LONGING TO BELONG: MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS AS A PATHWAY TO FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR RACIALLY MINORITIZED FACULTY AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Raquel Wright-Mair
Rowan University

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As predominately white institutions (PWIs) seek to support racially minoritized faculty, there is evidence that racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs experience isolating, hostile, and unwelcoming environments (Bonner et al., 2014; Stanley, 2006; Turner, 2003). Existing higher education research does not explore the significance of sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty and ways in which sense of belonging can be cultivated in these neoliberal institutions. Through a critical race theory lens and phenomenological method, this study focuses on ways in which mentoring relationships develop pathways to sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs. Findings reveal a robust network of mentoring relationships for racially minoritized faculty, including holistic and critically conscious mentoring by colleagues, supportive peer mentoring, mentoring students, and community-based mentoring relationships. Implications for research and practice are outlined to further explore how these crucial relationships can develop sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs.

Sense of belonging is broadly understood as a feeling of mattering, connectedness, acceptance, support, affirmation, and validation (Strayhorn, 2012; 2019), and is crucial to the success and development of various constituents within higher education. Although predominantly white institutions (PWIs) were not designed for racially minoritized populations, many racially minoritized faculty members end up employed by these institutions. As such, they have a desire to be valued by the institution and feel a sense of belonging in these environments (Wright-Mair, 2017). Sense of belonging is intricately tied to the natural human instinct to connect with others and feel included (Hagerty, Williams & Oe, 2002; Maslow, 1954). However, no empirical

studies within the higher education literature account for how sense of belonging is cultivated and what role sense of belonging plays in the experiences of racially minoritized faculty at PWIs. I argue for the need and relevance for racially minoritized faculty to feel a sense of belonging at PWIs, and outline evidence on how mentoring relationships create pathways to experiencing a sense of belonging. This study is guided by the research question: In what ways do racially minoritized faculty members' mentoring relationships foster a sense of belonging at PWIs?

PWIs are characteristically individualistic in nature, which is contrary to the collectivist cultures that many racially minoritized faculty members come from. For example, most PWIs traditionally value and evaluate faculty members based on their single authored journal articles, research projects that are not inclusive of community, and favor prestigious grants that do not account for or address equity and inclusion. These environments are often unwelcoming and isolating to racially minoritized faculty who value meaningful connections with others (Bonner, 2014). The term *racially minoritized faculty* is used throughout and refers to faculty members who are defined by society as racial and ethnic minorities. The term minoritized

> assumes that there is a history of structural and institutional actions that have over time limited access to and led to a lack of presence among students of color in higher education labeled as racially and ethnically different from the norm. (Benitez, 2010, p. 131)

The term minoritized captures scholars' (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013) critiques that the term minority is not an objective indication of quantity but rather a social construct that is placed on populations with limited access to power.

Racially minoritized faculty contribute uniquely to college campuses by providing perspectives, experiences, and research based on their racialized identities (Antonio,

2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). For example, racially minoritized faculty enrich institutions through nontraditional avenues of scholarship that typically emphasizes personal reflection and community based research (Antonio, 2002), serve as mentors to racially minoritized students and peers (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015), as well as bring unique perspectives to admissions processes (Squire, 2020) to name a few. These faculty members also bring with them unique research interests, approaches to pedagogy, and acts of service that are not typically valued particularly in predominantly white environments (Jayakumar et al., 2009). Having racially minoritized faculty members represented on college campuses in the United States allows for disruption of normative discourse, institutionalized cultures, and ways of thinking, which are especially pervasive throughout PWIs. The perspectives, experiences, and scholarship racially minoritized faculty members bring with them to PWIs are invaluable and as such it is imperative that scholars and administrators examine and understand how to facilitate a sense of belonging in institutional environments that do not typically account for racially minoritized faculty.

To begin, I examine the literature on sense of belonging and mentoring for racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs. I then provide an overview of the methods employed for the study. Finally, by utilizing a phenomenological approach, I address the gaps in knowledge by illuminating how mentoring relationships are a pathway to sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs.

Review of the Literature

Feeling a sense of belonging is influenced by "the perception that one is an integral part of a community, place, organization, or institution" (Asher & Weeks, 2014,

p. 287). Experiencing feelings of connection and belonging to an institution allows all diverse populations within higher education institutions to be seen, heard, welcomed and appreciated (Hausmann et al., 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). For example, racially minoritized students need to feel a sense of belonging to succeed in the academy because institutional environments, especially those that are predominantly white, tend to be isolating and unwelcoming (Strayhorn, 2012; 2019). Previous research for students has suggested that racially minoritized students who are mentored report a higher sense of belonging than students who do not have mentors (Holloway-Friesen, 2019; Strayhorn, 2007).

