Establishing the Foundation: Culturally Congruent Mentoring for Research Scholars and Faculty From Underrepresented Populations

Gail E. Wyatt
University of California, Los Angeles

Harolyn M. E. Belcher
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and
Kennedy Krieger Institute

There are scores of university faculty and scholars from diverse backgrounds who have long researched, preached about, and presented statistics and reports to illustrate the direct and indirect effects of generations of policies and practices that have resulted in disparities in health and mental health in our country (Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality, 2017; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; Ginther et al., 2011; Heckler, 1985; Jones, 2000; Jones, Jones, Perry, Barclay, & Jones, 2009; Satcher & Higginbotham, 2008; Valantine & Collins, 2015). In 2005, Thomas Insel, then director of the National Institute of Mental Health, called together research experts from underrepresented populations in the research field to discuss strategies to incorporate diversity in training and research methods, into existing training programs and who might be best to teach this information in university settings. From that group, Tony Strickland and Gail Wyatt were asked to develop a program that would address gaps and disparities in research training for postdoctoral investigators who had high potential of applying for and being awarded R series grants. With the collaboration and recruitment efforts of other colleagues—namely, Cheryl Boyce, then project officer at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—the team developed the African American Mental Health Research Scientist (AAMHRS) Consortium Working Group. AAMHRS organized a 3-day mentored research training meeting in Los Angeles in March 2005. The AAMHRS program served as the template for what is known today as an R25 training grant, awarded by the NIH nationally and internationally.

The AAMHRS program highlighted the premise that differences between people based on ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, and lifestyles are rich in information and history that may provide a foundation from which resilience and health promotion may be derived. Research scholars and faculty from underrepresented populations, including racial and ethnic groups, as well as socioeconomic, sexual identity, gender, ability status, faiths, and other marginalized populations, may hold significant insight into the complex etiologies and solutions to alleviate health disparities. This insight is often overlooked in programs promoted by our esteemed universities.

Although general considerations based on underrepresented group identity may be made, recognizing individual geographic, gender, sexual orientation, immigration, socioeconomic, and ability status and cultural variations *within* given underrepresented racial and ethnic populations is of utmost importance. Exclusion of the core of what creates diversity weakens an individual. Valuing cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as considering multiple identities and intersectionality, within the mentoring relationship provides a foundation that fosters self-efficacy and a successful research career for scholar and faculty.

One of the graduates of the AAMHRS program was Harolyn Belcher, MD, MHS, now professor of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and director of the Center for Diversity in Public Health Leadership Training at Kennedy Krieger Institute. During the ensuing years following AAMHRS participation, she would develop research mentorship programs for over 600 diverse undergraduate and graduate students. As Belcher (former AAMHRS scholar) and Wyatt (AAMHRS mentor) have reunited as colleagues to coedit this special issue, they also adapted and developed innovative mentorship paradigms that build on the strengths and acknowledge challenges of underrepresented graduate and early career faculty researchers (see Figure 1).

Often, mentoring is not formally taught or rigorously evaluated at the university level. Much less is the opportunity for in-depth understanding of what cultural and linguistic diversity brings to the mentoring relationship. We can hardly expect research mentors, even with the best intent and well-respected reputations in research, teaching, and clinical care, to guide students from diverse

Gail E. Wyatt, Department of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, University of California, Los Angeles; Harolyn M. E. Belcher, Department of Pediatrics, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and Center for Diversity in Public Health Leadership Training, Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Harolyn M. E. Belcher, Center for Diversity in Public Health Leadership Training, Kennedy Krieger Institute, 716 North Broadway, Room 409, Baltimore, MD 21205. E-mail: belcher@kennedykrieger.org
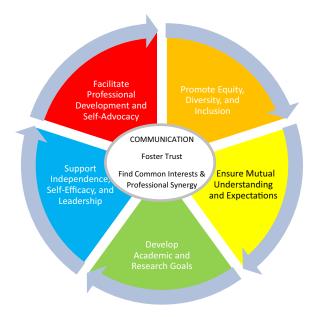
Figure 1. Mentors' Wheel: A culturally congruent foundation for mentoring scholars and faculty from underrepresented populations. ©Belcher, Stone, Wyatt, 2019. All rights reserved. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

populations with limited knowledge and forethought of the challenges encountered by graduate and early faculty scholars from historically underrepresented and diverse populations. That is why mentors need mentoring. That is what the authors provide in the articles included in this special issue.

