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Mentoring Graduate Students: A Study on Academic Rejection, the Pressure to Publish, and Career Paths

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ABSTRACT

Within the academic context, mentoring is a positive and ongoing relationship between a professor and student that fosters academic growth and accomplishment. Thus, mentors are crucial for graduate students in both masters and doctoral programs. Currently, there is a lack of research regarding mentorship, especially when it involves common obstacles that a student may experience such as academic rejection, the pressure to publish scholarly work, and career conversations post-graduate school. Academic rejection refers to the act of receiving a rejection for a scholarly task such as a rejection notice for a manuscript, award, grant, or even employment. Accordingly, the current study aims to qualitatively explore academic rejection, the pressure to publish, and career conversations post-graduate school using a convenience sample of 75 current faculty members who are appointed to a criminology and criminal justice department at a university or college. Themes related to academic rejection, the pressure to publish, and career conversations are discussed, as well as the implications of these themes are further discussed.

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Introduction

The Oxford Dictionary defines a mentor as “an experienced person who advises and helps somebody with less experience over a period of time” (Lea & Bradbery, 2020). Within an academic context, mentoring is an ongoing helpful professional relationship between professor and student that both facilitates and fosters academic growth and accomplishment and involves a significant investment in time and effort (Crawford, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2011; Mullen, 2007; Peterson, 1999; Webb, Wangmo, Ewen, Teaster, & Hatch, 2009). Mentorship is especially crucial for select populations of students, including first generation students, students from low-income households, and underrepresented backgrounds (Engle, 2007; Ramos, 2019). Without proper mentorship, students might question their sense of belonging (Choy, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Thayer, 2000) and are at increased risk of not completing their degrees or attending graduate school (Engle, 2007; Ramos, 2019).

No matter the academic discipline, the mentoring relationship between a professor and graduate student is crucial for the student's academic success and prospective careers (Brill, Balcanoff, Land, Gogarty, & Turner, 2014; Crawford, 2011; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Lechuga, 2011; McElrath, 1990; Moak & Walker, 2014). Mentoring is especially valuable at the graduate level because it encompasses professionalization, socialization, and education. Moreover, the graduate experience is substantially different from what it is at the undergraduate level. In graduate education, students must learn collegiality and professionalism, in addition to disciplinary-specific skills (Peterson, 1999). Successful mentorship is characterized as collaboration between mentor and mentee that adheres to active partnership in scholarly and professional pursuits (Kunselman, Hensley, & Tewksbury, 2003).

Previous research has shown that strong mentorship is associated with success beyond graduation (Moak & Walker, 2014). Academically, faculty serve to teach graduate students relevant and discipline-specific behavior and are positioned to give critical feedback on the student's work and academic performance (Crawford, 2011). Faculty members also guide students through their degree progress by serving as committee member or faculty advisor and are positioned to give students advice on how to make informed decisions about career-related concerns like salary, the job market, job satisfaction, and publishing their work (Allen, Donoghue, Pahlevansharif, Jimerson, & Hattie, 2020; Pinheiro, Melkers, & Youtie, 2014; Thien & Beach, 2010). Faculty can also help students access resources such as financial aid and grant money and can give students personal references and intel about job prospects (McElrath, 1990). Faculty are also positioned to communicate professional behavior that is standard to the discipline and can help students develop professionally through networking and scholarly collaboration (Crawford, 2011; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; McElrath, 1990; Moak & Walker, 2014; Webb et al., 2009).

Within the discipline, there are studies on the topic of mentoring graduate students of criminology and criminal justice (Ballard, Klein, & Dean, 2007; Belknap, 1996; Berg & Bing, 1990; Breci & Martin, 2000; Crawford, 2011; Kim, Stallings, Merlo, & Wan-Chun Lin, 2015; Kunselman et al., 2003; McElrath, 1990; Moak & Walker, 2014; Mutchnick & Mutchnick, 1991; Penn, 2003; Peterson, 1999; Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997). Outside of the discipline, more research has been established focusing on marginalized groups of students including first-generation students and students of color (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017; Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007). However, there is a lack of research that considers the type of mentoring received by students and professors, which professional practices are being taught, and how important milestones or problems are being handled. Thus, there is a need for qualitative research on how CCJ faculty members advise graduate students within the discipline to aid current faculty members on how to develop and prioritize mentorship practices (Crawford, 2011; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Kunselman et al., 2003). Most salient to the current study on mentorship in graduate school concerns how faculty in CCJ departments mentor students about challenging professional obstacles to include academic rejections and the pressure to publish scholarly work. These problems and obstacles are universal to the academic experience for all graduate students in the field.

Background

The number of graduate programs in criminology and criminal justice (CCJ) have increased in recent years, which highlights the overall importance of mentorship within the discipline to prepare students for the professoriate (Kunselman et al., 2003; McElrath, 1990; Moak & Walker, 2014). According to the Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology and Criminal Justice (ADPCCJ) (2021), in a survey of 37 degree granting institutions across the U.S., almost 4,000 people were pursuing graduate degrees in CCJ at during the 2021–2022 academic year. The data suggest that graduate student rates have been relatively stable within the discipline in recent years. Almost 2,000 students had applied for a master's degree at any of the participating schools during the 2019–2020 school year. However, the number of doctoral program applicants has decreased slightly. There were approximately 1,000 prospective doctoral applications received by participating schools during the 2019–2020 school year (ADPCCJ, 2021).

