Mentoring has traditionally been an important apprentice model determining the advancement and success of graduate students. Unlike the more specific role of dissertation advisor discussed in the previous chapter, embedded in the concept “mentor” are a number of interpersonal relations. Two decades ago, Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee summarized the mentor’s diffuse roles:

- A teacher, by enhancing an individual’s skills and intellectual development;
- A sponsor, by using influence to facilitate an individual’s entry and advancement;
- A host and guide, by welcoming the individual into a new occupational and social world and acquainting the individual with its values, customs, resources, and role players;
- An exemplar, by providing role modeling behavior. (Levinson et al. 1978 cited in Luna and Cullen 1996, 4)

More recently, mentoring has come to be seen as a panacea: empowering faculty, retaining students, improving curriculum and the quality of higher education, and offering particular benefits to minority students and women (Johnson 1989; Rendon and Justiz 1989; Pounds 1989; Rendon 1992; Luna and Cullen 1996; Faison 1996). A few scholars have approached the topic critically, warning of potential drawbacks to the mentoring relationship: it may be overly protective, stifling, egocentric, exploitative of the protégé (Levinson et al. 1996;
Fury (1979); may limit the protégé to a single relationship (Fury 1979); and may benefit the mentor more than the protégé (Rawles 1980; McGiniss and Long 1980 cited in Mirriam 1983, 170). Despite the notice of possible drawbacks, most writers proceed from the perspective of the institutions of higher education to emphasize ways that mentoring helps students (Luna and Cullen 1996). However, mentoring as an institutional practice has rarely been examined structurally or analyzed critically.

Blindness to structural significance and the student's perspective extends to the peculiar homage paid in the literature to the etymology of the word mentor. The word mentor has come to mean a trusted guide and advisor to the young. Attention has been given to the psychosocial aspects and ways that mentoring involves the "whole person" (cf. Erickson 1963; Levinson et al. 1978). Almost every writer on the issue comments on the origin of the word in Homer's Odyssey (Luna and Cullen 1996; Johnson 1989; Knox and McGovern 1988). In that epic, the goddess Athena disguised herself as "Mentor," a nobleman from Ithaca, to act as guide and advisor to Odysseus's young son while Odysseus was away; however:

To him, on departing with his ships, Odysseus had given all his house in charge, that it should obey the old man and that he should keep all things safe. (Homer, Odyssey, Book 2, line 225)

No authors grasped the dual nature in Homer's description of mentor: to be counselor; to take charge of the household whose duty it was to obey "the old man." In fact, fifteen definitions of "mentoring" culled from the literature of higher education, business, and developmental psychology by Jacobi (1991) do not mention the functions for the institution. However, as we shall demonstrate, mentoring is all about the maintenance and reproduction of existing hierarchy and the status quo; the primary beneficiary is the institution. Mentors are first and foremost agents of socialization; it is this reproductive aspect of mentoring, essential to the activity, that is ignored by most writers on academic mentoring.

Proceeding from Janet Egan's (1989, 200) assessment of graduate school as a socialization process, we examined the structural consequences of mentoring in graduate school. Instead of beginning with institutional concerns like matriculation, supervision, and account-ability, we adopted the perspective of those being "socialized"—the women of color graduate students that we interviewed. The present analysis focuses on the structural aspects of mentoring as an essential element of the legitimation and reproduction of academia.

The research reported on here is based on open-ended interviews with twenty-six women of color graduate students in sociology. The details of the sampling procedure and methods are discussed in Romero and Margolis (1998) (see also Romero and Storrs 1994; Margolis and Romero 1999; and Margolis and Romero 2000). In-depth, open-ended, tape-recorded telephone interviews ranged widely to explore the formal and informal social structures of graduate programs. Interviews included discussions of financial and mentoring support; relationships between faculty and graduate students; research, publishing, and teaching opportunities and experiences; and factors that influenced decisions to select programs and shape career plans. We asked open-ended questions about mentoring experiences, including questions about the subject and about their perceptions of the experiences of other students in their program—a process that left the women free to define mentoring as they saw it.1

