as key support and motivation. Some students express interest in and aspire to pursue graduate and professional schools after graduation. Similarly, Kelly et al., (2023) emphasize the instrumental role of aspirational capital in mentoring relationships, showing how it helps international college students build and strengthen their bonds with faculty mentors to succeed in the U.S. Having role models and support networks from the community play an important role in encouraging students of color to envision and pursue their dreams and goals.

Grounded in aspirational capital, in this mentoring relationship, I expect to see faculty of color serve as role models, helping mentees to envision themselves in similar academic positions, affirm their lived experience, and support their aspirations to pursue careers in academia (Holland, 2017). This capital also emphasizes the long-term goals of both graduate students and faculty of color, including possibly becoming faculty members or researchers who

remain deeply connected and engaged in their communities. By engaging in community-driven research and mentoring relationships, these individuals help create new possibilities and pathways for future generations in higher education (Kelly et al., 2023).

Secondly, *linguistic capital* refers to the intellectual and social skills that communities of color cultivated through multilingualism, storytelling traditions, oral histories, and diverse communication practices (Yosso, 2005). Within higher education, linguistic capital acknowledges that students of color often develop the ability to navigate multiple spaces—e.g., home, community, and academic environments—by shifting language practices and communication styles to meet different expectations. These adaptive capacities and abilities also allow students of color to articulate complex ideas and experiences as well as create counter-stories that challenge deficit narratives and institutional racism in higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), positioning language as a form of knowledge production.

Scholarship highlights that linguistic capital plays a significant role in mentoring relationships, particularly when mentors recognize and validate students' communication abilities. For example, Kelley and Watson (2023) demonstrate that mentoring framed through a linguistic capital lens affirms international students' multilingual identities and strengthens academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Wang et al. (2018) highlight how culturally responsive mentoring enhances students' confidence in articulating ideas across linguistic and cultural contexts. When faculty mentors—particularly faculty of color—acknowledge these dynamics, they can create relational spaces that legitimize diverse learning styles, encourage authentic scholarly voices, and demystify disciplinary language expectations.

Linguistic capital in my study importantly allows me to examine how faculty mentors of color recognize, affirm, and strategically leverage students' language and communicative assets

to enhance engagement and increase students of color's sense of belonging and persistence across various communication platforms. While I am not expecting faculty of color to engage with students across multiple languages, their recognition and affirmation would strengthen students of color's engagement and academic confidence within their respective mentoring relationships.

Third, *familial capital* refers to the cultural knowledge, community memory, and moral support cultivated within immediate and extended family (or kinship) networks and broader communities (Yosso, 2005). This familial capital challenges deficit narratives by recognizing that students of color inherit intergenerational wisdom, and communal values and strategies, from the broader communities to sustain and persist through challenges. An important factor is the notion of kinship—often extending beyond biological family (living or passed) to include relatives, peers, and community elders or members—that plays a critical role in nurturing an individual's resilience, identities, and problem-solving capacities across multiple settings. These communal bonds would help students of color to foster a sense of belonging and shared responsibility that counteracts isolation in higher education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Moreover, familial capital draws from communal bonds (Morris, 1999) and funds of knowledge (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992) that reflect on the knowledge and experiences that students of color bring with them to the classroom. In higher education, these family and community-rooted resources often function as motivational anchors, particularly for first-generation and racially minoritized undergraduate and graduate students whose academic pursuits are intertwined with collective aspirations (Garcia, 2021; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2018).

The relevance of familial capital to this study lies in examining how faculty of color and graduate students of color cultivate what may be understood as an academic “extended family,”

such as peers, faculty and staff, within their mentoring relationships. Research shows that faculty of color, particularly Black faculty, frequently enact kinship-based mentoring practices for Black graduate students to address racial trauma and to engage in healing practices (Smith et al., 2024). Through such relationships, mentors draw from their own family and community histories to offer coping strategies, normalize experiences of impostor phenomenon, and affirm students' cultural identities and experiences in higher education (Bertrand Jones et al., 2015; Blockett et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2024; Sverdilk et al., 2020). As a result, students of color often conceptualize mentors as fictive kin who provide emotional reassurance and guidance beyond technical academic training.

Familial capital also illuminates how both faculty and students of color's commitments to family and community shape their decisions to pursue and persist in academic careers, framing scholarship as collective advancement rather than individual achievement (Yosso, 2005). Thus, graduate students frequently construct peer-based "academic families"—through research labs, cohort models, and study groups—that mirror extended kinship structures and provide reciprocal academic and emotional support (Holland, 2017; Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2018). By centering familial capital, this study moves beyond individualistic mentoring models and instead examines how kinship-oriented relationships enhance belonging, confidence, and support navigation of academic and professional spaces.

Fourth, *social capital* refers to the networks of people and community resources students of color utilize to succeed in higher education (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital, rooted in family, peers, and community, looks at the social connections that provide both instrumental and emotional support to students of color to navigate complex institutional landscapes. These networks provide a sense of reassurance and belonging, affirming that students of color are not

alone in their pursuit of higher education. Yosso (2005) highlights how communities of color offer critical knowledge and resources, including assistance with scholarship applications, college preparation, legal guidance, and employment opportunities. Dyrness et al. (2024) extend this social capital to illustrate how minoritized undergraduate and graduate students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) mentored elementary students of color, fostering and developing critical consciousness to help them understand ongoing systemic inequities.

This mentorship underlines the significance of peer and community-based support in affirming cultural identity and lived experiences as they navigate different social and institutional environments. The relevance of social capital to my study provides a lens to view the potentially less visible forms of support that faculty of color provide to graduate students, such as introducing students to professional and academic networks that validate their research interests. Both formal and informal networks demonstrate the collective powers that aim to uplift students of color in higher education.

Navigational capital highlights students of color's skills and abilities to effectively maneuver through educational institutions, particularly at PWIs that are historically exclusive and racially-hostile for students of color, through a network of support (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Closely aligned with social capital, navigational capital acknowledges both the individual agency and collective knowledge that students of color draw from their family, peers, and communities to negotiate and persist in academic spaces where they are often being marginalized. This form of capital showcases the resources, strategies, and resilience that students of color deploy not only to survive but to navigate and thrive in different challenging social and academic environments. Alarcón and Bettez's (2017) work underlines the importance of peer-mentoring among Latin@ faculty who collaborate and forge new learning methods and

create research partnerships that support Latin@ doctoral students in navigating PWIs. Similarly, Samuelson and Litzler (2016) show how Black and Latino engineering students draw on navigational capital by actively seeking out networks, showing capacity to maintain high academic achievement, and leveraging their lived experiences as tools to persist in engineering programs.

Navigation capital for this research study helps trace the guidance that faculty of color offer to support how students of color interpret and maneuver through institutional processes, such as securing funding, publishing, as well as managing social and personal issues both inside and outside of academia. By modeling resilience and sharing their own strategies and experiences of overcoming systemic barriers, faculty of color help students build the confidence and skills necessary to advocate for themselves and to flourish in higher education.

Sixth and lastly, *resistant capital* highlights the knowledge and skills that students of color cultivate through their community's cultural histories and collective struggles to oppose and challenge structural inequality (Yosso, 2005). This capital reflects the intergenerational transmission of critical awareness, advocacy, and self-determination that enables students of color to confront and disrupt inequitable systems while remaining grounded in their cultural roots and identities. Students of color inherit these identities and values from their families and communities—such as resilience, collective responsibility, and moral commitment to justice—that foster critical consciousness and self-reliance to engage with systems of oppression, recognize power hierarchies, and mobilize toward social change (Freire, 1993; Hope et al., 2016; Rhoads, 2016).

Recent scholarship further demonstrates how resistant capital operates in higher education contexts. For instance, Strangfeld (2024) illustrates how Latina/o/x students draw upon

resistant capital to confront racialized, gendered, and class-based stereotypes while persisting in their academic journeys. Similarly, Kornbluh et al. (2022) reinforce the importance of resistance-oriented strategies in challenging institutional inequities and the lack of diversity and representation in higher education. In graduate education scholarship, resistant capital has manifested through students' willingness to question dominant disciplinary norms, challenge deficit narratives, and advocate for more inclusive policies and practices (Heberle et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2016; Rhoads, 2016).

Importantly, resistant capital in this study reveals how mentoring relationships can nurture and strengthen students' abilities to collaborate, advocate, and persist within doctoral programs. A mentoring relationship that affirms students of color's sociopolitical awareness and lived experiences enhances their capacity to engage in self-advocacy and challenge institutional inequity policy and practices. Faculty of color also often draw upon their own experiences in navigating racialized academic environments to provide guidance, strategic insight, and emotional reinforcement for graduate students of color (Griffin, 2020; Pfund et al., 2016; Pfund et al., 2022). In relation with other capitals, resistant capital supports students of color as they navigate social and academic barriers and norms while fostering leadership, collective advocacy, and long-term commitment to social justice and equity in higher education.

Community Cultural Wealth & Racial Complexity in Mentoring Relationships

Overall, the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework provides a critical and culturally grounded lens for examining mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color. CCW highlights the various forms of cultural knowledge, skills, and resources that students of color draw upon to navigate, persist, and succeed in higher education institutions (Yosso, 2005). Applying this framework allows for a deeper analysis of mentoring

relationships by highlighting both the benefits and challenges that graduate students of color encounter throughout their doctoral programs. Doing so also incorporates faculty of color insights into their experiences regarding their roles in guiding, supporting, and shaping these academic journeys. Furthermore, CCW acknowledges the racial complexity embedded within mentoring relationships by recognizing that both mentors and mentees have different forms of capital to navigate institutional barriers and racialized academic structures. Faculty of color and graduate students of color do not share a monolithic racial or cultural identity, and they often come from very diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and political backgrounds, and lived experiences that shape their perspectives, expectations, and experiences in higher education (Omi & Winant, 2015). These differences may influence how mentors and mentees interpret racialized experiences within academia and how they develop strategies for navigating institutional barriers and academia cultures or norms.

While a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates that faculty mentors of color can provide critical support to graduate students of color, such as fostering self-advocacy, strengthening persistence, and promoting academic success (Griffin, 2020; Holden et al., 2021; Posselt, 2018; Sowell et al., 2015), other studies suggest that mentoring relationships may also reproduce certain challenges. For example, some scholars describe the phenomenon of “cloning,” in which mentors encourage mentees to replicate their own academic identities, career paths, or survival strategies as a model for success (Brown et al., 1999). Similarly, mentoring guidance that normalizes “survivalist” strategies for navigating racialized academic environments may have placed emotional and professional burdens on students of color and shape how they conceptualize success and belonging within academia (Ocampo & BlackDeer, 2022). While there are setbacks and challenges, it is still important to examine and understand

these nuances to better address practical strategies and approaches to support both faculty and students in their respective mentoring relationships.

Afterall, mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color can still be understood as sites of knowledge, where students of color receive both psychosocial and academic support that cater to their needs in navigating complex racial dynamics in higher education. The CCW framework is particularly useful for examining these dynamics because it centers the cultural assets, resilience, and community-based knowledge that both faculty and students of color bring to higher education, while also acknowledging the structural inequalities that continue to shape mentoring relationships and academic pathways. CCW allows me to interpret these nuances of mentoring relationships to empower students of color and reflect on the complexities of navigating higher education as marginalized scholars.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore the complexities of the mentoring relationship between faculty of color and Ph.D. students and candidates of color in higher education, examining how faculty's experiences and mentoring practices influence doctoral students' academic trajectories, professional development, and overall success. Specifically, this study sought to understand the extent to which faculty mentorship serves as a catalyst for advancing graduate students of color in their doctoral journey and to gain insights into the approaches that faculty of color use when mentoring graduate students of color. To achieve these goals, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do doctoral students of color characterize as the advantages of having a faculty of color in relation to their degree progress?
2. To what extent do faculty members' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds inform and shape their approaches to mentoring graduate students of color?
3. How do faculty of color characterize the importance of their mentorship of students of color as potentially contributing to future diversification of the professoriate?

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to address these research questions. First, I provide a rationale for employing a qualitative research design, discussing its significance in capturing the lived experiences of both faculty of color and graduate students of color. Second, I detail the study's research site, participant recruitment, data collection, and analytical approach, along with procedures to establish trustworthiness and credibility. Lastly, I present a researcher positionality statement, critically reflecting on my own experiences, assumptions, and potential biases that may shape my analysis and engagement with the study.

Through this research, I aimed to contribute meaningful insights into the role of mentorship in fostering the success of Ph.D. students of color in academia.

Research Design

Rationale

To address these research questions, I employed a qualitative constructivist research design to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and mentoring interactions between faculty of color and Ph.D. students of color. A constructivist approach is grounded in the assumption that reality and meaning are socially constructed through individuals' experiences, interactions, identities, and interpretations of the world around them. Maxwell (2012) defines constructivist epistemology as "the belief that knowledge of this world is inevitably our own construction, created from a specific vantage point, and that there is no possibility of our achieving a purely 'objective' account that is independent of all particular perspectives" (p. vii). Thus, participants can interpret the same phenomenon differently based on their lived experiences and social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2012). This constructivist approach helps scholars to understand the nuances and subjective meanings that participants assign to their experiences, as well as to reflect on the shared experiences or commonalities across people's experiences, creating a collective sense of meaning (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). By centering the voice of both faculty of color and graduate students of color, the study aimed to understand how faculty and graduate students interpret and navigate their mentoring relationship, making meaning and sense of their individual and collective experiences in higher education.

The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of both faculty of color and Ph.D. students of color. By examining the nuances

within their experiences, this approach helped to contextualize and understand mentorship practices at both institutional and professional levels. Semi-structured interviews provide a structured yet flexible framework for data collection, allowing researchers to follow a predetermined set of interview questions while also adapting the conversation with follow-up inquiries based on participants' responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This balance ensured consistency across interviews while also capturing the richness and depth of individual experiences.

The open-ended nature of the questions enabled participants to share insights that might not emerge in a more rigid interview format. Additionally, this approach allowed for flexible analysis, as responses can be examined by specific interview items, broader themes, or emerging categories, given that all participants respond to the same core questions while allowing the conversation to unfold more organically (Adams, 2010; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Since each mentoring relationship is distinct, semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to provide in-depth, personal narratives about their experiences. By centering their voices, this method illuminated both the benefits and challenges of Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color's mentoring relationship within the doctoral journey as well as captures faculty's experiences, mentoring styles, and efforts to diversify the professoriate. Moreover, this approach ensured that participants' realities were represented authentically, minimizing the researcher's biases and allowing participants' lived experiences to shape the findings rather than imposing predefined notions of what constitutes effective mentorship. At the same time, I acknowledge that my own positionality and interpretations also contributed to the construction of meaning throughout this research process, in which reflexivity is an important component of data collection and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Site Selection

The site of this study was Southwestern Research University (SRU, a pseudonym), a prestigious Research-1 (R1) institution located in the Southwest region of the United States. SRU is one of 187 universities classified as R1 by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and the American Council on Education (ACE), indicating the highest level of research activity. R1 institutions distinguish themselves by their strong commitment to knowledge production, cutting-edge research, and innovation, investing at least \$50 million annually in research and development across multiple disciplines and awarding a minimum of 70 research doctorates (ACE, 2025). Due to their extensive research resources and academic prestige, R1 institutions are considered among the most elite institutions in the U.S., attracting both undergraduate and graduate students from across the country and around the world.

SRU's diverse student body reflects national trends in the increasing enrollment of students of color in higher education (NCES, 2023). During the 2023-24 academic year, SRU enrolled more than 30,000 undergraduate and 13,000 graduate students, with a diverse student demographic distribution. African American students comprise slightly over 6% of both the undergraduate and graduate student populations, while American Indian and Alaskan Natives students represent less than 1% of the undergraduate and graduate populations, respectively. Hispanic students make up more than 20% of undergraduates and 10% of graduate students, while Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students account for a significant proportion of SRU's student body—roughly one-third of undergraduates and more than one-fifth of graduate students. In contrast, White students constitute about one quarter in both undergraduate and graduate student populations. Additionally, approximately 3% of undergraduates and 2% of graduate students are categorized as “unknown” in SRU's student demographic records.

While AAPI students are proportionally overrepresented in both undergraduate and graduate levels, other historically marginalized groups continue to face disparities in accessing and completing graduate and professional degrees. As described in Chapter 1, students of color are still underrepresented in graduate programs, institutionally at SRUs and nationally, except Asian American students, particularly East Asian Americans. Also, it is important to acknowledge that these demographic figures include both domestic and international students, with international students making up more than 7% of undergraduates and 15% of graduate students at SRU—presumably the majority of whom are of Asian descent. According to the Institute of International Education (2024), a private non-profit organization that facilitates international education and exchange programs, India and China are the top two countries sending students to study in the U.S., especially in California, New York, and Texas, where the majority were studying and pursuing STEM fields.

While SRU's student demographics reflect progress toward greater diversity in higher education, the university's faculty composition also mirrors national trends in the persistent of underrepresentation of faculty of color, as discussed in Chapter 1. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), during the 2023-24 academic year, SRU has approximately 5,000 faculty, but faculty of color are still disproportionately underrepresented. Faculty identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders each represent less than 1% of the total faculty. Black and Hispanic or Latino faculty account for 4% and 7%, respectively, while Asian American faculty makes up more than a quarter. White faculty continues to be the majority with more than half of the professoriate positions. Faculty who identify as two or more races and unknown are comprised of 1% and 5%, respectively, while international faculty makes up approximately 4%. SRU faculty representation

aligns closely with the national professoriate trends as shown in Chapter 1, highlighting ongoing challenges in diversifying the professoriate. The demographic gaps between both students and faculty of color underscore the importance of institutions continuing efforts toward diversifying and increasing representation in academia.