Empirical studies that have focused exclusively on CCJ mentorship have been established in the literature (Ballard et al., 2007; Belknap, 1996; Berg & Bing, 1990; Breci & Martin, 2000; Crawford, 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Kunselman et al., 2003; McElrath, 1990; Moak & Walker, 2014; Mutchnick & Mutchnick, 1991; Penn, 2003; Peterson, 1999; Waldeck et al., 1997). Peterson (1999) conducted a qualitative study to examine mentorship in CCJ from a graduate student perspective and found that students are almost exclusively responsible for initiating mentoring relationships with faculty. In doing so, students must develop survival skills in graduate school, which includes displaying an appropriate level of assertiveness and following it up with hard work and common courtesy. This type of approach not only helps graduate students gain potential mentors, but it also prepares them to build relationships with colleagues in the future. In addition, faculty members must remain aware of the messages they send to mentees, as they are setting an example, either consciously or unconsciously, of how to behave in academic settings (Peterson, 1999).

Crawford (2011) was the first to examine the experiences of faculty in 31 CCJ doctoral programs across the United States to gather information about how they select, mentor, and supervise graduate students. The study also included exploration of various ethical dilemmas that are common in mentoring relationships. Most respondents (46%) reported they would serve as a committee member if asked but would only chair a project if they knew the student well or have had them in class before. A quarter (24%) of participants indicated that they would sit on a committee or chair a student project for anyone who asked, which suggests that faculty members are selective about which students they choose to work with. Research suggests that mentoring is a dynamic process in which both mentor and supervisor must participate in and that graduate departments must have open discussions about the difficulties that exist and develop standards for teaching professional and ethical behavior among graduate students (Crawford, 2011).

Kim et al. (2015) added to the empirical literature on mentoring by developing a profile of mentoring in CCJ doctoral programs. In doing so, the researchers surveyed 21 doctoral coordinators in CCJ doctoral programs across the United States to learn more about informal and formal mentoring programs and to measure perceptions of mentorship and academic success. The researchers found that even though mentoring programs were not offered at all the institutions, mentoring programs were said to

have significant influence on students' academic success regardless of the type of mentoring they receive (Kim et al., 2015).

Academic rejection

Academic rejection is the result of any activity within academia in which one of the results of said activity is a rejection notice. Rejection in academia is extremely common, especially concerning graduate school applications, academic employment, grant and funding applications, and awards (Allen et al., 2020; Day, 2011; Jaremka et al., 2020). However, academic rejection is typically viewed as an individual challenge rather than an institutional one, and institutions do not usually concern themselves with the known mental impacts of rejection (Allen et al., 2020). Because academia allows an influx of opportunities to succeed and fail at various levels, the culture itself can become toxic and counterproductive to the goals of higher education (Day, 2011; Morrish, 2019; Weare, 2019). Therefore, it is critical that students cultivate meaningful relationships at the graduate level of education (Moak & Walker, 2014). Doing so may help them to circumvent issues surrounding academic rejection (Jaremka et al., 2020).

Existing research from psychology illuminates some of these consequences surrounding rejection in academic settings. For instance, receiving a rejection elicits both basic emotions like anger and fear, but also self-conscious emotions such as guilt, shame, and embarrassment. Consistent activation of these emotions due to rejection can breed feelings of alienation, isolation, and even imposter syndrome (Edwards and Ashkanasy, 2018; Ekman, 1992; Jaremka et al., 2020; Lewis, 2008). However, not everyone experiences rejection in the same manner. For some people, rejection may not illicit many negative emotions or consequences, but for others, they may be more susceptible to these emotions after a rejection (Day, 2011). *Rejection sensitivity* refers to a learned reaction that occurs as a response to past events or circumstances (Butler, Doherty, & Potter, 2007; Day, 2011). Thus, some academics and graduate students may be sensitive to rejection because of prior and difficult experiences that they have had with rejection. Furthermore, people who are categorized as "rejection sensitive" may overreact to rejection or they may anxiously expect a rejection in all instances (Butler et al., 2007; Day, 2011; Downey & Feldman, 1996). As such, it is apparent that greater sensitivity to rejection can influence one's perceptions, emotions, motivations, and academic performance (Day, 2011; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006). Ultimately, if rejections are consistent, the chances of rejection sensitivity may increase substantially, leading to both faculty members and graduate students to feel isolated and less confident of their work. Termed anecdotally as *imposter syndrome*, rejection may breed feelings of doubt in one's ability to be an academic, and one's confidence in their scholarly work. Without motivation and confidence in one's work, it can be incredibly difficult to bounce back after a rejection and resubmit elsewhere, due to the fear of receiving yet another rejection (Day, 2011; Jaremka et al., 2020).

The pressure to publish

It has been said that academics operate in a "culture of rejection" that is based largely on their publication record, ultimately fueling feelings of over-competitiveness with

others (Carson et al., 2013). Certainly, in academia, there exists a common mentality that to be successful in the field, students and faculty must regularly publish scholarly work, or they will perish. Thus, in order to maintain involvement, academics must maintain a steady pipeline of publications to facilitate a sense of belonging and social identity (Carson et al., 2013). There is not a reputable rejection rate for CCJ journals and the rate of journal submissions varies, however, it is estimated that between 50 to 90 percent of journal submissions are rejected (Allen et al., 2020; Woolley & Barron, 2009).