If there is a master narrative in graduate school it is the reproduction of academia itself with its ivory tower, valorization of theoretical knowledge, disciplinary structures, emphasis on discourse and method, and hierarchies of knowledge and rank. Mentoring describes the process whereby people of power embedded in the system personally select and groom their successors—successors who will in their turn safeguard the noble house.2 From this perspective, the mentoring function is perhaps the most singly important element of the hidden curriculum in higher education. Highlighting the difficulties in mentoring relationships and the experiences of women of color sheds light on the interpersonal dynamics and institutional structures that work against the students who are different from the faculty in the department in some key characteristics. As Mirriam (1983, 167) noted in her review of the mentoring literature, "successful but unmentored men and women are largely ignored in these studies as are other possible explanations for success." This chapter is an investigation of the role of conflict and dissent in the socialization of graduate students, specifically the importance of opposition and resistance in intellectual development. It concludes with an examination of alternative norms and values cultivated through conflict and dissent.
INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS AND INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Despite attempts to institutionalize mentoring programs (Luna and Cullen 1996), mentoring remains outside the institutional rules and it is rarely part of faculty accountability. No faculty can be forced to mentor a particular student, or to mentor them well. Mentoring is not enforceable and cannot easily be monitored, and neither student nor faculty can be held accountable for mentoring or not mentoring. The truth of this is captured in one student’s observation: “It’s just that there are students that professors would rather work with, rather help, rather make commitments toward and so forth.” The presumption of choice and assortative mixing between mentors and students makes it look like a fair and equitable process; but there will never be a mentor for every student. Because part of the game of mirrors that is mentoring is for the mentor to shine by reflection, many tend to avoid the difficult students and select students who are already reflections of themselves (Roth 1955; Plutzer 1991). Two points that capture the essential basis for mentoring come from an interview with a very perceptive African American woman completing her dissertation at a private eastern university:

I think they discriminate on the basis of class, one, and the second thing is interest. My perspective is so different from theirs that they know that we don’t share enough in common to have a good solid working relationship with one another. It’s just my bias is not the same as their bias. I think the institution and the people who represent the institution respond to you and make opportunities for you if they think that you’re going to use them and make them look good.

From the perspective of the institution the mentor controls the gates to social reproduction. The explicitly personal nature of the relationship between mentor and student means that here the academic system works outside the formal curriculum and without regard to objective measurements like grades and test scores, or the laws and rules governing affirmative action and civil rights. Charles Lawrence and Mari Matsuda (1997, 100–1) remind us of the pitfalls of the subjectivity and personalism that are the hallmarks of the mentoring relation:

[S]ubjective evaluation invites prejudice. At one law firm, the evaluation sheet for associates asked: “is this our kind of person?” When insiders look for someone who “seems like the type of person who does well here,” they tend to look for someone like themselves, missing the valuable talents of people who are different.

Moreover, decisions not to mentor are an essential way that the system produces losers. Thus, as in the law firm discussed by Lawrence and Matsuda, this is where the hidden curricula of academic institutions incorporate subjective judgments in a powerful way. The real conflict in finding a common ground for potential mentor and protégé lies in value differences and commitment to the institutional structure—academia, the discipline, the graduate program.

Five of the women that we interviewed described mentoring relations that they had with department faculty and each fit a traditional academic model. The students were single, young, and enrolled full-time, and embraced the career goal of a tenured academic position in a university sociology department. The majority of the women that we interviewed did not fit this model and were not mentored by faculty. Some were international students. Others were older, had established careers in other settings, and approached graduate education with a different set of expectations. These older women of color were frequently from blue-collar, working-class backgrounds: they had different sets of life experiences; they had held full-time jobs for long periods of time; been married (and often divorced); had children and raised families; and a few had served in the armed forces. Interviewing nontraditional students gives us a useful window on student-faculty relations in higher education.