Furthermore, accessibility and established institutional connections were important considerations in selecting SRU as the research site for this study. My existing relationships with student affinity groups, resource centers, and other campus communities provided opportunities for me to connect with graduate students and faculty from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and to facilitate participant recruitment. These established connections were particularly valuable for building trust and gaining access to underrepresented student populations in such a large institution. In addition, my familiarity with the campus allowed me to physically visit various academic departments, student spaces, and resource centers to share information about the study, engaging and developing rapport with potential participants. These connections and my familiarity with the institutional environment provided an important foundation for conducting an in-depth qualitative study centered on participants' lived experiences. At the same time, I remained attentive to how my familiarity with the institution could influence my recruitment process, participant interactions, and interpretations of the data.

Data Collection and Sampling Plan

Doctoral Students

To gather in-depth, participant-driven data, I employed a purposeful and intentional recruitment strategy to engage with Ph.D. students of color across multiple academic disciplines, and these specific disciplines were primarily concentrated within two broad areas: the Social Sciences and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Purposeful

sampling is widely recognized in qualitative research for its ability to identify participants who can provide information-rich narratives aligned with the study's objectives (Patton, 2015). The recruitment process began by connecting and collaborating with graduate student affinity groups across the SRU campus, as these organizations primarily support students of color and serve as key sites for engaging a diverse participant pool. Affinity groups offer culturally affirming spaces that foster a sense of belonging, mentorship, and peer support, making them valuable networks for outreach and engagement. Additionally, I connected and coordinated with student affairs offices, leveraging their campus-wide reach to distribute recruitment flyers and emails to eligible Ph.D. students and candidates. To further expand the participant pool, I utilized a snowball sampling approach, a widely used method in qualitative research where initial participants refer their peers and colleagues who might fit these criteria and be interested in sharing their experiences for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color are defined as individuals who identify as “nonwhite,” including those who identify as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/x, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, American Indians or Alaska Native, and two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The “Other” category in the recruitment survey was informed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) survey at the University of California-Los Angeles. This self-reported category provided respondents with an option to identify a racial or ethnic background that was not captured by the larger and standardized racial and ethnic categories in the survey (HERI, n.d.). For participants who identified as two or more races, including those who may have a White parent or multiracial background, I did not assume that their multiracial identity automatically positioned themselves as a person of color. Thus, I asked these participants to self-identify whether they considered

themselves as a person of color or a member of a minoritized racial or ethnic group in order to be eligible for the study. Participants included in the study confirmed that they identified as such before proceeding to the interview.

Participants were selected based on four specific inclusion criteria: (1) being a current Ph.D. student or candidate, (2) having completed at least one year of study in their respective Ph.D. program, (3) self-identifying as a student of color, and (4) having a faculty advisor or mentor of color. To streamline the recruitment and screening process, interested participants completed a Google Form questionnaire² as a screening test. The form collected participants' demographic and academic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, academic discipline, years of study, career aspirations, and their relationship with their faculty advisor/mentor (who must be a faculty of color and/or share a similar racial background). Additionally, participants confirmed their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study without any monetary compensation.

Once potential participants submitted the screening Google Form expressing interest and met the inclusion criteria, I reached out individually to establish rapport, clarify the study expectations, and schedule a 60–90-minute one-on-one semi-structured interview, conducted via Zoom with voice recording and transcription. The shortest interview was an hour and eight minutes, while the longest interview lasted three hours and twenty-eight minutes. The interviews covered a wide range of topics, including participants' personal decision and journey to their current doctoral programs, their expectations of and interactions with their faculty of color before

² Originally, I intended to use Social Exchange Theory as a second theoretical framework to guide this study. With this intention, I developed the recruitment materials and began recruiting graduate student participants before making changes to the study's conceptual framework. However, after further consultation with my dissertation committee, I decided to remove Social Exchange Theory and focus only on Community Cultural Wealth as the guiding framework for the study. As a result, references to Social Exchange Theory remained in some of the original recruitment materials because they had already been distributed and used during the initial recruitment process.

and after enrollment, the personal and professional challenges and barriers that they have encountered in their current doctoral programs, and the ways in which their faculty mentors shape or influence their academic experiences and career aspiration to date (see Appendix A for the graduate student interview protocol). With participants' consent, I audio-recorded the Zoom interviews and used Otter.ai to transcribe the interview afterward. To ensure the accuracy in these transcripts, I relistened to the audio records and manually corrected and updated the transcripts.

To enhance reflexivity and mitigate potential biases throughout the research process, I maintained reflective memos and journals after each interview, documenting my initial thoughts, emotional responses, and emerging patterns for later analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These memos served as essential tools for self-examination, allowing me to critically reflect on how my positionality and assumptions might shape data interpretation. By engaging in this ongoing reflexive practice, I aimed to ensure that participants' voices and lived experiences remained at the forefront of my analysis.

I conducted interviews with 13 Ph.D. doctoral students and candidates, including two additional student participants beyond the data I had collected during the pilot study. In terms of demographic representation, Asian American students are slightly overrepresented in the current sample, comprising five out of the 13 participants. The remaining participants include three who identify as Latina/o/x, two as African American/Black, and three as two or more races. In a way, this sample reflects the broader composition of graduate students of color at the institution, where Asian American students are disproportionately represented in comparison to other minoritized groups. Regarding gender identity, seven participants identify as female, one as non-binary, and three as male. In terms of academic status, three participants were in their second

year, four were in their third year, six in their fourth year, and only one was in their sixth year.

All the participants were from either the social sciences or STEM disciplines, with a majority of eight participants in social science and five in STEM fields³.

Faculty

For the recruitment of faculty of color, I ensured that the sample composition aligns as closely as possible with the student participants' academic disciplines and backgrounds. Faculty of color are being recruited based on three criteria: (1) self-identify as a person of color, (2) have at least one Ph.D. mentee/advisee of color, and (3) on a tenure track position or tenured. To streamline the recruitment and screening process, interested faculty participants also completed a Google Form questionnaire as a screening test. The form collected faculty participants' demographic and academic information, including gender, race/ethnicity, academic discipline, years of teaching, mentoring, and their relationship with their former and current mentees of color. Additionally, faculty participants confirmed their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study without any monetary compensation. Once faculty participants filled out the Google form, I reviewed each individual response to ensure that they meet the inclusion criteria and then reached out to schedule a 60–90-minute interview via Zoom. The shortest interview was an hour and three minutes, while the longest interview lasted an hour and fifty minutes. The interview explored topics relating to faculty mentor's career trajectory, their personal and professional mentoring experiences and how those experiences shape their approach to mentoring students of color, the challenges and barriers that they have overcome as a faculty of color, and their efforts

³ Originally, I distributed my recruitment materials across multiple academic disciplines to a diverse pool of potential participants. However, only doctoral students from disciplines within STEM and Social Science fields responded to the recruitment survey and met the eligibility to participate in the study. As a result, the participant sample naturally narrowed the scope of the study to these two broad discipline areas. Following the student recruitment process, faculty recruitment became more intentional, with efforts focused on recruiting from similar disciplinary backgrounds to create similar participants groups for both faculty and graduate students of color.

toward diversifying academia, whether collectively or individually (please see Appendix C for the faculty interview protocol).

To facilitate faculty recruitment, I first employed a snowball sampling approach, inviting faculty and staff to recommend colleagues or other faculty of color who might be interested in participating in the study. Next, I connected with my graduate student participants and encouraged them to refer their faculty mentors. However, I did not receive any responses from my graduate students' faculty mentors. In addition, I reached out to several Student Affairs offices to help disseminate recruitment materials to faculty in both the Social Sciences and STEM departments across the SRU campus. Despite these efforts, I received limited interest, likely due to the timing of the recruitment process because I started during the summer of 2025, when many faculty members were on leave or engaged in other summer commitments. As a result, at the beginning of fall 2025, I searched the faculty webpages of both STEM and Social Science departments to collect faculty email addresses, and then I contacted them directly. I reached out to more than a 100 faculty of color across both broad disciplinary areas (i.e., Social Sciences and STEM), including two follow-up emails—one after two weeks and another after one month. Although I received more than twenty-five responses, a majority of the respondents indicated that they were unable to commit the time required for an interview due to their research and teaching, among other obligations. Ultimately, I was able to secure and conduct nine interviews with faculty of color, six from Social Science and three from STEM.

Regarding participant demographics, three faculty mentor participants identified as Asian American and Pacific Islander, two identified as African American/Black, two identified as Latino/a/x, and the last two identified as multiracial. In terms of gender identity, seven of the nine faculty participants identified as women, one identified as a man, and one identified as

queer⁴. Despite efforts to recruit participants across gender identities, most survey respondents were women of color, while many male faculty did not respond to the survey or email outreach. With respect to academic rank, five participants were Assistant Professors, two were Associate Professors, and two were Full Professors. This faculty sample's demographics are closely aligned with the graduate student sample, allowing for insights from both disciplinary areas regarding mentee-mentoring experiences.

Data Analysis

To analyze the transcribed interviews of my participants, I employ both inductive and deductive approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Inductive analysis is where researchers start with “specific observations and builds toward general pattern” (Patton, 2015, p. 122), interpreting the data without imposing preconceived notions and allowing emergent themes and patterns to surface organically from participants' narratives. This method is particularly valuable in qualitative research, as it provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of participants' experiences and the nuanced meanings participants assign to their realities and experiences. On the other hand, the deductive approach, defined as “finding case manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to examine and elaborate the construct, its variations and implications” (Patton, 2015, p. 437), allowed me to apply theoretical frameworks—Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) theory (Yosso, 2005)—to guide my analysis and interpretation of the dataset. By integrating these approaches, I captured the lived experiences of

⁴ All the participants completed a demographic screening survey before being selected for an interview. In the survey, Professor Eva self-identified as “queer” in response to the question regarding their gender identity, but there were no separate questions in the protocol to distinguish their gender identity from sexual orientation. Therefore, this distinction was not explicitly captured during data collection. This limitation is important to acknowledge because gender and sexuality are related but portray different dimensions of an individual's identity. Sexuality refers to an individual's sexual or romantic attractions and relationships, whereas gender refers to an individual's inner sense of themselves, and its relationship to culturally and socially constructed categories such as woman, man and nonbinary, among other gender identities (Morgan, 2013). Therefore, rather than making assumptions about Professor Eva's intended meaning of “queer,” I retain the participant's self-identified terminology while acknowledging the limitation of the demographic survey in distinguishing between these identities.

participants and the broader systemic patterns that shape Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color's mentoring relationships in higher education.

The analytic process began with immersive engagement with the data, where I conducted an initial open reading of all interview transcriptions to capture participants' voices and perspectives without immediate categorization. This preliminary phase allowed for a holistic understanding before imposing a coding structure (Saldaña, 2021). While reading through the transcripts, I highlighted commonalities and differences in Ph.D. students of color's experiences, identifying central themes that emerge across narratives. During this stage, I engaged in data condensation (Miles et al., 2014), synthesizing large amounts of qualitative data into meaningful units while preserving the richness and depth of individual experiences.

For the first round, I developed a systematic coding guide, using in vivo coding and paraphrased the data using participants' own words to identify recurrent patterns and themes (Saldaña, 2021). Once preliminary codes were established, I refined the initial codes using the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, focusing on all six capitals that shape students' mentoring relationships (Yosso, 2005). I then applied a second-round coding process, integrating pattern coding techniques (Saldaña, 2021) to refine, categorize, and link codes in alignment with both emergent themes and theoretical constructs. I employed Dedoose software during the second round of coding. Afterward, I analyzed these themes and categories to derive my findings. By juxtaposing my theoretical frameworks with empirical findings, I ensured that my analysis is grounded in both participants' lived realities and established scholarship on mentorship in higher education.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Ensuring trustworthiness and credibility is fundamental in qualitative research to accurately and authentically represent the voices and lived experiences of both Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color. Thus, I employed three trustworthiness strategies: member checking, peer review, and the incorporation of rich, thick descriptions of the findings to represent participants' voices and narratives.

First, I employed member checking, or seeking participant validation, which is a critical process in qualitative research that enhances credibility by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After constructing preliminary themes and drafting initial findings, I shared a version of the analysis with each participant to ensure their voices and experiences were accurately represented. This approach granted participants the opportunity to suggest modifications or clarifications if needed, a process that affirms the validity of their experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I engaged in a peer review process by consulting faculty members and colleagues in higher education who have expertise in qualitative research but have no direct involvement in the study. These scholars served as external reviewers, providing critical feedback on my interpretations, methodology, and overall analytical approach. Their insights were instrumental in helping me refine my approach, especially reevaluating my interview protocols to ensure that they were sufficiently robust and aligned with my research questions. The feedback prompted me to reflect more intentionally on the scope and focus of my interview protocols, encouraging me to move beyond a narrow view of academic mentoring to explore the multifaceted nature of mentoring. This change allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how mentoring relationships shaped the experiences of graduate students of color across different contexts, including social, cultural, and professional settings. Peer reviewers played an essential role in strengthening the credibility

of qualitative research by posing “hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). This collaborative process ensured that my findings are rigorous and well-aligned with qualitative research best practices.

Third and last, I used a thick, rich description approach to enhance the study’s transferability and contextual depth. By presenting detailed, nuanced accounts of participants’ experiences, I aimed to authentically convey their voices while allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts with similar characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach not only strengthened the credibility of the study but also highlighted the diversity and complexity of mentoring relationships in higher education.

Additionally, I engaged in continuous reflexivity throughout the research process to mitigate potential biases and enhance transparency. I maintained analytic memos after each interview and coding phase to document my interpretations, methodological decisions, and insights (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These memos provided a structured space to critically examine my positionality and its influence on data interpretation, helping to ensure that my engagement with participants’ narratives remained objective and ethically sound. By integrating these rigorous validation strategies, this study aims to uphold credibility, trustworthiness, and methodological integrity, contributing to a deeper understanding of the mentoring experiences between Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color in higher education.

Limitations

This study had several key limitations that future scholars may build upon to deepen and expand the understanding of mentorship experiences between Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color. A majority of the Ph.D. student participants in this study came from the social sciences, a field that has historically been more progressive in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion

(NSF, 2023). Moreover, the social sciences tend to have a relatively higher representation of faculty of color, including women of color, and a more diverse student body compared to other disciplines, particularly STEM fields, where faculty diversity remains significantly limited (NSF, 2023). As a result, this study may not have fully captured the distinct challenges faced by doctoral students of color in STEM, where the lack of faculty representation may result in different mentorship dynamics and experiences (McGee, 2020). Future research could explore how mentorship in underrepresented disciplines, particularly in STEM and professional fields, shapes students of color's academic outcomes and career trajectories.

Another key limitation was that while this study examines mentoring relationships between faculty of color and Ph.D. students of color, it does not exclusively focus on racial identity-base matching and dyadic relationship between mentors and mentees. Prior research suggests that racial matching in mentoring relationships can provide culturally relevant guidance and support (Griffin et al., 2011), yet it is not the sole determinant of a successful mentorship experience. Instead, this study highlighted the significance of having cross-racial faculty of color as mentors, regardless of exact racial alignment, and explores how these relationships influence students of color's doctoral journeys, persistence, and outcomes. Thus, future scholars could explore more race-match in a dyadic mentoring relationship to explore more nuances among different racial groups and their approaches.

The last limitation related the imbalance of gender identity within my faculty of color sampling, where a majority, seven out of nine participants, identified as women. Future research could explore more on the nuances between male and female mentorship to better understand the different approaches that could support graduate students of color in their respected doctoral programs. This opportunity also would allow scholars to be more creative in engaging and

recruiting male faculty of color. Despite these limitations, this study still provides critical insights on faculty mentorship in shaping the academic experiences of doctoral students of color and contributes to ongoing efforts to foster more inclusive and supportive graduate education environments in both STEM and Social Science disciplines.

Researcher Positionality

Research is shaped by the worldview of the researcher, influencing the way in which they think, interpret, and analyze the study. A researcher's experiences and identities are important factors to reflect and to understand their connections with the topic (Holmes, 2020). Thus, I reflect on my personal and professional experiences on the importance of mentorship and its role in shaping my own academic journey.

As a Hmong refugee, first-generation, low-income graduate student, I grew up without much academic support and had few, if any, role models in my family to follow. Higher education was a challenging road to navigate for me. In fact, higher education was never really a goal of mine to pursue, but a dream of my parents to keep pushing and telling me to go to school and work hard as a means of securing a stable job. However, I was fortunate to “accidentally” connect with an Upward Bound Pre-College Program, a federally funded program that provides academic support to prepare first-generation, low-income, and marginalized students of color for college. Unaware of UB at the time, while attending an Admitted Student's Day at my high school, a counselor briefly mentioned a program through Marquette University that “pays” marginalized and unrepresented students to study. Intrigued by this notion of receiving a small stipend in exchange for academic engagement, a few Hmong friends and I applied. What initially drew me in for financial reasons quickly transformed into a more meaningful experience. Through UB, I received a significant amount of academic support, e.g., tutoring, mentorship, and

college preparatory experiences, among others, that inspired me to go to college and fostered an appreciation for the role mentorship plays in academic success.