While there is a recognition that racially minoritized students need to experience a sense of belonging in order to thrive in the academy, the evidence on sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty in the academy is sparse, yet equally important. Mentoring and sense of belonging as topics of educational research increased dramatically in the last decade. In the higher education literature, research focuses primarily on college students and those in the academy who mentor them and help them create institutional sense of belonging (e.g., Duran, Dahl et al., 2020; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Means & Pyne; 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). The path to success for racially minoritized faculty members in the academy is fraught with obstacles like racism, tokenism, stigmatization and stereotype, inflicting psychological and emotional harm (Neimann, 1999) leaving a lasting effect. However, recently there is increasing evidence of the benefits associated with mentoring relationships and racially minoritized faculty in higher education, so they

remain, succeed and, ultimately, thrive in academe by fostering a sense of belonging (Wright-Mair, 2017).

Sense of Belonging for Racially Minoritized Faculty

Sense of belonging is a rudimentary human necessity (Hagerty et al., 2002; Maslow, 1954) and the growing body of literature in several academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, higher education, and business) makes it difficult for scholars to agree on a universal operational definition. Deficits of sense of belonging are linked to challenges in people's social and psychological life and can have debilitating consequences for psychosocial well-being (Sargent et al., 2002). College student sense of belonging is well represented in the literature and allows researchers to explore how belongingness leads to institutional affiliation (Hagerty et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008; 2019). Additionally, the research on student sense of belonging fills an important gap in understanding student retention at institutions of higher education (Maestas et al., 2007; O'Keefe, 2013).

To date, no empirically derived research examines racially minoritized faculty and sense of belonging in higher education. However, the available literature on the experiences of racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs document strong feelings of isolation, exclusion, dismissal, marginalization, hostility, and an overall feeling that they are not welcomed (Bonner, 2014; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Stanley, 2006; Tuitt, 2010; Turner 2003). Examining the importance of, and pathways to sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty is therefore important, as scholars and practitioners seek to create campus environments that are affirming, supportive and welcoming. Mentoring relationships provide racially minoritized faculty unique opportunities and pathways for

feeling a sense of belonging through socialization into the academy, building

professional networks, collaborating on scholarly or teaching initiatives, increasing job

satisfaction and feeling a connection to their institution, department, and/or discipline

(Davis, 2008; Jones, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013; Ponjuan et al., 2011; Salinas et al,

2020; Stanley 2006; Zambrana et al., 2015). These relationships take different forms

and exist both inside and outside of the institution. Mentoring relationships also propel

generativity, which is defined as a desire to mentor the next generation in a field or

discipline, and is a feeling of responsibility experienced by many racially minoritized

faculty members to contribute to the continuous improvement of their community

(Gregory, 2001; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Moore, 2017; Torrens et al., 2017; Turner et

al., 2008).

Mentoring Relationships as a Pathway for Racially Minoritized Faculty

Turner et al. (2008) offer one of the most comprehensive literature reviews of

racially minoritized faculty (i.e., referred to as faculty of color). Based on what was found

through departmental, institutional and national contexts, 252 publications by 300

authors from 1997-2007 were filtered. Turner et al. (2008) make recommendations for

improving the conditions for racially minoritized faculty at the departmental, institutional

and national contexts; mentoring is included as being significant to the persistence of

racially minoritized faculty members. Not surprisingly, most mentoring strategies in

higher education fall short of meeting the needs of underrepresented populations in the

academy (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015) but provide one avenue that allows racially

minoritized faculty members to feel a strong sense of connection to their campuses,

which are often lonely, hostile and unsupportive (Gregory, 2001; Gutierrez y Muhls et

al., 2012). The increasing literature related to racially minoritized faculty mentored by

(i.e., colleagues, peers, and so on) or mentoring others (i.e., each other and students)

unpacks the magnitude of these relationships and their meaning to the success of this

group who have faced decades-old disregard in the academy. Empirical evidence

suggests that faculty from several racially minoritized groups demonstrate a clear

preference for equity-minded mentoring relationships (Griffin, 2019). The quality of

equity-oriented mentoring relationships is much more impactful for racially minoritized

faculty members' sense of belonging than juxtaposed against mentor assignments that

simply check a box.