The unmentored students in our study were keenly aware that they violated many of the expectations held by faculty; they attributed this violation to their failure to attract mentors. A Latina from a working-class background blamed her lack of a mentor on her own failure to understand the system:

No one in my family has ever been to college. I didn’t understand what graduate school was about. In a lot of ways I didn’t understand that one has to kind of affiliate oneself to a professor and establish a relationship [because] that professor is in turn responsible for getting financial support for the student or for advising the student to do this, that or the other thing.
Unprepared to seek a mentor, this Latina student did not position herself to be drawn into a mentoring relationship. Unfamiliarity with the importance of mentoring and how the relationship operates in higher education may result in students missing opportunities.

However, not having a mentor may also be a product of not needing one. When we asked if she had a mentor, one African American woman explained:

No. Probably because I didn’t know that I needed one. I’ve been a 4.0 student throughout school. And I just didn’t think I needed one. I’m sure that if I wanted one I could get one. We have a mentor program at the university. . . . You must remember, now, I’m a very mature student. I worked thirty-four years before I ever went to school; and so what they would offer me might not be what I could use.

Some of the non–traditional students are already in academic careers that are perceived as having low status by graduate faculty in the research-oriented institutions, namely those in positions at universities or community colleges. A Native American student who never had a mentor found the hierarchy stifling but persevered in order to acquire knowledge to help her in her job:

I think the fact that I’m a little bit older, I’m not a young graduate student. Had I been younger, I would’ve dropped out. I would’ve definitely left if I had been in my twenties. But luckily I was in my thirties when I got into the program. I was already teaching at a college. I had tenure at another college.

It was typical that these women came to school with a well-developed research agenda:

My dissertation topic is something that I’ve been thinking about from day one. And a lot of the work that I’ve done for various classes, whenever I’ve been able to, related it to my dissertation topic or some form of it. I have been collecting materials and talking to people and thinking about it for a long time.

I started thinking, I should be able to do what I want to do. I’m a grown-up. I’m forty some years old. If I want to write a dissertation about [X], then by God, I should be able to do that. And so that’s what I decided I was going to do.

These women recognized that mentors do not serve everyone and that the faculty decision to mentor or not was grounded in faculty and student characteristics, including: age, race, class, gender, ability, and sexual preference as well as political and personality issues. An African American woman completing her dissertation at an east coast university made the link between mentoring and reproducing the status quo:

Mentoring relationships in this department? Yes. It actually does occur. There’s this one professor who basically is one of the old guard who doesn’t ever want to change his racist attitudes or his attitudes about smoking in the classroom. He basically operates on this old system of you know one professor, one student. He has a lot of students that work with him but yeah I mean it’s really kind of the old fashioned way. You basically develop a working relationship with this person and you’re his protégé in a way. So all his students actually have this kind of relationship with him and he’s producing somebody who’s gonna be like himself.

This student’s assessment of the mentoring relationship brought to light the inequities of mentoring relationships that were not offered to everyone, or operated to reproduce the old discipline and its networks.

CONFLICT, OPPOSITION, AND THE FUNCTION OF MENTORING

Much of the literature on mentoring either ignores conflict and dissent or implicitly assumes a teaching-centered model of learning. In borrowing concepts from business models, discussions of mentoring fail to examine what must be core issues in academia: student agency, the development of intellect, and the connection to the great chain of cultural symbols that is scholarship. Mentoring reproduces specific models of academic endeavor, but conflict and opposition are essential to the development of new forms of thought and paradigms. In the process of intellectual struggle, mentoring has at best a suspect role. Scholarship is
not all about getting through graduate school or getting an academic job. Moreover, as Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux (1994, 26) noted in a different context: “Mental development can take place under both favorable and unfavorable conditions... people develop cognitively often during attempts to resist—to overcome disadvantageous circumstances.” This was clearly evident in one woman’s statement:

The thing that I got out of Yale was my struggle against the institution, my struggle against how sociology was taught there and I think I learned a lot about being critical by struggling against what I thought was inequitable in the department.

The situation faced by women of color graduate students makes an important example because it involved not simply integrating into academia, but changing academic theories, practices, and institutions in profound ways that the institutions and institutional power structures prohibited and sought to prevent. The academic careers of these women were part of intersecting and not always congruent projects stemming from the social movements of civil rights, feminism, and the gay movement, and from insurgent theoretical perspectives like Marxism, postmodernism, multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory. The women that we interviewed entered the academic world at a particular historic moment in the late 1980s and early ’90s. Their presence, a product of court orders and affirmative action programs as well as the encouragement of the preceding generations of academics of color, was part of an opening wedge that began cleaving academia in the 1960s and is not done yet. And the increasing presence of such non-traditional students in graduate school portended additional change in sociology.