I attended a predominantly white post-secondary institution where I often found myself as one of the only students of color in the major disciplines, Political Science and International Affairs. Despite these institutional challenges and barriers (e.g., lacking a sense of belonging or having imposter syndrome/phenomenon), I participated in the Student Support Services and Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Programs, federally funded programs to assist marginalized college students of color to complete college and to pursue graduate school. The mentorship I received from these programs—students, staff, and faculty—plays an important role in fostering my sense of academic and social belonging. The guidance I received from these mentors of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Hispanic, and white, shapes my critical thinking and engagement with racial and social justice issues across my communities. These personal and academic experiences not only cultivated my academic interests but also inspired my commitment to the art of mentoring as a means of fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Throughout my academic journey, I have taken on multiple mentorship roles, serving as a Graduate Assistant for the University of Pennsylvania's Stouffer House, an Upward Bound Academic Advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and a Graduate Mentor for the Undergraduate Research Center and a College Academic Mentor for the College of Letter and Science at the University of California-Los Angeles. In each of these roles, I have worked closely with high school and undergraduate students from various socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds, providing academic guidance and social support. These personal and professional experiences influenced my interest in developing a deeper understanding of

mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color in higher education.

Thus, I acknowledge that my social identities, lived experiences, and professional engagements may have shaped my approach, assumptions, and motivations for this study. My own journey navigating higher education as a student of color has heightened my awareness of the institutional and systemic challenges that Ph.D. students and candidates of color often encounter, particularly in terms of representation, access to mentorship, lack of research funding, and the complexities of navigating some predominantly white academic spaces.

Given these personal and professional connections to the research topic, I have taken intentional measures to ensure that my interpretations remain rooted in participants' voices rather than my own experiences. Throughout the research process, I maintained reflexive memos to document my immediate thoughts and feelings after each interview as well as during the analysis. This practice allowed me to critically examine how my perspectives might influence data interpretation and to consciously differentiate between participants' lived realities and my own assumptions or experiences. This positionality statement is not only an acknowledgment of my connection to the research but also a commitment to approaching the findings with both empathy and critical awareness. While I recognize the shared experiences among Ph.D. students and candidates of color, I remain attuned to the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds within this population. My goal is to center participants' voices and honor the complexity of their experiences, ensuring that this study contributes to a broader understanding of the mentorship experiences between Ph.D. students of color and faculty of color in academia.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings from my data collection from both graduate students and faculty of color to address my three research questions. First, I examine the mentoring experiences of graduate students of color, and the various forms of capital they drew upon, developed, and acquired throughout their doctoral journeys. Second, I discuss how faculty of colors' background, lived experiences, and identities shaped their mentoring approaches with graduate students of color. Third, I elaborate on faculty mentors' aspirations and practices in supporting graduate students of color's career trajectories, including but not limited to pathways into the professoriate. Lastly, I discuss the importance of the alignment of cultural capital between graduate students and faculty of color, and how both groups use capital to enhance their learning, persistence, and professional development.

Description of Participants

Graduate Student Sample

As highlighted in Chapter 3, the overall sample of graduate students of color consisted of 13 participants from two broad disciplinary areas: Social Science and STEM, as shown in Table 4.1 below. The sample slightly skewed toward Asian Americans, with five participants identifying as Asian American, and toward female-identified participants, with eight participants identifying as women. However, these patterns generally reflect the Southwestern Research Institution's student demographic in terms of race and gender. The majority of the graduate student participants were in their fourth year or beyond at the time of interviews. Since the completion of these interviews, four participants have graduated. Out of these four, two went into academic career tracks and two went into the industry as research staff at a research institution. Across graduate students' experiences, community cultural wealth demonstrates how

faculty mentors of color’s advocacy enable graduate students of color to pursue innovative, personally meaningful, identity-aligned, and community engagement research agendas. In many cases, these research interests challenged or extended beyond traditional academic and institutional norms, creating opportunities for students to contribute to knowledge production that centered their communities, lived experiences, and voices in higher education.

Table 4. 1

Demographics of Graduate Student Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Academic Year	Field
Alina	Female	Southeast Asian	4th	Social Science
Ash	Non-binary	South Asian	3rd	Social Science
Evelyn	Female	More than 2 races/East Asian	4th	Social Science
Irene	Female	Latino/a/x	6th	Social Science
Jasmine	Female	Black	2nd	Social Science
Luis	Male	Latino/a/x	3rd	Social Science
Mei	Female	Asian	3rd	Social Science
Adam	Male	Black	4th	STEM
Chloe	Female	Latino/a/x	2nd	STEM
John	Male	More than 2 races/East Asian	3rd	STEM
Lily	Female	More than 2 races/Black	2nd	STEM
Sophia	Female	Asian	6th	STEM
Yuan	Male	Asian	4th	STEM

Faculty Sample

To gather a faculty of color sample that aligned with the graduate student sample, the nine faculty participants were also intentionally recruited from the Social Science and STEM fields and reflected a similar range of racial and gender identities, as shown in Table 4.2. Similar to the student demographics, the faculty sample included more female-identified participants than male-identified participants, with seven women, one man, and one participant who described their gender as queer. However, the sample was more evenly distributed across racial and/or ethnic identities. While this sample cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of all faculty of color, all racial groups, or all academic units, it offers important insight into the varied backgrounds, lived experiences, and mentoring practices of faculty mentors of color.

Table 4. 2

Demographics of Faculty Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Rank	Field
Professor Emma	Female	African American/Black	Assistant Professor	Social Science
Professor Eva	Queer	Southeast Asian	Associate Professor	Social Science
Professor Daisy	Female	More than 2 races/Black	Full Professor	Social Science
Professor Ivy	Female	Southeast Asian	Associate Professor	Social Science
Professor James	Male	Latino/a/x	Full Professor	Social Science
Professor Maya	Female	More than 2 races/Black	Assistant Professor	Social Science
Professor Clara	Female	Puerto Rican	Assistant Professor	STEM
Professor Ling	Female	East Asian	Full Professor	STEM
Professor Olivia	Female	African American/Black	Assistant Professor	STEM

In terms of academic fields, five faculty mentors were from the Social Sciences and four were from STEM. Across faculty participants' narratives, community cultural capital shaped how faculty mentors empathized with students' experiences, provided psychosocial support, helped students overcome academic and personal challenges, and guided them through career exploration and professional advancement. These forms of capital illustrate how faculty of color mobilized their own lived experiences, institutional knowledge, community commitments, and professional networks to support graduate students of color's persistence, development, and career trajectories in and beyond higher education.

Findings: Advantages - Capital of Having Faculty Mentors of Color in Higher Education Understanding, Wellbeing, and Holistic Care

To address my first research question, I draw on the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework to analyze the mentoring relationships and practices that supported select doctoral journeys. Findings showcase students' relationship with a faculty mentor of color is not only academically supportive but also emotionally, culturally, and racially affirming. One of the most significant advantages identified by graduate students of color was the sense of shared racial, cultural, and gendered understanding that shaped the mentoring relationship. This shared identity or lived experience fostered relatability, trust, and holistic care, allowing students of color to communicate openly about both academic and non-academic challenges they faced. For several participants, having a faculty mentor of color created an immediate sense of comfort that made it easier to discuss vulnerabilities, ask questions, share uncertainty, and seek support around issues that directly affected their degree progress. Jasmine, a second-year Ph.D. student in a Social Science field, described how having a faculty mentor of color allowed her to be both vulnerable and comfortable within the mentoring relationship:

[My mentor] is the person who I would probably be the most comfortable talking to, the most comfortable being vulnerable with... you know, having dumb moments or asking maybe silly questions.... I feel like having a faculty mentor of color was just better for my overall well-being to even endure the journey of the academic.

Jasmine also shared that she formed an immediate connection with her faculty mentor because of their shared identities and experiences as Black women navigating higher education and the systemic barriers embedded within academic spaces. This connection allowed Jasmine to feel emotionally, personally, and academically supported in ways that she believed were central to her persistence in the doctoral program. By contrast, Jasmine expressed that she would have been more hesitant to open up to a white faculty mentor about her personal life and challenges.

For many graduate students of color, academic spaces can feel highly competitive and racially isolating. As a result, students of color may feel pressured always to appear competent and may avoid asking questions or admitting uncertainty out of fear of being judged as unprepared or incapable. Through Jasmine's experience, her faculty mentor of color created a mentoring space where vulnerability was not treated as weakness but instead as part of the learning and development process. Jasmine described feeling comfortable enough to have "dumb moments" or ask "silly questions" without fear of judgment. This sense of psychological safety improved her well-being, academic comfort, and ability to engage in intellectual growth. Her experience suggests that the faculty mentor's identity mattered because it shaped how Jasmine experienced support, care, and belonging within the mentoring relationship. The mentor's shared racial and gendered experiences may have allowed her to understand, whether directly or indirectly, the emotional demands of navigating academic spaces as a woman of color.

Jasmine further emphasized that this shared racial and gender identity helped her progress in her doctoral journey without sacrificing her mental health and well-being, which she believed may not have been possible in the same way with a white faculty mentor.

But I feel like with her on our shared racial identity and both being women, I feel like automatically, there's just a level of comfort. Whereas if I was with a white faculty member, man or woman, I feel like I would be more reserved... To begin with, I don't really open up and trust too many people, and especially sharing ideas, I just don't feel comfortable doing that. So I might not even feel comfortable telling them about my housing issues or my funding issues, I might have felt like they didn't care about that, they might only care about the academic side, they don't care about my emotional well-being... or anything like that. So if I had someone else, they might have gotten me further along in my academic journey than I am now. But in that journey, I don't know how good I would have been, I could have been a hot mess and anxious, dealing with all of these issues and hating it a lot out here, like suffering outside of school. Whereas having a Black advisor, I'm able to just share those other issues and share like that emotional baggage that I have navigating the academic space.

Jasmine's experience illustrates how shared racial and gender identity can create a space for trust, vulnerability, and holistic support. The support that Jasmine received from her mentor goes beyond academic advising, creating a sense of psychological safety that allow her to disclose personal, financial, and emotional struggles that she faced during graduate school. Doctoral students of color often navigate these academic spaces and challenges by themselves, where they constantly feel pressure to appear competent and self-sufficient while managing racialized stress among other academic concerns. The "emotional baggage" reflects the accumulated stressors that often cause graduate students of color to leave their graduate study. Jasmine's mentor, who shares her racial and gender identity, recognizes these emotional burdens and material needs not as distractions but as conditions that shaped her ability survive and succeed her doctoral journey.

While Jasmine does not claim that having a faculty mentor of color automatically guarantees better academic progress, she expresses the importance of having a Black faculty whose support helped her endure setbacks and to steadily move forward without sacrificing her mental and emotional wellbeing. Jasmine's experience also demonstrates the complexity of success and mentorship in graduate school. Academic progress is often measured by

publications, but Jasmine's experiences reveal that a student can appear to be successful while struggling emotionally and socially. Through a Community Cultural Wealth lens, Jasmine's experience reflects the importance of social and familial capital. Her faculty mentor of color provided a trusted relationship, emotional care, and cultural understanding that helped Jasmine feel supported and understood in relation to her racialized and gendered experiences. Like other graduate student participants, Jasmine's narrative shows how faculty mentors of color can also mobilize relational forms of support that affirm students' humanity and strengthen their capacity to persist in graduate education.

Similar to Jasmine, Alina, a first-generation, fourth-year student in the Social Sciences, elaborated on how sharing a cultural identity with a faculty mentor of color reduced the burden of explanatory labor often required in mentoring relationships with other faculty. While she emphasized that race should not fully define a mentoring relationship, she also acknowledged that race and culture still play an important role in students' experiences, particularly in fostering comfort, trust, and mutual understanding. For Alina, the alignment of cultural understanding and expectations functioned as forms of social and familial capital, allowing her to discuss family obligations, cultural values, and personal responsibilities without having to overexplain or justify their relevance to her academic life. This level of understanding reduced the emotional labor of translating her experiences for others and created a mentoring relationship that felt more emotional, as Alina stated:

I don't think we should be defined by race for sure. But I think there is a difference, when you talk to a faculty of color, you don't even meet to have that conversation...Like when I talk to my other, you know, advisor slash mentor [who is also a faculty of color], I don't need to remind her that I'm Asian, and that it impacts my experience. I can just say something safe about my family. Without giving her all that context of filial piety and things like that, you know, there's a lot less background work that needs to happen. I had

to do it with my white friends. I had to do with white faculty. I don't have to do it with faculty of color.

Alina's experience captures the invisible labor that students of color often must do when they are interacting with white peers or faculty regarding obligations and expectations beyond academia spaces. Mentoring relationships for graduate students of color extend beyond academic work such as classes and research, as students do not enter doctoral programs as isolated individuals; they bring with them family histories, community obligations, cultural values, and racialized experiences that shape their academic journey. A faculty mentor of color may be more likely to recognize those factors as part of the student's academic journey rather than as distractions from it. Thus, Alina's reflection illustrates how social and familial capital can be closely aligned within mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color. This alignment allows faculty mentors of color to provide emotional support, cultural acknowledgment, and understanding without requiring students to fully explain or justify their experiences. These forms of capital strengthened faculty mentors' capacity to empathize with students' realities in higher education, particularly as students navigate the intersecting demands of race, gender, culture, family, and academic expectations.

Emphasizing the importance of this intersectional understanding, Sophia, a sixth-year Ph.D. candidate in a STEM field, shared that her mentor "understands what it is to be a woman of color, not just a woman, not just a person of color, but a woman of color in academia." For many students of color who participated in this study, this recognition is connected to a form of holistic care that they had not previously experienced in other mentoring relationships. Jasmine echoed this sentiment when describing how her Black faculty mentor supported her by "considering [me as] the whole person," adding, "I haven't felt that until I had a Black faculty member." These accounts suggest that faculty mentors of color often provided support that

extended beyond academic advising by recognizing students' full identities, lived experiences, and emotional needs as central to their doctoral persistence and well-being.

At the same time, Alina acknowledged that faculty of color also come from different backgrounds and experiences, and while racial/ethnic identities alone cannot guarantee a stronger mentoring relationship, the cultural awareness that faculty of color have regarding race and cultural experiences and expectations matter. This awareness changes the mentoring dynamic because the students of color do not have to repeatedly explain the role of race, family, or cultural background in their life. These doctoral student participants feel they can bring their racial, cultural, and familial self into the relationship without having to translate every part of their experiences. As a result, their faculty mentors of color provide not only academic guidance but also cultural understanding, validation, and a more humanizing form of support for graduate students of color in higher education.

Comprehensive and Logistical Support: Problem Solving, Networking and Career Opportunities

Another critical advantage of these mentoring relationships was the comprehensive, tangible, and logistical support that faculty mentors of color provided to help graduate students of color address major life challenges and systemic barriers. This support directly contributed to students' academic focus, material stability, and ability to persist in their doctoral programs. Across 11 out of 13 student participants' narratives, graduate students described their mentors as pivotal in helping them resolve urgent practical, social, and academic problems efficiently, particularly when institutional systems were difficult to navigate or unresponsive to their needs.

Jasmine, for instance, described experiencing a major transition crisis during the first year of her doctoral program, especially around housing and funding. Because she received limited

support from university housing administrators, she struggled to navigate the situation on her own and felt uncomfortable sharing such personal concerns with other administrators or faculty members. However, the trust she developed with her faculty mentor of color allowed her to disclose these challenges and receive timely guidance. Through this support, Jasmine was able to overcome significant barriers that could have disrupted her progress and continuation in her doctoral program, as she stated:

I really needed to get into student housing...and it was very stressful. I would contact housing, I talked to them. And they're like, Oh, you're number like 200 on the waitlist. And as an out of state student, I'm like, I don't live here, what do you mean? And I would express that to my advisor. And she told me essentially what to do and who to write to. And I got housing, like within two or three weeks. And that was like to me, like helping me out with my living situation, because I'm about to be homeless. And the university is not helping me, but like her being able to make moves and do it so quickly and helping me was really helpful. And then like summer funding last year...you don't have summer funding, and she was able to get me a summer job working with a summer program. And so literally every challenge that I've had transitioning out here...she's always helped me with all the big issues, that's been really, really a big impact.

Jasmine's experience indicates that the faculty mentor of color can play a critical role in helping the doctoral students of color navigate both material and institutional barriers that directly affected their ability and capacity to remain in the program. Jasmine does not solely describe the mentorship only as an academic guidance, she also emphasizes the importance of advocacy, survival support, and institutional navigation cues in her success. This logistical aid extended to securing funding, employment, and navigating institutional bureaucracy that has helped Jasmine, like many other students of color, to transition, adjust, and persist within their respective graduate programs. This form of support reflects good mentoring practice because the mentor listened to Jasmine's concerns and responded with concrete strategies and resources to navigate her personal and social crises. Although this experience may not be directly tied to shared racial or gender identity alone, the trust and comfort Jasmine developed with her mentor made it

possible for her to openly share personal and material challenges. As a result, her mentor's culturally responsive and relational approach created the conditions for Jasmine to receive the advocacy and support she needed to transition, adjust, and persist in her doctoral program.