While the existing literature affirms that mentoring can foster feelings of inclusion

for racially minoritized faculty when done in a manner that is focused on equity, quality

of relationship building, and reciprocity (Griffin, 2019); there is no empirical evidence

that examines how mentoring relationships lead to racially minoritized faculty sense of

belonging in the academy. Therefore, this study fills this void by addressing the

following research question: In what ways do racially minoritized faculty members'

mentoring relationships foster a sense of belonging at PWIs?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical construct that provides scholars tools

to disrupt notions of race and racism in education (Solórzano, 1998). CRT was originally

developed in legal studies (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995) and has provided a

useful framework that challenges normative discourse across disciplines in academe.

Specifically, Tate (1997) and Yosso (2006) have challenged ideologies within the field of

education that call for objectivity and neutrality in research. CRT calls for a careful

examination of the relationship between racism and structural inequities along with an understanding that racism is deeply rooted in the history of the United States (Bell, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2001) and, as such, much of what racially minoritized faculty encounter in the academy is woven into the fabric of institutions of higher education. In order to advocate for and create meaningful change for racially minoritized faculty members, the structural barriers they encounter must be contextualized in order for intentional and meaningful change to occur.

CRT has five tenets including (1) counterstorytelling, (2) permanence of racism, (3) whiteness as property, (4) interest conversion, and (5) a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006). CRT allows for the deconstruction of experiences unique to racially minoritized faculty at PWIs and helps to affirm these experiences, in order to start reimagining the academy as a place where sense of belonging can be experienced by all in this environment. Utilizing CRT allows for large scale transformation and helps to provide a guiding framework for what is needed to provide racially minoritized faculty with environments that contribute to their overall success and sense of belonging. In this study, CRT was particularly useful for interpreting and developing findings. While the literature reviewed offers insight into the benefits of mentors for racially minoritized faculty, questions about the extent to which these mentoring relationships contribute to racially minoritized faculty sense of belonging at PWIs remain unexplored.

Methods

The initial data collection was a part of a larger study that focused on factors that contribute to the success of racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs. A

phenomenological approach was utilized for the broader study, allowing for the researcher to understand the lived experiences of a group of people, and clearly account for how they make meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach was most appropriate for the study as it allowed for a better understanding of how racially minoritized faculty members experience predominantly white campus environments and achieve successful outcomes as outlined by PWIs. My own positionality influenced the analysis of this study. As a Black, multi-racial, first-generation immigrant woman from Jamaica, I have first-hand knowledge of how many racially minoritized faculty members in the field of higher education experience sense of belonging. Mentoring relationships have played a key role in establishing my own sense of belonging in PWIs and these relationships have sustained me in otherwise isolating, often hostile and unwelcoming environments.

Participant Recruitment

Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), participants were recruited and selected based on the following: (1) were tenured faculty members, (2) self-identified as racially minoritized, (3) worked at a PWI for more than one year, (4) had a terminal degree, and (5) had research agendas that advocated for equity and inclusion. A recruitment email was first sent to Chief Diversity Officers at six PWIs, to identify potential participants through racially minoritized faculty organizations on campus. These institutions were chosen to help shed light on the experiences of racially minoritized faculty working in the mountain west region.

After recruitment emails were sent out, potential participants were prompted to complete an online questionnaire providing demographic information and their

perspectives on open-ended questions about their experiences at PWIs. Twenty-one respondents completed the survey, from which 12 tenured faculty participants, who met the outlined criteria, were chosen to participate in the study. The sample included six women and six men. Four participants identified as African American/Black, seven as Latino/a, and one as Asian American. Participants came from a wide cross section of disciplines including: anthropology, criminology, educational psychology, ethnic studies, higher education, law, religion, sociology, and social work.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed twice for 60- to 90-minutes in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. In the first interview, participants were asked questions that allowed for an understanding of how their institution supported them, and what factors contributed to their success as a faculty member. Interview one questions included: Tell me about some of the things that have made you successful in your role as a faculty member? How has your institution supported your thriving as a faculty member? The second interview focused on understanding how racially minoritized faculty members made sense of their campus environment and their ability to thrive within these contexts. Sample questions from the second interview include: Tell me about the opportunities on your campus to connect with other faculty who share your identities and experiences? How does your institution demonstrate that they value your individual cultural background, diversity and/ or principles of inclusion? All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed professionally. Memos were kept throughout the interview process in order to document key responses and interpretations of discussions throughout the interview process.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from interviews were read twice in order to develop a deep understanding of participant experiences at PWIs. Transcripts were analyzed by Nvivo software and significant statements were identified through the process of horizontalization, which detailed how participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Codes were then generated and organized into categories, which were then broken down into final themes.