In the discussions that follow, we turn to an analysis of resistance and opposition to the hierarchical regimes of graduate school that include the status of rank and discipline; patriarchy; and racial, ethnic, and national subordination.

Resistance
In our study, resistance seems to fall into the category of feelings that “I don’t want to grow up to be like you.” An African American woman in an Ivy League university gave this reaction to one of the members of her committee:

I always felt very suspicious of his support because some of it came unprompted and had a weird ring to it. And as it turns out, I sat in on his class and he and I had a big falling out, basically because we fundamentally disagreed on a lot of things and he finally was able to say, “look, I’m neoconservative.” And that didn’t come out until I took his course, so I felt like he was sort of doing a good deed, you know, by encouraging me. And the problem with that is I didn’t really feel like he honestly respected my work. I felt like he was, you know, “this is my civic duty to support this minority graduate student.” And I find that pretty insulting.

An A.B.D. Asian American graduate student in an Ivy League university was from time to time invited to luncheons where faculty mentors and their chosen students interacted. She recalled these relationships with scorn:

The four other male students, it was like, you know, when we had these lunches, it was their opportunity to shine for the professor and they were extremely competitive. You know, they were extremely arrogant. I also got a sense of how they treated their students, you know, so it was all very, sort of, authoritarian and, you know, this is an opportunity to impress the boss.

The personalized power relationship of mentor-protégé may be particularly unacceptable to non-traditional students—including those who are working-class, people of color, women, and older students. For some students such closeness represents illegitimate authority, an unwelcome and condescending parental figure, a sexual threat, or a hurdle to be overcome or circumvented. An older African American woman graduate student observed:

I like to keep distance in those relationships. I don’t want to add too much personality into it. Because sometimes people can get into arguments on a personal level that they wouldn’t get involved with on an academic or professional level. And I’ve seen that. I’ve already seen a couple of my female cohorts get into this kind of father-daughter thing, and it might be more difficult... But I really don’t want to get involved in that dynamic. I have a father and I have enough with the one that I have.
Three of the students we interviewed—an Asian American, an African American, and a Native American—rejected the traditional taken-for-granted power relations of graduate school. As one asserted:

I didn’t want to go get myself locked into place where they say come in, take sixteen courses, we tell you what sixteen. And do a thesis. We tell you what thesis, and also you’re gonna work on your professor’s project while you’re at it. I really resented that.

In some cases resistance was grounded in a profound dislike of faculty: a distrust of their politics and a wariness of personal relations within or across gender, racial, class, and nationality lines. In other cases, the traditional academic rituals of subordination were denied legitimacy.

Opposition
As part of the development of feminist and nonwhite paradigms for sociology, women of color graduate students and faculty opposed elements of the graduate curriculum and the discipline itself. A black woman spoke for many of our respondents when she criticized the abstract theoretical thrust of her program:

I mean they place a much higher value and premium on things that are purely theoretical types of studies. And things like that than they do things that I consider more practical and policy oriented. I think that the historical background of Black women—that we are interested in things that we feel like can make a difference in the real world.

A Native American woman’s critique not only pointed out the essentialist Eurocentrism of the discipline but the peculiar form of logocentrism embedded in the tyranny of print media:

It was like saying that all the thinking in the world comes from Europe. People in other parts of the world don’t have any ideas. And a lot of it has to do with the fact that you’re always in competition with the written word. And what’s written down is God. You know it’s reified in paper so therefore how can you question this?

The vast majority of the women that we interviewed defined themselves and their intellectual careers in opposition to the department and the types of knowledge that were being privileged and reproduced. They lived their graduate school project in opposition to the dominant forms of knowledge and to the existing hierarchy. Each idea put forth by their professors could not be accepted at face value, but had to be tested against an identity different from “white sociology.” They had to bring race into the center of sociological discourse even though it was never central to the canon.