Unfortunately, publication or the lack thereof, can take an emotional toll on a person (Day, 2011). When manuscripts are rejected, the author(s) can suffer personally and professionally, since publications serve as a measure of success in academia (Carson et al. 2013; Day, 2011). Assistant professors are perhaps the most vulnerable group to experience negative outcomes from manuscript rejections because publications are the main determinant of receiving promotion, tenure, and salaried raises at many institutions (Carson et al., 2013; Day, 2011). Also of concern, many universities set requirements and limitations to the publications where they can only count for tenure if the work was accepted in one of the top journals in the field (Carson et al., 2013). Top journals tend to have even higher rejection rates, making the chances of rejection after submission that much more likely (Day, 2011). The most current estimate for most research-oriented positions is 2–4 accepted solo or lead journal publications before going on the job market. However, this number is generally an average recommendation when considering how many candidates that are interested in top research-oriented institutions, which makes the process even more competitive (Alarid, 2016).

The academic job market

Graduate students who choose to embark on a career in academia can expect both agony and ecstasy on the academic job market (Adams, 1995). Overall, it is estimated that between 65 to 85 PhDs are awarded each year for people seeking careers in CCJ, most of which will begin looking for academic positions to immediately follow graduation (Frost & Clear, 2007). Other candidates are also on the job market, including professionals, and people who are already positioned in academia looking to move to new institutions. The academic job market is unpredictable, and the state of the discipline fluctuates over time (Pikciunas, Cooper, Hanrahan, & Gavin, 2016). Fortunately, several studies have considered the CCJ job market in various ways, which can help guide and increase transparency for potential candidates and hiring departments (Applegate, Cable, & Sitren, 2009; Burns & Kinkade, 2008; Del Carmen & Polk, 2001; Gould et al., 2011) Morreale & McCabe, 2014; Pikciunas et al., 2016; Radatz & Slakoff, 2022; Sitren & Applegate, 2012).

Del Carmen and Polk (2001), who were the first to examine hiring trends in CCJ, analyzed applicant characteristics to determine what qualities hiring departments seek in candidates. Their findings suggest that most (58%) institutions were searching for assistant professors and that ideally, candidates had already been awarded their doctorate degrees (82%).

In the mid- to late-90s, almost half (46%) of departments were seeking to fill positions for criminal justice generalists. Other departments needed law enforcement (13%) or legal scholars (4%) (Del Carmen & Polk, 2001). From 2004 through 2009, departments were seeking assistant professors who held doctorate degrees in CCJ or a related discipline, and very few advertisements had given preference for specializations (Gould et al., 2011). However, during the 2012–2013 academic year, departments were seeking temporary lines rather than tenure track positions, as well as people who had experience teaching online (Pikciunas et al., 2016).

Overall, it has been found that most hiring departments are seeking candidates with experience in research, publishing, and teaching (Burns & Kinkade, 2008; Sitren & Applegate, 2012). Hiring departments also prefer that candidates actively participate in scholarly activities and academic conferences (Applegate et al., 2009). In addition to these qualities, however, institutions are also seeking candidates with practical experience and are emphasizing the importance of critical thought. Therefore, graduate programs should prepare students both mentally and intellectually (Morreale & McCabe, 2014). It would also be in the best interest of prospective candidates that they remain well-informed and educated about the direction of the academy. Likewise, faculty mentors should be prepared to help guide students through the job search process and give insight about which positions might be the best fit for them. Both parties can access various pre-market preparation guides to the academic job market provided by Alarid (2016) and Radatz and Slakoff (2022) to navigate the process.

Mentorship and academic rejection

Jaremka et al. (2020) state “those of us in positions of authority have opportunities to foster structural and cultural change within our professional societies, at our universities, or within our departments” (p. 519). Thus, as the authors here state, while faculty members may not be able to make discipline-wide changes, they can however, make changes at the individual level, by mentoring and fostering change in future academics like those completing doctoral studies. As such, faculty are in an ideal position to share their experiences on mentoring graduate students, yet there is very little research that examines their perceptions on rejection (Jaremka et al., 2020), or experiences with the informal or formal mentorship of doctoral students in CCJ (Kim et al., 2015).

The limited literature that does exist recommends that faculty work to improve one-on-one mentorship practices, institute writing into the existing program curriculum, and institute interdisciplinary workshops for graduate students (O’Hara, Lower-Hoppe, & Mulvihill, 2019). Faculty are also encouraged to include mentoring in their own research agenda, publish regularly with students, and help to institute mentorship programs within their department or university (Maher, 2014). Indeed, new faculty who had mentors were more successful in publishing, suggesting the necessity to pay it forward to future academics (McElrath, 1990). Additionally, faculty members should be taught resilience strategies to handling negative outcomes, that they can then pass on to others (DeCastro et al., 2013).

Despite the wide-reaching consequences and implications of rejection, there is a noticeable lack of discussion about academic rejection in mentoring literature, particularly on how mentors ought to advise graduate students in handling these experiences (Allen et al., 2020; Crawford, 2011; Day, 2011; Jaremka et al., 2020). One such study does exist within the academic medical discipline which suggests that experiences of rejection vary by person and by instance. Thus, in order to retain individuals, there is a need for resilience training and more research discussing how rejection is handled and overcome (DeCastro et al., 2013). Further, there is a need for updated research on mentoring in CCJ graduate programs, particularly doctoral-granting institutions, to help guide faculty in the development, evaluation, and analysis of future mentoring research (Crawford, 2011; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). More empirical research is needed to determine how faculty mentors manage various types of rejection (e.g. rejections for graduate school admission, grant applications, awards, scholarships, research projects, manuscripts, and the job market) for the benefit of both academe and the mental health of its student members and to normalize the experience (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018; Jaremka et al., 2020).

