Help A Sista Out: Black Women Doctoral Students' Use of Peer Mentorship as an Act of Resistance

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Many Black women doctoral students entering and persisting through graduate study lack the affirmation, community, and resources necessary to confidently assert themselves as members of the academy. These barriers make it especially difficult for Black women to effectively navigate doctoral programs that privilege and normalize elite white male experiences. Using Black feminism as the conceptual lens, this manuscript presents a burgeoning peer mentorship framework of Black women doctoral students attending a predominantly white institution through a collective Black feminist autoethnography. This model highlights our strategy for not only surviving the academy, but also resisting manifestations of white heteropatriarchal violence within academia. In contrast to more common and formal faculty-student mentorship models, we engage an emergent, horizontal peer mentorship framework, comprised of three tenets: radical coping, communal sista scholarship, and the cultivation of an authentic holistic self.

Introduction: Problem Statement, Positionality, & Resistance

Mentorship[1] is a crucial component of the doctoral student experience in part because it furnishes academic navigational tools and prepares researchers for professional life after degree completion. However, due to historical inequities in education, doctoral students with marginalized identities struggle to establish meaningful mentorships within academia. More specifically, many Black women doctoral students[2] entering and persisting through graduate study lack the affirmation, community, and resources necessary to confidently assert themselves as members of academic and research communities (Apugo, 2017; Brown II, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Shavers & Moore III, 2014; Walkington, 2017).

Black women graduate students often view mentors who share their racial and cultural identities as vital for optimal success in their program of study (Zachary, 2012). Black women doctoral students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) often seek mentors who share comparable identity-related experiences. Therefore, these students tend to seek out Black women faculty mentors who also attended PWIs (Griffin, 2013), but Black women doctoral students are unlikely to locate them due to the underemployment of Black women professors at PWIs (Harley, 2008). Moreover, some Black women doctoral students with racial and social justice-centered political orientations have even fewer sources for potential support because one's race, gender, or class does not guarantee ideological alignment.

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[1] We use the terms mentorship and mentoring interchangeably in this paper.
[2] Because of the paucity of research centering Black women graduate and doctoral students and the overlap of experiences between Black women pursuing various graduate degrees, "Black women doctoral students" and "Black women graduate students" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

This predicament is where, we, three Black women doctoral students possessing justice-centered epistemologies, find ourselves within the academy. Our positionality is reflected through our shared political orientations, as well as our identities as Southern-raised, Black women PhD students committed to centering Black student experiences and interrogating structural oppression in our scholarly work. We came together in the fall of 2016 as first-year doctoral students attending a large, midwestern research intensive PWI, the type of setting that is founded on the exclusion of Black and Brown people (Anderson, 1988), and especially antagonistic towards Black women (Green & Lewis, 2013). Because of the hostile campus climate Black women doctoral students attending PWIs must frequently endure, we assert that our presence in this overwhelmingly racist, sexist, and classist space is radical in and of itself. Moreover, we actively resist dominant cultural norms perpetuated through the doctoral socialization process and society at large such as the myth of meritocracy (Yosso, 2002) and rugged individualism (Morrison, 1992). Our resistance is reflected through our resolve to actively work against these exclusive conventions to demonstrate that Black women can lead authentic lives and engage all parts of ourselves in our work. Striving to accomplish such a task remains difficult, which is why we have developed a system of mutual support in the form of peer mentorship to facilitate the process of surviving graduate school to ultimately resist the systemic marginalization faced by Black women in the academy (Collins, 2000/1990; Lorde, 2012/1984).

The purpose of this project is to examine our praxis of peer mentorship. Our guiding question is: How do we as Black women graduate students develop and use peer mentorship as an act of resistance to navigate and progress through doctoral study? For this project, we employ a collective Black feminist autoethnographic method. Since our praxis is situated as an act of resistance, it is essential that we explicate the forces we are resisting. Inspired by the Black feminist tradition (Bambara, 1970; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Cohen, 1997; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Davis, 1983; James, 1999; Lorde, 2012/1984; Smith, 2000/1983; Walker, 1983) in general, and Black lesbian feminist poet and activist Pat Parker's delineation (1999/1978) in particular, we draw on these ideas to inform and shape our sense of resistance.

> If I could take all my parts with me when I go somewhere, and not have to say to one of them, 'No, you stay home tonight, you won't be welcome,' because I'm going to an all-white party where I can be gay, but not Black. Or I'm going to a Black poetry reading, and half the poets are anti-homosexual or thousands of situations where something of what I am cannot come with me. The day all the different parts of me can come along, we would have what I would call a revolution (Parker, 1999/1978, p. 11).

Parker (1999/1978) shared how she was obligated to compartmentalize vital parts of herself as she navigated society. In recounting her experiences of having to abandon her gender, race, or sexuality in certain settings, Parker highlighted the oppressive and disingenuous expectations many people of Color broadly, and Black women especially, regularly confront. These seminal insights foreground our praxis of peer mentorship. We seek to resist this forced compartmentalization and work toward a reality where all parts of our beings are appreciated and welcomed in our personal and professional lives.

We strive to expose and rebuke white[3] expectations that demand Black women silence essential elements of our identities to placate the dominant culture. In openly challenging racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia among the many expressions of oppression, we seek to resist threats against our humanity and justice.

Defining Our Peer Mentorship

Responding to calls for more research on Black women peer groups and peer mentorship models (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017; Grant, 2012; Niles, 2007; Patton, 2009; Patton & Harper, 2003), we offer a working definition of our peer mentorship praxis as an act of resistance. We blend Cornu's (2005) definition of peer mentoring as a specialized kind of group mentorship in which each individual serves as both mentor and mentee, stressing shared interdependence among members, with Terrion and Leonard's (2007) definition, which argues that "peer mentoring is a helping relationship in which two individuals of similar age and/or experience come together...in the pursuit of fulfilling some combination of functions that are career-related (e.g. information sharing, career strategizing) and psychosocial (e.g. confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, friendship)" (p. 150). To supplement and tailor these definitions to our own praxis, we have identified how we integrate concepts of informality; horizontal leadership; sistership (James-Gallaway, Griffin, & Kirkwood, forthcoming); and holistic care (Bambara, 1981; hooks, 1993; Lorde, 2012/1984).

This peer mentorship framework[4] is informal in that our praxis is unofficial and goes without institutional documentation; it is also unassigned or pre-planned. Thus, this practice is in many ways organic and spontaneous. However, we have added elements that make the framework more systematic, such as checking in with one another regularly regarding progress toward stated goals. Our horizontal leadership structure provides a way to assume fluid, peer-to-peer roles as teachers and students in a non-competitive, non-authoritarian manner. We acknowledge that we are all first-generation graduate students and are therefore learning information for the first time. As we learn, we teach one another by sharing our resources and insights, never assuming power or superior learnedness over one another. We embrace sistership (James-Gallaway, Griffin, & Kirkwood, forthcoming) as a step up from friendship in which we enact fictive kin relationships (Cook & Williams, 2015) that beget close, sister-like bonds spanning our professional and personal lives. The practice of holistic care relates to many of our aforementioned points that enhance our model; above all else, we prioritize the whole well-being of one another. Often, this means prioritizing the psychological, spiritual, and physical care of one another before academic or individual achievement. We do so because we know that we are unable to produce high-quality work if we are unwell, as the psychological and physical elements of ourselves drive our labor outputs. Ultimately, our adaptive model of peer mentorship is emergent, and it will grow more complex as our sistership develops with time.