Being in opposition does not simply mean confronting abstract ideas; frequently and most uncomfortably it means confronting one’s professors:

I have never treated these faculty members like they were gods or anything like that. Some students are just terrified of actually confronting them about what we don’t like about their work, or what we don’t understand, or what we think needs to be developed more fully, or what have you.

For these women, one problem with having a mentor is becoming beholden to that person. At national meetings, associations set up an employment service—colloquially known as the meat market. Frequently one sees protégés all dressed up and trailing behind their mentor with respectful and hopeful looks on their faces. Among some of the women, making it without mentors or assistance became a point of pride: “You know that on some level I don’t feel beholden to them for anything because other than admitting me to the program they haven’t given me anything. So of course I was very outspoken about my experience.” Joyce Ladner set forth the challenge to future generations of sociologists of color with her 1973 volume The Death of White Sociology. She began with the following epigram from Lerone Bennett, The Challenge of Blackness (1972, 35-36), which said, in part:

It is necessary for us to develop a new frame of reference which transcends the limits of white concepts. It is necessary for us to develop and maintain a total intellectual offensive against the false universality of white concepts, whether they are expressed by William Styron or Daniel Patrick Moynihan.
Whether the goal of killing white sociology is understood in Kuhnian terms of scientific revolutions, or as the oedipus/electra complex that requires killing the father/mother figure, earning their doctorates without help, or in spite of the faculty, was an important form of opposition. In the account below, this woman explains the racial climate in academia that led her to write articles and send them out to journals before showing them to her professors:

If I failed I wanted it to be my failure. And I was willing to accept that. And if I succeeded at it, I wanted it to be my success because part of what happens, being a minority student, you spend so much time in another world—you sort of start questioning your own intelligence. And you start to wonder what ideas are yours, and what are somebody else's. And so I did not give it to anybody to look at. I sent it in and you know I sent in my first two articles totally. Once they came back with the acceptance and I did the corrections and got them in, that's when my professors saw them for the first time.

These forms of overt political opposition are unavoidable and are clearly a boon to self-esteem but have personal and professional costs for the student. In one Native American student's experience:

If you don't jump in as a woman of color and start playing their game and turning out white sociology then it just takes you forever. And then you get a really bad reputation as well as a troublemaker and so on.

Failure to show deference and a willingness to engage in political arguments also contributes to the inability of these students to find mentors among faculty who may find this behavior threatening. The following statements by two students finishing their dissertations, one Asian American at a southern university and one Latina at an eastern university, demonstrate this:

I am very vocal and I am very political. So I had problems first with my political beliefs. I'm considered what you can call probably a progressive person. And I face problems with professors because of my political beliefs. And of course that's related to what I am. A Filipino woman. In one particular class, for example, I had to even to rewrite a paper because the professor thought that it was too Marxist oriented or too, you know, "left" for him.

Any type of research is a political option you do and depends on your perspective. . . . What I'm trying to say is that they will be interested [in your work] as long as it expresses their own views, too. But as long as it contradicts what they stand for, they don't support it, nor do they see it as valid and so that's a political issue.

These patterns of opposition illustrate the extent to which non-traditional students are far less accepting of the power differentials of academia, including the mentor-protégé relationship. Some women from communities of color or working-class backgrounds may have cultural beliefs and practices antithetical to those promulgated in academia.

The rejection of mentoring and faculty guidance is a complicated issue because these independent women were simultaneously aware that they were missing important elements of their graduate education. An African American woman attending a major Midwest university explained that no one informed her of funding opportunities, taught her how to write a proposal, or made any suggestions about how to get her work published. She put it ruefully:

No, I've never really had a mentor. And I've really missed that. You know there are some students who get the opportunity to work on a publication or research project with another faculty member. That hasn't happened to me. I'm not sure why that is. Part of it may just be that I'm not the kind of person that asks a lot of other people. Maybe they [mentored students] were more aggressive or more assertive or something. I guess I feel a little slighted. There are some students that have that mentor-student relationship and I've never managed to have that at all. I've always felt like I was kind of out there on my own. Everybody's been perfectly nice and helpful and complimentary, but as far as someone who just really took me under their wing, showed me the ropes so to speak, or that kind of thing [it didn't occur]. I feel like it's been a real individual project for me.