Textural and structural descriptions were developed and utilized to describe how participants experienced their campus environments (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions explain what participants experienced, and structural descriptions indicate how the institutional environment contributed to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were analyzed to identify similarities and differences across the sample; after which composite textural-structural descriptions were developed to highlight the shared essence of the phenomenon experienced by the broader group of participants, also referred to by Moustakas (1994, p. 100) as intuitive integration. For the purpose of this study, a second wave of analysis was conducted to examine how mentoring relationships are a vehicle to racially minoritized faculty members sense of belonging in predominantly white campus environments.

Findings

The fours findings of this study reveal that racially minoritized faculty members benefit from 1) holistic and critically conscious mentoring by colleagues; 2) supportive peer mentoring groups; 3) mentoring students; and 4) community- based mentoring relationships.

Holistic and Critically Conscious Mentoring by Colleagues

All participants discussed the importance of having mentors who utilized a holistic approach to mentoring and who were also critically conscious. Holistic mentoring was described by participants as the ability of their mentors to support them fully, not partially, as whole human beings. In other words, all aspects of their varied identities were taken into consideration and they were supported accordingly as individuals with unique experiences and identities. These included racial and ethnic identity, ability, sexual orientation, gender identities, identities as caregivers (parents, or children caring for elderly relatives), and socioeconomic status. Critical consciousness was discussed by participants as the understanding and prioritization of one's positionality in the world, and an acknowledgment of power and oppression and one's role in disrupting oppressive ideologies and practices. This was evident across various mentoring relationships particularly with regards to academic rank, and across race mentoring relationships.

Participants described different kinds of mentoring relationships as crucial to their success. Most importantly, all participants outlined that holistic and critically conscious mentors, allowed them to experience a sense of belonging in an institutional environment that in many instances felt lonely and unwelcoming. Jeremy discusses that his academic mentor made a huge difference in his career and set him up for incredible success through holistic mentoring. While Jeremey's mentor did not share his racial or ethnic identity, Jeremy outlines that as a mentor, she was critically conscious of his identities, and potential challenges he would face, and was fully invested in his

professional success. Jeremy also states that his mentor placed great emphasis on

supporting him fully as a human being:

> My mentor is now getting towards the end of her career and just never drops the passion for this. She is always fired up, wants to get it done, believes in change, [and] applying smart ideas to policy but is very realistic… She showed me how you can do work that matters, that can really change things. What the scale of that change can be and the importance of critical work. She cares so much about me as a person, my family, my life…*me*. She expected a lot and served as a model for me- with my students. I should expect a lot but also be warm, be caring, develop them intentionally, really put myself in their position and think about what they need to grow right now to get to where they want to go, analyze what they really need. How can I help them get there and put my ego aside and just remember this isn't about me at all?

In addition, participants discuss the importance of having mentors who were able to

relate to their lived experiences as racially minoritized faculty at PWIs, and provide them

with advice and support for navigating unfamiliar and uncomfortable campus

environments. Tina for example stated the following:

> My department mentor who also held an administrative role took me under his wing, and as a Latino, was able to speak to a lot of the issues that I went through personally and professionally. He helped to prepare me for experiences I was sure to encounter as a faculty member of color. We had real conversations, so it was a good experience, I have been really fortunate to be able to rely on my mentors to look out for me and really prepare me beyond a transactional mentoring relationship.

Tina's comment emphasizes the desire many racially minoritized faculty members have

to move beyond surface level mentoring relationships and establish meaningful and

fulfilling relationships. While many participants discussed the benefits of having a

mentor who understood their personal lived experiences, they also discussed the

importance of having mentors from different racial identities. Many participants spoke

favorably about their relationships with colleagues and peer mentors of different and

similar races. Delores noted that her mentor:

> Taught about the gray areas in the academy– the hidden rules of the academy. He taught me how to use my voice in different ways– I think for me the thing that I have always told people is don't close off the opportunities that different gender, different race, ethnicity mentors might offer you. Just because you don't identify with somebody or they don't have your same experience, does not mean that they can't serve you well. Or doesn't mean that they don't have your best interest in mind. It doesn't mean that they can't be one of the most important mentors you've ever had. My main mentor is an older white man, who just got it. He understood what it meant to be critical and conscious.