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[3] In this manuscript, we use "Black," "white," and "people of Color" as cultural and racial descriptors. According to legal and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) and teacher education professor Cheryl Matias (2016), "Black" and "people of Color" respectively should be capitalized because the terms are used in reference to specific cultural groups, therefore making them proper nouns. The term "white" is racially but not culturally specific. Moreover, "white" has been used historically to oppress people possessing non-white identities; therefore, we use "white" as it aligns with our politic. Finally, "people of Color" is used as an act of solidarity with other racially oppressed groups.

[4] This framework, entitled "the JAD framework," is based upon the authors' initials and pronounced like the jade stone. The framework is further explicated in the discussion section of the article.

Literature Review

To organize our review of literature, we divided extant scholarship into three sections: peer mentoring, Black women graduate students, and Black women's friendships. A synthesis of these bodies of literature follows.

Peer Mentoring in Higher Education

Peer mentoring research in higher education has stressed that there is no agreed-upon definition of either mentoring or peer mentoring (Colvin, 2015; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). However, a broad definition identifies peer mentoring as fundamentally concerned with establishing a helping relationship wherein two individuals of comparable age or experience join formally or informally to work toward career-related goals and/or share psychosocial support (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017; Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

In higher education, mentoring research tends to examine the undergraduate experience, a sensible skewing due to undergraduate students typically representing the largest student group on college campuses. Less scholarship investigates peer mentoring specifically. Studies have primarily drawn on empirical explorations to evaluate the nature, structure, benefits, drawbacks, and effectiveness of peer mentoring models within higher education contexts (Baker, Pifer, & Griffin, 2014; Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017; Deo & Griffin, 2011; Gunn, Lee & Steed, 2017; Kalpazidou, Schmidt & Faber, 2016; Moschetti, Plunkett, Efrat, & Yomtov, 2018; Reddick, Griffin, Cherwitz, Cerda-Prazak, & Bunch, 2012; Rieske & Benjamin, 2015). In addition to general analyses of peer mentoring models, some studies have sought to understand peer mentoring within specific racial or ethnic groups (Moschetti et al., 2018); in fields such as STEM and law (Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017; Deo & Griffin, 2011); as it pertains to specific gender groups (Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017; Kalpazidou, Schmidt & Faber, 2016); as relationships enacted between undergraduate and graduate students (Baker et al., 2014; Reddick et al., 2012); in designated learning communities or sub-groups (Gunn, Lee & Steed, 2017; Rieske & Benjamin, 2015); and as a function of pre-college bridge programs such as the Posse Program (Jones & Ware, 2008; Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010). One study looking at second year retention rates in undergraduate populations highlighted the importance of peer mentoring relationships in supporting such efforts, specifically with regard to Black students (Kniess, Cawthon, & Havice, 2015). Such disaggregation complicates understandings of mentoring models generally, and peer mentoring approaches in particular, by underlining the specific needs of students and contexts within which they engage peer mentoring in higher education. Further, many of these conceptions of peer mentoring are structurally rooted in practices and ideologies misaligned with Black women's epistemologies.

Research has also shown the positive impact of peer mentoring as a means to supply students with the opportunity to develop important career and social skills, garner social support, cultivate social capital, acquire access to information, and secure a sense of belonging (Colvin, 2014; Evans & Peel, 1999; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Treston, 1999; Moschetti et al., 2018). Students develop these competencies through their engagement with peer mentoring, which in tandem supplies psychosocial aid in the form of emotional support, help with goal setting, and problem-solving skills (Thompson, Jefferies, Topping, 2010). Peer mentoring has also been linked to improved student retention, especially for first-year students (Colvin, 2014; Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2008; Jacobi, 1991; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schütz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014; Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2017).

Few studies investigate peer mentorship in graduate student populations, with the literature on Black women graduate students' peer mentoring being notably scant. This observation is important because according to women and students of Color, race and gender are vital factors in mentoring relationships (Bova, 2000; Budge, 2006; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ragins & Scandura, 1997; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Our work addresses this gap in research by contributing an examination of our praxis of peer mentoring as Black women doctoral students.

Black Women Graduate Students

In 1921, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, Georgiana Simpson, and Eva Beatrice Dykes became the first Black women to earn doctoral degrees in the United States (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Almost 100 years later, Black women doctoral students still endure arduous conditions in pursuit of doctoral studies. They experience the pervasive double bind of racial and gender-motivated marginalization in the form of microaggressions (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2016), including gendered-racial stereotyping from professors, classmates, and students (Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010); funding inequities and later, undercompensation as Black women faculty members (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013; Walkington, 2017); projections of anti-intellectualism (Moore, 2017; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001), including questioning the rigor in their work (Grant, 2012; Moore, 2017); and feelings of isolation (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Shavers & Moore, 2014). Drs. Alexander, Simpson, and Dykes experienced similar manifestations of white supremacist ideology (e.g. isolation, undercompensation, microaggression, and marginalization) while pursuing their degrees in the early 20th Century (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Beyond the fact that Black women doctoral students have been undergoing similar types of marginalization for almost 100 years, the experiences of Black women graduate students are further complicated when considering the duality of possessing privilege and managing marginalization within the ivory tower (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1986; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Henderson, et al., 2010; Moore, 2017). The outsider-within status (Collins, 1986) occupied by Black women graduate students is further exacerbated through the doctoral socialization process.

Doctoral socialization is the process in which students learn how to navigate the academy (Grant & Simmons, 2008). This process communicates both explicit and implicit expectations within academia that are pertinent to one's success (Patton, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001), but often blind to the unique ways Black women graduate students experience the academy (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1991; Moore, 2017; Walkington, 2017; Wilder, Bertrand Jones & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013). Although research suggests Black women graduate students benefit from formal doctoral socialization experiences, specifically same race, same gender mentorship, there is a dearth of these opportunities available to Black women graduate students (Bertrand Jones, Osborne-Lampkin, Patterson, & Davis, 2015; Shavers & Moore, 2014). Furthermore, there are multiple barriers to Black women doctoral students establishing these relationships. Low percentages of Black women faculty in the professoriate limit the availability of Black women faculty to serve as mentors (Grant, 2012; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Walkington, 2017; Wilder, et al., 2013). Additionally, there are more Black women doctoral students seeking mentorship than there are other Black women in the academy to serve in these more traditional mentoring roles. This deficit of availability often leads to Black women faculty devoting large amounts of time to mentorship, a necessary task but a possible obstacle to promotion and tenure (Griffin et al. 2013; Patton, 2009). Therefore, we, like many other Black women and Black

women doctoral students before us, have resolved to utilize our personal interactions to generate organic mentorships (Stanley, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Tillman, 2012).

