Mentoring in Political Science: Examining Strategies, Challenges, and Benefits

Editors' Introduction: Mentoring and Marginalization

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he idea for this symposium was hatched, as so many are, at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), during a post-panel conversation in a conference hotel bar. In this case, we were discussing the crucial role—as well as the challenges—of mentorship for underrepresented groups in the discipline and the academy, and we decided to propose a session on "Mentoring and Marginalization: Challenges, Critiques, and Strategies" for the following year's APSA meetings. The contributions to the resulting 2017 roundtable offered a timely exploration of the power relationships and dynamics in political science through the lens of mentoring, particularly as it relates to the promotion and enhancement of equity and diversity in the discipline.

The articles in this symposium build on these presentations. We begin with a brief history of mentoring and a review of what extant research suggests about its possibilities, limits, and challenges, particularly for groups that are underrepresented in political science and the academy: women, people of color, and LGBTQ people, as well as women and LGBTQ faculty and graduate students of color. Following a synopsis of the individual contributions to the symposium, we conclude with some suggestions about how institutions and scholars particularly senior scholars and/or relatively privileged ones might reflect on and even change their mentoring practices to better promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.

DEFINING MENTORING

Scholars have traced the term "mentoring" to Homer's Odyssey, in which Odysseus's friend Mentor offered wise guidance and advice to Odysseus's son Telemachus when Odysseus left for the Trojan War (Anderson and Shannon 1988; Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber 2016). Although contemporary uses and definitions of the term vary, we understand it to describe a relationship in which more senior members of a profession (in this case, academia) commit their time and energy to guide more junior members of that profession toward fulfilling their teaching, research, and service responsibilities and advancing their career more broadly (Caskin, Lumpkin, and Tennant 2003). Mentoring relationships may be formal, such as when administrators or professional associations (for example) ask senior or experienced scholars to mentor more junior scholars, or more informal, arising from relationships that develop through meetings and peer networks (Bryant-Shankin and Brumage 2011). Mentoring activities also range widely, encompassing everything from offering technical advice (e.g., how to structure a course syllabus and where to submit a paper for publication), to providing letters of reference and feedback on drafts of written work, to more personal and psychological support (Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber 2016). Whereas some of these mentoring activities dovetail with those associated with advising, mentoring tends to combine professional guidance with a more personal relationship, in part because it develops over time and because the mentor takes a special interest in the mentee's professional development (National Academy of Sciences 1997).

One of the many benefits of mentoring is that it provides graduate students and junior scholars with support and insights about the norms and expectations associated with an academic career, as well as financial resources, "access" to professional opportunities, and letters for employment and other professional opportunities. Empirical research demonstrates that this support and "insider knowledge" are essential for professional advancement. Inge Van der Weijden and her coauthors (2015) found, for example, that junior scholars who are mentored effectively have more positive views about their work environment and that they tend to publish at a higher rate. Research also suggests that the benefits of mentoring can be reciprocal. For example, Evanthia Kalpazidou Schmidt and Stine Thidemann Faber (2016) found that mentors benefit from mentoring junior scholars through professional development, institutional recognition, and personal satisfaction. Moreover, mentors also may gain research assistance and coauthorship from their mentees, all of which increases their productivity.

CAN WE MENTOR OUR WAY TO EQUITY AND DIVERSITY?

In addition to mentoring's important role in scholars' and teachers' professional development, satisfaction, and success,

it is often proffered as a way to promote equity and diversity in the academy. For example, although women now comprise the majority of students in colleges and universities, they still occupy only 27% of tenured faculty at four-year institutions (Turner Kelly 2019).1 People of color are also vastly underrepresented on college campuses. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) indicate that "of all full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 42 percent were White males [sic], [and] 35 percent were White females [sic].2 Because gender identity and sexual orientation are not protected categories under federal civil rights laws, analogous data about LGBTQ people are not readily available.3 As a consequence, "data sources we commonly use such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System do not track sexual orientation and have no means of tracking transgender identity" (American Federation of Teachers, Higher Education 2013). However, as the authors of a report from American Federation of Teachers, Higher Education (2013, 5-9) explained, whereas it may be "difficult to

study of race, gender, and sexuality. APSA reports that in 2014, for example, women accounted for 44% of all doctorates conferred in political science but held only 39% of full-time faculty positions. Moreover, the proportion of women in full-time positions is significantly lower in the 20 largest PhD-granting political science departments (APSA 2016). Women of color are even more woefully underrepresented. For example, whereas the proportion of white political scientists decreased from 93.4% in 1980 to 76.2% in 2017 (APSA 2011; Hildago et al. 2018), in 2010, women of color comprised a mere 13.4% of full-time faculty members in political science—well below their share of the general population (APSA 2011).