Participants acknowledged that senior colleagues play crucial roles in their professional and personal lives, and provided countless ways of decoding the rules of the academy. They collectively agreed that mentoring relationships by senior colleagues were important to their development and equipped them with genuine advocates who were vested in their success, and who were unafraid to advocate on their behalf. These relationships were not just about socialization into the academy, they also represented a true desire to establish and develop meaningful relationships that transcended academic contexts and honored the unique contributions of racially minoritized faculty.

Supportive Peer Mentoring

Having supportive peer mentors was essential to participants feeling a sense of belonging on campus. Participants explain that peer mentors were often found both *on campus* and *off campus*. Despite the proximity of peer mentors, participants state that they serve an important function to their lives by providing a solid foundation for the exchange of ideas, collaborative work, camaraderie, support, and friendship. Cesar for example discussed the benefits of having peers on campus who shared his ethnic identity, together their peer relationship helped to concretize a sense of belonging for each other on campus. Cesar notes that:

> A few of my Latino peers and I get together regularly for lunch or just to get together. We also collaborate on projects, we're always finding the space to

make it happen. It is just a kind of camaraderie between us, and being able to hang out with folks that you enjoy spending time with is great. And that's fun. We hang out at conferences and go to a number of sessions together, present together. Sometimes it is just good to be around other folks that share your background and your ideas. You don't have to explain things per sey, they just get it. From a scholarly standpoint, it helps as well obviously because we're going to collaborate and produce things that help us all out.

Manuel also spoke to the impact that peer mentoring had on him, even on a subconscious level where he started to emulate his peer mentor on campus, who he admired greatly and who played a key role in helping to navigate the academy as well.

Manuel notes:

Even with my one of my mentors here, who's like a brother to me… without even coordinating, we dress alike all the time. We show up at a place and are like, 'that's a nice shirt'. I respond 'I know, I got the same one'. I think there's something really beautiful about that too. Maybe it's subconscious, or maybe we are so connected. I don't know-I feel like through that mentoring relationship I am being remade into a better person, a better man, a better scholar. I find myself speaking oftentimes the same words that he does, taking similar approaches to navigating the academy. And it's become very, very hard to tell where he ends and I begin because we are so in sync and supportive of each other.

Delores also discussed that external peer mentoring has also greatly benefitted her sense of belonging at her institution, and across the academy:

Continuing my mentoring relationships with faculty I've known since grad school has been very important. We support each other every year by having a writing retreat. We meet weekly to see what our writing goals are – not just writing goals, personal goals too. I mean, our latest thing right now is any time one of us gets asked to do a keynote or to take on another service project, we send it to each other first because we're having a hard time saying no. So we're making each other justify why we would take something else on. And that has been super helpful. We reward each other for publications and other achievements and talk about what women in the field are going through. What are the expectations, how do they negotiate different things they face?

Delores' comments outline the ways in which sense of belonging is facilitated through external entities, outside of one's own home institution. Sense of belonging was facilitated in two main ways for participants by having *on-campus peer mentors* and

external peer mentors.

Mentoring Students

Many racially minoritized faculty members feel a great sense of pride and responsibility to mentor and develop their current students and prepare them for future professions. These faculty members mentor students regardless of their workload and are committed to fostering meaningful and substantial lifelong relationships with students. Salinas et al. (2020) highlight what many participants echoed in this study, that many racially minoritized faculty members feel a great desire to "pay it forward" and commit to generativity (p. 15), contributing to what participants explained as being a great fulfillment to develop the next generation of professionals who will leave their mark in the academy and make great strides in research and practice. Luis, in his comments below, explains his commitment to mentoring law students and preparing them for their future careers:

> I will recruit students, especially students of color in the program that I see are having trouble and help them to understand what they need to be successful. I will have them come to me, and I will say to them, I'm going to give you some problems to do, and I want you to do them, and then I'm going to give you advice on your writing. I tell them- I'm giving you this opportunity to do this work and I will help you. I have helped a lot of students over the years. And in fact, there was a Latina student about four years ago in one of these sessions who came to me. She emailed me and said here's this problem I got from my professor and here's what I wrote. And then I gave her feedback. And then she started bringing me more and I was giving her feedback constantly. She took advantage of that for two whole years of law school, and now she's a partner at one of the top law firms in the country.