Black Women Friendships

Black woman researcher Marnel Goins (2011) reluctantly noted her exclusive use of college-educated Black women (most held graduate degrees) as a limitation of her study. Goins naming this limitation highlighted the exclusivity of her research participant pool and the erasure of many Black women's perspectives from her study. However, in analyzing her sample, she rationalized that "Black women have disproportionately fewer graduate degrees than their [w]hite male counterparts; as a result, these Black women participants may feel particularly oppressed and/or marginalized because of their involvement in academic settings" (Goins, 2011, p. 544). As a coping mechanism, Black women's friendships function as sites of empowerment and resistance from oppression in a variety of contexts. The available literature focused on Black women's friendships (Bryant-Davis, 2013; Collins, 2000/1990, 2004; Denton, 1990; Goins, 2011; Hall & Fine, 2005; Harris-Perry, 2011; McMillan, 2013; Niles, 2007; Smith, 2000/1983) provides useful examples of the significance of these relationships regarding Black women's coping and survival. Because there is scant research on the topic, this paper seeks to fill a research void on Black women's friendships.

The available literature is heavily concentrated in the fields of psychology and communication. However, we can also look to other sources such as music (e.g., *Count On Me, Best Friend, Girl*), television (e.g., *Living Single*, *Girlfriends, Insecure*), film (e.g., *Waiting to Exhale, Set It Off*) and books (e.g., *Just Between Girlfriends*, *Waiting to Exhale*) that depict the intricacies and influences of BWF. Communication professor Mary Jane Collier (1996) defines friendship as a voluntary, close relationship, and William Rawlins (1998) describes it as "dynamic, ongoing, social achievements, involving the constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors'' (p. 64). For the purpose of this paper, we engage both definitions because each highlight key components of our relationship. Specifically, "reciprocal influence," "voluntary," and "close" all describe our dynamic friendship.

BWF offer affirmation, a safe space/homeplace, support, and encouragement (Denton, 1990; Collins, 2000/1990 Goins, 2011; Niles, 2007) because Black women share similar life experiences that are often plagued with oppression and/or trauma. This homeplace is "where Black [women] can relax, tell stories, gain strength, empower themselves and maintain harmony in their lives" (Goins, 2011, p. 531). The process of dehumanization associated with oppression is reversed when Black women see each other in honest and loving ways; this is made possible through Collins' (2004) idea of collective freedom. For example, "in the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversations and humor, [Black] women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Collins, 2000/1990, p. 102). Engaging in this friendship dynamically reduces Black women's risk for emotional disorders (Hall, 2006) by providing a level of understanding that is nonexistent in other types of friendships. In the academy, Black women graduate students often find themselves pushed to the margins, fighting for access, resources, visibility, and respect.

In navigating predominantly white spaces, Black women graduate students are frequently one of few Black women in classrooms, leaving them isolated, emotionally exhausted, and yearning for connections to peers with similar experiences and worldviews. While these relationships can form in classes, organic friendships often originate in both physical and digital spaces that afford

Black women graduate students the opportunity to shed the masks we wear as a coping mechanism to protect ourselves from the gendered-racial violence inflicted upon us in historically white, disparaging spaces such as the academy. In our organically formed friendship, we centered ourselves and attempted to counter the oppression we confront daily. In seeking to do so, we rely primarily on Black feminist principles and extensions, which we discuss next.

Black Fem Everything: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Other than being the most useful tool for helping us address our guiding research question, Black feminism helps us identify the value and heuristic potential in our peer mentorship model. By bringing these features into focus, we are better able to analyze our first-hand experiences with peer mentoring as Black women doctoral students. We merged our theoretical framework and methodology sections because they are deeply intertwined and thus difficult (perhaps unproductive) to disentangle. Moreover, our theory, Black feminist thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000/1990), and methodology, Black feminist autoethnography (Griffin, 2012), center the Black feminist tradition, which chiefly informs this work and our relationship to one another.

Black Feminist Thought

Because our project is a direct product and interrogation of our identities, we rely on Patricia Hill Collins' (2000/1990) Black feminist thought as our conceptual framework. This model is apt because it values, centers, and normalizes Black women's standpoints, offering an outlook of society from our perspective while also granting "the tools to resist [our] own subordination" (Collins, 2000/1990, p. 198). Moreover, we work to further this concept's import by answering Collins' call to self-define and self-validate even within academia, where we are frequently discouraged from doing so. BFT allows us to speak our truths as we see fit without altering our ideas to fit dominant paradigms (Collins, 2000/1990). Essential aspects of BFT include intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and outsider-within-status, which are applicable to academe (Collins, 1986). We rely on these particular lenses to explain our lateral mentorship practices and the importance of our emergent framework.

Possessing the identities of both Black and woman, Black women experience a double bind that creates unique oppressions, as Black feminists have noted for decades (Bambara, 1970; Beale, 1970; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; King, 1988). To this point, intersectionality as a concept was coined in 1989 by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw who was working to clarify the simultaneous influences of race *and* gender in building a case for the rights of Black women employees who experienced both racial and sexual discrimination in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1991). She argued that because said plaintiffs were both Black *and* women, their experience was unique, and their identities could not be viewed separately. Instead, one must examine the power dynamics at the intersection of these identities. Intersectionality not only focuses on how multiple identities intersect to create varying social experiences but also scrutinizes identities' relationship to power. Analytically it serves as: "(1) an approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people; and (2) an important tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 36).

Thus, society continually derogates women of African descent due to the combination of these identities (Collins, 2000), relegating them to the margins where they feel like outsiders, especially within bastions of elite male whiteness like academia (Collins, 1986). At this social location, Black women's perceptions can "reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox

approaches," distinct views that routinely misalign with what the academy typically considers valuable knowledge (Collins, 1986, p. S15). This outlook gives us a unique perspective from which to critique structural oppression; nonetheless, intellectual isolation, microaggressions, and cultural alterity exacerbate the emotional, psychological, and academic duress of Black women graduate students.

Black Feminist (Collective) Autoethnography

To respond to our research question, we engage autoethnography; this approach enables us to be "self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 274). Despite fervent criticism of autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012), we find this method most suitable because it "is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 274). Further, Black feminist Irma McLaurin (2016) underscores the salience of employing autoethnography as a strategy that aids us in speaking and working to clarify issues that reach far beyond our own experiences. Stressing the centrality of self-collective-writing, McLaurin astutely remarks that autoethnography is dialogical in nature and organized primarily around the oppressor's language; this structure helps spotlight the practitioner's and/or researcher's ability to navigate both worlds—that of the oppressor and that of the oppressed--and to trouble the binary or elusive boundary seeking to divide subjective and objective realities, as Collins (2000/1990) has similarly observed. In drawing on Black feminist principles, this technique facilitates our collective decision to privilege and assess our concrete experiences with one another.