There are many sources for these disparities, of course, but chief among them is that neither the academy nor political science is immune to the well-documented misogyny, racism, homophobia, and ableism—and the intersections among them—endemic to the educational system and to the broader labor market. As such, in addition to the "regular" demands of their jobs, women, LGBTQ faculty, faculty of color, and faculty at

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collect data that would enable analysts to understand how pervasive the discrimination against LGBT people actually is," there nonetheless is "ample evidence" that they face "an array of challenges, ranging from personal attacks, both verbal and physical, to actions (intentional or otherwise) that isolate and alienate LGBT individuals, to institutional policies that prevent individuals from freely expressing their sexual identity and/or gender identity."

Similarly, despite improvements in disability-related accommodations at colleges and universities since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, little research and information has been published on faculty members with disabilities; consequently, there are few data about the experiences of faculty members with disabilities. The data that do exist suggest that people with disabilities also remain vastly underrepresented among college faculty. For example, although 22% of the general population has a disability, the National Center for College Students with Disabilities estimates that this is true for only 4% of faculty members (Grigely 2017). Moreover, American case law suggests that college and university faculty members with disabilities face a range of problems including discrimination, architectural barriers, and tenure denial, among other issues (Rothstein 2018).

Although these inequities present academy-wide challenges, efforts to increase equity and diversity are particularly important in political science. Although there are important variations across subfields, political science nonetheless is a discipline that remains overwhelmingly straight, white, and male, and it has been slower than many others in the humanities and social sciences to incorporate and make central the

the intersections of these social locations face challenging and sometimes even hostile campus environments. They must contend with harassment and discrimination; their research is often devalued when it comes to publishing, tenure, and promotion (particularly if it addresses issues of race, gender, and sexuality); and their service burdens typically are heavier and unrecognized (APSA 2011; Gutiérrez y Muhs 2012; Smith 2013). Women, LGBTQ-identified faculty, and faculty of color also must contend with more challenges in the classroom: their authority is challenged more often than that of their male counterparts, and studies of teaching evaluations clearly indicate that students' racism, misogyny, and homophobia influence the assessments of their teaching abilities (American Sociological Association 2019; Anderson and Kanner 2011; Martin 2016; Novkov and Barclay 2010).

The lack of equity and diversity in political science (and the academy more generally) creates significant feedback effects for students and scholars in the discipline. For example, this environment contributes to conditions that lead women and faculty of color to leave the discipline—which, in turn, exacerbates their underrepresentation among the political science professoriate (Gutiérrez y Muhs 2012). This ongoing underrepresentation means that political science faculty are unlikely to descriptively resemble their students, particularly as access to higher education has increased among members of the very marginalized groups that remain underrepresented in the discipline. Moreover, because women, scholars of color, and LGBTQ scholars are more likely than their straight, white, and male colleagues to study marginalization and its relationship to politics, the lack of

equity and diversity also contributes to the underrepresentation of research about issues such as race, gender, and sexuality (Key and Sumner 2019; Teele and Thelen 2017). The result is that "[p]olitical science is often ill-equipped to address in a sustained way why many of the most marginal members of political communities around the world are often unable to have their needs effectively addressed by governments" (Pinderhughes et al. 2011, 1).

First, the senior scholars most likely to provide both formal and informal mentorship to members of marginalized and underrepresented groups—women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and first-generation college students—are often themselves members of these same groups. Several studies make clear that many of them already shoulder disproportionate service burdens (Mitchell and Hesli 2013). Because these demands are exacerbated by the fact that many political

Furthermore, because mentoring by and of members of marginalized and underrepresented groups often entails that scholars intervene in situations with some of the same senior colleagues who undervalued, bullied, hazed, and harassed them, this mentorship can be both time-consuming and emotionally challenging.

MENTORING IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

A large and growing body of scholarship has made clear that these and other forms of inequality and marginalization are the result of deeply ingrained social and cultural processes and structural factors (Gutiérrez y Muhs 2012). In the context of the contemporary neoliberal university, however, the lack of racial diversity and gender equity is more typically treated as an individual-level problem that can be addressed with individual-level solutions. In this context, mentoring relationships are particularly attractive to resource-constrained college and university administrations. As the n-gram data in figure 1 suggest, the popularity of the term "mentoring" increased in tandem with the period of constricted state funding for public universities (Lipsitz 1990). Recognizing that university-based mentoring would not solve the problems of recruitment, promotion, and retention in political science, APSA established a task force on mentoring in 2002, which was composed of members of APSA Women's Caucus and APSA Committees on the Status of Women, LGBTQ, Black, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Based on the task force recommendations, the APSA Mentoring Program was created the following year.5

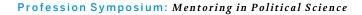
There is evidence that such efforts can be effective. In their report for the Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century, Dianne Pinderhughes and her coauthors (2011, 49) noted, for example, that mentoring "is often cited in the literature of higher education as one of the few common characteristics of a successful faculty career, particularly for faculty of color and women."