Building on the importance of material support, financial security emerged as a major concern for many graduate students of color, particularly those who identified as first-generation students. Graduate education is costly, especially in a large metropolitan city where tuition, housing, transportation, and basic living expenses can create significant financial strain. As a result, seven of the participants emphasized the importance of faculty mentors who actively helped them secure funding and stabilized their living conditions that allowed them to progress toward degree completion. Irene, a sixth-year doctoral candidate who identified as Latina, shared that when she first entered her Ph.D. program, she was initially paired with another Latinx faculty member. However, after one meeting at the beginning of her first year, she described that advisor as having "ghosted" her and having provided no meaningful guidance or support. This lack of advising, combined with funding insecurity and frustration, left Irene considering whether she should remain in the program. Fortunately, Irene was later able to transition to another Latina faculty mentor. This new mentor helped her apply for and secure the funding she needed to survive, and to stabilize her doctoral journey so she could thrive:

I can't do this anymore. Like, I'm about to drop out of the program because I didn't have any funding. I couldn't apply for anything. My advisor wasn't there, and no one was writing me letters. At that point, [my new advisor/mentor] was like, okay, this is dire. I don't want you to go, like, it's time for us to work together now... Like she actually did do something that some faculty will not do. She found me funding for the summer so I could survive. And so it was from year two to seven that we stayed together fully.

The structural barriers Irene's experience illustrates can limit a student's ability to continue in graduate school, particularly when funding, advising, and institutional support are inconsistent or

unavailable. Her mentor became a critical source of social and navigational capital by connecting her to resources and securing the funding support necessary to remain in the program. At the same time, Irene's experience also demonstrates that not all faculty of color are necessarily supportive or effective mentors. Her narrative therefore reflects a broader challenge that many graduate students of color are forced to navigate: the decision of whether to leave their doctoral programs before receiving meaningful support. While her latter mentor's actions were deeply meaningful and transformative, her account also exposes how graduate programs can make students of color feel vulnerable when access to funding, advising, and advocacy is unevenly distributed. Irene's narrative demonstrates both the power of faculty mentorship and advocacy, particularly considering the institutional failures that make such intervention necessary.

In a similar situation, John, a husband and a third-year Ph.D. candidate in a STEM major, shared the commitment of his mentor to ensure his successful journey:

Another big thing I asked him was funding. And he said, with the grant I'm on, everything should be good. But it was really encouraging from him to hear my very first quarter if I didn't have funding that he would pay for my tuition out of his own salary, which I thought was very surprising for someone to do that.

This commitment highlights that the role of mentorship that could become a form of advocacy and protection, ensuring John has financial stability necessary to continue and succeed in the program. For graduate students of color, and those with a family, funding insecurity can be consequential because it could intensify existing family and financial responsibilities, among others. John's mentor's response helped reduce his anxiety and reinforced that he is valued. This experience portrays that John's mentor was deeply invested in his success, so much so that he

was willing to use his own resources to protect John's place in the program⁵. The mentor's willingness to provide and care for John as a form of support that resembles academic kinship, family, and community to ensure that John is successful in the program. This form of support created a sense of security and stability, allowing John to focus more fully on his academic and professional development. When students received genuine, committed mentorship, they were more likely to communicate openly and honestly and to seek guidance that would establish their scholar identity and professional growth. While this generosity is not necessarily connected to racial identity, it reflects John's mentor's broader commitment to supporting him through the material and emotional challenges of the doctoral journey. In this relationship, John has an academic family that will help him persist and progress toward degree completion.

In relation to financial security, many graduate students of color who participated in this study praised their mentors for the time and effort provided to actively connect them to professional networks, research opportunities, and career pathways that directly contribute to their degree progress and career aspirations. Mentors described by graduate student participants in this study proactively created opportunities and leveraged their social capital to support their students. Adam, a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in a STEM field, shared that his faculty mentor referred and connected him to research opportunities that led to his current job as a researcher, even though he did not end up pursuing a career in academia: "My faculty mentor connected me with his network at this [research firm]...[W]ithout his referral, I might not [have gotten] this opportunity." This experience shows that mentoring is not only about giving advice but also about using one's professional position to advocate for students. Leveraging his own social and

⁵ It is important to acknowledge that John's mentor's generosity should not be a baseline for evaluating a positive, holistic, mutually beneficial, and effective mentoring experience. It suggests how significant generosity is in general to the ability of graduate students of color to successfully complete graduate programs of study.

navigational capital, the mentor connected Adam to a research opportunity that strengthened his skills, visibility, and career options. This connection demonstrates that faculty mentors of color can play a powerful role not only as advisors but also as sponsors who use their networks to create opportunities for graduate students of color, opening opportunities and possibilities beyond academia.

Research Navigation, Validation, and Aspiration

Many graduate students of color participating in this study expressed gratitude for the support they received from faculty of color to help them navigate the research process, especially working in and with communities of color. Due to cultural similarity and understanding, these graduate students felt that faculty of color provided important tips and advice about navigating research in communities of color, both domestically and internationally. For instance, Ash, a third-year Ph.D. student in a Social Science field, described the struggle they faced when they conducted field research in a rural community in South Asia where they were challenged by local authorities:

[My mentor] really changed how I do research....She would give me little tips like, when you go to the village, make sure to check in with the police office because you want to be on their good side because you know sometimes like in these [rural] areas if they see outsiders, they might just sort of give you trouble for the sake of giving you trouble....And that actually ended up being a really good piece of advice.

Afterward, Ash's mentor suggested that next time they need to make "friends" or connect with local authorities to explain the importance of their research and its impact on the community to gain support and trust before reaching out to community members. Ash emphasizes the importance of having a faculty of color with community and cultural knowledge to help them navigate their research. While Ash's faculty mentor is not from South Asia, they are from another developing country, and Ash highlighted the value of their methodological expertise and

field research experiences working with communities of color to navigate cultural differences and practices.

Faculty mentors of color can inform a graduate student of color's research practice by offering forms of knowledge that are not always taught in formal methods courses, as Ash experience documents. Student is not only learning how to conduct research in a technical sense but also how to enter communities, build relationships, and navigate local power structures with care. These navigational skills and forms of knowledge extend beyond academic spaces to include field sites, local authorities, rural community dynamics, and the risks of being perceived as an outsider. This experience highlights how Ash's faculty mentor of color provided culturally responsive, experience-based guidance that helped them become a more thoughtful researcher and a more capable navigator of complex academic and community spaces.

Furthermore, faculty mentors of color play an important role in providing intellectual validation and emotional encouragement for graduate students of color's research topic to become scholars outside of the academic norms. Alina, a fourth-year, first-generation Ph.D. candidate in a Social Science field, wanted to drop out of her program after her second year since she was struggling to find a faculty member who supported and believed in her research. The majority of faculty in her department are white faculty who devalued and even discouraged her research methods and interests that aimed to integrate critical race theories into psychological quantitative approaches. Alina felt excluded and demoralized until she reached out to a faculty member of color in the department who encouraged her to continue pursuing her research interests. Her new faculty mentor was willing to support her, as Alina explained, "[My mentor] is validating my research interests and making me believe that my research is valid in the sense of not saving the world...but like it's valid enough. It's interesting enough...he just gives me

hope.” Students of color, particularly first-generation, come from unique backgrounds and experiences with research interests rooted in their communities, lived experiences, and racialized realities. However, academic spaces do not always recognize these topics as rigorous, important, or sufficiently “theoretical.” Overall, 11 of the student participants revealed that having a mentor of color who recognized their unique identities and experiences helped interrupt that self-doubt and lack of academic belonging by affirming that their research matters, as Alina shared that she would not have continued her Ph.D. studies without her mentor’s guidance.

This validation is important, especially, when students are facing departmental and institutional pushback. For instance, Sophia shared an experience of being criticized by the department for conducting research outside of the academic norms, and how her mentor acted as an intellectual advocate and emotional support to resist and navigate these institutional barriers. In discussing a dissertation workshop where students share their work and receive feedback from faculty and peers in attendance, Sophia described:

I did not have a pleasant experience where a couple of faculty members made me cry, because they basically were questioning my research [legitimacy] and like how [I conducted my research] and stuff. And so [my mentor] did have a conversation with them, and [my mentor] did apologize for not being there that day, because she was busy. But she was really helpful and made me understand that it’s not that there’s something wrong with my ideas or my research. It’s just the way I do things is not necessarily the way my department is used to doing things.

Faculty challenged Sophia’s scholarly identity, competence, and sense of belonging within the academic space, making the graduate school experience unpleasant. Although departmental workshops are often intended to support students’ research development, Sophia’s experience illustrates how these spaces can also reinforce dominant academic norms by questioning the legitimacy of particular approaches to research and knowledge production. In response, Sophia’s mentor helped her reframe the experience, emphasizing that the issue was not her ideas or

abilities but rather a mismatch between her approach and what the department was accustomed to valuing. By affirming Sophia's work and helping her navigate departmental politics, her mentor served as a protective and legitimizing figure who enabled her to remain committed to her dissertation. The mentor's intervention did not simply provide emotional reassurance, it helped Sophia understand the power dynamics in academia and navigate those power and barriers, particularly in relation to whose research is valued, whose methods are questioned, and whose knowledge is recognized as rigorous.

Offering support in navigating the power dynamics is significant as it allowed Sophia to continue developing the dissertation she wanted to write rather than abandoning or reshaping it solely to satisfy dominant departmental norms. Sophia underscored the significance of this support, stating, "I'll say, honestly, I don't think I could have written the dissertation I wrote, if [my mentor] didn't support me. 100%." Her experience demonstrates the importance of faculty mentors of color's advocacy, and how they can help graduate students of color to defend their scholarly identities, support research commitments, and persist in academic environments where their work may be misunderstood, marginalized, or dismissed by dominant academic norms.

The advantages of having faculty mentors of color enhance the various capital that helps students to persist, resist, and navigate their doctoral journeys. Faculty mentors of color helped the graduate students of color in this study build a strong network, validate research practices and ideas, and survive a moment where their research and scholarly identity were called into question. This makes the mentoring relationship between faculty of color and graduate students a crucial site of protection, affirmation, and scholarly empowerment in higher education.

Disadvantages: Challenges and Barriers in Graduate School

Overall, the findings suggest that the disadvantages these graduate student participants experienced were not necessarily due to racial or gender identity themselves, but rather in the broader conditions of graduate education. While some participants described challenges with faculty mentors of color, these issues were more often connected to poor or miscommunication, funding and housing insecurity, and the nature of academic pressures and norms. Thus, the disadvantages reflect the larger realities of graduate school, where graduate students of color must navigate unclear expectations, limited resources, and competitive academic cultures. Therefore, the following section discusses disadvantages that participants identified as part of their broader experiences navigating institutional and professional barriers in higher education.

Funding Insecurity and Materials Hardships

Chronic financial precarity and insufficient funding emerged as the most frequently shared challenges that graduate students of color participating in this study encountered throughout their doctoral journeys, creating material hardship and persistent stress that directly shaped their academic progress, well-being, and sense of stability. Even though this experience is not particularly tied to having a faculty mentor of color, it showcases the reality of graduate education that participants, particularly first-generation students, continue to experience financial struggles in graduate school. A majority of the participants consistently described graduate stipends as inadequate for covering housing, food, transportation, and other basic living expenses, while also navigating personal and family responsibilities that were often invisible to the institution. When asked about academic barriers and challenges, Ash immediately responded, “Money! Definitely, that’s like, probably like, the main thing...A huge source of stress.” Their response illustrates how financial instability was not a peripheral concern but instead a central condition structuring their doctoral experience. Ash further explained that the lack of guaranteed

funding and the limited availability of teaching or research positions required them to constantly search for new opportunities, either on or off campus, adding another layer of labor on top of coursework, research, teaching, and other program expectations. Ash shared, “every three months, [you have to] look for a new job, and making sure you’re funded is like, quite stressful,” a process that directly competed with time and energy that could have otherwise been devoted to research and degree progress.

This sentiment was echoed across other participants’ narratives. Luis, a third-year Ph.D. student in a Social Science field, described what he sees as the exploitative dimensions of graduate labor, explaining that he was “putting in more hours than I was getting paid for” in a research position. His experience highlights how funding insecurity is compounded by uneven labor expectations, where students may be underpaid for work required to maintain their position and to remain visible within their departments. These accounts reveal how financial precarity places graduate students of color in a relentless cycle of searching for supplemental work, managing unstable income, and making difficult decisions about time allocation. These material conditions not only create stress but also constrain students’ ability to focus on classes, research, professional development, and long-term career planning. Financial instability becomes both a personal and institutional barrier, shaping the conditions under which graduate students of color are expected to persist, produce, and succeed.

Graduate School’s Reality: Psychological Trauma and Rejections

Interestingly, a few graduate students shared that doctoral experiences could inflict severe psychological trauma and mental health decline, framed by participants as a direct and often accepted cost of academic success. From Sophia’s experience within her department, she jokingly but truthfully elaborates the consequence of going through a doctoral program:

Doing a PhD leaves you with psychological trauma, and permanent physical disability. Because you have to face rejection over and over again...whether it's when you apply for fellowships, grants, and scholarships, or when you have to defend your ideas against your committee, or you have to defend your ideas against the department, or when you are dealing with publication, you get rejection letters, and you have to do revise and resubmit.

Sophia's experiences, similar to many study participants, capture the emotional and psychological toll of doctoral education, especially the cumulative burden of repeated rejection, revision, uncertainty, and self-doubt that one has to endure. Sophia is not describing a single difficult moment in her doctoral journey, but an ongoing pattern of failure and recovery that embedded in the Ph.D. journey, despite the support and advocacy that she received from her mentor. Her experience reveals how doctoral training can adversely affect students of color's sense of belonging, confidence, and well-being, especially after being rejected so many times and having to constantly try to pick yourself back up and move forward. Unfortunately, graduate students of color shared that they did not receive the coping mechanisms needed to navigate these social and emotional challenges. Over time, these setbacks become internalized as personal inadequacy and self-doubt, the questioning if there is something inherently wrong with them, or their ideas or their ability to succeed in graduate school.

For these participants, these experiences of rejection and failure are often intensified by broader experiences of marginalization within academia. Repeated critique within departments, disciplines, and institutions challenges the legitimacy of students' research interests, methods, and identities. As a result, these participants experienced academic rejection not only as part of scholarly development but also as a continuation of racialized and disciplinary exclusion. This marginalization comes into play when students of color pursue research that challenges dominant departmental norms or centers on communities of color's experiences and knowledge. Overall,

these participants in this study expressed ongoing defense of their scholarship, identity, and place within the academy beyond dissertation topic or publication.

Inconsistent Communication and Mentor Availability

Another disadvantage across these graduate student's experiences is the prevalence of deficient and unreliable communication from faculty mentorship. Yuan, a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in a STEM field, shared the struggles he had to navigate as he worked with a faculty of color, despite his overall moderately positive mentoring experience. Yuan's mentor often deterred him from pursuing and trying new methodological approaches, and, instead of offering new suggestions and advice, the mentor would call out his research methods as "wrong" and prevent him from pursuing it further. Yuan felt discouraged at times collaborating with a mentor who refused to allow him to explore and use a new methodological approach. For instance, Yuan expressed,

Sometimes when I do something [my mentor] doesn't understand, he will not try to understand that method...he was like what you did is wrong, or what you did is useless, and you should do what I'm saying...I tell [my mentor that his method] was appropriate before but now because a lot of new methods or new data are coming out. There are better methods to analyze [these datasets], but he will refuse to accept...and he will say what [I] did was wrong, or what [I] did was useless...You're wasting your time.

This experience discouraged Yuan at times from pursuing his own research interests due to cultural norms of the department that validate methods and projects rigidly favored by faculty advisors. Since he could not challenge his advisor's position, Yuan revised his works to align with his advisor's approaches at the same time trying to incorporate some new ideas to back up his claims and analysis. The resultant high expectations, long lab hours, urgent weekend communication, and inconsistent availability negatively affected his mental health and well-being. This experience weakened his trust in their mentoring relationship and made him hesitant

to rely on his mentor for academic or professional guidance. As a result, Yuan's four-year experience working within these cultures and environments dissuaded him from pursuing position in academia, even though he kept an open mind about it. While Yuan's experiences could not be generalized to the STEM field, this experience reveals a significant disadvantage that is not necessarily rooted in a racial identity, but due to inconsistent communication, lack of accountability, and poor mentoring practice.

Faculty's Lived Experiences and Cultural Influence on Graduate Students of Color Ratify Gaps in Personal Experiences and Sacrificing for Students' Professional Growth

Related to my second research question, the findings show that faculty of color's mentorship is fundamentally shaped by their own educational, cultural, and professional experiences. These experiences often served as a foundation for empathetic and culturally informed mentoring practices. Across the nine faculty interviews, an important theme emerged: faculty mentors of color frequently drew from their own graduate school experiences, including both the mentorship they received and the support they lacked, to inform how they now guide graduate students of color. Through a Community Cultural Wealth framework, faculty members' backgrounds and lived experiences helped them become more aware of the forms of capital students need to navigate graduate education. Faculty's own graduate school experiences, whether positive or negative, influenced how they provided emotional support, affirmed students' research interests, helped students navigate institutional barriers, and encouraged them to pursue scholarly work that may fall outside traditional academic norms.