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to provide advice, motivation, and feelings of support for graduate students and early career researchers in CCJ by offering insight from CCJ faculty who have advised graduate students on the topic of academic rejection, particularly regarding the pressure to publish scholarly work and the academic job market. We believe that this exploratory study, will shed light on mentoring practices within the CCJ discipline specifically as well as provide findings that will benefit the literature on handling rejection in academia at large. In addition, we hope that this study adds to the mentoring literature, by serving as a guide for graduate students, and for faculty members wishing to improve their mentoring practices or looking to include more discussions of challenging conversations within the discipline. Several exploratory research questions guided the current study:

1. What experiences do faculty members have mentoring CCJ graduate students?
2. What advice do faculty members give graduate students when they experience rejection in the areas of publishing, career exploration, grants, and awards?

Methodology

A convenience sample of 75 CCJ faculty members from 37 graduate-degree granting institutions were recruited via the American Society of Criminology's (ASC) sub-divisions listservs from April through May 2022. Faculty were administered an anonymous 41-item online survey to collect demographic data and to measure perceptions of academic rejection, including the pressure to publish scholarly research, and job market conversations.¹ Of the 41-items included in the survey, a total of 24 were presented in

¹To participate in the study, respondents must have been current professors or instructors appointed at a CCJ department at a university or college. While respondents were required to be appointed to a CCJ department, they

Table 1. Profile of respondents (n = 75).

Variable	Frequency	Percent	
Academic Position			
Graduate Assistant	2	2.7	
Instructor	1	1.3	
Assistant Professor	26	34.7	
Associate Professor	17	22.7	
Full Professor	19	25.3	
Professor Emeritus	1	1.3	
Unknown	9	12.0	
Type of University			
Teaching-Oriented	14	18.7	
Research-Oriented	24	32.0	
Mix of Teaching and Research	28	37.3	
Unknown	9	12.0	
Graduate Programs			
Master's Program	15	20.0	
PhD Program	5	6.7	
Master's and PhD Programs	38	50.7	
No Graduate Program	9	12.0	
Unknown	8	10.7	
	Range	Mean	SD
Years in Academia	1–49	9.12	10.56
Number of Mentees	0–16	3.56	3.54

this study, most of which were open-ended. For more information on the exact survey questions used in this study, please refer to [Appendix A](#).

Univariate statistics and cross-tabulations were used to analyze faculty position, number of publications submitted annually, number of publications submitted that were rejected, and the number of graduate students mentored. Conversely, advice on handling rejections, publishing scholarly research, and descriptions of mentoring programs lent themselves well to qualitative analyses. The current study was mainly descriptive and exploratory in nature and a convenience sample was used rather than a probability sample. Therefore, these findings were not expected to be generalizable.

A total of 87 CCJ professors responded to the survey ([Table 1](#)). However, 12 participants were dropped from the final sample due to a high number of missing responses (5), and not consenting to the study (7), resulting in a final sample of 75 respondents. This resulted in a response rate of 2.85%².

Most of the respondents in the sample were serving as assistant professors (34.7%), full professors (25.3%), or associate professors (22.7%) at the time of survey administration. Respondents were employed at a variety of universities including research-oriented (32.0%), teaching-oriented (18.7%) and a mixture of both teaching and research (37.3%). In addition, half of the participants (50.1%) in the sample were employed at a university that offered both master's and doctorate programs and 20% of the sample

could be housed under a larger discipline such as public policy, public affairs, or sociology. Respondents were only eligible to participate in the current study if they had experience in mentoring graduate students.

²It is quite possible that the survey did not reach every intended member of our sample, or it may have reached the same person several times if they are a member of multiple division listservs. In addition, it is possible that the timing of the survey may have influenced participation, as the survey was open for about a month during April and May, commonly two of the busiest months of the semester for faculty members

were employed at a university that only offered a master's program. Conversely, 12% of the sample were employed at a university that did not offer graduate programming. There was a wide range of expertise in the sample; on average, respondents have been in academia for about 9 years. Senior-level academics reported that they have served in their positions upwards of 49 years. In terms of the number of graduate students currently being mentored, the estimates ranged from 0–16 students, with an average of 3.55 students currently being mentored.

Findings

Academic rejection

In academia, rejection notices can be received for many different types of scholarly tasks, such as publishing articles, to applying for grants, awards, and even employment. We found that faculty members submitted anywhere between 1 and 30 publications in a given year, with an average of around 4 ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 4.31$) publications annually. By rank, assistant professors published an average 5 articles annually ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.22$), associate professors published an average of 5 ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 0.76$) publications annually, and full professors published an average of 4 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.64$) publications annually.

Faculty members also reported that they received between 0 and 7 rejections of their publications per year, with an average of 2 ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.44$) rejections. In terms of publishing requirements, more assistant professors stated that their position at their university had a requirement to publish (23), whereas only 16 associate professors, and 18 full professors stated that they were required to publish scholarly work.

Qualitatively, the findings from this study indicate that much of the advice that was given by faculty could be applied across many of the scholarly tasks that one might be rejected for. In addition, it did not appear that the received responses differ for different groups of our sample such as by academic position or by type of institution that the respondent was employed at. Overall, several themes emerged from the research, each of which are outlined in detail below.