Tina discussed that mentoring students went beyond just supporting students academically but explained that she was invested in helping students understand how their identities and experiences were integral and relevant in academic contexts. This was particularly important since many students are conditioned not to value their racial,

ethnic and cultural backgrounds or see them as relevant and applicable resources to

their education. Tina posits that:

> Students must understand something about the nature and process of
> conducting research but also take into account how their work might be informed
> by, and strengthened by their own experiences; or how their world view might
> come in to determining what they want to do. Having those kinds of honest
> conversations where I can use my own experience as a first generation Latina
> student and saying, yes, I can understand all that you're experiencing or some of
> what you're experiencing, maybe not others. I can understand imposter
> syndrome, which is real. I see and feel that all the time.

Bob explained that he encourages his students to think beyond college and urges them

to participate in activities that allow them to gain experience and develop academically.

What Bob outlines below is that he is proactive, honest, and forthcoming with

information before students even start thinking about their future plans. He provides

important resources and volunteers to mentor students throughout college in efforts to

prepare them for graduate studies specifically. Bob mentions:

> I especially encourage my students to use me for help. I was previously a faculty
> fellow for research on campus. I'm the editor of a prominent journal, I can help
> you get published. I can help you get funding to go to conferences. I tell them
> you're a step ahead of the game, and this will get you into graduate school. And
> even if you don't want to go for a Ph.D. there's something to be said about going
> for a masters just to be a bit stronger in your academic discipline and develop
> your writing skills. I really push my students, in terms of that pragmatism. I tell
> them to use those papers in classes that they have written and try to get
> something out of it – take it to a conference, present it. Use it for an annual
> research day, and I push that type of thinking in my classes even in my 100 level
> classes. I teach them how to do so because if I don't who will?

Brooke spoke directly to the intentionality she exercises with students, particularly those

interested in pursuing graduate degrees. She expresses feeling a strong sense of

urgency to provide support as students navigate the academy and thinking beyond

college. Brooke comments that:

> One of the things that I have always been committed to is when undergrads tell

me they want to go to grad school, particularly undergraduates of color, I make sure they schedule a meeting with me. And we have the, 'this is what grad school really is' conversation. And for a lot of them who are first generation, it's the first time anyone has ever sat them down and be like this is how you pick a program. This is how you pick a school. Those two things don't always align. It's completely different and I'm very honest with them about the sacrifices and the joys and the gifts, but also the choices you have to make and telling them before they have to make them, so they can know what's coming. And so those gifts of truth-telling, authenticity, and affirmation is something I take very seriously in how I work in the academy.

Participants overwhelming agreed that one of the most gratifying experiences, which contributed to a sense of belonging was cultivating mentoring relationships with students, especially those from racially minoritized backgrounds and preparing them to move into careers post college and graduate school. All participants expressed that their students who identified as racially minoritized were in many instances the only other people on campus that they connected with that had their shared racial identities. That commonality provided a strong sense of connection and participants saw themselves in these students and felt a sense of responsibility to provide information, guidance, support, and affirmation. This contributed to participants feeling a sense of belonging to their campus community.

Community-Based Mentoring Relationships

All participants acknowledged that mentoring within their own home communities allowed for them to experience a greater sense of belonging to the campus community. While these relationships operated outside of the institution, they played a vital role for participants. Blanca mentioned that she prioritizes mentorship in her communities, and that the nature of community-based mentoring, outside of an academic realm allows her to be fulfilled in her mission of being able to contribute to, and serve her own community, which primarily consisted of Latinos/as. Blanca explains that her personal

and professional desires are reflective of the values embodied by her home community, she explains:

> I have the desire to succeed because my success is about my family who have come before me who are long dead and who have yet to come. I don't give up. I mean, I just don't. I say my parents died for my education because they did and for me it's important to continue working within those communities because you can become separated from community by virtue of educational experiences and acquisition of academic language, one which our families don't have access to. I work closely with communities and plan events that allow for connection and relationship building with scholars. And I think being around my own people in the community – not at the university, but in the community, also puts me closer to what the issues are that we're really facing around education, health, etc. I also extend myself to the family members of my own students and faculty mentees and help to mentor or support them in any way I can.