For instance, Professor Olivia, an Assistant Professor in a STEM field who currently mentors three students of color, shared that she did not have the most positive graduate school experience. Her challenges were shaped by restrictive departmental norms, limited support for

interdisciplinary research, and a lack of attention to mental health and wellness. These experiences now inform how she mentors students whose research interests or intellectual approaches may not fit neatly within conventional disciplinary boundaries. Having personally navigated departmental barriers and worked to expand how her field recognized interdisciplinary and justice-oriented scholarship, Professor Olivia became more intentional about supporting students' innovative ideas and research approaches. Rather than discouraging students from pursuing work that challenges traditional academic expectations, she seeks to affirm their intellectual commitments and help them navigate the institutional structures that may constrain or question their research.

Professor Olivia described entering engineering with interests in environmental justice at a time when such work was largely absent from her field. Because her advisor was accustomed to more traditional engineering research, she often struggled to find support for her interdisciplinary interests, noting, "My advisor was just very used to traditional engineering research... I came in wanting to do environmental justice work, which at that time was completely nascent within engineering." She explained that her advisor did not know how to support work that fell outside conventional disciplinary boundaries and that she was even encouraged to leave the department to join the School of Education. As a result, Professor Olivia took on the responsibility "to create a dissertation that was legible to my engineering faculty." Reflecting on these experiences, Professor Olivia explained that they shaped her commitment to mentoring students whose interests may not fit dominant disciplinary norms, "I very much want to be that person for students who don't fit that norm... to create a space where they feel welcome and included."

Professor Olivia's experience illustrates how mentors draw upon their own encounters with disciplinary gatekeeping to support graduate students of color pursuing non-traditional research

agendas. Having navigated skepticism toward environmental justice scholarship within engineering, she developed strategies for translating and legitimizing work that falls outside established disciplinary expectations. These experiences now inform her mentoring practice, allowing her to help students anticipate barriers, persist in pursuing their intellectual interests, and navigate institutional environments that may not readily recognize the value of their work. In this way, the resistance and navigational capital she developed as a graduate student have become resources she can pass on to the next generation of scholars.

Furthermore, Professor Olivia is now more cognizant about students' wellbeing and mental health, better equipping her to help current students of color balance wellbeing and academic pressures and demands:

Understanding of my own graduate experience. I did not have the most positive relationship with my graduate school advisor and graduate school is very stressful. So, I think for me, it's the understanding of where I was as a graduate student that definitely informs my mentorship of graduate students now, where I tell students, because students will say, Oh, I'm so sorry I can't make this meeting and I'm like, you're human first. Life happens, and so we work through that, and so very accommodating and understanding that life just happens.

Rather than reproducing the same harmful or unsupportive advising practices, Professor Olivia intentionally and consciously chose to mentor her students with empathy, flexibility, and care in the current sociopolitical climate and to support students with compassion. Moreover, she understands that students of color often carry many responsibilities, such as being a caretaker for the family or needing to work outside their university commitments. In response, she creates spaces for students to open up and share when they need the support, an act that humanizes the graduate school experiences. Professor Olivia's previous negative mentoring experience ultimately became a source of reflection and transformation. She knows what it feels like to lack support, so she has intentionally offered her mentees the understanding she had not received

during her own doctoral training. This does not mean that all faculty of color mentor students in the same way or draw similar lessons, but it does indicate how lived experiences can inform a more relational and student-centered mentoring practice.

Faculty of color, furthermore, at times seek to rectify their own unmet needs and be more cautious about how to approach and support students of color. Professor Emma, an Assistant Professor in a Social Science field, reflected, “[T]he way that I advise is a reflection of how I wish I was advised as a graduate student.” Faculty of color participants in this study often reported experiencing significant challenges that defined their responsibilities and approaches to working with graduate students. These experiences were translated into concrete actions that faculty of color took on to make a difference in their students’ graduate school experience.

Professor Olivia notes “during graduate school, I kind of had to find and seek conferences [for myself] because I just didn’t have that real mentorship and support. And so now I send students things.” Her experience of navigating graduate school with limited support informed her mentoring practice and commitment to provide the necessary support for her students’ academic and scholarly development. Through CCW, Professor Olivia’s social and navigational capital allowed her to share and increase students’ access to academic and professional opportunities while helping them better understand the hidden curriculum of graduate school. She transformed her experiences of limited mentorship into a proactive and supportive approach to help students of color access opportunities that she had to find on her own.

Relatedly, Professor Clara, an Assistant Professor in a STEM field who has two graduate students of color, including one who is undocumented, described the personal sacrifices she makes to support her students’ professional development. Reflecting on institutional budget

constraints, she explained, “[The university], for a little while, was saying that we shouldn’t go to conferences because of the budget crisis. So I usually send [my students] with my own bank money, although that means that I, myself, don’t go...I’ll prioritize the students over myself.” Professor Clara’s account illustrates how mentorship can extend beyond academic advising and emotional support to include the direct provision of material resources. Her willingness to prioritize her students’ development, even when doing so may limit her own professional opportunities, reflects a mentoring commitment that seeks to mitigate structural barriers and expand access to opportunities that are often unevenly distributed across graduate education. Through CCW framework, her mentoring reflects familial and navigational capital, as she approaches her students’ success grounded in care, collective uplift, and institutional access. These two capitals portray the academic kinship of her prioritizing students’ growth and development, while navigating institutional barriers that restrict students’ access to professional opportunities.

At the same time, this experience reveals the hidden labor and cultural taxation placed on faculty of color. Beyond sacrificing their time, Professor Clara also uses personal and financial resources to ensure that her students can access professional opportunities, even as this labor indirectly benefits the institution. Faculty of color are often already overburdened with teaching, mentoring, service, diversity work, and supporting students underserved by formal structures. The issue is not that faculty care deeply for their students, but that universities fail to provide adequate support, making personal sacrifice necessary.

Role of Family and Influence on Mentorship Approach

Family played an important role in shaping faculty of color’s own educational trajectories and mentoring approaches. For some participants, family members served as early models of

academic engagement, mentorship, and community responsibility. Professor Maya, an Assistant Professor, and Professor Daisy, a full Professor, both in Social Science fields, shared that having parents in academia exposed them to scholarly environments, research practices, and educational possibilities at an early age. These early experiences helped shape their academic journeys and informed how they now mentor students of color. Their parents modeled not only how to navigate academic spaces but also how to use knowledge, access, and institutional position to support others.

Professor Maya emphasized the importance of how her parents, particularly her mother, helped shape her scholarly identity long before she considered pursuing a career in academia. Her mother introduced her to research during her K–12 education by reading archival documents, exploring historical materials, and interviewing people for school projects. As Professor Maya recalled:

For my third-grade history project...we looked at Madam CJ Walker, who was a black woman, made a lot of money producing hair care, and she had lived in Indiana for some time. [My mother] ordered me books about Madam CJ Walker, she took me to the archive so I could look at letters written by Madam CJ Walker.... she got me interested in the process of research really early. She even had me interview people in elementary school through my high school projects.

This familial capital of Professor Maya's showed how her mother transmitted knowledge, values, and academic practices that nurtured curiosity and scholarly identity before formal graduate school. Her experience reflects how families of color can cultivate academic skills and confidence at an early age to be successful. This role of family and community support inform her own mentoring practices, particularly her desire to work and support graduate students of color and improve their confidence and capability to be knowledge producers in higher education.

In relation to the influence of family, Professor Daisy also shares how her father's mentoring approach contributed to her commitment to care for students as a whole person and

supporting their long-term success. She recalled that her father “was an amazing mentor to tons of people” who helped his students find employment, provided them with a place to stay when they need housing, and supported through difficult moments, especially when his students were considering leaving school. One of her father’s former mentees, whom her father convinced not to drop out of college and later became a lawyer, drove overnight to attend her father’s funeral. For Professor Daisy, this instance reflected the depth and lasting impact of her father’s mentorship.

These early experiences provide important context for understanding Professor Daisy’s own approach to mentoring. She described herself as a “helicopter advisor,” explaining that she meets with students at least twice each month and establishes clear developmental milestones from the beginning of the mentoring relationship. By graduation, she said she expects students “to know how to at least contribute to writing a grant proposal...have either written or contributed to writing a review for a journal article...have presented at conferences.” She also noted that she has published with nearly every one of her mentees with the exception of a single student who left the doctoral program. Viewed through the lens of CCW, Professor Daisy’s mentoring reflects the relational commitments she observed growing up, extending care beyond academic advising while intentionally preparing students for long-term professional success.

Professor Daisy’s mentoring also demonstrates how multiple forms of community cultural wealth can operate simultaneously. By explicitly teaching students how to write grant proposals, publish scholarly work, and present at conferences, she makes many aspects of the “hidden curriculum” of academia more visible and accessible to her mentees. Her practice of co-authoring with her mentees further extends students’ professional networks while providing tangible scholarly credentials that can support future educational and career opportunities. Rather

than assuming students will acquire these experiences on their own, Professor Daisy intentionally integrates them into the mentoring process.

Her description of herself as a “helicopter advisor” also suggests that this intensive approach is highly intentional and may not appeal to every student. By clearly communicating her expectations at the outset, she creates transparency about the level of structure and engagement students can expect. In this way, her mentoring emphasizes both sustained support and explicit preparation for navigating academic careers.

Increasing Academic Confidence and Strengthening Community Commitment

Faculty of color participants described frequently drawing upon cultural and intellectual traditions to shape their mentoring approaches that prioritizes community, collectivism, and belonging over individualistic achievement. This shared viewpoint manifests as a conscious rejection of hyper-competitive academic norms in favor of values derived from their diverse and unique backgrounds and experiences. For instance, Professor Olivia explicitly rooted her mentoring approach in “Black radical thought” and community commitment to take and make spaces, empowering students of color to claim their voices and sense of belonging to overcome self-doubts in higher education. Professor Olivia shared:

When I mentor students of color, my commitment to community is part of that already and creating that space where they feel comfortable, welcome, [and] included, but also capable...I would even say, like Black radical thought of taking space and creating space, and trying to instill that in my students, to take space in the department, make space for what they want to see, and take space and hold that space...I am part of environmental justice organizing spaces, and so I think that shapes why I’m committed to creating that space, but also why I really want them to succeed because I want them to stand in their space.

Professor Olivia’s approach helps students of color recognize their talents and skills, enhancing their sense of belonging and strengthening their confidence to participate fully in academic spaces. She understands that students of color may not always feel welcomed or recognized in

departments, especially in STEM fields where their identities, research interests, or community commitments can be marginalized. Thus, Professor Olivia intentionally creates a relationship and space where students of color feel “comfortable,” “welcome,” “included,” and “capable” to succeed and thrive in academic spaces.

Professor Olivia’s mentoring philosophy draws from Black radical thought and tradition to encourage students of color to create, claim, and hold spaces within academic environments that have historically marginalized communities of color. Her approach helps students to nurture and improve their self-esteem and academic confidence, affirming students’ capability and right to be present in academic spaces. Grounded in community values and commitments, Professor Olivia shows that holistic care not only supports individual student success but also uplifts the broader academic and community spaces that are working to transform. These experiences reflect various capitals that are used to support and enhance Professor Olivia’s mentees’ experiences.

Similarly, Professor Clara articulates that her mentoring philosophy is shaped by Latino cultural collectivism that emphasizes mutual care, shared responsibility, and community engagement to increase a sense of belonging and success in higher education, rather than focusing on individual achievement. Her approach challenges dominant academic norms and practices that focuses on individual productivity, competition, and pressure to be the “superstar.” She states,

Community engagement and community belonging. I think that there’s a lot of emphasis in academia to be the superstar, to make sure that you rise above the rest. But in Latino communities, it’s very collective, and you really emphasize taking care of other people. Things are work because there’s a team. And even though science prides itself on having a big co-author list and supposedly working as a team, I don’t think that’s often how it gets communicated. And I don’t want my students to think that it’s that they have to be superstars, that they have to know everything, but that it’s better if they cultivate a community that can work together for a better future.

Graduate schools can be isolating places by valuing and promoting individualism, competing to outperform others, visibility, and prestige. Thus, graduate students of color are often encouraged to distinguish themselves from others, produce at high level and always appear to be self-sufficient. However, Professor Clara critiques these dominant academic and disciplinary norms and draws from her Latinx background and community values to offer a different model of academic success, one that emphasizes on collectivity, teamwork, and responsibility for others. Her personal experiences and background inform her mentoring approach to encourage students to cultivate a community of supports, rather than doing it alone. Being culturally informed, Professor Clara redefines to her mentees what success means in higher education, encouraging students of color to build relationships, support one another, and develop a collective sense of purpose. This approach challenges the individualistic logic of academia and offers graduate students of color a more sustainable and affirming way to understand their learning, development, and professional futures.

Emphasizing the importance of community support, Professor Eva, an Associate Professor in a Social Science field, also encourages her students of color to nurture relationships outside of academia as a guiding principle to overcome current sociopolitical challenges that higher education faces. She shares that despite struggles and barriers within the academia that places significant pressures and responsibility to faculty of color to mentor and work with students, the power and support of the larger community encourage and motivate her to continue the work to support students of color:

Even though there's academic intensity [in the current sociopolitical climate], we're not the only ones feeling this and living through it, and there's definitely a good number of folks around me anyway, where we have the support of each other. So there's a sense of community that I remind students of and to keep reminding myself that there's a community that's feeling with us.

In the context of Southwestern Research University, graduate students organized for better pay, and protested to the plight of Palestinians and advocated for a free Palestine. During this period, the university administration responded forcefully to student protests and campus movements, creating significant anxiety, pressure, and uncertainty for students, staff, and faculty across campus. As a result, faculty of color often carried additional burdens to create and hold supportive spaces for students of color who were navigating both academic demands and the emotional weight of the broader sociopolitical climate.

Professor Clara's statement, along with the reflections of other faculty of color, captures how solidarity and community became essential sources of support during this time. The current sociopolitical climate was not only intellectually demanding but also politically and emotionally draining for faculty of color, who were often called upon to help students make sense of institutional responses, campus tensions, and broader social injustices. Rather than framing these stresses as individual struggles, faculty of color situated them within a shared environment where students, staff, and faculty were collectively experiencing uncertainty, fear, and exhaustion. At the same time, faculty of color reminded students that they were not alone and that allies and broader communities existed to support them. Community-building became a source of endurance, care, and resistance amid ongoing crises in higher education, and this support reflects resistant and aspirational capital by emphasizing emotional validation, collective solidarity, and hope. Through these practices, faculty of color helped students process the current academic and sociopolitical climate while also encouraging them to persist, resist, and find strength in community.

These faculty of color's experiences demonstrate that mentoring approaches are deeply rooted in and influenced by their lived experiences, cultural values, community commitments,

and memories of navigating graduate education themselves. Faculty of color participants often drew from personal experiences of exclusion, inadequate advising, financial precarity, disciplinary marginalization, and community-based care to develop more holistic and intentional forms of support for graduate students of color. Their mentorship practices reflect an understanding that doctoral success is not only measured by publications and degree completion, but also by students' ability to feel seen, supported, and connected to a broader community.

Importance of Mentorship and Contributing to the Diversification of the Professoriate

Addressing research question three, the findings show that faculty of color understood their mentorship as both an individual and collective responsibility. Many faculty participants framed their mentoring as a necessary intervention in response to the academy's systemic failures to recruit, retain, and support underrepresented scholars. Their mentorship was therefore not only about guiding individual students through graduate school, but also about building an intergenerational academic pipeline that could support the advancement of future scholars of color. This responsibility was enacted through holistic support, institutional advocacy, and strategic career preparation that helped graduate students of color prepare for both faculty and industry roles.

Lack of Diversity, Cultural Taxation, and Role to Diversify

Faculty members lived experiences position them as racial minorities within academia and cultivate a profound sense of duty that directly informs their mentoring practices and availability. This shared sense of obligation often stems from being one of few faculty of color in the department, creating a feeling of being an indispensable resource to support students of color across different levels of higher education while shouldering a significant burden. Professor Ivy, an Associate Professor in a Social Science field, powerfully captures this notion of cultural

taxation in that she is not only supporting graduate students but also undergraduates and retention programs across campus that add responsibilities not recognized by institutions. She reflects,

For the longest time, for about 20 years of my career at [this institution], I was the only Southeast Asian faculty member in the social sciences and humanities...so I was also advising student organizations on campus and various programs from outreach, retention as well at the undergraduate level. Even with undergraduate students, your level of mentorship is much more individualized...the same as you're doing at the graduate level.

Professor Ivy's experience reveals how underrepresentation among faculty of color can create an uneven distribution of mentoring labor, where one faculty member becomes responsible for supporting many students who are searching for cultural recognition, guidance, and sense of belonging in higher education. The lack of faculty diversity not only affects representation at the faculty level but also limits students' access to culturally relevant mentorship and support that place disproportionate pressure on the few faculty of color who are present. This is the reality of cultural taxation, where Professor Ivy and other faculty of color are often expected to carry out work related to diversity, mentoring, and student support across both undergraduate and graduate levels without adequate recognition or compensation. Although this mentoring work was meaningful and aligned with Professor Ivy's commitment to students of color and program success, it also reflected the invisible and uncompensated labor that faculty of color often conducted without sufficient recognition within the institution. This cultural taxation illustrates the ongoing dilemma that faculty of color face: supporting students of color's persistence and success while being over-worked personally and professionally by the institution's reliance on them to carry the burden of labor connected to student diversity, retention, and sense of belonging.