Rejection is normal

One of the most common themes found across the data was that rejection in academia is normal. As stated previously, receiving a rejection notice is so universal for academics that in many cases, it feels like a modal outcome. One such respondent stated, *"The field is largely based around rejection, to be honest."* Several respondents explained the normalcy of rejection through use of a variety of metaphors that equated it to being part of the process, or the "name of the game." This tactic may be especially helpful when mentoring graduate students on rejection to make the process more transparent, and to temper expectations. Like a game, if you lose (receive a rejection) this match, it does not mean that you will lose the next match:

"Rejections are part of the process and in many ways, it is a crapshoot."

"At least you have something to reject; it is proof that you are in the game."

"Rejection is part of the game."

"I remind them [graduate students] that this is a long game, a marathon, and it requires patience and practice."

Resilience is necessary

In a related manner, across all tasks, a theme of resilience emerged regarding rejection, as well as the notion to overcome the feelings brought on by imposter syndrome. Responses that illustrated resilience either emphasized the future or chalked up rejection as being a tough lesson learned. Respondents stressed that there is no shortage of journal publications, awards, grants, or jobs to pursue in the future and that *"if at first you don't succeed, try again."* Respondents also noted that resilience only comes after learning tough lessons and that graduate students should get used to rejection since it is such a universal occurrence in academia. One faculty member stated, *"get used to it [rejection] because if you cannot handle constant rejection then this is not the field for you."*

Reframing rejection

A third theme that was common across all types of scholarly tasks was in reference to the emotional turmoil that follows rejection. According to respondents, students can better manage rejection by reframing the experience in a positive way. In essence, the rejection should be perceived as a lesson learned, a small win, and *not* a reflection of the individual's worth. One faculty member stated that *"the first rejection may sting the worst, but eventually you will learn to take the positive."* Relatedly, another said *"if you turn this into a learning process rather than a commentary on your ability as an academic not only will it help you to succeed, but it will also help you stay sane in the job."* In addition, several respondents stressed that a rejection is not the reflection of an individual or their scholarly work, but rather, it is a rejection of the current piece of work and only that piece of work.

"Rejection doesn't reflect them as a scholar."

"This is a rejection of your work in its current form, not a rejection of you, your work, or you as a scholar."

"Do not view rejection as a personal indictment."

"Regardless of what the feedback said, this does not mean that you are a bad scholar."

Coping with rejection

Lastly, across all tasks, faculty members highlighted the importance of coping mechanisms in overcoming a rejection. One of the most consistent suggestions was to distance oneself from the rejection before acting upon it. For example, respondents suggested *"taking time to be upset, because it is upsetting to have worked so hard and then have that work rejected,"* and *"do whatever you need to do for a few days to get over it."* When asked how faculty members handle rejection, many suggested self-care, venting, taking the day off, watching TV, and even drinking. For example, *"I took my time at home to pursue other hobbies so that I could relax."* And *"I believe that I got drinks with friends and then binged some TV."* The moral of the story here,

however, is to do whatever you can to cope, so that you can pick back up and start again.

Publishing scholarly work

Within the criminal justice discipline, it is evident that the pressure to publish scholarly work has increased dramatically, as doctoral students and early career academics are expected to publish their work so they can be competitive on the job market. Some of the respondents spoke to the historical changes in the pressure to publish in academia. One stated *"20 years ago, it was possible to get a R1 faculty job having no publications (or a handful), now it is not surprising to see job candidates going on the market with 5 or more publications under their belt."* Another stated *"it has grown to the point to where we expect graduate students to have records similar to tenure guidelines."*

Competition

Overall, it is evident that the pressure to publish scholarly work has increased due to numerous reasons, including competition with others, and a shifting emphasis on research productivity to obtain steady employment. Faculty emulated this in their responses, stating that to even be considered for a position as a doctoral candidate, one must have a publication record, or else, they might just be passed over:

"It seems like if you don't publish at least one article as a graduate student, you won't get any interviews at an R2 designated school or higher."

"The graduate students with publication records are more attractive to research universities. Those institutions offer better salaries, course release time, and research support. If a student seeks that goal, they need to publish in graduate school."

"There are more publications required to be competitive, and more of them as solo or first authored manuscripts too."

Shift in publication expectations

One additional theme presented by the faculty members was the notion that CCJ is experiencing a shift in research productivity where *"the field is currently emphasizing the quantity of publications rather than the quality of the publications."* This expectation can exert a tremendous amount of pressure on faculty and graduate students. Respondents stated, *"the pressure to publish more and more has increased to the point where professionalization has become more important than actually learning scholarly content."*

Journal articles

Faculty also offered advice about how to move forward from article rejections. One respondent suggested that people *"identify three journals that you plan on submitting to and when. When and not if—you receive a rejection, read your reviews, make necessary changes, and send it to the next journal on that list."* Importantly too, respondents gave advice for scholars to acknowledge the nature of the publication process to understand why rejections may occur in the first place. One respondent stated that they understood more about the process after hearing an editor of a reputable journal

speak at a conference: *"He stated that articles are rejected often for simply not following the submission guidelines to the letter, and for research topics that did not fit with the journal's scope. If this was not the case, there may be obvious flaws in the article such as an unsound methodology, poor writing style, and a lack of consequential findings."*

Relatedly, one critical step in understanding the rejection and the publication process, is to determine if the rejection was due to significant empirical concerns, or if it was a desk rejection due to journal fit: *"Depending on the feedback you received (or didn't) decide if there are significant changes to be made before you submit to another journal, or if the rejection is simply due to journal fit... if the issue is fit, submit as soon as possible... if it isn't and changes need to be made, make the changes as needed."* In most instances, faculty members imparted good sentiments about reviewer feedback. For example, *"revisit the comments, and review your work to see if they are fair and constructive."* Another suggested *"Fix anything that is fixable and that you agree could be improved."* Here, the importance of an experienced mentor cannot be overstated because graduate students may have a more difficult time when determining what reviewer feedback is sound and fair, and what feedback should be ignored.