Our particular use of autoethnography is informed by Rachel Griffin's Black feminist autoethnography (BFA; 2012), which is grounded in BFT (Collins, 1990/2000). In Griffin's article (2012), she offers a particularly useful delineation of BFA by stating that "BFA renders Black women more visible in the realm of autoethnography," values "subjected knowledge birth from a standpoint informed by intersectionality"; it "also offers a narrative means for Black women to highlight struggles common to Black womanhood without erasing the diversity among Black women coupled with strategically ''talking back'' (hooks, 1989) to systems of oppression" (p. 143).

As a technique created by and chiefly for Black women, Black feminist autoethnography is able to hold all of who we are and what we bring to the endeavor of doctoral studies. We collectively engage this approach as a means to reflect on our group practices and write from such a vantage point. In communing to orally, verbally, and spiritually think through, trace, and interrogate the ways in which we support and challenge one another through peer mentoring, we posit this strategy as disparate from more conventional autoethnographic engagements that rely on a single individual (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014; Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013; Hernandez, Ngunjiri, & Chang, 2015; Norris, 2008; Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Leathers, 2009). And due to our focus on the wide overlap in our experiences and dispositions as Black women doctoral students, we were unable to select other approaches such as duoethnography, which is predicated on juxtaposing differences (Breault, 2016; Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013) as opposed to capturing the essence of our peer mentorship framework. So, we offer this exploration as a methodological contribution to the emerging area of collaborative autoethnographies in education (Chang et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2013; Hernandez et al., 2015; Norris, 2008; Toyosaki et al., 2009).

Background and Profiles

Our group formation has multiple beginning points, one of which was when ArCasia emailed Devean about rooming together during the summer of 2016. The department head told ArCasia that Devean was a fellow incoming PhD student. Although Devean declined ArCasia's invitation, this initial contact was soon followed by a more intimate, in-person hangout where the two traded stories and laughs after their orientation in August of 2016. Another beginning during the summer of 2016 was Devean and Jari's engagement in a group chat conversation to which they were linked through their sorority. In addition, Devean and Jari took a course together their second semester on campus during which the two go to know one another. ArCasia and Jari shared a class during the fall semester; however, it was when ArCasia suggested we three meet for dinner toward the end of the 2016 fall semester that the trio's tenure truly began.

The purposes of our informal peer-mentoring group are to create a sense of home and the conditions we need to survive. These two goals run parallel because creating home helps foster the context necessary for our survival both in the academy and society. As a group, we navigate these dual purposes by tapping into our peer-network for support, friendship, affirmation, call-outs, challenges, and accountability. Feeling foreign in the academy, we draw on our southern backgrounds to construct new expressions in our current Midwestern context. Our aims rest within Black feminist epistemologies that render ourselves, our experiences, and our knowledges legible. Table 1 indicates important characteristics shaping our group's function and form.

Table 1
Biographical profile of JAD

Name	Role	Home state	Ability status	Pre-PhD program work experience	Age	Race	Gender	Religious background	Sexual Orientation	Class background
Jari	The Wordsmith	MS	Able-bodied	Higher education student affairs	30	Black	Woman	Black Christian non-denominational	Hetero-sexual	Lower middle class
ArCasia	The Sensei	TX	Able-bodied	K-12 classroom teacher	29	Black	Woman	Black Christian Baptist	Hetero-sexual	Working class
Devean	The Pragmatist	AR	Able-bodied	K-12 student administrator	27	Black	Woman	Black Christian Baptist	Hetero-sexual	Middle class

We have defined our roles within this peer mentorship framework based upon our unique experiences coupled with our natural inclinations. As previously stated, our framework follows a lateral structure, so our roles of mentor and mentee shift often and at will. Despite the fluidity of our roles, we tend to operate based upon our natural orientations. Because of our unfamiliarity with the academy, being the first people in our families to pursue doctoral study, understanding the various aspects of doctoral socialization will have a direct impact on our future success (Patton, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). These roles—The Sensei, The Pragmatist, and The Wordsmith—guide our practice of holistic care; these roles are defined below.

Jari, "The Wordsmith," has a way with words, as the name suggests, and she serves as the resident optimist of the collective. Her previous English literature training facilitates the ease with which she offers keenly worded justifications for social phenomena in both professional and casual settings. ArCasia, named "The Sensei," knows what the other two do not know. Sensei is befitting because she is knowledgeable about aspects of doctoral socialization and typically knows how and where to find answers to political or methodological questions about this process. Lastly, Devean, "The Pragmatist," is a supreme planner and has developed a calculated and strategic plan for success. In our sistership, she is often responsible for getting our projects off the ground whether that is through cataloging ideas in Google docs or coordinating collaborative scholarly efforts. These roles will be used in the vignettes presented in the findings section to illustrate how we embody them within our sistership and peer mentorship framework.

Data Collection and Analysis

Our use of autoethnography is a collective practice, as our conversations, reflections, and analytic memorandums sought to explore and delineate how we mentor one another. One characteristic that made this process feasible was our ability to trust each other's sense of discernment, made possible due to our shared identities as Southern-raised, Black women possessing a deliberate, justice-oriented politic. We recognize that many of the techniques we used could be considered overly informal and thus lacking rigor. In response, we emphasize that such interpretations align with dominant perspectives of the academy, perspectives that routinely marginalize, disavow, and overlook the divergent innovation we offer (Collins, 1986, 2000/1990).

To conduct this study, we met in-person eight times for approximately three hours each meeting throughout 2018 and the spring semester of 2019. In these meetings, we reflected on our peer-mentorship experiences together through conversation and story(re)telling. Our main data sources came from our group text message conversations and collective reflection memorandums we wrote together. Data from in-person meetings were supplemented by ongoing phone and text message conversations on the topic of our peer mentorship. We compiled our group text messages and independently reviewed the data, employing an emergent coding strategy; we shared codes with one another and collectively refined these initial codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During in-person meetings, we collectively reflected on salient, in-person conversations we had within the last year and a half and recorded these recollections in as much detail as possible. Next, we created a cohesive document and reviewed, expanded, or clarified the text as we iteratively analyzed existing notes to identify emergent themes. This process allowed us to establish credibility, or internal validity, by embedding member-checking and reflexivity into each step of our examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

We arrived at our framework though a collective axial coding process that drew from our initial codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The initial codes fell into the following categories: (a) the capacities in which we support one another; (b) our motivations; (c) our goals; (d) our academic needs; (e) our personal needs; (f) our lack of formal, traditional support and mentorship; (g) our collective values; and (h) our shared ontologies; (i) our shared epistemologies; (j); and our shared axiologies. As we continued to examine and refine our codes, we streamlined them into themes through axial coding and further into three tenets, which we present in the discussion section.