Service is another dimension of cultural taxation. It is the expectations that faculty of color serve as a representative of diversity for students' committee without fully engaged with their intellectual expertise, research area, or mentoring fit. While students often seek out faculty of color because they desire recognition and culturally informed perspectives, Professor Eva's experience shows that institutional underrepresentation of faculty of color could place faculty of color in difficult position, intensifying the demands of their participation in mentoring, advising, and services:

A handful of students say to me, 'I need you on my committee because I need a diverse perspective,' or 'I need a woman of color's perspective,'...they don't talk about the content of my work, but they talk about my identity, or they perceive it, which is very surprising to me...You focus on the work you show the people who you say you want to work with, because the project is intellectual work, it's academic work. But there are a couple students who have said to me directly, they want representation.

This interaction shows how institutional underrepresentation creates dilemmas for both faculty and students, revealing the complication and the assumption that faculty of color are automatically available or appropriate mentors for all students of color. The faculty members do not reject the importance of representation, but they resist being positioned only as a racialized or gendered presence. Their identity matters, but so does their scholarly training, methodological expertise, theoretical contribution, and capacity to support the student's specific project. Symbolically valuing a faculty of color while overlooking or disregarding their intellectual labor, can cause more harm than benefit for both faculty and students of color. Effective mentoring should not embody the creation of a token faculty member of color; rather it should recognize and honor their lived experiences and intellectual expertise.

In addition to feeling tokenized, faculty of color mentioned the lack of support and recognition from the institution and their respective departments and the expectation to mentor students of color, often creating a burden for faculty members. Having to mentor so many

students prevent faculty of color from conducting research, which is what the institution and department tend to value. Professor Clara noted that, “[My department would just say] it’s our choice if we want to mentor, but that we were hired to be researchers...If we choose to do it and don’t have enough time for something else, then that’s our problem because we are researchers.” The admonition to mentor on your own time disincentivizes faculty of color to make time to be a mentor. Faculty of color who take on mentoring responsibilities place additional burdens on themselves by having to divide their time between research and other academic responsibilities.

Thus, mentoring potentially penalizes faculty of color. Professor Emma shares, “among Black women faculty, people have said to me, ‘do not get seen as the person in your department who takes on all the service because then what they’ll try to do to you is they’ll try to put you into a staff position, and that is not at all helpful to anybody.’” This statement highlights the racialized and gendered risks that faculty of color, especially Black women, face when they are expected to take on excessive mentoring and diversity-related labor. While service is necessary and meaningful to support students of color’ success, it can also become professionally dangerous when it is unevenly assigned to faculty of color. When faculty mentored at their own risk, institutions exploit their commitments to support students of color while failing to recognize those who mentor as full scholars.

Despite this dilemma, faculty of color are still committed to engaging and carrying on community services and mentorship. Professor Olivia shares about incorporating her community service, commitments, and mentorship to legitimize her scholarly productivity: “And so while I’m over here doing these community meetings and all of that work, is that going to be recognized by the department? Probably not. But then once they see the paper that comes from it, then that is the legible metric to them.” While the time spent attending community meetings,

building relationships, listening to community concerns, and doing collaborative work may be central to the research process, that labor is often invisible or undervalued within the department. What becomes visible and “legible” to the institution is not the relational work itself, but the publication that comes from those services to justify their services. This legibility is important in the context of faculty of color’s mentorship because many faculty of color engage in research and mentorship rooted in community responsibility and social justice. Yet, these commitments are not always rewarded within institutional evaluation systems unless they become measurable through traditional academic standards. These invisible services reveal the double labor that faculty of color often perform in academia, serving their communities while also translating that work into recognizable academic metrics to receive institutional recognition and to maintain their academic positions.

Faculty of color also characterized their mentorship as a profound moral, personal, and intergenerational responsibility shaped by their own lived experiences and by the academy’s continued systemic failures. For many participants, mentoring graduate students of color was not understood as an optional extension of their faculty role, but as necessary labor in response to institutions that have historically failed to recruit, retain, and support scholars of color. Professor Clara captured this shortcoming directly, stating, “I think the university is not doing its part in diversifying academia, and so it all falls on us.” Her statement reflects the uneven distribution of responsibility in higher education, where faculty of color are often expected to compensate for institutional inaction through individualized mentoring, advocacy, and care. This responsibility is rooted in a deep commitment to students and communities but also produced by structural neglect.

Mentoring and diversifying responsibility were also described as personal, as faculty often drew from their own experiences of exclusion and limited support to guide how they mentor the next generation of scholars. Their commitment to graduate students of color was not only professional but also connected to memory, identity, and a desire to create the kind of support they may not have received. At the same time, faculty framed mentorship as intergenerational work that could contribute to a sustainable pipeline of scholars of color in the academy. Professor Emma described her long-term vision when she shared that she “[looks] forward to the day where I have students who have students.” Her statement reflects an understanding of mentorship as a generational chain, where supporting one graduate student of color has the potential to shape future students and future fields of study. These narratives position faculty of color’s mentorship as indispensable to the diversification of the professoriate. Their work is not only limited to helping an individual student complete a degree; it is also about cultivating future faculty, expanding what counts as legitimate scholarship, and creating conditions for students of color to imagine themselves as belonging in academia.

Overcoming Self-Doubts and Increasing Sense of Belonging in Academia

Faculty of color play an important role in helping graduate students of color overcome self-doubt and developing a stronger sense of belonging in academic spaces that often make them feel isolated, questioned, or out of place. For many students of color, doctoral education is shaped not only by academic expectations and norms but also by racialized experiences, imposter feelings, financial stress, and the constant pressure to prove their worth and legitimacy. Professor Daisy helps students overcome these self-doubts and lack of belonging through helping them find their voices in the academy. She provides tips and suggestions to support students navigating these spaces: “Seeing people grow. I mean, without question, seeing people find their

voice, find their confidence. And begin to move out of the imposter syndrome into I deserve this, and I'm going to be this person.” For students of color, this process is meaningful and powerful because academic spaces often require them to defend the value of their research, communities, and lived experiences, as shared by Sophia and others.

Professor Olivia's experience shows that effective mentorship helps students of color reinterpret their presence in graduate school and to see themselves as deserving scholars who have earned their places rather than through luck or a diversity policy. Similarly, Professor Maya describes her own personal struggle with “not claiming my ideas” which allows her to spot and help students of color overcome similar patterns of self-doubt and imposter syndrome, “I still have to unlearn this for myself, and so I see it really easily when it comes up in students' papers. It's like you're talking about something that's really important that only you know how to say, I want you to tell me in your words, what is important about this, not what everyone else is saying...it's time for you to step into your power.” Professor Maya acknowledges her own self-doubt as an ongoing process that helps her help students to recognize the value of their own intellectual voice. Again, faculty of color affirm that the students of color have unique perspectives and experiences that could make significant intellectual contributions to the field and that they need to claim those voices and knowledge production. These experiences illustrate how aspirational and resistance capitals are cultivated in mentoring relationships that affirm students of color as scholars with valuable voices, ideas, and authority.

Furthermore, faculty of color also described imposter syndrome or phenomenon as a condition shaped by racialized academia structures, rather than having self-doubt due to the constant defending of their research and scholarly identity. Professor Ivy shared that she has had to deal with this backlash and criticism her entire academic career, “[Imposter syndrome] has

been something that I've been dealing with this my entire career... your confidence level fluctuated, and it's really hard to maintain because you feel like your work is always being judged. And of course, your work continues to be judged once you're an established academic." Professor Ivy's experience shows that imposter syndrome is not only internal, but it is produced and reinforced by an academic environment that continues to position scholars of color's works as less legitimate or rigorous, especially when their scholarships fall outside of dominate disciplinary norms. As a result, even established scholars still must constantly defend one's research and scholarly identity that could erode their confidence and sense belonging in academia.

Professor Ivy's experiences also demonstrate the reasons faculty of color are more attentive to graduate student of color's struggles with self-doubt. They have had to navigate similar forms of judgment, critique, and marginalization that they now use to inform their approaches to helping students of color understand the feelings of inadequacy are not proof of intellectual failure. Instead, these feelings often emerge from institutional conditions that undervalue community of color's ideas and ways of knowing or knowledge. Through this awareness, faculty of color can help graduate students of color develop resistant and aspiration capital by reframing self-doubt and critiques as part of navigating academic barriers and structures. Faculty of color can also help students to sustain and improve their confidence, recognize their scholarship, and persist when institutions fail to fully affirm their intellectual contributions.

Responsibility and Transforming Academia and Career Aspiration

Faculty of color described their mentorship as a responsibility not only to diversify and transform the academy, but also to prepare students with the flexibility and skills needed to

pursue a range of career opportunities. Professor Daisy shared that she trained and mentored her students to be ready for the academic career; however, she does not force them to go into academia if they have the skill sets to become strong scholars and researchers. Professor Daisy explained, “I start with the expectation that they’re going into the academy. I’ve had a couple of people who you know, as time went on, said, I’m not so sure. And what I say to them is, prepare your skill set as if you’re going into the academy, and then if you don’t go into the academy, you’ll still have a skill set that will allow you to be in demand in other places.” She recognizes that students’ career goals could change over time and does not frame leaving the academic pathway as a failure; instead, she encourages students to prepare broadly and strategically. Having strong research and analytical skills would also be valuable in other professional spaces that would open more possibilities beyond academia.

Similarly, Professor Olivia shares that with the current job market and constraints in higher education, socially and politically, it is important to be pragmatic and encourage their students to seek out other opportunities: “[I]t’s also a reminder that you’re getting a PhD, and there’s so many different routes. And yes, it is a tough job market, but the good thing is that they’re in a position to apply to many different kinds of sectors.” Professor Olivia previously worked in Washington DC as a policy analyst before returning to academia as a professor. Her experience encourages students of color not to limit themselves to academia and helps them to understand the hidden curriculum of academic preparation while also recognizing that career trajectories are not always linear. By encouraging students to build a skill set valuable both inside and outside the academy, faculty participants in this study helped students of color navigate uncertainty without losing direction. These participants framed career flexibility as a

strength rather than a compromise, emphasizing that rigorous preparation will allow students to prepare for other career sectors.

In relation to diversifying the professoriate, this approach matters because faculty of color participants trained and encouraged students of color to become future faculty, yet they also honored students' agency by supporting multiple career outcomes. Within the current sociopolitical climate and tough job market, faculty mentors of color play a vital role in cultivating confidence, preparation, and flexibility so students see themselves as scholars whether they remain in the academy or pursue other professional paths.

Mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color can contribute meaningfully to the diversification of the professoriate by helping students develop scholarly confidence, professional skills, research identities, and a sense of belonging in academic spaces. Given the instability of the academic job market, attacks on diversity-related work, the current sociopolitical climate in higher education, and the limited availability of tenure-track positions, faculty of color, by their lived experience, mentoring interventions, and mere presence encourage students to remain open to multiple professional pathways. Their mentorship supports diversification not only by preparing students of color for faculty careers, but also by equipping them with transferable skills, confidence, and critical awareness to pursue meaningful work beyond the academy. Faculty mentors of color continue to help students understand that their scholarship, leadership, and community commitments can have an impact across many institutional and professional spaces, both inside and outside of the academy.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Building on existing research, this study examined the critical role of mentorship between faculty and students of color, discussing how graduate students characterized the advantages and disadvantages of having faculty mentors of color, how faculty mentors' lived experiences and cultural background informed their approaches to mentorship, and how faculty of color viewed their mentorship as contributing to the diversification of the professoriate. Across 13 student and nine faculty interviews, mentoring emerged as more than an academic relationship focused on degree milestones, research productivity, or professional preparation. Instead, these mentoring relationships operated as relational, cultural, emotional, and institutional practices that provided validation, advocacy, professional networks, and a stronger sense of belonging for students of color to succeed in their respective doctoral programs. In some instances, the racialized and cultural experiences shared between faculty of color and students of color were important in shaping and strengthening their mentoring relationships. Faculty's personal experience as a person of color navigating higher education informed how they understood and approached students' challenges and recognized different aspects of students' personal and cultural identities and capital, such as with Professor Olivia. The findings from these narratives also complicate assumptions that shared racial identity automatically produces positive mentoring experiences. While students of color who participated in this study identified certain advantages due to shared identities and cultural backgrounds with their faculty mentors of color, a few participants also expressed general concerns about poor communication, institutional pressures, and uneven access to resources and funding in graduate school. As a result, not all beneficial mentoring practices in the study appeared to dependent on shared racial or ethnic identity. Mentoring practices such as transparent and consistent communication, advocating for students, connecting

students with networks, and validating research interests or topics could be adopted by faculty across all racial or ethnic groups. Yet, faculty of color's mentorship still reflects the unique value of shared racialized experiences and culturally responsive approach that could be developed to support faculty generally toward supporting students of color.

Drawing from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework, this study shows that graduate students of color draw upon multiple forms of capital to progress through their doctoral journeys. By working with faculty of color, these forms of capital were often recognized and strengthened through shared experiences and identities that validated students' research interests outside academic norms, connected them to funding and professional opportunities, helped them navigate institutional barriers, and affirmed their identities within academic spaces. CCW describes a set of assets that students possess individually and those they bring with them from families and communities. This study's findings demonstrate that these forms of capital also operate relationally and intergenerationally. Through mentoring relationship, CCW is transmitted and circulated in ways that help students of color connect with resources and navigate barriers in higher education and beyond, as well as the possibility of strengthening faculty mentoring practices to recognize and validate the community cultural wealth that students of color bring to their educational experiences.

Discussion of Findings

Mentorship as a Holistic Support and Cultural Affirmation

A major finding in the study is that graduate students of color experienced faculty mentors of color as important sources of holistic support and cultural affirmation. Students described feeling more comfortable being vulnerable, asking what they described as "dumb" and/or "silly" questions, sharing personal challenges, and discussing issues related to family,

funding, housing, emotional wellbeing, and racialized experiences. This finding aligns with mentoring literature that defines effective mentorship as a professional working alliance that includes both career-related and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985; Byars-Winston et al., 2019). More importantly, this study shows that, for graduate students of color participants, psychosocial support is often inseparable from racial, cultural, and institutional realities. Student participants' emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and degree progress were shaped by whether their mentors recognized them as whole people and scholars whose academic lives were connected to material, familial, cultural, and racialized experiences. When these factors are recognized, students participants were more likely to secure funding, feeling belong, and thrive in their doctoral programs, like Evelyn and Jasmine shared how her faculty helped them secured housing and funding. This finding also builds upon research showing that students of color often benefit from culturally responsive mentoring relationships that affirm their identities and experiences (Byars-Winston et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2011; Pfund et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2011; White-Lewis et al., 2022; Zambrana et al., 2015), mobilizing different types of capitals to help graduate student participants access resources, navigate institutional barriers, and validate marginalized research agendas, as shown in Sophia and Alina's narratives of conducting research outside departmental norms.

Student participants in this study described how shared racial, cultural, or gendered identities with their faculty mentors of color reduced the burden of explanatory labor. The graduate student participants in this study did not always have to explain themselves as to why family obligations matter, how racialized experiences shaped their academic confidence, and the importance and meanings of community-engaged research (Smith et al., 2024). This facet of the mentoring relationship reduced explanatory burden, created emotional safety, and ultimately

increased students' willingness to seek support. Furthermore, consistent with the literature, faculty mentors of color, such as Professor Olivia and Professor Emma, fostered culturally affirming forms of social and familial capital by providing care, understanding, and validation that reinforce students of color's persistence, confidence, and sense of belonging within academic spaces (Griffin, 2020; Holden et al., 2021).

However, it is important to acknowledge that this mentoring does not mean that race-matched or identity-aligned (this was not the pairing of mentoring relationships in the study) mentoring relationships are automatically positive or that faculty of color should be assumed to be naturally better mentors. Instead, the findings show that shared or proximate identity between faculty of color and students of color can create conditions for trust, recognition, and cultural understanding when combined with effective mentoring practices. This distinction is important because it avoids essentializing faculty of color or placing the burden and responsibility of student support solely on them. The strongest mentoring relationships in this study were not solely due to faculty and students' shared racial identity. Instead, they were strengthened by the quality of the relational practices and experiences that faculty of color provided, such as Professor Daisy's clear expectations and "helicopter" mentoring approach, and Professor Maya who drew from her own graduate school experiences to provide the kind of supports necessary to succeed in a doctoral education. These experiences allow faculty of color participants to recognize and strengthen different forms of capital to enhance their students' experiences such as communicated care, advocacy, and understanding of how race, culture, gender, and inequitable institutional structures shaped students of color's doctoral journeys.

Mentorship as Institutional Navigation and Material Supports to Survive and Persist

Another major finding is that faculty mentors of color helped students navigate urgent material and institutional barriers, including housing insecurity, funding instability, summer employment, and access to professional development and conferences. Graduate students of color in this study, such as Ash and Luis, repeatedly described financial precarity as a central barrier to degree progress and overall satisfaction with their doctoral experience, particularly among first-generation students. These findings are consistent with scholarship showing that doctoral persistence is shaped not only by intellectual ability but also by funding, departmental climate, and access to institutional resources and resources (Clark et al., 2012; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Tram et al., 2023). Financial support is directly tied to both students' and faculty members' satisfaction with their respective graduate programs, as it affects students' ability to conduct research, meet program expectations, maintain well-being, and graduate on time (Tram et al., 2023). For first-generation students and students of color, these barriers can be intensified because they may have less access to the hidden curriculum of graduate education, including how to secure fellowship and funding, build professional networks, and navigate bureaucratic systems. Recognizing these multifaceted needs, faculty of color who mentored many of the student participants in this study were more likely to go above and beyond academic advising responsibility to help students of color securing funding, summer employment, or providing personal financial support that empowered students of color to persist and remain in their respective doctoral programs.