In 2015, Belcher and Wyatt cosponsored a 1-day workshop at John Hopkins University with nine other Behavioral Science Centers for AIDS Research (CFAR) directors. We presented new thinking about mentoring experienced mentors to work with investigators who represented or worked with underserved populations. The presentations by some of the speakers formed the idea for this special issue. We hope that this issue will promote discussion and thought to take the process of mentoring mentors further. Mentoring is a shared experience between the mentor and a scholar (mentee, student, or faculty member). Mentoring is based on the mentor's life experiences, built on the mentor's knowledge and wisdom. Being an effective mentor is one who learns how to listen without judgment, to help scholars understand the effects of their own experiences and choices on who they are and what they want to become: Good mentoring involves knowing the whole person! Being intentional about development of mentoring skills is important because someone is always watching and learning from what we, as mentors, do.

Although research in the mentoring field is in its infancy, we approach this special issue with the understanding that we are defining the kind of content that is missing from the way that we are taught in graduate school. The content, lessons learned, and recommendations in articles in this special issue come from lived experiences and are conveyed through quantitative and qualitative research, social theory, panel discussions, and case studies. The models presented and the theories used are some, but certainly not all, that will be used in this field in the future. Throughout the

articles, authors use a variety of terms to describe race/ethnicity (e.g., Hispanic, Latino(a), or LatinX and Black or African American) and scholar mentees (e.g., graduate students, scholars, protégés, and mentees). Out of respect for the authors' diverse perspectives, we have retained their chosen descriptive terminology.

This special issue focuses on mentoring early researchers from graduate school through early faculty, especially scholars who are from populations currently underrepresented in the research field. The core competencies of mentoring outlined in the article by Fleming et al. (2013) include (a) maintaining effective communication, (b) aligning expectations, (c) assessing understanding, (d) fostering independence, (e) addressing diversity, and (f) promoting professional development. These core competencies are foundational to effective mentoring. This special issue goes beyond the traditional core competencies to devote special attention to aspects of mentoring that are unique to successful research mentoring of underrepresented populations in graduate and early faculty positions. The skills to mentor can be refined. We hope that these articles will contribute to that process.

The issue is divided into two broad topic areas that focus on (a) special considerations and recommendations when working with early research scholars from underrepresented populations and (b) innovative and promising mentoring strategies. The issue begins with a prologue by Broughton, Plaisime, and Parker (2019). The authors discuss the importance of intentional mentorship. The article entitled, "Mentorship: The Necessity of Intentionality," was written collaboratively with a doctoral scholar mentee. Understanding that effective mentoring is a relationship, involving both the mentor faculty/researcher and the scholar mentee, is fundamental. There is the responsibility of both mentor and scholar to create a successful mentoring relationship. Broughton et al. advise mentors to self-reflect and "Identify, Improve, and Implement."

"Mentoring the Mentors of Students From Diverse Backgrounds for Research" by Wyatt et al. (2019) provides an ecological model and case studies to discuss challenges faced by graduate scholars from underrepresented populations. The article highlights, defines, and provides guidance for prospective mentors to address challenges related to implicit bias, internalized racism, colorblindness, stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, and code-switching. These challenges may be insidious and hard to discuss, yet impede scholars from exhibiting their optimal research productivity. Individual (scholar and mentor) level and system (mentor and university environment) level recommendations are given.

Alegria, Fukuda, Markle, and NeMoyer (2019) use a novel approach synthesizing findings from an expert panel of successful female researchers from underrepresented populations. In "Mentoring Future Researchers: Advice and Consideration," the authors discuss mentoring strategies to address relevant issues for mentoring underrepresented scholars that include discussions related to work/family/life balance, recommendations for scholar mentees with disabilities, immigration concerns, and career planning support. Disproportionately, scholars from underrepresented populations have financial and family obligations to balance with their tuition costs. Isolation in the academic environment and challenges negotiating university and research cultures are important to address as a mentor of scholars from underrepresented populations. The many roles of the mentor and guidelines for having "difficult conversations"—how might the mentor work to change the system rather than being part of a system that is unresponsive to the

scholars' needs or exhibits implicit biases in policies and practice—are provided.

Unique challenges and pitfalls of being the "model minority" scholar are discussed in Chin and Kameoka's (2019) article, "Mentoring Asian American Scholars: Stereotypes and Cultural Values." It is vitally important to recognize that Asian Americans, as well as other racial and ethnic populations in the United States, are a diverse population with differing historical experiences in the United States (e.g., internment, forced labor, refugees), cultures, and citizenship status (e.g., recent immigrants vs. multigeneration U.S. citizens). Although one must be careful not to overgeneralize, Chin and Kameoka's article illustrates common misconceptions and expectations about Asian American scholars using scholar quotes and explanations. Chin and Kameoka inform mentors of Asian American scholars about hierarchical collectivistic cultures and high-context communication, explaining how behaviors associated characteristics may influence the mentor–scholar relationship.