Resistance and opposition is likely a situation to which one is condemned—cast into by gender, culture, age, and race. Certain students live their graduate career in resistance or opposition because it is the only
choice in a system that was not made for them. Bonilla, Pickron, and Tatum (1994), in their profoundly oppositional essay on peer mentoring among graduate students of color, direct us toward some alternatives to academic mentoring as usually practiced. These three graduate students in education worked together to shepherd each other through the dissertation process, and in reflecting on this experience describe many of the things that faculty mentors cannot provide. Like the students we interviewed, they describe feelings of fear, frustration, anger, and vulnerability and the need to question academia itself. They recognized that “[t]he major difference lies in the power and status relationship of the faculty-student relationship versus the equality inherent in the peer mentoring relationship” (Bonilla, Pickron, and Tatum 1994, 112).

Similar alternative support networks were reported by numerous women we interviewed. One of our interview subjects, an older Latina from Southern California, reflected on a support group she turned to after being told by her chair that: “people like you don’t finish the program. It’s a waste for the university and for you and your time. You should go back to your family and just forget about this.” She commented:

I couldn't believe it. I was in shock. I realized that, “wait a minute, you know, all these people, the whole faculty are my enemies. They are not here for me or in the same way that they are here for the younger students.” But what I did instead of going and crying on my own—we used to have a women’s group, support group of women. It was mostly Anglo women, a lot of lesbian women. Probably there was something that they could understand because they couldn’t come out in that department, in that environment. They knew that they [faculty] would punish them in the same way that they were punishing me for being Latina.

While it muddies the conceptual waters to call formal and informal organizations of graduate students “mentors” or “peer mentors,” graduate student political organizations and affinity groups are essential both in aiding graduate students and in reshaping academia to be more inclusive and less hierarchical. In organizing, students can move from individual resistance to the kind of organized opposition that produces change. At one university, the concept has been institutionalized by graduate students, as one of our respondents recalled:

We created a position in the department for a graduate student who is a mentor to minority graduate students and he has been in the department for the last two years. And that was thanks to the pressure we put on them [faculty]. The graduate mentor has to be a person of color because that person is going to be sensitive and is going to know how to relate to his own or her own experience, what these minority students might face. We don’t want them [new students] to go through the same things that we had to face.

A Native American woman attributed her persistence in the program to a peer relationship with another Indian graduate student:

I almost quit. One time because I just got so fed up with just the whole system. . . . There were some other people at the university that were friends of mine that I went to see. Another Indian graduate student who had a really very similar experience in another department who had graduated had always told me, “You’re gonna do it in spite of the university.” So it’s like being in a little—you know metaphorically—it’s like being in a war. . . . That’s sort of the mentality that I took on. That I’m going to do this and I’m not going to let them sort of break me or I’m not going to give up.

Peer relationships among students with similar backgrounds and political commitments confirm and enhance the women of color graduate students’ identity as scholars, teachers, and researchers. These relationships create a culture of cooperation rather than competition and may serve as the kernel of change in the discipline and academia.

DISCUSSION

From the vantage of the student there are a number of problems that cannot be addressed by more effective mentoring programs. The uncritical advocacy of mentoring programs does not recognize that:

- Mentoring has specific reproduction functions that may not benefit or be appropriate for some students;
- Mentoring empowers the institution and the faculty at the expense of the student and does not recognize student agency or resistance;
- Mentoring is not a cure for structural racism;
Mentoring offers no meaningful way to change the system; Business models based on hierarchy may not be appropriate for academia where the life of the mind depends on criticism, opposition, and resistance as much as on “learning the ropes”; Mentoring functions as an individual path to upward mobility. It is a different model from a civil rights or group conflict approach of group relations; Mentoring assumes that students and faculty share common goals. Some faculty and students reject the hierarchical position or parental affirming and enhancing role.