Faculty mentors of color often served as institutional translators who helped students understand what to do, who to contact, what resources were available, and how to advocate for themselves. Through a CCW lens, this support reflects navigational capital, as mentors of color helped students to move through institutional barriers and structures that were often confusing,

unresponsive, or inequitable, as shown by Jasmine's experience of securing funding and housing and Ash's experience of conducting research abroad in Chapter 4. It also reflects social capital, as mentors of color used their networks, institutional standing, and professional relationships to connect students to resources and opportunities, such as Adam's position as a research staff member at a research firm. These supportive forms of capital were not peripheral to academic success; they created the material stability necessary for students of color to continue in and complete their doctoral programs.

This finding also connects to the body of literature on mentoring by showing that mentorship for graduate students of color often includes attention to material conditions. Traditional mentoring frameworks tend to emphasize career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Kram, 1985;1988; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). While these dimensions are important, this study demonstrates that effective mentoring for graduate students of color also requires practical advocacy around survival needs like housing, funding, and employment, as these are not separate from academic progress. These material conditions directly affect whether students of color can focus on their class, make progress on research, and persist through their doctoral journey.

Thus, student participants' academic progress and financial and material needs are inseparable. The findings also reveal the inequity of institutional structures and barriers, e.g., meeting basic needs such as housing or living expenses, that students of color often face to succeed. When faculty mentors of color intervened to help students navigate institutional struggles such as secure housing, funding, or employment, it revealed the failure of institutional systems to support, maintain, and retain its graduate students while relying on the services and

power of effective mentorship and advocacy to keep graduate students of color in their doctoral programs.

While many student participants in this study acknowledged that faculty mentors of color are an important source of support, this perspective was not universally held among my participants. Failures in mentorship are not evidence that similar and/or cross racial or cultural mentorship is ineffective, but it is more of the mentors' poor communication and inconsistent support that undermine any mentoring relationship. For example, Irene's original mentor of color "ghosted" her, contributing to her nearly leaving the program, while Yuan's mentor repeatedly missed or rescheduled meetings without explanation, shaping his negative perception of academic culture and dissuading him from pursuing an academic career. These findings challenge assumptions that shared racial identity would always guarantee effective mentorship.

Consistent with mentoring literature that recognize mentoring relationships can be harmful or ineffective when there is neglect, mismatched expectations, poor communication, exploitation, or lack of support (Morales et al., 2021; Tuma and Dolan, 2024; Tuma et al., 2021; Padersen et al., 2022), evidence from this study shows that these challenges can also occur in same-race or identity-aligned mentoring relationships. As a result, this finding shows that CCW should not be applied in ways that romanticize cultural alignment. While cultural wealth and shared identity can create powerful opportunities for connection, effective mentorship also includes both personal and institutional efforts, such as communication, accountability, availability, intellectual fit, and resources to address holistically the needs that students of color have. Thus, the disadvantages students experienced were not necessarily caused by race and cultural identities but by the broader institutional structures and mentoring practices. This distinction enables the study to affirm the values of faculty of color mentorship while also

recognizing its limitations and complexities that remind scholars and practitioners to be vigilant and intentional about their own commitments to support students of color in higher education.

Mentorship as Validation of Scholarly Voice and Research Legitimacy

Graduate student participants in this study also described faculty mentors of color as crucial in validating research interests that were interdisciplinary, justice-oriented, community-engaged, or otherwise outside dominant departmental norms. Alina, Sophia, Irene, and several others explicitly shared how their faculty mentors not only affirmed their research agendas but also defended them when other faculty questioned their legitimacy. These findings align closely with resistant capital within the CCW framework, as mentors helped students challenge narrow definitions of legitimate knowledge production, persist in pursuing research rooted in their communities, and advocate for scholarship that addressed issues of equity and social justice (Heberle et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2016; Rhoads, 2016).

This finding is significant because doctoral education is not only a process of completing coursework and writing a dissertation; it is also a process of becoming a knowledge producer and building one's scholar identity. For students of color, this process can be complicated by academic environments that devalue research connected to race, community, inequality, identity, or social justice. In these contexts, students of color begin to question whether their ideas, methods, and intellectual commitment belong in their respective disciplines. Faculty mentors of color played an important role in helping these participants resist internalizing departmental critique as evidence that their work was illegitimate. Instead, mentors of color helped students of color understand that this devaluation of their work more likely reflects narrow disciplinary norms rather than the quality of their research, as shown through Sophia's experience. This

support legitimized students of color's research agendas and sustained their scholarly confidence as they continued to be scrutinized by institutional and departmental norms.

The finding also aligns with scholarship on graduate student socialization as they become independent researchers, a process whereby doctoral students learn disciplinary norms, meet professional expectations, and develop scholarly identities through relationships with faculty and departments (Austin, 2002; Gardner, 2008). However, this study complicates traditional socialization models by showing that students of color may not simply need to be socialized into existing academic norms. In some cases, they need mentors who help them question, resist, and transform those norms. Faculty mentors of color supported students by creating space for new forms of scholarship that centered marginalized communities, identities, and knowledge. This finding is important and relevant for students of color pursuing community-engaged, interdisciplinary, and/or justice-oriented research that may not fit within conventional departmental norms and expectations, especially in STEM fields. In fact, faculty mentors of color acknowledge that such work often requires additional labor, including building trust with communities, translating research across audiences, and defending its legitimacy within departments. These findings suggest that mentoring literature would have to account for the politics of knowledge production and whose knowledge is considered "legitimate." Effective mentorship for students of color includes helping them navigate the tension between disciplinary expectations and community commitments while affirming that their research agendas are intellectually rigorous, meaningful, and necessary.

Faculty of Color's Lived Experiences and Background Influences on Mentorship

The second research question focuses on faculty members lived experiences and cultural backgrounds that inform their approaches to mentoring graduate students of color. The findings

show that faculty of color's mentoring practices were deeply shaped by their own graduate school experiences, family histories, racialized experiences, and community commitments and influences. Many faculty of color described their approaches to mentoring students in ways that responded to what they experienced and what they did not receive as graduate students. For instance, Professor Maya and Professor Clara shared the challenges they face in having to educate their advisors about their dissertation topic while navigating difficult advising relationships, limited support, or disciplinary marginalization because their research fell outside of the traditional departmental norms. These experiences became the foundation for faculty of color to become more empathetic, corrective, and student-centered mentoring practices.

Faculty of color who participated in this study described wanting to create mentoring relationships that humanized and centered student wellbeing. As a result, they became more cognizant of students of colors' needs, especially those related to funding, housing, and employment. During difficult times, faculty of color emphasized flexibility, care, emotional support, and an awareness that "life happens," allowing time for students to make up work, reschedule meetings, and succeed at their own pace. These approaches align with mentoring literature that emphasizes the importance of psychosocial support, trust, and relational mentoring (Campbell et al., 2012; Daloz, 2012; Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Professor Daisy and Professor Olivia exemplify these practices by creating safe and supporting spaces for students to navigate self-doubt, express vulnerability, and develop confidence. Thus, the findings also show that faculty of color's relational mentoring practices were often rooted in cultural and community-based values. For some faculty participants, mentorship was shaped by family models of care, where parents and mentors had demonstrated mentorship as a responsibility to help others succeed. For others, mentorship was shaped by social justice and community values

and practices, such as Black radical thought, Latino collectivist values, and community engagement.

Through a CCW lens, faculty of color do not need to embody every form of capital to support graduate students of color. Instead, they draw upon their own experiences, cultural knowledge, and institutional awareness to help students navigate academia, legitimize their research, and access to academic and career opportunities. Faculty of color from this study most clearly leveraged their social capital by using their academic and professional networks to connect students with employment, research collaboration, and career opportunities. They also provided navigational capital by helping students to understand the hidden curriculum, including departmental politics, funding structures, and research expectations. As a result, faculty of color participants helped their students to rethink their lived experiences as sources of knowledge and cultural wealth rather than as deficits or barriers to their academic success. This reframing empowered student of color participants to recognize how their cultural backgrounds and familial and community experiences could strengthen their academic skills, perspectives, and scholarship, challenging deficit views that tend to distance students from their communities or push them to assimilate into dominant academic norms to be successful. These mentoring experiences also reflect faculty of color's efforts to challenge academic norms that marginalize students' scholarly identities, research interests, and knowledge production. By validating students' research, faculty of color helped students to see their work as meaningful both within and beyond the academy.

While Yosso's (2005) framework was developed to challenge deficit perspectives about students of color, this study demonstrates that faculty of color hold and mobilize community cultural wealth in their mentoring practices to strengthen students' own capital. Faculty of color

participants recognized the cultural assets that students of color bring with them and helped students identify how their lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and family and community connections could be leveraged to persist and achieve their educational goals in marginalized academic spaces. Thus, faculty of color participants contributed uniquely to mentoring relationships by helping students of color to recognize and value their own capital that might otherwise be overlooked or undervalued within academic environments. This mentoring approach is qualitatively different from deficit-oriented perspectives that position students of color as lacking the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital necessary for academic success, that pressure students to overcome perceived deficiencies or cut cultural ties in order to succeed. Instead, faculty of color participants encouraged students of color to draw upon their personal, cultural, and communal experiences as important sources of knowledge and capital throughout their doctoral journeys. Recognizing these experiences help students of color to develop meaningful research questions, identify community issues that are often overlooked by dominant academic perspectives, and create scholarship to support and represent their own communities' experiences and voices in academia. Overall, faculty of color's lived experiences and cultural backgrounds are not separate from their professional roles, and these factors shape how they understand students of color's needs to better address and support students both inside and outside of academia.

Invisible Labor and Cultural Taxation of Mentorship

Although faculty of color described their mentoring as meaningful and necessary to recruit, train, and potentially diversify the professoriate, they also described the burden of these additional and invisible works and responsibilities. Faculty of color participating in this study often mentored many students, advised student organizations, supported both undergraduate and

graduate students, funded students' conferences in current institutional budget crises, and provided emotional support during difficult sociopolitical moments. These forms of labor were often not fully recognized within institutional evaluation systems unless they resulted in traditional academic outputs, such as publications or grants, that directly enhance the institution's reputation.

This finding aligns with scholarship on cultural taxation, which describes how faculty of color are often expected to perform additional diversity-related service, mentoring, and emotional labor without adequate recognition or reward (Lee, 2012; Museus, 2014; Padilla, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2014). Faculty of color are often seen as representatives of their racial or ethnic communities and are expected to support students of color in ways that exceed formal workload expectations. Moreover, faculty participants in this study described how students of color, both undergraduate and graduate, often sought them out for support. These requests were sometimes difficult for faculty of color to decline, as Professor Ivy shared in Chapter 4 that it is faculty of color's responsibility and obligation to mentor and create safe space for students of color. The findings from this study show that faculty of color's mentoring labor is essential to students of color's persistence and the diversification of the professoriate, yet it adds additional burdens often undervalued by institutions that prioritize research productivity (Museus, 2014; Padilla, 1994).

Institutions claim to value diversity, equity, and inclusion, but the labor required to support students of color is disproportionately placed on faculty of color (Griffin, 2020). Faculty mentors of color may feel morally and personally responsible for mentoring students, but they must also protect their own careers in institutional systems that reward publications, grants, and prestige more than mentoring and community engagement. This tension was especially visible

when Professor Clara described using her own money to support students' conference travel or sacrificing her own professional opportunities to prioritize students. This finding reveals the failure of institutional support to assist faculty of color and their mentees, and the finding suggests that institutions must move beyond symbolic appreciation of faculty of color's mentoring labor. Mentorship should be formally incentivized, recognized, and rewarded in promotion, tenure, and merit review cases. Moreover, departments need to consider how to balance mentoring workload expectations alongside more traditional metrics of academic productivity, such as publication and grants. Without structural recognition, institutions are likely to continue to exploit the commitment of faculty of color while failing to create sustainable systems of support for both faculty and students of color to sustain and thrive in higher education.

Faculty Mentors of Color's Approaches to the Diversification of the Professoriate

The third research question explored how faculty of color characterize the importance and intended outcomes of their mentorship for diversifying the professoriate. Faculty of color described their mentorship as a responsibility to support students of color's persistence, professional development, and potential entry into academic careers. Their mentorship is a part of an intergenerational pipeline, where mentoring one student could eventually influence future students, future departments, and future academic fields. This aligns with literature showing that mentoring is critical to the retention and advancement of underrepresented scholars in academia (Griffin, 2012; Lunsford et al., 2017; Zambrana et al., 2015). Faculty mentors of color contributed to diversification by helping students develop confidence, scholarly voices and identities, publication experience, conference participation, grant-writing skills, and professional networks. These are key components of academic socialization and preparation for the

professoriate (Austin, 2002; Gardner, 2008). Mentors of color also helped students imagine themselves as future faculty by validating their research and affirming their belonging in academic spaces, overcoming imposter syndrome or self-doubt.

However, faculty participants also offered a nuanced understanding of diversification. While many wanted to prepare students for academic careers, several participants also recognized the realities of the current academic job market, the sociopolitical climate in higher education, and the emotional costs of pursuing faculty careers. As a result, faculty of color participants described having encouraged students to develop skills that would prepare them for academia while also remaining open to multiple professional pathways. Professor Daisy and Professor Ling emphasized that applicable research skills can expand students' career opportunities both inside and outside of the academy. This preparation challenges narrow definitions of success that measure diversification only by tenure-track placement. The findings suggest that diversifying the academy should include preparing students of color to enter, transform, or strategically choose alternatives to academic careers.

This finding contributes to mentoring literature by emphasizing career flexibility. Effective mentorship does not necessarily push all students toward the professoriate; it involves helping students build transferable skills, understand their options, and make career decisions aligned with their values, well-being, and goals. Faculty mentors of color supported diversification not only by preparing students to become faculty, but also by affirming that students' knowledge, leadership, and community commitments could matter in many professional contexts.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study reveal the nuanced social and academic experiences that both graduate students and faculty of color navigate at the complex intersection of research, mentorship, service, and community engagement. These experiences demonstrate that mentoring relationships are not simply individual interactions between faculty and students. Rather, they are contextualized by broader institutional structures, disciplinary norms, racialized climates, and material conditions. In this section, I review several implications for practice and future research designed to support graduate students, faculty mentors, and academic leaders in strengthening mentorship practices and creating more equitable policies and inclusive structures for both faculty and graduate students of color.

Implications for Mentoring and Institutional Practices

Graduate schools and institutions should recognize mentorship as holistic work that includes academic, emotional, cultural, material, and professional support. Mentoring should not be limited to research supervision, degree monitoring, or progress toward program milestones, because students of color often navigate heightened racialized scrutiny, isolation, financial precarity, and uncertainty, particularly within the current sociopolitical climate in higher education. As the findings indicate, students' needs often include access to material resources such as funding, housing, employment, summer support, and professional opportunities. These needs are not separate from students' degree progress, and they directly shape whether students of color are able to enroll, focus on research, and develop as scholars. Beyond acknowledging these challenges, institutions can develop formal structure and mentoring plans that clarify academic expectations, funding guidance, and professional development resources. These structures would help faculty become more informed about available campus resources and better prepared to refer graduate students of color appropriate forms of support on campus. It

might be a stretch, at least in the short term, to expect all faculty to be able to navigate these kinds of conversations about funding insecurity, housing instability, and racialized experiences among other concerns. However, ensuring that faculty are at least conversant in institutional resources that can support students through these challenges would be a step in the right direction.

Graduate school could also establish emergency funding, summer bridge program, centralized resource guides to support students, so they would not have to rely solely on individual faculty intervention. Building these structures, departments could move beyond individualized models to address students' needs systematically. Such practices would create conditions where graduate students of color not only survive their graduate programs, but also thrive intellectually, emotionally, professionally, and personally.

Next, and connected to the first implication, institutions should create broader mentoring ecosystems that provide culturally responsive mentorship training while also reimagining mentoring and service as work that is meaningfully rewarded. Instead of relying on individual faculty members—particularly faculty of color—to meet the mentoring needs of all students of color, institutional leaders must develop structures that help all faculty become more culturally aware, equity-minded, and responsive to students' racialized experiences. Since there are not enough faculty of color to mentor all graduate students of color, institutions have a responsibility to create initiatives that prepare faculty across racial and disciplinary backgrounds to better understand, identify, and support students' academic, emotional, cultural, and professional needs. Scholars have developed and implemented multiple culturally aware and culturally responsive mentorship models to help faculty better engage with students of color (Byars-Winston et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2011; Pfund et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2011; White-Lewis et al., 2022). These

models demonstrate that effective mentorship requires more than good intentions. Effective mentorship requires critical awareness of race, power, institutional inequity, communication, and the ways students lived experiences shape their graduate education.