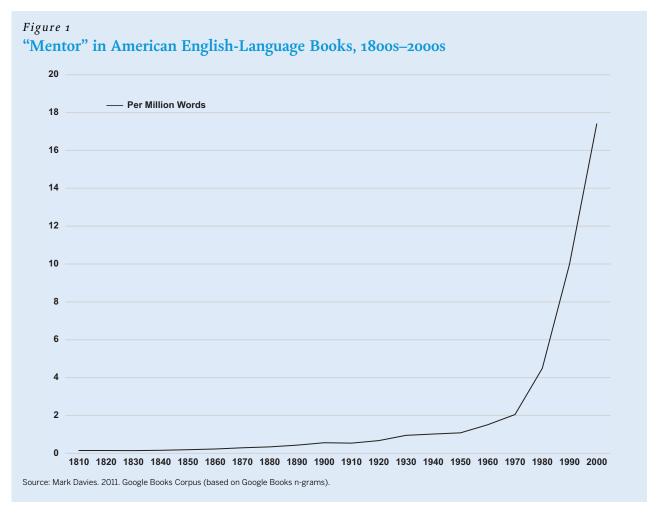
LIMITS OF MENTORING: NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED, AND BAD BEHAVIOR CAN BE ITS OWN REWARD

Although mentoring can have important benefits for members of marginalized and underrepresented groups, it is no panacea. Moreover, because—like so many forms of labor—the burdens of mentoring are not evenly distributed, there is reason to be concerned that mentoring also might exacerbate some of the very problems it is intended to alleviate. This possibility manifests in at least two relevant and important ways.

science departments have few, if any, senior scholars who are members of marginalized groups, senior scholars who do belong to them often find themselves serving as mentors to many graduate students and junior scholars beyond their own institutions. For example, many political science departments have few or no "out" LGBTQ people on the faculties. As a consequence, LGBTQ-identified graduate students often reach out to scholars from institutions other than their own for advice about issues such as how to be "out" in graduate school or as a junior faculty member and how to navigate self-presentation on the job market. Although these more senior scholars are likely grateful to be in a position to give such advice and often have benefited from it themselves, it also is likely the case that straight, white, male scholars are not typically expected to provide guidance about such issues. Furthermore, because mentoring by and of members of marginalized and underrepresented groups often entails that scholars intervene in situations with some of the same senior colleagues who undervalued, bullied, hazed, and harassed *them*, this mentorship can be both time-consuming and emotionally challenging. In these and other ways, although often gratifying, mentoring can also contribute to the "tax" borne by so many women, LGBTQ people, and people of color in the academy-a tax that essentially demands that they provide free "overtime" in the form of additional, lower-prestige, and time-consuming service and emotional labor (Disch and O'Brien 2007).

Second, but in some ways conversely, mentoring may do little to challenge the status quo, at least in part because senior scholars from underrepresented groups often are reluctant, disinclined, or not well positioned to do so. That is, rather than questioning and pushing back against problematic disciplinary norms and practices that have long served to exclude and marginalize scholars from and scholarship about these issues and groups, some members of these groups understand their role as mentor to be primarily about "gatekeeping," making graduate students and junior colleagues conform to and meet those norms. Perhaps because they feel that they "made it" on their own, other members of marginalized groups reject the notion that they have any obligation to help their junior counterparts; some are even themselves bullies, gatekeepers, or power abusers.





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At the same time, members of dominant and "unmarked" groups—who are most likely to hold power in the discipline—are not expected to share their resources, networks, and research collaborations with members of marginalized groups. As such—like whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality themselves—the benefits of mentorship to unmarked groups themselves remain unmarked, thereby normalizing and sustaining their power in the discipline. Among the results of these dynamics is that the mentoring benefits to members of unmarked groups are "submerged" (Mettler 2011), creating a feedback loop in which straight people, white people, and cisgender men are allowed to feel as if they "made it" on their own, whereas members of marginalized groups are seen as "needing" mentoring to compensate for what are treated as their individual deficits, serving to perpetuate meritocratic mythologies.

OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES

The articles in this symposium offer a range of contextual and experiential reflections about mentoring in political science. In

"Mentoring: Past and Present," Dvora Yanow situates the practice of mentoring historically, explaining how this practice has evolved from one largely defined as a workplace relationship between a senior man and a junior one to one defined as a "solution to perceived problems of employee retention and promotion" as members of underrepresented groups entered the workforce in increasing numbers. However, as mentoring has grown more popular and "essential," Yanow demonstrates that it also has become a more highly professionalized and managed practice. Drawing from two moments in her own professional history, she shows what a more informal, organically developed mentoring relationship can look like and addresses questions about present-day managed mentoring practices.

Following Yanow's broad discussion of the evolution of mentoring, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea situates it within the specific context of the modern, "corporatized," and neoliberal university. She discusses how macro-factors such as, *inter alia*, measuring faculty "productivity" have affected mentoring as well. Using evidence from a review of online mentoring

resources and her own experiences as both a mentor and mentee, Schwarz-Shea argues that the formalization of mentoring is indicative of the corporatization of the university—a process that also, paradoxically, has undermined the academic culture that makes mentoring viable. Her article concludes with thoughts about how faculty can navigate this paradox while also challenging discourses and practices that weaken the academic cultural conditions essential to genuine mentoring relationships.

The remaining contributors focus on a theme that emerged in our 2017 APSA roundtable: the relationship between mentoring and various forms of discrimination and harassment. The prominence of this theme became even more striking in the months following the conference, as an array of sexual harassment and assault allegations emerged to indicate that prominent and powerful people in a wide range of industries and professions had been using their position to exploit and compromise the careers of their employees and junior colleagues. The academy provides no shortage of its own examples of allegations of long-standing patterns of harassment on the part of individual faculty members (Anderson 2018; Flaherty 2018), as well as evidence of widespread harassment at professional meetings (Sapiro and Campbell 2018).

That political science has not been immune to such behavior is reflected in Natasha Behl's article, "Violence and Mentoring: Race, Gender, and Sexual Harassment," in which she brings research about mentorship into conversation with her personal experience of sexual harassment as a woman of color graduate student. In particular, she examines what happens when race and gender intersect with epistemological and methodological differences between students and faculty in ways that make some students more vulnerable to sexual harassment in the mentor—mentee relationship. She shows that whereas this relationship indeed may empower and lift up members of underrepresented groups, it ultimately is difficult to "build trust and solidarity in a hierarchical power structure also divided across racial, gender, and epistemic differences."

Nadia Brown and Celeste Montoya also discuss how race and gender operate and intersect in the mentoring process in "Intersectional Mentorship: A Model for Empowerment and Transformation." They demonstrate that whereas mentoring is "a vital means of helping women of color and members of other marginalized groups," like Behl, they argue that mentoring also may *perpetuate* oppression if mentors fail to account for and challenge multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization. Although they have benefited from engagement with women's caucuses and status committees that attempt to address this oppression in political science, for example, they articulate their frustration with the single-axis models of representation and advocacy that such efforts typically offer. Instead, they argue for "a more intersectionally conscious and action-oriented model of mentorship."

Together, the articles by Behl and by Brown and Montoya underscore a key barrier to mentorship: that colleagues often regard women less as scholars and more as potential conquests (Sapiro and Campbell 2018). The consequences of these attitudes and behaviors typically are borne not by those who perpetrate them but instead by members of marginalized

groups, who often must endure the bad behavior and the attendant feelings of isolation, lost confidence, and helplessness that they engender. These feelings can be particularly acute when someone who shares a marginalized identity and who may have been a potential source of mentorship and protection instead harassed and bullied them. Such violations of trust can make it feel ever-harder to ask for help of any kind.

In the final article, "A Black Feminist Autoethnographic Reflection on Mentoring in the Discipline of Political Science," Lahoma Thomas indicates what intersectionally conscious and action-oriented mentoring may look like in a tribute to her mentor, the late Dr. Lee Ann Fujii. Drawing from Black Feminist Thought and her own autoethnography, Thomas shares some of the ways in which graduate students encounter interlocking systems of oppression that often leave them isolated and alienated in the academy. However, she also shows how Dr. Fujii's "unconventional mentorship"—which emphasized frequent, candid conversations about the challenges and barriers experienced by racialized scholars in the academy—shaped Thomas's research interests and enabled her scholarly progress.