It is important to note that our analysis process has been a collective effort in that we shared all information pertinent to this study with one another on open platforms. In the event that we did

reflect individually on our praxis and arrive at new insights, we soon shared them with one another for confirmation (i.e., member checking) and added notes to our growing data document. BFT and Black feminist autoethnography were essential to our project because they enabled us to identify the inherent merit in ourselves and our emergent practice. This robust sense of awareness defies many of the messages reproduced writ large in society and imparted -to us by the academy. Again, it would be difficult to overstate the valuable perspective BFT provides in helping us carry out a study in which we as Black women are situated as normal (i.e., not aberrant), powerful, perceptive, and intelligent. We maintained these fundamental dispositions as we collected and analyzed our data, and when any of us slipped back into dominant paradigms that emphasized deleterious messages about Black women, we checked or corrected one another. We reflect on this strategy through our vignettes below.

Findings

Our findings section is comprised of four vignettes[5] representative of our formal or informal check-ins. Formal check-ins were usually pre-planned, whereas informal check-ins could evolve from a text message conversation or data collection session. All of the experiences presented in the vignettes were experienced by one of us; however, aspects of the story have been streamlined to clearly demonstrate the tenets of the JAD Framework we are proposing. We further explicate the JAD Framework tenets in the discussion section of the paper. Reflection on our framework led us to define our roles within this peer mentorship framework based upon our unique experiences coupled with our natural inclinations as discussed above. These roles, The Wordsmith, The Sensei, and The Pragmatist, were introduced in Table 1 and facilitate our support of each other in organic and distinctive ways.

Vignette #1: The Beginning of our Sistership, October 2016

"Y'all's curls are poppin." Jari says to ArCasia and Devean.

"Thank you!" they reply.

Jari continues, "I'm about to be about that natural hair life. I want to be a revolutionary, and I can't be revolutionary on the crack."

Devean and ArCasia look puzzled. Jari offers "the creamy crack[6]" as she points to her head.

"Ahhh," ArCasia says as we all laugh.

"Yes, you can," Devean countered.

"I guess," Jari said, unconvinced. "Well it's been about 8 weeks since my last relaxer, so we'll see how it goes.

"Well all right," said ArCasia as Devean nods in approval.

"What made y'all go natural?" Jari asks.

Devean says, "I went natural the first semester of my master's program in 2014."

"What made you do it?" ArCasia asks.

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[5] The vignettes shared in the findings section were reconstructed from group recollections (e.g. vignette #1 and #2), research memorandums (e.g. vignette #3), and text message records (e.g. vignette #4).
[6] "Creamy crack" is a colloquial term for a hair relaxer, one that chemically alters hair to contrast its natural, kinky state by straightening it.

"I'd been getting relaxers since I was a little girl so I wanted to see what my natural hair looked like," replied Devean. "My family wasn't thrilled about my decision, so by the time I was in my master's program, I felt like I was grown."

They all laugh. "Yeah, my mom said I was trying to kill her the first time I went natural." The laughter continues. "She's come around a bit but I want to loc my hair in about a year so I need to start planting seeds now to get her on board," Jari says with a laugh.

"I eventually want to loc my hair too," shared ArCasia.

"Ok, y'all," Devean said as she holds up the Black power fist.

As they all laugh, Jari asks, "ArCasia, why did you go natural?"

"My reason was more so based on necessity," ArCasia replies. She continues, "I moved to China after undergrad to teach and I didn't have my mom to give me perms. On top of that, I didn't really have access to Black hair care products so I had to learn how to take care of my hair with stuff from the grocery store."

"Wow," says Devean.

Jari jokes, "Juices and berries."

"Truly!" ArCasia replies as they all laugh.

This vignette captures a portion of the collective's first conversation. This encounter was the first of many and foundational to our peer mentorship framework. In this exchange, the members of the sistership were able to share freely about their choice to wear their natural hair texture. Although our initial reasons for going natural were not overtly political, Black women wearing their natural hair texture is inherently political, as it is an aesthetic choice that shirks white supremacist heteropatriarchal beauty ideals. This vignette also provides a glimpse of our eventual roles in our peer mentorship framework. Jari's playful use of words demonstrates her cheerful nature and penchant for wordplay. ArCasia's recounting of learning how to care for her hair with natural products while in China is indicative of her role as sensei. Devean's curiosity about her natural hair texture driving her decision to start her natural hair journey aligns with her pragmatic nature.

Vignette #2: The Wordsmith (Jari), September 2018

"Jari, how's your writing coming?," ArCasia asks as I take a bite of my food. "Wake up!," she shouts to solicit my attention after I close my eyes and lower my head toward my chest, feigning slumber.

"Is this an intervention?" I ask as I emerge from my fake nap, pick up my fork, and continue eating. The way that they look at me says, "You might as well be on A&E [the channel that broadcasts the show *Intervention*]."

Devean and ArCasia look at each other then ArCasia responds, "You know, it's been a while since we brought up your work. We just wanted to check in."

"Well, you know, I'm trying but it's hard out here in these streets. I just don't have as much time to devote to my writing as I would like."

"That's real," said Devean, "But you have to get it done."

"I know, I know," I reply "but I don't know what I could do differently. There just isn't enough time in the day."

"What can we do to help? What do you need?" ArCasia asks.

Devean follows up with, "Do you have a writing plan?"

I look at them in a way that conveys, "Why do y'all keep asking me questions y'all already know the answers to?" then reply, "No. I have a planner but I've never actually written in it. I make to-do lists but don't take the time to write down a day-to-day plan because I feel like that time could be used to get work done. I have intentions to work on my paper in the evening but I spend most days on campus in class, teaching, or completing other tasks for my assistantship. I aim to work at home but I'm usually tired by the end of the day."

ArCasia says, "Yeah, your assistantship is a lot but you're here to do your work. I think you're going to have to prioritize your time to get this project done."

"That's real, but 'how Sway'?" I ask.

"You just do it." Devean offers.

"Just like that, huh?" I ask.

"Yeah," Devean says with a shrug. ArCasia nods and we all laugh.

After dinner, ArCasia and Devean came by and helped Jari map out a timeline for completing her early research project. ArCasia shared the steps she takes when working on a project, and Devean sent Jari an excel sheet to help her organize her tasks. After writing out her plan, ArCasia and Devean agreed to check in periodically with Jari to see how writing was progressing. Jari has always been deliberate about tasks so it still took her a while to complete her project, but the time ArCasia and Devean took to help Jari sort out her thoughts and create a plan of action was a demonstration of care for Jari as a person and her success as scholar. This vignette also demonstrates how Devean and ArCasia utilized their skill sets as the Pragmatist (e.g. sharing her excel spreadsheet, offering creating a writing plan as a tactic for completing my project) and the Sensei (e.g. sharing her writing tips and a strategy for completing my project) respectively, to assist Jari with achievement her goal.

Vignette #3: The Sensei (ArCasia), July, 2018

"Yeah, if I can get a job in this God forsaken market," I say as we review our notes for our manuscript.

"Girl!" Devean yells with indignation as she peers over her computer screen to stare at me. Jari gives me a side eye that says, "really fam?"

In my defense I add, "Y'all know there aren't any foundations jobs."