Embedded in the construction of mentoring are two central issues: (1) the function of mentoring is a device to reproduce existing systems and institutions; and (2) the failure to recognize that women and minority scholars profoundly changes the culture of academia, for they cannot simply be socialized into academics like their white male predecessors. The movement of women, people of color, and gays has been an oppositional movement, not one of inclusion. This project is in opposition to mentoring to reproduce the institution. In Talking Back, bell hooks (1989, 58–59) analyzed her graduate school experience in English, similar in every way to the accounts reported by the sociology students in our study:

During graduate school, white students would tell me that it was important not to question, challenge, or resist. Their tolerance level seemed much higher than my own or that of other black students. Critically reflecting on the differences between us, it was apparent that many of the white students were from privileged class backgrounds. Tolerating the humiliations and degradations we were subjected to in graduate school did not radically call into question their integrity, their sense of self-worth…. To them, tolerating forms of exploitation and domination in graduate school did not evoke images of a lifetime spent tolerating abuse. They would endure certain forms of domination and abuse, accepting it as an initiation process that would conclude when they became the person in power. In some ways they regarded graduate school as a game and they submitted to playing the role of subordinate. I and many other students, especially non-white students from non-privileged backgrounds, were unable to accept and play this “game.” Often we were ambivalent about the rewards offered. Many of us were not seeking to be in a position of power over others. Though we wished to teach, we did not want to exert coercive authoritarian rule over others. . . .

Although hooks writes as if she is taking a heroic stance “transgressing” and “talking back,” for most of the women we interviewed the situation was far more painful and uncertain. It is not comfortable to oppose the power structure, to suffer much of graduate school alone, to see peers benefit from relations with faculty denied or unavailable to you. One seldom feels heroic or empowered. Much resistance is by necessity what Maddox (1997, 276) termed “expressions of alienated resentment,” as exemplified in the following commentary by a Latina attending a west coast university:

Oh you saw white students working with all different kinds of people in that department. It seemed like every professor would have a pet or a couple of pets that they would take under their wing. One of my office mates was always working and involved in research. And I got to the point where I didn’t even like her. Because I could see that going on with her and it wasn’t happening with us.

As we asked in our earlier work (Margolis and Romero 1998), How can the hidden curriculum “reproduce” what does not yet exist—that is, women of color sociologists? Mentoring, which functions as a key element in professional socialization, clearly could not be the answer to insurgents seeking to change sociology. In the long run, however, as the role and status of these women change the discipline—as they take their place in the hierarchy—they will be in a position to aid those who come after.

Academia has produced “good old girls” networks, associations of scholars of color, and journals that are parallel to but structurally function in much the same way as the “good old boys” networks, and similarly there are critical and progressive networks that strive to mentor students and reproduce their own structures. It is curious to consider what it means for critical theorists to arrive at tenured positions and be in position to mentor their own critical students who do not thus produce themselves as oppositional theorists but are reproduced in an uncritical way. New networks are routinized; new paradigms become “normal science.” Tools for accomplishing this become
part of hidden curricula. The larger issue of course is that the dialectic of change both in science and in the arts and humanities predicts that new groups with new ideas will seek to break in and change the disciplines in the future in ways those disciplines try to prevent. Mentoring will always function to limit and slow change.

NOTES

1. Less than half of our sample (43 percent) claimed to have been mentored. For minority students, this seems to be an improvement over earlier statistics. In 1989 Blackwell reported that only 20 percent of African American students had mentors. Our findings of 43 percent were less than Knox and McGovern’s 1988 study of Virginia Commonwealth University in which 66 percent of women students had a mentor. Those who had been mentored described faculty behaviors ranging from offering advice about the program and information about the profession to the offer of research or teaching assistantships to warm personal friendships. However, detailed long-term guidance through graduate studies and collaborative research were comparatively rare, noted by only half of those who reported mentoring relationships.

2. As Luna and Cullen (1996, 62) emphasized: “Mentoring should be reserved for developing human potential in terms of improving organizational goals.”

3. This is congruent with Acker’s concept discussed in the previous chapter that “registration status” is an important axis of differentiation.

4. While no doubt in many departments there were faculty of color and women who shared and encouraged the students’ perspective, they do not dominate sociology or the power structure of departments.