Post-graduate careers

Another important aspect of mentorship is to help graduate students assess their options for post-graduate careers. We asked our faculty to sample a series of questions regarding conversations with graduate students on career-related topics. The current study found that of the 44 faculty members who were employed at institutions with graduate programs, 38 (86.36%) regularly discussed career options with their mentees. This portion of respondents indicated that their conversations with students included a mixture of both academic and industry career options. Only three (6.98%) faculty members stated that they focused exclusively on academic career options, whereas two (4.76%) stated that they rarely focused on academic career options when having conversations about careers. In addition, one (2.38%) faculty member stated that they focus exclusively on alternative or industry career options, and two (4.76%) stated that they rarely mention alternative or industry career options to students.

One of the main pieces of advice given by faculty regarding student career mentorship is that the discussions should be individualized; the conversation about career options largely depends on the student, their goals, and skillset. In general, faculty also indicated that it is crucial for students to have a plan before the job search even begins, and to be honest about what they want their life to be like post-graduation:

"I ask them what they want their life to look like, both big picture and in terms of their everyday life."

"They need to consider what type of life they want post-graduation. Find a job that fits that – not the life that fits the job."

Advice on academic and industry careers

Much of the advice from faculty was focused on mentoring graduate students on how to search for academic careers as instructors and tenure track assistant professors. Respondents largely indicated that the academic job market is incredibly selective and

highly competitive, with only a few tenure-track positions available in each cycle. Therefore, students should be honest with themselves about their life and interests. In addition, students must assess their enjoyment of teaching and research and search for positions at research- or teaching-oriented universities that align with their interests. Several respondents also focused on industry careers, mentioning that industry jobs are just as promising and rewarding as jobs in academia. For example, respondents advised that students *"don't be pressured by faculty to go into academia, you are not a failure or a disappointment if you choose alternative career options."* In addition, they stated that *"academic jobs are not the only good jobs out there."*

Competition and realizing job fit

When graduate students are nearing completion of their degree, they will begin to explore career options. The job market can be very competitive for people pursuing careers in criminal justice or academia. As was expected, most survey respondents referenced careers in academia, rather than alt-academic positions or careers in criminal justice. One respondent reported that *"the academic job market is insanely competitive, even before the COVID-19 pandemic."* Students may be competing for a limited number of jobs with their peers, so they must do their best to outperform others for the jobs in which they are pursuing to avoid rejection.

To handle rejection of employment opportunities, applicants must also understand how search committees work, and calculate how they "fit" within the university and department. According to one respondent: *"The most important consideration that departments give to job candidates is fit. There are only so many elements of one's application and CV that you can control relative to the department needs, interests, and expectations."* Others agreed, stating that *"Fit in the department is critical. We want someone who wants to be in our department and will contribute to the department, students, and the university."*

It is important to note that some committees may be less interested in a candidate's fit in the department, because it could be considered risky to reject them for it. Additionally, while it was not directly mentioned by our respondents, the more recent attention to diversity and inclusion when hiring may also play a role in fit and committee expectations. Search committee members may not only be looking for a candidate who will fit the department and university, but they may also be searching for people who come from diverse backgrounds.

Respondents also mentioned that, in line with reframing, that it is less about the person and more about their fit with the other members of department. As stated, *"it doesn't mean that there is something wrong with you, you just might not have been the best fit for the program."* Thus, when handling rejection from a job, it may be easier to reframe the situation, in that, applicants may have been qualified for the position(s), but they did not fit well with the needs of the department and have not found the perfect fit for their research.

Job rejections

Several respondents indicated that faculty mentors must also demystify the job market process for graduate students. One person stated that they *"would first explain the*

vulgarity of job interviews and then debrief the student about their experience. From that, I would help them develop a new plan." Another respondent suggested that mentors discuss the specifics of the job search process with the prospective applicant as well as what the search committee is looking for in a candidate. The most important piece of advice from faculty regarding job rejections was to try to figure out why the rejection occurred. Several faculty members recommended that the applicant *"ask the rejector for some feedback"* and *"call the employer to know more."*

Grants and awards

In terms of grants, only 29 (38.67%) faculty members stated that they were required to apply for grant funding for their research, whereas 37 (49.33%), stated that they were not required to apply for funding. The remainder (9) faculty members did not know if they were required to do so. These findings suggest that grants and grant funding might not be at the forefront of faculty members' minds when mentoring, as it is not required for every faculty position.

Qualitatively, one of the most common sentiments that faculty shared regarding awards and grants was to expect a rejection if one was to apply for either. In both instances, only a few grants and awards are given out, and there is only a finite amount of money to be distributed for research. After receiving a rejection in either of these arenas, faculty suggested that feedback and reviews are critical for overcoming barriers and that scholars should *"Take any feedback and make sure to incorporate it into your next application"* and that *"The grantor should provide some explanation of why it was rejected."* Lastly, a few respondents recommended that people explore professional development opportunities to handle award and grant funding rejections.