"Well, I wouldn't know that if you hadn't told us, which is reason number 432 why you won't have to worry about finding a job," Jari chimes in. "I mean, who else reads dissertations for leisure? If you can't get a job there's no hope for any of us!"

We laugh and Devean adds, "Right, and you're taking steps to make yourself marketable. You have publications that speak to different concentrations, hella teaching experience, and you know how all this stuff works."

"Yeah, but these folks don't care anything about that. Plus, my partner and I will be looking for two jobs instead of one."

"That's real." Devean offers.

"The spousal hire situation is going to complicate things for sure." I add.

"That is real but y'all are both lit. Your work is necessary so someone will surely be willing to hire one of you. It'll just be a package deal." Jari says with a shrug.

"Yeah, we decided that we're both willing to be the spousal hire. We'll go just about anywhere starting out. We just want jobs," I respond.

"Even, like, Montana?" Jari asks. She continues, "I don't think I could do it fam. My next move has to be near my people."

"As long as there's a major airport, we'll be good starting out," I add.

"And y'all would have each other," Devean asserts.

"True," I say.

Devean says, "Y'all will be fine."

I reply, "I hope so."

It is ironic that ArCasia is most aware of the doctoral socialization process yet is also most concerned about finding a job in the academy. ArCasia is the most concerned of the three because Devean plans to be a scholar practitioner and Jari is unwaveringly optimistic about our job prospects because our work is "lit." Perhaps it is ArCasia's awareness of the numerous pitfalls Black women must navigate in pursuit of tenure track positions that is the source of her apprehension about entering the job market. Additionally, ArCasia's history of education concentration is experiencing a shortage of tenure-track positions. All things considered, ArCasia has worked to be proactive about crafting a strategic plan to bolster her chances of employment. Devean's practical reminders about these tactics ArCasia has deployed to increase her marketability and Jari's light hearted demeanor are helpful reminders that help ArCasia feel more positive about this inevitable process.

Vignette #4: The Pragmatist (Devean), July 2018

The following is an excerpt from one of our group message conversations:

Devean: "Sooo, my advisor mentioned me graduating in August."

ArCasia: "Wait, that wasn't the original timeframe. How do you feel about that?"

Devean: "Y'all know I got a three-year plan. I'm not sure what to do."

Jari: "…It might be for a reason. Like you being Professor Owens…. [emoji eyes]"

ArCasia: "…I personally think you'll be fine if you're held up. But that may not be true. Make a pro/con list? That extra time can help you refine the craft…"

Devean: "I'm already seriously struggling with finding motivation and energy for this entire process. Drawing it out won't help that. We're planning for my partner to go to business school full time in the fall, which requires me to have a full-time job."

ArCasia: "Which you can definitely get ABD, no?"

Devean: "Yes, but I still have to enroll in thesis hours…"

ArCasia: "Then it might have to be August. You just walk the next May."

Devean: "I'll be over it by then lol… So, I could wait until May 2020…"

ArCasia: "That's not terrible, is it?"

Devean: "No it's not terrible. Just not what I wanted *sigh*"

[Later]

Devean: "…So I won't actually be graduating until next school year… I didn't realize my advisor wants me to do 45-50 interviews. [Wide eyed emoji]"

ArCasia: "That's a LOT! But good!"

Jari: "Oh my! You'll have hella data to pull from for your pubs." [shrugging woman emoji]

Devean: "Ain't no pubs."

ArCasia: "Haha"

Devean: "Y'all should've saw my face. I'm like wheettttttt"

Jari: "Lol glad it went well though"

Devean: "I think I need a day to get over it lol"

ArCasia: "Lol that's real"

Devean: "…It's just weird to not be going 90 to nothing but I definitely don't feel motivated or productive right now. I was beating myself up for not doing any work last month."

ArCasia: "We deserve time off too! That's how we avoid burnout. I relished my month off and don't feel bad about it!"

 Devean: "I'm always beating myself up about not doing work… even though I lowkey gave myself last month off, I was still like, 'Damn, Devean you should be doing something.'"

 Jari: "That's real"

ArCasia: "I hear you. That makes sense."

This vignette highlights Devean's tactical nature regarding her plan for completing her degree. When she started the program, Devean followed a detailed three-year timeline that mapped out completion dates for all of her milestones. While she is still mindful of her initial plan, Devean has had to be flexible. Even aspects of this conversation (e.g. her partner did not start business school and her number of interviews decreased) have changed over the course of the semester. ArCasia's role as Sensei was demonstrated through her consideration for the political implications of being so rigid about her timeline. ArCasia helped Devean think long term about her process, versus focusing on the details (i.e. checking off milestones). Regardless of the subject of the conversation, Jari, The Wordsmith, always teases Devean by figuring out a way to make an appeal for her to pursue the professoriate. Although Devean has no interest in seeking a tenure track position, she appreciates Jari believing in her work and challenging her to seek out opportunities where she can add to the knowledge production about Black girls. Both sister scholars help Devean realize that it is okay to (slightly) deviate from the plan because it can be for her betterment overall.

As previously stated, our framework follows a lateral structure so our roles of mentor and mentee shift often and at will. Despite the fluidity of our roles, we tend to operate based upon our natural orientations. Because of our unfamiliarity with the academy, being the first people in our families to pursue doctoral study, understanding the various aspects of doctoral socialization will have a direct impact on our future success (Patton, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). These roles: the sensei, the pragmatist, and the wordsmith, guide our practice within the JAD framework, which is further defined below.,

Discussion: The JAD Framework

The JAD framework reflects the themes that emerged from our data analysis. We affectionately named the framework JAD, pronounced like the stone, jade, based on our initials because this work is of such a personal nature for us. Moreover, the jade stone is known for its spiritual growth and physical healing powers. In the book, *Crystal Bliss,* Devi Brown (2018) asserts that the jade stone enhances balance between the body and mind. The JAD framework aims to resist the contexts and expectations (i.e., conformity to political complicity and white heteropatriarchy) that do not welcome our presence, ideas, or intellectual labor. Our practice of communal support functions as a site of resistance where we offer uplift and genuine support to help us reach respective goals while centering our collective aim to annihilate systemic oppression. We have organized this emergent peer mentorship framework into three central tenets: radical coping, communal sista scholarship, and the cultivation of an authentic holistic self. These tenets were evinced in the vignettes above. Additionally, Table 2 shows which vignette topics correlate to the tenets of the JAD framework.