Another participant spoke directly about a debate league he created in his local community that helped to develop students from urban communities and prepare them to get into college or law school. He and several other faculty and administrators from his institution, a prominent law school, created this program and work tirelessly to keep it active in addition to their other roles as faculty members. Luis noted:

> Our league is now in several school districts and we have got a ton of students. A large percentage of the students come through my institution, many students in the league also go to other colleges and law schools nationally. We have been very successful, 85 percent of the students in this program are people of color. They are going to make big differences in their community and they already have. My institution has been supportive of those efforts in helping to fund initiatives like these and support my desire to provide mentorship and guidance to these students within the community.

Likewise, Lydia explains the importance of giving back to her local community, and serving as a role model, mentor, and sponsor to people within the Black community. Lydia discusses that she has a personal and professional responsibility to create pathways for young Black children in order for them to understand the possibilities that exist for them. Lydia states:

> I do several engagements in the community a month, whether at high schools, organizing meetings, school board meetings, and different things in predominantly Black communities. And I'm encouraged to do so by my department and college. The department is extremely supportive and doesn't penalize me. Having a Ph.D. and being a professor of color demands that I give-back to the community, it's not a choice for me! And so I constantly spend my time in the community doing everything from tutoring somebody's child to speaking at their church. That carries very little weight in terms of service or tenure, very little weight in terms of recognition of the time and energy it takes. But mentoring is something I want to do. I need them [my community] to know I am invested in their success, as others have been for me.

Delores echoed that she remained connected to communities that she had previously been actively involved, and with whom she identified with racially and ethnically.

Delores points out that:

> I actively work with different communities of color, different refugee and immigrant populations locally, and that is greatly valued by my institution. Knowing that my work and involvement with these communities of color has value at my institution is really key to my success. What people often don't realize is that people in my community give me as much strength and hope and energy to fight on as the hope I offer them. So while academic spaces may not have been created for us, together with our families, our communities – we are actively working to remake these spaces. They teach me that it is possible by still being involved.

Participants perceive their home communities as integral to their success, and separating from these communities is impossible for many racially minoritized faculty members. In various capacities, participants prioritize involvement in their communities specifically in regards to mentoring, teaching and collaborative research. Giving back to communities is crucial to racially minoritized faculty, developing and engaging in community-based mentoring relationships in home communities external to the institution, added to faculty participants feeling a sense of belonging in their roles on campus.

Discussion

This study builds on several contributions to prior research. First, the findings enhance the substantial body of literature on the positive impacts of mentoring relationships for racially minoritized faculty members and their experiences, namely at PWIs. Existing scholarship highlights that it is not only important for racially minoritized faculty to receive engaging, supportive, intentional and consistent mentoring (Griffin, 2019), but also indicates that what drives their desire to remain in the academy is their personal and professional desires to pay it forward by mentoring students (Salinas et al., 2020). Extant research discusses the need for racially minoritized faculty to feel connected to their campus environments and feel as if they belong, often times because they are the only racially minoritized faculty within their department or college. The literature on belonging underscores the importance of relationships (Hausmann, et al., 2009; Lambert et al., 2013; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012), while the current inquiry adds to this knowledge by highlighting the ways in which belonging for racially minoritized faculty is fostered through various mentoring relationships. The current findings also highlight that sense of belonging is not only limited to daily occurrences on campus, but also accounts for other meaningful elements that are deemed intrinsically important to racially minoritized faculty and are valued or supported by the institution.

Second, this study shed lights on the benefits of holistic and critically conscious mentoring by senior colleagues for racially minoritized faculty. Participants in this study highlight the benefits of mentors who acknowledge their various experiences and identities, and accept them as unique whole individuals and support them accordingly.

Faculty participants throughout the study note that while many of their mentors were academic and supported them professionally, they were also cognizant of their additional identities outside of the academy and actually valued them. As such, participants experienced support from their mentors in very holistic ways and note that their ability to succeed and thrive was inextricably connected to the mentoring they received. While participants outlined the many benefits of mentoring relationships whether by colleagues, or peers internal or external to the institution, it was pointed out that having mentors with shared racial and ethnic identity contributed strongly to a sense of belonging. Additionally, it was noted that mentors of a different race helped to foster feelings of belonging when they are critically conscious and equity-minded (Griffin, 2019), and were able to truly understand and disrupt power and oppression.

Third, peer mentoring plays a significant role in the lives of racially minoritized faculty. These peer groups allow racially minoritized faculty to connect with others across disciplines who are at the same stage in their career and who face similar challenges. Peer mentors also provide great opportunities to collaborate on scholarly activity and make strategic decisions with the input of others. Friendships were also discussed as a product of peer mentoring relationships and were critical to those racially minoritized faculty who often have nobody in their immediate friendship circles to turn to for support.