Holloway and colleagues (2019), in their article "Perspectives on Academic Mentorship From Sexual and Gender Minority Student," conduct an in-depth perspective of mentoring scholars who are sexual and gender minorities (SGMs). Recommendations in the article are based on a survey of over 150 scholars. Scholars recommended individual-, dyadic-, and structural-level activities that could be undertaken by academic mentors of students who are SGMs to promote academic success and positive career trajectories.

Two articles discuss mentoring considerations to facilitate the engagement of underrepresented populations in research. "Best Practices for Researching Diverse Groups," authored by Burlew, Peteet, McCuistian, and Miller-Roenigk (2019), and "Mentoring the Next Generation of Behavioral Health Scientists to Promote Health Equity," written by Milburn, Hamilton, Lopez, and Wyatt (2019), address the fact that underrepresented racial and ethnic populations, individuals with disabilities, and individuals who are SGMs disproportionately experience health disparities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). It is therefore of significant public health importance to enhance the recruitment of underrepresented groups in research studies. Increasing the diversity of researchers may be one crucial step in this effort. Race concordance between researcher and research participant is associated with increased trust and research study enrollment of underrepresented populations most at risk for health disparities (Mouton, Harris, Rovi, Solorzano, & Johnson, 1997).

The final two articles outline specific strategies that may enhance the opportunity for mentorship and scholar success: "Effective Mentoring of Underrepresented Doctoral Trainees and Early Career Scholars in the Biobehavioral and Health Sciences: A Developmental Framework to Maximize Professional Growth" (Lanzi, Footman, Washington, & Ramey, 2019) and "Research Accountability Groups and Mentoring Minutes: The M3 Approach to Promote Public Health Infectious Diseases Research for Diverse Graduate Students" (Belcher, Piggott, Sanders, & Trent, 2019). Lanzi et al. (2019) describe the developmental trajectory of a mentoring relationship from initiation stage through redefinition stage where mutual mentoring occurs, as well as the dynamic process of mentoring and strategies that promote communication, active listening, and trust. Belcher et al. (2019) outline an effective multimodal mentoring program that includes a team of the re-

search and professional development mentors, small scholar group research accountability sessions, and development of a web-based individual development plan to align mentor scholar expectations.

"Research mentorship refers to a dynamic, collaborative, reciprocal and sustained relationship focused on an emerging researcher's acquisition of values and attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to develop into a successful independent researcher" (Abedin et al., 2012). Mentoring plays an essential role in personal and career guidance and research productivity (Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusić, 2006). A mentor may have multiple roles. Mentoring may be psychosocial (providing support, encouragement, networking, advocacy), instrumental (providing instruction and research skill development), or a combination of the two. Effective mentorships create a network of relationships that aid in career advancement (Williams, 2013).

This special issue includes articles that highlight considerations and recommendations to support the successful culturally congruent mentorship of underrepresented graduate research scholars and faculty. Establishing the foundation is building the trust and communication necessary to advance the scholar's career. Ignoring the importance of culture in the mentoring relationship may lead to suboptimal performance and diminished self-efficacy for the mentee scholar. Mentorship requires an understanding of the scholar and faculty member as an individual, as well as his or her cultural beliefs and life experience, academic strengths and weaknesses, and psychosocial factors that may influence scholar and faculty mentee success and performance. Assisting the scholar or faculty member in developing a mentoring team and introducing the scholar to professional and career opportunities will promote growth and career advancement. Professional growth and career advancement are the goal of the mentorship relationship. In fact, "Redefinition" of the mentoring relationship, when mentor and scholar/faculty mentee become peers, as noted by Lanzi et al. (2019) in their article on effective mentoring of underrepresented doctoral trainees, is the ultimate goal of mentorship!

We encourage mentors to consider the strategies that will work best for you and to actively work to eliminate institutional and structural racism and policies that limit the potential of so many. You will not only model that mentors should grow and advocate, but by enhancing mentorship skills, mentors become even more irreplaceable in our lives.

This issue is a call for more culturally congruent mentorship training, support, and research on the effectiveness of mentoring strategies. The role of mentoring is fundamental to professional growth and success. Importantly, one size does not fit all. A repertoire of mentoring strategies and formats is necessary to include the talent, skills, and contributions of the next generation of diverse researchers in public health and biomedical sciences. It is incumbent on us now to grow a comprehensive knowledge base so we may best promote health and well-being for all citizens through innovative and effective strategies to support mentoring and research that eliminates health disparities.

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