Discussion

The findings from the current study demonstrate that rejection in academia is normal and extremely common across all activities including, but not limited to, publishing scholarly work, job searches, and grant and award applications. In fact, it appears that rejection is so common that it should be the expected outcome. Many respondents lamented that while rejection is disappointing, it is simply part of the process. This finding aligns with prior studies that have also found that rejection is common in academic settings (Allen et al., 2020; Day, 2011; Jaremka et al., 2020). Graduate students may not have much experience with rejection and can have difficulties dealing with it when it happens; therefore, it is critical that mentors prioritize normalizing rejection and discuss how often it occurs with graduate students. This conversation is especially important for first generation and marginalized students, as additional effort in diversity and inclusion of students and faculty of diverse backgrounds is encouraged. Further, it is essential that mentors guide students early in their academic careers to foster resilience and develop positive coping mechanisms, should a rejection occur. Mentors can also make meaningful attempts to understand their mentees' backgrounds and pass prerequisite knowledge to students who may not have been socialized in an academic setting. Practical methods of doing so include the use of informal

questionnaires to survey graduate students about their experience and establishing formal seminars or courses that aim to dispel the academic culture.

Our findings suggest that the pressure to publish scholarly work has increased substantially. Faculty members mention that one of the main reasons graduate students feel increased pressure to publish is due to competition with others. The academic job market has become increasingly competitive in which doctoral students are expected to publish often and in high tiered journals to remain competitive for a tenure-track position. This is not a new finding, as Alarid (2016) suggested that to be competitive on the academic job market, a doctoral candidate needs between 2–4 accepted solo or first author publications before going on the job market.

Doctoral programs in CCJ are experiencing rapid growth which has led to an influx of assistant professors having to balance research with teaching and mentoring doctoral students. In addition, most doctoral programs focus on research and publications, as opposed to training students to teach or conduct service in academic settings. More resources are needed to help faculty in the discipline gain further insights into mentoring (Moak & Walker, 2014). Ballard et al. (2007) concur with this observation and note that most doctoral students will not end up at research institutions when they finish their formal education and will instead be hired at teaching institutions and/or be employed in professional practice. Thus, faculty in CCJ departments can add value to students' educational experiences by socializing them in teaching, community service, professional development, scholarship, career structuring, and collegial interactions so that they are competitive on the job market and can transfer these skills to various types of careers (Ballard et al., 2007). In terms of diversity and inclusion, it is important that mentors are also knowledgeable about the diverse backgrounds and obstacles graduate students may particularly if they are first-generation, marginalized, or experiencing disability or financial hardships.

Moak and Walker (2014) also emphasize that doctoral students' mentors be especially diligent in their role since many students who begin doctoral programs will not complete the degree (Bair & Haworth, 2004; Gardner, 2009). In doing so, faculty mentors must be honest about time commitments and that they listen to, challenge, and respect the student. Mentors should also engage doctoral students in all aspects of their graduate experience, introduce them to others in the field, and help them to develop the skills that they need to be successful in academia and in their chosen careers (Moak & Walker, 2014). Indeed, mentoring relationships between graduate students and professors is a critical factor in determining successful completion of the program (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

It is evident that publishing demands have drastically increased in recent years, which puts tremendous amounts of pressure and rigorous workload expectations on graduate students and early-career researchers which could lead to burnout and other serious concerns. Faculty in the current study stated that graduate student curriculum vitas (CVs) now closely resemble the CV of a professor going up for tenure twenty years ago. Therefore, as the pressure increases, graduate students may experience rejections at higher rates than were previously experienced. Faculty mentors must be receptive to the increased pressure that graduate students face by being supportive and careful not to invertedly place additional pressure on them.

Conclusion

The current study can be used as motivation for future research on mentoring in CCJ and in academia at large. Currently, there is a gap in the literature regarding effective ways to mentor graduate students, especially when it involves the natural, non-academic obstacles that a student may experience over the course of a graduate program, which includes rejection. The current research aims to add to existing literature on CCJ culture and builds on the discipline's knowledge of graduate education. Future efforts should continue to build the foundation by exploring the manners and methods in which faculty employ to mentor students, and assessing which strategies are effective. From a programmatic perspective, mentoring should take several factors into consideration, including the needs of first-generation students, graduate student mental health, socialization in academe, and the unpredictability of the academic job market. Given the current state of the discipline, it is in everyone's best interest to hold the marketability and well-being of the next generation of graduate students to a higher priority, so that CCJ continues to evolve.

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Ethics

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Appendix A: Survey questions

Instructions for survey

This research aims to gather advice for graduate students from current faculty members in criminology/criminal justice (CCJ) programs across the U.S. on a range of topics including academic rejection, the pressure to publish scholarly work, and career pursuits. This survey is completely anonymous and will not include any identifying information. Demographic information will be aggregated with other responses; if your individual responses are shared in the newsletter, they will be attributed with a pseudonym.

It is estimated that it will take you less than a half hour to complete this survey. By completing the survey, you are consenting to participation, however you can leave the survey at any time.

Thank you for your time!

A: Demographic information

1. What is your current academic position?
 - a. Instructor
 - b. Assistant Professor
 - c. Associate Professor
 - d. Full Professor
 - e. Non-academic industry or practitioner
 - f. Other: Please specify _____

How long have you held your position? (Open ended)

- a. Not applicable

Does your current position require you to regularly publish scholarly research?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

Does your current position require you to regularly seek out research funding?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not applicable

How would you describe the university in which you are currently employed?

- a. Teaching-oriented
- b. Research-oriented
- c. A mix of teaching and research
- d. Neither
- e. Unsure
- f. Not applicable

Does your department have a graduate program?