My findings further suggest that culturally responsive mentorship training could prepare faculty to recognize and strengthen different forms of community cultural wealth that graduate students of color already possess rather than approaching students through a deficit perspective. These trainings would encourage faculty to engage students in conversations about their lived experiences, validate cultural and community knowledge as scholarly assets, and provide intentional advocacy. Faculty could also help students connect their personal and community experiences to research questions, professional goals, and other forms of knowledge production. Culturally responsive mentorship training would help White faculty and other cross-racial mentors to develop practices similar to those demonstrated by faculty of color in this study, including validating students' experiences, recognizing their existing community cultural wealth and capital, and providing opportunities to engage institutional and professional networks.

However, I would caution that culturally responsive mentorship training should not be viewed as a substitute for recruiting, retaining, and supporting a more racially diverse professoriate. Although White faculty can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective cross-racial mentors, training alone cannot fully reproduce the lived experiences that faculty of color would bring to their mentoring relationships. As demonstrated by this study's findings, faculty of color draw upon their own experiences navigating racialized academic environments, such as Professor Olivia and Professor Emma, to provide students of color with culturally informed strategies, examples, and perspectives that would be qualitatively different from those provided by mentors who have not encountered similar experiences. The presence of

faculty of color in universities also signals to graduate students of color that they do not need to separate their cultural and racial identities from their identities as researchers, scholars, or future faculty members. Therefore, institutions should not choose between faculty diversity and culturally responsive mentorship training, but instead to pursue both simultaneously: diversifying the professoriate while building the capacity of all faculty to provide culturally responsive mentorship for graduate students of color.

However, mentorship training alone is unlikely to be effective if institutions do not provide incentives, accountability, and recognition for faculty to engage with these materials seriously and apply them in practice. Faculty already navigate multiple responsibilities, including teaching, research, grant writing, committee work, advising, and professional service. Without institutional recognition, culturally responsive mentorship training may be treated as optional or secondary requirement rather than as a central component of faculty responsibility. Therefore, institutional leaders should categorize culturally responsive mentorship training and mentoring labor as valued service and reward this work in tenure, promotion, and merit review. When institutions formally recognize mentoring as essential academic labor, faculty may be more likely to prioritize these trainings and integrate culturally responsive practices into their relationships with students (O'Meara, 2011; White-Lewis et al., 2022). Moreover, this recognition can reduce the disproportionate pressure placed on faculty of color, who are often expected to mentor, support, and advocate for students of color without adequate compensation or institutional credit as acknowledged and echoed by all nine faculty participants. Valuing mentoring and community engagement as legitimate academic labor would also lessen the burden on faculty of color to translate their service, mentorship, and community commitments

into publications or other traditional metrics to receive institutional recognition and maintain their academic standing.

Intentional Recruitment and Retention of Faculty of Color

Graduate schools should prioritize the recruitment, retention, and support of faculty of color, not simply because representation matters, but because faculty diversity expands the availability of mentoring relationships that students described as uniquely valuable. While culturally responsive mentorship training for all faculty is necessary, training alone cannot substitute for the presence of faculty of color in departments, classrooms, and research spaces. Students of color in this study described faculty mentors of color as providing forms of cultural understanding, racial affirmation, reduced explanatory labor, and holistic support that were deeply connected to lived experience. Better faculty training can help all mentors become more aware of students' racialized experiences and needs, but it cannot fully replace the relational trust, shared understanding, and sense of possibility that many students experienced when working with faculty who had navigated similar institutional barriers. Therefore, institutions must avoid using mentorship training as a substitute for diversifying the professoriate. Instead, they should pair training with intentional hiring, retention, equitable workload policies, mentoring recognition, and promotion structures that support faculty of color in the long-term. Increasing faculty diversity is essential not only for representation, but also for creating more mentoring options, reducing the overburdening of existing faculty of color, and building academic environments where graduate students of color can see themselves reflected, supported, and imagined as future scholars.

Implications for Future Research

With the increase of diverse student enrollment and complex sociopolitical climate in higher education, mentorship becomes an important factor to foster student success and achievement. The findings of this study suggest the need to further examine mentoring relationships between faculty of color and graduate students of color as complex, relational, and institutionally shaped students' experiences rather than assuming that shared racial or cultural identity automatically produces positive outcomes. While these findings demonstrate that faculty mentors of color can provide critical forms of validation, advocacy, cultural understanding, and professional guidance, a few graduate students of color also shared and caution about by poor communication and limited availability mentorship they received. Future research could explore not only the benefits of faculty-student identity alignment, but also the conditions under which these relationships become effective, harmful, or unsustainable. Also, future scholars could further examine how mentoring expectations are negotiated, how students define effective support, and how faculty mentors balance their commitments to students with institutional demands for research productivity, service, and promotion. Moreover, while trying to capture the nuanced experiences of both faculty and students of color, these mentorship experiences are not dyad. Scholars could further explore the direct dyad relationship between faculty of color and students to better understand and address specific gaps, challenges, and needs.

In addition, my study examined the experience of graduate students currently pursuing their doctoral degrees, rather than a one-to-one relationship between a faculty member and a graduate student, scholars could investigate how peer mentors, staff advisors, alumni, community partners, and professional networks work alongside faculty mentors to support graduate students of color's persistence and career development. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in tracing how mentorship influences students' degree completion, scholarly identity

development, career choices, and movement into or beyond the professoriate. In term of effective trainings, researchers could investigate whether mentoring skills are transferable through culturally responsive mentorship or CCW-informed training and examine changes in their mentoring practices over time. Researchers would also need to interview or survey student mentees to determine whether they experienced greater cultural validation, trust, belonging, and advocacy. Finally, future research should continue to expand theoretical frameworks such as Community Cultural Wealth by examining how cultural capital is activated, transferred, and transformed through mentoring relationships. By studying mentorship as relational, intergenerational, and institutionally mediated, future scholarship can better explain how graduate students of color are supported not only to survive higher education, but also to transform and diversify it.

Conclusion

The ongoing lack of faculty diversity in academia continues to pose new challenges for students of color, including institutional and structural barriers such as stereotypes, discrimination, and doubts about their talents and potentials in the field, or a lack of mentors of color for guidance and support (Griffin, 2020). My study builds on existing mentoring research to examine the extent to which graduate students of color who have faculty mentors of color/same race benefit in terms of their academic experiences and professional development. Overall, I found that mentoring relationships can be transformative sites of cultural affirmation, institutional navigation, scholarly validation, and professional development. Through these mentoring relationships, graduate students of color gained access to community cultural capital that supported their persistence and sense of belonging in their respective doctoral programs. Faculty mentors of color drew from their own lived experiences, cultural backgrounds,

community commitments, and professional trajectories to provide meaningful mentorship that was often holistic, corrective, and deeply relational.

I also caution against romanticizing faculty of color mentorship. Shared identity can foster trust and understanding, but it does not guarantee effective mentoring. Effective mentorship must be supported by communication, accountability, institutional resources, and structural recognition. Furthermore, the labor of mentoring students of color should not fall disproportionately on faculty of color, especially when institutions fail to reward that labor. This study contributes to mentoring literature and Community Cultural Wealth scholarship by showing that community cultural wealth is not only individually possessed, but also relationally activated and intergenerationally transmitted through mentorship. Faculty of color mentorship can contribute to the diversification of the professoriate by preparing students of color for academic careers, validating their scholarship, and helping them prepare to become future faculty. These mentoring relationships also support students' confidence, well-being, professional flexibility, and capacity to transform academic and non-academic spaces. Mentorship between faculty of color and graduate students of color is not merely a support mechanism; it is a critical site of resistance, care, knowledge production, and institutional transformation.

APPENDIX A

Semi-structured interview protocols – For Graduate Students of Color:

1. Please tell me about your higher education journey, your undergraduate experiences and path to SRU.
 - a. How did you choose your current graduate program?
2. What factors influence your decision to choose and come to SRU?
 - a. Was it to work with a particular faculty member? If so, what kinds of conversations did you have with your prospective mentor ahead of time?
 - b. What did you want/expect in terms of mentorship generally and/or mentorship from this person specifically?
3. What do you think of when you imagine an ideal mentor?
 - a. How do you define a mentor(s) in graduate school?
 - b. How have you developed a relationship with that person/those people?
 - c. Is your academic advisor your mentor or someone else?
4. Please describe what kind of mentoring styles/relationships do you prefer or seek?
 - a. Please describe your relationship with your current faculty mentor/advisor.
 - i. Did your expectations for mentoring prior to coming to SRU have/have not been met? Why or why not?
5. Please tell me a time when you feel supported by your faculty mentor, such as what kind of resources/support (e.g., academic, emotional, financial, etc.) you received from your faculty mentor/advisor?
6. How supported do you feel/received from your mentor?
 - a. What kind of challenges have you encountered as a graduate student?

- b. How did your mentor/mentors help you to overcome those challenges/barriers (or did they not at all)?
 - c. Is having a faculty mentor of color (or with a similar racial background) makes it easier or harder for you to get the necessary support you need? Why or why not?
7. These next questions regard to the CCW framework:
- a. How does your faculty mentor support you in navigating your graduate school journey, academically, socially, and personally? Please elaborate on each aspect.
 - b. How does your mentor help you to develop a network of support? If your mentor does not help at all, where do you find/form your support/network groups? Please elaborate.
 - c. In what ways do your faculty mentor(s) support and shape your career and educational development/planning?
 - i. Has your initial career aspiration changed while you are in your graduate program? Why or why not?
 - d. In what ways do your mentor help you to cope and persevere when you are facing new challenges, academically, socially, or personally? Please elaborate on each aspect.
8. Moving forward with your academic journey, what kind of suggestions do you have for your graduate program/department and faculty mentor to be more successful at supporting you and other students of color?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not yet asked? Thank you.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Form for Graduate Students of Color

Hi, my name is Xiong Her, and I am a fourth year Ph.D. student in the Higher Education and Organizational Change program in the School of Education and Information Studies. I am recruiting current Ph.D. students and candidates to participate in a study examining the impact faculty mentors and/or advisors of color have on their graduate journey. I am looking for participants who have completed at least 1 year of their Ph.D. program and have a faculty mentor/advisor of color. Participation in the study will include a conversational interview covering topics related to their graduate school experiences, mentoring relationships, and career aspirations. To participate in an interview, students must identify as a Ph.D. student of color and have a faculty advisor/mentor of color in their respective doctoral program. Interviews will take 60 to 90 minutes and occur at a date/time convenient for participants, in-person or virtual. Participation is voluntary, and participants will not receive any monetary rewards.

Study: Mentoring Relationship Among Faculty of Color and Graduate Students of Color

Description: Academic mentorship plays an important role in helping students to be successful in higher education, especially providing career advice and psychosocial support, as well as being a role model to guide them. Students with supportive mentors tend to perform academically better compared to their counterparts. However, there are limited research studies that look at this mentoring relationship between faculty of color and graduate students of color. The goal of this study is to further examine faculty of color mentor relationships with students of color through Community Cultural Wealth Framework and Social Exchange Theory to better understand graduate students' experiences and navigation in educational journeys and beyond.

If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me via email at xher21@g.ucla.edu or faculty advisors, Dr. Mitchell Chang and Dr. Kevin Eagan, at mjchang@gseis.ucla.edu and keagan@ucla.edu. Thank you for your interest in my research study.

Thank you for your time and for your interest in my research study.

1. Name:
2. Pronounces:
3. What is your current gender identity? (Select one response only)
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming

- e. Other
4. Are you: (select all that apply)
- a. White/Caucasian
 - b. African American/Black
 - c. Native American/Alaska Native
 - d. East Asia (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)
 - e. Filipina/o/x
 - f. Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong)
 - g. South Asian (e.g., India, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lanka)
 - h. Other Asian
 - i. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - j. Mexican American/Chicana/o/e/x
 - k. Puerto Rican
 - l. Central American
 - m. South American
 - n. Other Latina/o/e/x
 - o. Other
5. What is your graduate program?
6. Did you complete at least one year of your Ph.D. program?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
7. What year are you currently in?
8. Is your faculty advisor/mentor a faculty of color?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Please list your faculty mentor/advisor's full name?
10. How is your relationship with your faculty advisor/mentor?
11. What are your career aspirations and/or interests? (e.g., academia, non-profit, public/private sectors, etc.)
12. Would you like to be contacted for an interview?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. If yes, please list your email address (your email will only be used to communicate for the next step. Thank you.)

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured interview protocols – For Faculty of Color

Personal Experiences & Motivation:

1. How did you find your way into the academy?
 - a. Can you describe how your cultural background and lived experience have shaped your academic journey?
 - b. What is your favorite part of being a faculty mentor?
 - c. How many mentees do you normally accept/have per academic year?
2. How have your personal and professional life circumstances (e.g., family responsibility, financial stress, mental health) shaped your mentoring of students of color?
 - a. How do you engage with and support your mentee(s) in these various activities (e.g., conference, publishing, grant writing/funding, providing letter of recommendation)?
3. To what extent, do you feel like you have a responsibility to mentor students of color?
 - a. Where does that sense of responsibility come from?
 - b. Do you view your mentorship as part of a broader effort to diversify academia?
Why or why not?

Mentoring Dynamics:

4. What type of students are you looking for to mentor?
 - a. How is/are your relationship(s) with your current mentee(s)?
5. What are some unique challenges/opportunities to mentoring graduate students of color?
 - a. How do you incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and identity into your mentoring approach?

- b. How do you approach conversations with mentees of color around academic confidence, imposter syndrome, or sense of belonging in academic spaces?
 - c. How do you check in on mentees of color's well-being beyond their academic progress in the academic setting?
- 6. How has your mentoring relationship with mentees change over time?
 - a. Do you find students of color approach you differently compared to other students? If so, in what ways?
- 7. In what ways have the current social and political climates shape your approach to mentoring mentees of color?
 - a. How do you support mentees of color in processing current events, creating a safe space, or cultivating a community amidst ongoing sociopolitical challenges?
 - b. How do you balance the emotional labor of supporting your mentees while also navigating your own responses and feelings to current sociopolitical issues?
 - c. In what ways do you engage with broader communities—both inside and outside of the academia—to support students of color, especially those who are international, undocumented or from immigrant background?
- 8. Which aspects of your own cultural backgrounds (e.g., family values, community experience, language, etc.) do you draw upon in a mentoring relationship with students of color?
 - a. Do you recognize any forms of community cultural wealth in your students of color? If so, how do you validate or build upon them?

Recognition and Impacts:

9. Do you feel like your mentoring work, particularly with students of color, is valued and/or recognized by your institutions?
 - a. How does (or doesn't) this recognition influence your continued commitment to supporting and mentoring students of color?
10. What kind of resources/support did you receive from the institution to support both you and your mentee(s)?
 - a. What could your institution do to improve your mentoring relationship with your students?
11. Have you supported any of your mentees in becoming faculty members themselves?
 - a. If so, in what ways do you believe your mentoring impacts your mentee's decisions to pursue academic careers?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not yet asked? Thank you.

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Form for Faculty of Color

Hi, my name is Xiong Her, and I am a third year Ph.D. student in the Higher Education and Organizational Change program in the School of Education and Information Studies. I am recruiting current faculty of color to participate in a study examining the impact faculty mentors and/or advisors of color have on their students/mentees of color graduate journey in their respective fields. I am looking for participants who are faculty of color on a tenure track position or already have tenured and have at least one student/mentee of color (or preferably same race). Participation in the study will include a conversational interview covering topics related to scholarship, mentoring experiences and relationships with graduate students of color. To participate in an interview, faculty must identify as a faculty of color and have Ph.D. advisees/mentees of color. Interviews will take 60 to 90 minutes and occur at a date/time convenient for participants, in-person or virtual. Participation is voluntary, and participants will not receive any monetary rewards.

Study: Mentoring Relationship Among Faculty of Color and Graduate Students of Color

Description: Academic mentorship plays an important role in helping students to be successful in higher education, especially providing career advice and psychosocial support, as well as being a role model to guide them. Students with supportive mentors tend to perform academically better compared to their counterparts. However, there are limited research studies that look at this mentoring relationship between faculty of color and graduate students of color. The goal of this study is to further examine faculty of color mentor relationships with students of color through Community Cultural Wealth Framework and Social Exchange Theory to better understand graduate students' experiences and navigation in educational journeys and beyond. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me via email at xher21@g.ucla.edu or faculty advisors, Dr. Mitchell Chang and Dr. Kevin Eagan, at mjchang@gseis.ucla.edu and keagan@ucla.edu. Thank you for your time and for your interest in my research study.

1. Name:
2. Pronounces:
3. What is your current gender identity? (Select one response only)
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
 - e. Other

4. Are you: (select all that apply)

- a. White/Caucasian
- b. African American/Black
- c. Native American/Alaska Native
- d. East Asia (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)
- e. Filipina/o/x
- f. Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong)
- g. South Asian (e.g., India, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lanka)
- h. Other Asian
- i. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- j. Mexican American/Chicana/o/e/x
- k. Puerto Rican
- l. Central American
- m. South American
- n. Other Latina/o/e/x
- o. Other

5. What is your present academic rank?

- a. Professor
- b. Associate Professor
- c. Assistant Professor
- d. Lecturer
- e. Instructor
- f. Other

6. What is your field of study?
7. Do you have at least one student of color as a doctoral student/mentee?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. If yes, how many?
9. How long have you been teaching and mentoring at your current institution?
10. How is your mentoring relationship with your students/mentees?
11. Would you like to be contacted for an interview?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
12. If yes, please list your email address (your email will be used only to contact for the next step. Thank you.)

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