Table 2
JAD framework vignette examples

JAD Framework Tenet	Tenet Location	How Vignette Demonstrates Framework Tenet
Radical Coping	Vignette #1	Radical coping is demonstrated through the wordsmith, sensei, and pragmatist's support of each other's choice to resist white normative perceptions of beauty and professionalism in physically legible ways.
Communal Sista Scholarship	Vignette #2	Communal sista scholarship is evinced through the sensei and pragmatist's intentionality about checking in with the wordsmith regarding her writing goals.
	Vignette # 4	The wordsmith and sensei demonstrated communal sista scholarship through the counsel they offered the pragmatist while she considered extending her program completion timeline.
Cultivation of an Authentic Holistic Self	Vignette #3	Cultivation of an authentic holistic self is demonstrated through the encouragement that the pragmatist and wordsmith offered the sensei when she shared a personal concern about finding a job post-graduation

The JAD framework is predicated on our need for mentorship responsive to the needs of Black women doctoral students situated in a particular context. Because our bond extends beyond the academy, our peer mentorship practices attend to elements of the body, mind, and spirit. Radical coping relates to the body and is evinced through conscious decisions made about how we present in the academy and society at large. Communal sista scholarship pertains to the mind and describes the encouragement we give each other in regard to our individual goals. This tenet also encompasses our intentional efforts to produce knowledge for and with Black women. Cultivation of an authentic holistic is attuned to the spirit and demonstrates the ways in which we support each other beyond our academic endeavors and provide a space of us to be our whole selves without reproach. Ultimately, our articulation of the JAD framework serves as an opportunity for us to define our inherent forms of resistance for ourselves (Collins, 1986). The three tenets are further explicated below.

Radical Coping

By virtue of our presence, we present a threat to white supremacist heteropatriarchal norms in the academy. Black women graduate students face numerous gendered-racial stressors within academia, which serve as additional barriers to success (e.g., graduation, entrance into the professoriate), as well as general wellbeing. We draw on the work of Black feminist Joy James (1999) to define radical coping. James states, "Black feminisms that view female and black oppression as stemming from capitalism, neocolonialism, and the corporate state are generally understood to be radical" (p. 79). Therefore, we define radical coping, in the context of graduate education, as a series of deliberate, personal and professional strategies designed to challenge manifestations of white supremacy. Additionally, we consider coping a radical act because we assert ourselves as members of the academy and persist despite structural obstacles impeding our thriving (Henderson, et al., 2010; Grant, 2012). At present, our practice of radical coping manifests through the advancement of socially conscious research agendas and our performativity of professionalism.

All of our research interests are situated within an educational context and either 1) center the experiences of Black women and girls or 2) make known the experiences of Black women by utilizing critical analytic strategies such as intersectionality (Collins & Blige, 2016; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and BFT (Collins, 2000/1990). Because our work applies qualitative methods and values positionality as an integral component of the research process, this research can be dismissed as colloquial or lacking rigor (Grant, 2012; Moore, 2017); therefore, one form of radical coping is manifested through the refinement of socially conscious research agendas. As Black women doctoral students possessing a radical politic and an unwavering commitment to social and racial justice, we endeavor to challenge white supremacist heteropatriarchal ideology through all outlets available to us. This is a risky goal for any academic (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005), but uniquely so for Black women doctoral students who face multiple vulnerable statuses as graduate students and Black women lacking protections such as tenure (James & Turner, forthcoming). Despite these professional perils, we rebuke the temptation to silence ourselves and our experiences to make our work more palatable to the dominant culture (Collins, 2000/1990). Instead, we forge forward unapologetically by constructing socially conscious research agendas that affirm Black women, illuminate the lived experiences of Black people in education, and fight against our marginalization within the academy by disrupting white supremacist notions of knowledge production (Collins, 1986, 2000/1990). In addition to utilizing our research agendas as a form of

radical coping, we also make intentional decisions regarding our performativity of professionalism in academia.

Doctoral student socialization is overwhelmingly Eurocentric, and therefore counterintuitive to Black woman's experiential ways of knowing (Collins, 2000/1990). Additionally, white heteronormative notions of professionalism deployed via this socialization are antithetical of Black women's natural states of being. For example, one of the stressors Black women graduate students face is gendered-racial microaggressions in the form of overt and covert gestures toward Black women's communication styles and personal aesthetics (Lewis, et al., 2016). These examples of gendered-racial microaggressions highlight the tension between white expectations of professionalism and Black women's inherent states of being. Therefore, we are intentional about the ways we present ourselves via our clothes, hair, and communication styles. For example, law scholar D. Wendy Greene (2013) asserts that Black women's choice to wear natural hairstyles serves as a means of emancipation that "signifies a demand for equal treatment and full recognition of their dignity, personhood, freedom, and autonomy as women" (p. 355). Accordingly, the members of our sistership each choose to wear natural hairstyles as a visible form of resistance to Eurocentric norms of professionalism. We therefore assert our commitment to presenting our whole selves in the academy via our personal aesthetic.

In vignette #1, Devean, ArCasia, and Jari discuss their decisions to go natural. Although this was the beginning of their collective, this vignette demonstrated radical coping through the support shown to each other when choosing to resist white supremacist heteropatriarchal ideologies in physically legible ways. It is important to note that although wearing natural hair is a political act, it is not always a sign of a radical politic (Shakur, 1987). Succinctly stated, we resist Eurocentric graduate student socialization messaging, as well as the vestiges of respectability politics that are sometimes embraced by other Black people. These practices operate as a form of self-validation by which we openly express ourselves academically and aesthetically (Collins, 1986). Ultimately, radical coping serves as a strategy in which we use our work and our aesthetic to push back against white supremacist heteropatriarchal manifestations within the academy. These practices serve as tactics we can use to resist our subordination (Collins, 2000/1990).

Communal Sista Scholarship

The academy reproduces the myth of rugged individualism (Morrison, 1992) through white supremacist heteropatriarchal rhetoric that suggests that individualism in the academy is common and even necessary for career advancement. We, however, resist this notion through the practice of communal sista scholarship, which hinges on the concepts of communalism (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997) and Black women's friendships (Collier, 1996; Rawlins, 1998). Based on these principles, we adopt the notion that our individual successes are dependent on our collective outcomes. Additionally, we recognize the significance of our friendship, which has evolved into a sistership, and its role in the production of our scholarship. Our communal sista scholarship manifests through regular check-ins, sharing resources, and working on collective projects.

Although one of our identification points was entering our program together, we are at a point where we are pursuing different milestones towards graduation. Additionally, we have varied career aspirations post-graduation; therefore, we are simultaneously working toward converging and diverging goals. Despite the incongruency amongst our academic and career trajectories, we often check-in via text and in-person meetups to assess progress towards each other's individual

goals. Vignette #4 illustrates a text meetup in which Devean receives consultation and support from ArCasia and Jari regarding her program completion timeline. We also endeavor to stay abreast of pending milestones and offer encouragement as a way to combat isolation, a common condition for Black women doctoral students in the academy. This was evinced in vignette #2 in which Devean and ArCasia check-in with Jari about her writing project. These two vignettes signify the ways in which we support each other in pursuit of individual academic goals. Additionally, we are intentional about celebrating each other's achievements. Communal sista scholarship also manifests through our intentionality about sharing resources and working together on projects.