- a. Yes, PhD and Master's program
- b. Yes, just a Master's program
- c. Yes, just a PhD program
- d. No, we don't have a graduate program in our department
- e. Not applicable

If you have a graduate program, how many students are currently enrolled (open ended)?

- a. Not applicable

If you have a graduate program, how many students are you currently advising or mentoring (open ended)?

- a. Not applicable

Does your department or university have a mentoring program?

- a. Yes

- b. No
- c. Not sure
- d. Not applicable

If you reported that your department or university has a mentoring program, please describe it below (open-ended)?

- a. Not applicable

If you reported that your department has a mentoring program, please indicate how students are identified and recruited to work alongside faculty (open-ended)?

- a. Not applicable

B: Academic rejection

For the purposes of this survey, academic rejection refers to rejection notices or letters that you received after submission of a publication, grant, scholarship, conference, or job.

12. How many manuscripts (books, book chapters, journal articles) do you submit per year? *Please estimate* (open ended)
13. How many of your submitted manuscripts (books, book chapters, journal articles) are rejected per year *please estimate* (open ended)
14. How many applications for funding (scholarship, fellowship, grants) do you submit per year? *please estimate* (open ended)
15. In your academic career, how many academic positions have you pursued (open ended)?
16. In your academic career, how many times have you been rejected from an academic position in which you were applying (open ended)?
17. Of the academic positions that you have applied to over your career, how many positions actually sent you a notice that they were not moving forward with your application (open ended)?
18. Reflecting on the last rejection that you took to heart, what did you do afterwards to heal from the experience (open ended)?
19. Has your procedure for handling rejection changed over the years? If yes, how so (open ended)?
20. Imagine that you have a graduate student that you are mentoring who just received their first rejection from a reputable journal. What advice would you give them (open ended)?
21. Imagine that you have a graduate student that you are mentoring who just received their first rejection for an academic job. What advice would you give them (open ended)?
22. Imagine that you have a graduate student that you are mentoring who lost an award or scholarship that they were hoping to win. What advice would you give them (open ended)?
23. Imagine that you have a graduate student that you are mentoring who just received their first rejection for a grant that they applied to. What advice would you give them (open ended)?
24. Is there any advice that you would like to share on the topic of rejection to future graduate students in criminal justice (open ended)?

C. Pressure to publish

For the next set of questions, think about your department's graduate program. If your department does not have a graduate program, please select "Not applicable."

25. Does your department's graduate program offer courses on publishing and writing manuscripts?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable

26. If your department's graduate program offers courses on publishing and writing manuscripts, is the class required?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable
27. Is there pressure for graduate students in your program to publish scholarly research? Are graduate students required to publish (open ended)?
 - a. Not applicable
28. When you are advising graduate students, what advice do you give them about publishing their work (open ended)?
 - a. Not applicable
29. Do you regularly give graduate students opportunities to conduct and publish scholarly research with you (open ended)?
 - a. Not applicable
30. For what reasons might a graduate student feel pressure to publish [*select all that may apply*]?
 - a. Experience
 - b. Livelihood in academia (good for jobs, etc.)
 - c. Publishing purely for the sake of sharing knowledge
 - d. Furthering your shared research agenda
 - e. Other (please indicate): _____
 - f. Not applicable
31. How has the pressure to publish as a graduate student in criminology and criminal justice changed in recent years (open ended)?
 - a. Not applicable
32. If you were mentoring a doctoral student who was unsuccessful at publishing, what advice would you give them (open ended)?
 - a. Not applicable

D. Career Pathways

For the next set of questions, think about your department's graduate program. If your department does not have a graduate program, please select "Not applicable".

33. Do you have regular conversations with your graduate students regarding potential career pathways after graduation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable
34. How often do you have conversations with your graduate students regarding potential career pathways after graduation?
 - a. I never have conversations on potential career pathways with my students
 - b. Only when a student asks to have this conversation
 - c. Only when a student is close to graduation (i.e. 6 months to a year out of graduation)
 - d. I rarely have this conversation
 - e. I have this conversation multiple times throughout the time that I advise my students
 - f. I regularly have conversations involving potential career pathways regardless of the stage that the graduate student is in for their degree.
 - g. Not applicable
35. When you have conversations about potential career pathways with graduate students, how often do you include academic career options (instructor, tenure track professor, etc.)?
 - c. I do not have these conversations
 - b. I rarely include these career options in my conversations

- c. I regularly include a mix of academic and alternative industry career options in my conversations
 - d. I focus exclusively on academic career options when having these types of conversations
 - e. Not applicable
36. When you have conversations about potential career pathways, how often do you include alternative career options? Examples include industry jobs, research institute jobs, law enforcement, and more.
- a. I do not have these conversations
 - b. I rarely include these career options when I have career conversations
 - c. I regularly include a mix of alternative and academic career options when having this conversation
 - d. I focus exclusively on alternative career options when having these conversations.
 - e. Not applicable.
37. Does your graduate program regularly (yearly or semesterly) provide professional development workshops and seminars for your graduate students on the topic of careers after graduation? (Examples include lunch and learn and extra workshops not offered for course credit).
- a. Yes
 - b. We have previously offered these workshops, but haven't lately
 - c. No, we haven't offered a workshop like this but plan to
 - d. No
 - f. Not applicable
38. What advice would you give graduate students currently weighing their options on careers after graduate school (open ended)?
- a. Not applicable