Four, the study emphasizes how crucial it is for racially minoritized faculty to mentor students, especially those with shared racial and ethnic identities. Most participants in the study felt that it was their responsibility to pay it forward by mentoring students at various stages in their educational journey. This was particularly true for

racially minoritized students who in many instances had shared identities and backgrounds. Racially minoritized faculty in the study often went above and beyond to advise and mentor students, write letters of recommendation, and invest heavily in their students' personal and professional growth and development. There was also a strong desire from participants to foster generativity in their students, in an attempt to prepare them to be the next generation of professionals within higher education.

Finally, the study reiterates the importance of home communities to racially minoritized faculty members, and the need many have to remain closely connected with those communities in meaningful ways. Findings indicate that racially minoritized faculty members seek to play active roles within their communities by mentoring members of their communities and maintaining other close relationships and partnerships involving collaborative teaching and research. Faculty members acknowledge that these home communities continue to play a central role in their lives and allow them to feel a sense of belonging and a more poignant connection to their life's purpose. The current study demonstrates that for racially minoritized faculty, feeling a sense of belonging is crucial to their existence at PWIs. Findings highlight different ways in which racially minoritized faculty experience feelings of belonging through varying mentoring relationships.

Implications for Research and Practice

The findings of this study yield a number of implications for research and practice. This inquiry contributes to understanding how mentoring relationships serve as a pathway for racially minoritized faculty to feel a sense of belonging at PWIs. It is important for higher education administrators, and faculty to consider ways in which they can improve institutional environments and foster greater support for establishing a

culture of mentoring and relationship building, if they are to maximize feelings of belonging and connectedness for racially minoritized faculty members' at PWIs.

With regard to future research, first, scholars should do more research on understanding the importance of sense of belonging for racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs, and examine what other factors contribute to racially minoritized faculty feeling a sense of belonging. This study provides one example of how racially minoritized faculty experience sense of belonging by way of mentoring relationships. Researchers should examine other aspects of campus environments including but not limited to availability of resources and networks, demographic composition, support structures, and institutional vision and goals in order to understand how they impact the development of feeling a sense of belonging to one's institution.

Second, research should explore the development of models that explain the importance of cultivating faculty sense of belonging, and guidelines for how to do so successfully in higher education institutions. These models can help to provide structure for institutions to encourage and facilitate systemic change. Third, research should examine the differences between faculty members who experience a genuine sense of belonging and those who do not, and analyze how those differences influence productivity, sense of satisfaction, and performance in the academy. This can help to shed light on the types of environments needed for racially minoritized faculty to be their best selves, and do their best work.

For practice, first, institutions of higher education should ensure that opportunities for developing meaningful mentoring relationships are present on campus; within departments, colleges and across campus. There should be active

advocacy occurring for junior and mid-career faculty and active promotion of meaningful faculty development at all levels. Faculty members should be consulted regularly and solicited for input about policies, procedures, and practices. There should also be a recognition of the magnitude of mentoring work with a clearly identified path that acknowledges and rewards faculty for their time and labor to mentor and engage in mentoring.

Second, institutions should make use of equity oriented centers that often offer racially minoritized faculty unique opportunities to connect with others that have similar identities. These centers often are not just for the benefit of racially minoritized students, but also serve an important role in the lives of racially minoritized faculty members at PWIs (Wright-Mair, 2017). Taking time to acknowledge racially minoritized faculty who are presenting work on campus at these centers, or engaging in initiatives, programs, mentoring, and so on should be a priority, and considered integral to their experiences at PWIs. Shifting what is deemed as acceptable forums of dissemination of work needs to occur, and these equity oriented centers should be seen as additional avenues to connect people of similar backgrounds and identities.

Recognizing that being in community with others, specifically people from the same racial, ethnic, and national origin helps with increasing sense of belonging on campus. It is imperative that institutions create avenues for racially minoritized faculty to engage meaningfully with their communities, regardless of where their institution is located. Serving home communities contributes to sustaining racially minoritized faculty as they are accomplishing a personal and internal desire to serve the communities from which they come (Salinas, 2015). Finally, institutions should count these meaningful and

time intensive contributions by racially minoritized faculty towards tenure and/or

promotion decisions.

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