The academy also breeds competition, yet another condition of academia rooted in Eurocentric concepts, more specifically, the myth of rugged individualism (Morrison, 1992), as well as the myth of meritocracy (Yosso, 2002). Novelist Toni Morrison (1992) asserts that the American conceptualization of individualism hinges on its juxtaposition against Blackness. According to education scholar Tara Yosso (2002), the myth of meritocracy proposes that all people have the same access to public services such as education. These concepts work to perpetuate "otherness" and reinforce Black women's outsider-within status (Collins, 1986). Additionally, the notion of competition is inherently antithetical to many Black women's ways of being and knowing. To resist this messaging, we often share information about funding opportunities, relevant literature, and calls for proposals. This orientation, which is rooted in our politic, is especially important for us because we believe that our individual strivings are fortified by our collective success.

We are also intentional about working together to produce knowledge that reflects our professional ideologies and overall lived experiences. Choosing to align ourselves with Black feminist traditions that blatantly challenge the myth of rugged individualism and the myth of meritocracy serve as a pathway for speaking our truth. This concept is further reinforced by our resolve to center the experiences of Black women in our scholarship (Collins, 2000/1990). Essentially, communal sista scholarship is a manifestation of collective fortitude in which we work together to 1) support one another's personal goals and celebrate achievement of those goals; and 2) collaborate to fortify our own work and create collective knowledge. Engaging in collaborative academic endeavors, as well as sharing our personal experiences serve as forms of empowerment (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Williams et al., 2005). To summarize, communal sista scholarship encompasses a spirit of communalism and Black women's friendships. This positionality facilitates actions that support progress towards our respective goals through challenging the master narrative of graduate study as a competitive, isolating experience. This practice allows us to self-define what it means to be a Black woman scholar in the academy.

Cultivation of an Authentic Holistic Self

Black women doctoral students have expressed a desire for mentorships in which they could explore personal and professional aspects of identity in confidence (Grant, 2012; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Our sistership serves as a space in which we have the freedom to engage in this exploration and be "works in progress." Cultivation of an authentic holistic self encompasses the efforts we make to reconsider, reaffirm, and reconcile the various aspects of our identity that are validated and problematized by new knowledge accessed in the classroom or experientially. In other words, we benefit from our established Black women friendship, rooted in Black women's historical orientation towards communalism and reliance on community (Boykin et al., 1997; Collins, 2000/1990; Henderson, et al., 2010; James-Gallaway et al., forthcoming) within the academy.

Black students schooled in Eurocentric educational contexts must do the work to unlearn ahistorical accounts of the Black experience. The irony is that graduate education, which often occurs in an oppressive context for Black women, also serves as a site for discovering gendered-racial truths. Much of this learning is experienced in the tradition of Black women's epistemologies and dialogical relationships in which we explore our lived experiences and provide space for both validation and critique (Collins, 2000/1990). Although we all benefit from strong support systems and other mentorships, our sistership functions as a unique counter-space in which we can share our work; pontificate about the systemic forces seeking to stifle our presence within the academy; offer workout tips; vent about aspects of our personal lives that are masked from the academy; and theorize about Cardi B's latest featured verse all in a single conversation with a fluidity that is unachievable in most other spaces we occupy. This affirming space that we have fashioned is antithetical to mainstream conceptions of the doctoral socialization experience (Bertrand Jones, et al, 2015; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Patton, 2009), of who can produce knowledge (Collins, 1986, 2000/1990) and of what constitutes rigorous scholarship (Grant, 2012; Moore, 2017). Cultivation of an authentic holistic self is shown in vignette #3 where ArCasia shared a personal concern with Jari and Devean. Because of ArCasia's vulnerability and trust in the sistership, Devean and Jari were able to provide encouragement and reassurance. This is also a space for us to work through tensions that arise from reconciling new information learned, while merging our academic training with our experiential knowledge (Collins, 1986), and cultivation of an authentic holistic self also necessitates moments of critique which fellow Southern Black feminist Brittney Cooper (2018) proposes as homegirl interventions.

As previously mentioned, one of the formal aspects of our peer mentoring framework is the institution of check-ins to assess individual progress towards stated goals. Because of the nature of our sistership, these more professional check-ins (Brown, 2013; Hill, 2018; Taaffee, 2016) can manifest into homegirl interventions (Cooper, 2018) that speak to the personal and facilitate personal and professional growth. Cooper (2018) defines homegirl interventions as "Black girl callouts" that come from other Black women in your circle meant to jar you to your senses in regard to your work, your rage, or your feminism (p. 5). These homegirl interventions serve to keep us on track and make steady progress towards our goals.

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusion

The limitations of this work include that, as a collaborative autoethnography, the findings come from our own recall and reflections. Because we relied in part on our memory for the vignettes presented, we may not have recalled all conversations verbatim. However, the overall message or lesson is evident. Due to the unique design of this paper, others may not be able to reproduce this work in the same manner. Although this may be seen as a major limitation in traditional research spaces, as Black feminist scholars, we recognize and appreciate the multiplicities of Black women's experiences. We believe that Black women graduate students would benefit from a directed study conducted by Black women employing pertinent components of the JAD framework.

This work seeks to fill a void in the literature regarding Black women friendships and Black women graduate students' experiences, as well as how Black women engage in peer-mentoring. Our emergent peer mentorship framework serves as a resource and a form of resistance against the racist, sexist, and classist encounters germane to the academy. The tenets of the JAD framework—radical coping, communal sista scholarship, and the cultivation of an authentic

holistic self—respond to the call for more research regarding Black women graduate students' ways of engaging in peer mentorship. The framework addresses the need for models that supplement the dearth of mentorship experiences Black women doctoral students face and support the personal and professional growth of Black women doctoral students (Bova 2000; Patton, 2009).

This study is important because it provides insight into the lived experiences of Black women graduate students, presenting a counternarrative that illuminates the experiences of Black women pursuing doctoral study who actively resist manifestations of the racist-sexist ideologies present in academe. This work also adds to the dearth of literature concerned with the intricacies of Black women's friendships. By analyzing our own experiences, we work toward illuminating common characteristics that Black women doctoral students share across institutions and disciplines. Our goal in doing so is to inform the construction of higher education supports for enhanced accommodation. Though we urge graduate programs to heed our call, we assert that JAD should never be taken up and institutionalized by the academy. The organic nature of our relationship is what makes it unique and powerful. Institutions can, however, create systems and procedures - such as recruiting and retaining a critical mass of Black women professors as well as Black women graduate students - to spark the genuine cultivation of this type of peer mentorship. Black women graduate students should seek out one another with the hope of forming a connection that is vital to their success in the academy. There is most definitely a need for more examples of different types of mentorship practices engaged in by marginalized students.

Our emergent JAD framework also has methodological implications; as we continue to refine this model, our collective Black feminist autoethnography methodology will also materialize. Additionally, this project is significant because it begins to consider the nature of knowledge production, assessing the contexts under which it takes place. If the academy is going to shift toward genuine inclusivity, equity, and justice to provide nurturing environments for all groups, most certainly Black women, it must make good on its promise of diversity, which is currently cosmetic and surface-level. As we continue to progress through our program, our continued commitment to our sistership and peer mentoring framework will make our ideal of bringing our whole selves (Parker, 1999/1978) to the academy all the more real.

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