CONCLUSION

The articles featured in this symposium remind us that, as Brett Stockdill and Mary Yu Danico (2012, 1) write, whereas "[t]he academy is often imagined as an idyllic place, neutral and untarnished by the ugly inequalities that mar the 'outside world," the "ivory tower" is, in fact, a part of the world and that, as such, like other institutions, it is a site of oppression. Nevertheless, they wrote, it also can be a site of "resistance and transformation." Indeed, although we cannot mentor our way to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive discipline, the articles in this symposium illuminate ways in which mentorship can be a force for this resistance and transformation by providing much-needed support for scholars from underrepresented and marginalized groups. Although a true transformation of political science requires deeper structural changes-from increasing institutional support to dismantling systems of racism, misogyny, and other vectors of disadvantage—we draw from these articles to suggest how senior scholars and leaders in departments and universities might more effectively use mentoring and related practices as tools for promoting—rather than hindering—equality, diversity, and inclusion:

- Recruit, hire, and retain more faculty and graduate students from underrepresented groups to diversify the academy and the mentors therein.
- 2. Be aware of who is spending their time on mentoring. The articles in this symposium strongly suggest that good mentoring cannot be imposed or "forced." However, they also suggest that senior scholars and university leaders should better monitor who is mentoring whom and—where it may be productive and appropriate—acknowledge and encourage more diverse mentoring relationships. That is, examine whether the women, people of color, and LGBTQ-identified faculty seem to be doing most of the work when it comes to underrepresented students and junior faculty.

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- 3. Implement a safe channel through which graduate students and junior scholars can report troubling practices and behaviors to replace the "whisper networks" that too often are the only ways in which information about bullying and harassment is transmitted among them.
- 4. Acknowledge that mentoring is work and reward it as such. Department chairs and other university leaders should acknowledge that supportive and effective mentorship is a crucial—and unevenly distributed—component of efforts to increase racial, gender, and other forms of equity, diversity, and inclusion. If they truly care about these things, they should acknowledge that being a supportive and effective mentor to underrepresented groups is timeconsuming and often comes at the expense of other more recognized and rewarded activities (e.g., research and publishing). Rather than normalizing this unfair and exploitative situation by treating mentoring as something that mentors do because they find it gratifying, chairs and administrators should treat it for what it is: a form of academic labor that is as essential as research and teaching are to the functioning and profile of their institution. (Most of us also find research and teaching gratifying, but we are not expected to do them gratis if we like them.) Simply stated: recognize and reward mentoring in tenure and promotion processes and compensate it with research support and/or relief from teaching and other service, especially for those who are overburdened and underrepresented (Disch and O'Brien 2007).
- 5. Address abuses of power in mentoring relationships. As many contributors to this symposium make clear, it is important not to "gaslight" members of underrepresented groups who report problematic mentoring or other relationships in the academy by trying to minimize their experience. Instead, make every effort to listen to and support them.

NOTES

- These numbers are similar to those for universities in other nations. In the European Union, for example, women account for only 20.9% of the equivalent of full professors and 37% of associate professors (Catalyst 2017).
- 2. Among nonwhite full-time faculty, the study also found that 6% were Asian/Pacific Islander males, 4% were Asian/Pacific Islander females, 3% each were Black females and Black males, and 2% each were Hispanic males and Hispanic females. Comprising 1% or less each were full-time faculty of two or more races and American Indian/Alaska Native (https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61).
- 3. As the American Federation of Teachers, Higher Education (2013, 5–6) report noted, "The universality of progress for LGBT equality in the workplace—and in society—is undermined by one simple but important fact: sexual identity, gender identity, and gender expression do not have any sort of protected legal status under federal law. Unlike race, ethnicity and gender (the subjects of our previous reports on faculty diversity), there is simply no federal legal framework within which equal rights for LGBT people can be enforced. As we will see, this lack of a framework also creates secondary problems in being able to collect data that would enable analysts to understand how pervasive the discrimination against LGBT people actually is."
- 4. Using US Census data, Catalyst (2017) estimated that in 2016, 17.4% of American women identified as Hispanic or Latina, 13.7% identified as Black or African American, and 5.8% identified as Asian or Asian American (catalyst.org/research/women-of-color-in-the-united-states).
- 5. For more information about this project, visit www.apsanet.org/mentor. Mentor enrollment takes place on a rolling basis; mentees may enroll during a period in the fall. APSA staff makes mentor matches twice a year: at the beginning of the fall semester (for short- and long-term matches)

and at the beginning of the spring semester (for short-term matches). The staff also requires a mentor—mentee orientation webinar at the beginning of each semester for all participants. To assess the process, APSA staff checks in with mentors and mentees approximately one month after the match has been made; participants may terminate the relationship at any time.

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