

Title

Mentoring each other: Exploration of peer mentoring networks among Black women doctoral students

Abstract

With the increasing focus on the critical importance of mentoring in advancing Black women students from graduation to careers in academia, this interactive symposium will identify and consider the peer mentoring contexts and conditions that support Black women's student success.

Proposal Text**Session Objectives**

This interactive symposium will explore how Black women doctoral students create peer mentoring networks to establish a sense of community and support for one another. Contextualized through the COVID-19 pandemic and racial unrest, this symposium will illuminate the frameworks that inspired Black women doctoral students to form peer mentoring networks. Grounded in Fries-Britt and Turner Kelly's (2005) mentorship model, this session will discuss the circumstances of why and how Black women doctoral students establish peer mentoring networks. In highlighting the important role peer mentoring networks play in the success of Black women doctoral students, we hope also to discuss what higher education structures need to exist to ensure more support for peer networks and the overall success of Black women doctoral students.

Expertise of Presenters

Sharon Fries-Britt (Panelist) is a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education and Special Education (CHSE). Her research examines the experiences of high-achieving Black people in higher education and underrepresented minoritized students (URMs) in STEM fields. She is an author and co-editor of *Building Mentorship Networks to Support Black Women: A Guide to Succeeding in the Academy* (2022, Routledge).

Bridget Turner Kelly (Panelist) is an Associate Professor of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland. Her scholarship focuses on marginalized populations in higher education, such as women and faculty of Color. She is an author and co-editor of *Building Mentorship Networks to Support Black Women: A Guide to Succeeding in the Academy* (2022, Routledge).

Tyanna AE Clayton-Mallett (Moderator) received her Master's in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Marquette University. She is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research interests include graduate socialization of Black doctoral students and examining the racial and political identity development of Black higher education professionals across the diaspora.

Stephanie Bent (Panelist) is a PhD candidate in the Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy program at the University of Maryland-College Park. She conducts research about student affairs practice in the Caribbean and Caribbean universities'

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contributions to regional development. Her research also explores Caribbean tertiary students' identity development both in the region and in the diaspora.

Niah Grimes (Panelist) is an assistant professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership, and Policy at Morgan State University. Dr. Grimes focuses her scholarship on eradicating violence and systems of oppression in higher education through creative, narrative, healing, and spirit-based approaches.

Dr. Ashley L. Gray (Panelist) is the founder of ALG Consulting, specializing in equity, diversity & inclusion services and qualitative research in higher education. Her research focuses on equity and pathways to the college presidency. Ashley is the first graduate of the Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies Program at Howard University.

Christine A. Stanley (Panelist) is a Regents Professor, Professor of Higher Education, and holder of the Ruth Harrington Endowed Chair in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University. She is also Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity Emerita.

Dr. Joy Gaston Gayles (Panelist) is an Alumni Association Distinguished Graduate Professor of Higher Education and Senior Advisor for the Advancement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the College of Education at North Carolina State University. Dr. Gayles is internationally recognized for her research and scholarship on women and people of color in STEM fields and her work in the area of intercollegiate athletics in higher education.

Practical Argument And Its Bases

Due to a gap in mentorship from the lack of Black women faculty in institutions, especially in historically White institutions, Black women graduate students establish horizontal mentorship relationships consisting of other Black women. The informal bonds created amongst each other comprise academic, emotional, psychosocial, and professional support, helping to mitigate racial microaggressions from professors, colleagues, and peers (Apugo, 2017). Moreover, Black women experience distinctive racial and gendered marginalization involving microaggressions, stereotyping, and alienation (Borum & Walker, 2012; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016) due to the intersectionality of their social identities. Thus, mentoring for Black women graduate students are more than the traditional definition of mentoring, consisting of academic and career guidance (Patton & Harper, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

This session is grounded in Kelly and Fries-Britt's (2022) mentoring network model, specifically, the peer mentoring aspect of the framework examining how peers stand in the gap (especially during this COVID and racial unrest season when the pressures were more intense), and how the connections sustained them and allowed them to accomplish key academic benchmarks as they navigated the global pandemic and increased climate of state-sanctioned racial violence and death at the hands of police. For Black women doctoral

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students, peer mentoring represents the radical centering and power of Black women's knowledge and lived experiences to get each other through their PhD journey.

Mentoring in higher education is established as an important factor in professional success (Behar-Horenstein et al., 2012; Merriam et al., 1987; Merriam et al., 2021; Rowe, 1981), particularly for minoritized students (Blackwell, 1989; Turner & González, 2014). Due to the intersections of gender and race, Black women students, in particular, are further implicated by adverse academic climates. Patton (2009) argued that mentoring relationships are vital in assisting minoritized women in overcoming "the dual-edge burdens of race and gender ... in 'old boy'" networks (p. 511). Stanley and Lincoln (2005) asserted that successful mentoring relationships are "characterized by trust, honesty, a willingness to learn about self and others, and the ability to share power and privilege" (p. 46). Similarly, Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) submitted that trust and transparency are essential but difficult to achieve.

Traditionally, mentoring relationships are often hierarchical and flow unidirectional, mentor to protégé. This form of mentorship has been ineffective at supporting Black graduate students (Borum & Walker, 2012; Davis et al., 2012; Esnard & Cobb-Roberts, 2018; Gregory, 2001; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016; Minnett et al., 2019; Patton 2003, 2009; Tillman, 2012).

Researchers pointed out the need to recognize models such as reciprocal mentoring relationships, co-mentoring, and alternative forms of mentoring for Women of Color, especially among Black women (Davis et al., 2012; Esnard & Cobb-Roberts, 2018; Gregory, 2001; Minnett et al., 2019; Tillman, 2012). Black women experience gendered racial microaggressions in college, leading to marginalization and alienation, causing them to cope by leaning on support networks (Borum & Walker, 2012; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016).

Consequently, peer mentoring is utilized as a form of resistance to systems of oppression and institutional barriers for Black women in academia from faculty to students (Henderson et al., 2010; Patton, 2003).

Session Format

(5 minutes) Welcome: Moderator (Tyanna AE Clayton-Mallett) will welcome attendees, introduce panelists, and provide an overview of the session objectives and timeline. This time will also briefly synthesize specific challenges Black Women doctoral students face.

(10 minutes) Black Women Doctoral Students and Formation of Peer Networks: Dr. Sharon Fries Britt and Dr. Turner Kelly will provide an overview of their continued work examining mentoring networks among Black women. They will specifically focus on their latest book, *Black Women Navigating the Doctoral Journey: Student Peer Support, Mentorship, and Success in the Academy* (forthcoming in 2023), which centers on how Black women doctoral students mentor each other.

Guiding Questions

What experiences have shaped and informed the framework in your latest book on Black women mentoring each other?

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When you started this project, what new lessons did you gain, if any, about the Black women's doctoral experience? What stood out about how current Black women doctoral students discussed their peer mentoring networks?

Discuss the significance of this work in building the capacity of faculty, graduate programs, and higher education institutions. Why do spaces and conversations like these continue to be important?

(20 minutes) Just Me and My Sistas: Black Women Doctoral Students Mentoring Each Other: Each panelist will describe the formation, theoretical frameworks, activities/events, etc., of their peer mentoring network.

Guiding Questions

Discuss the experiences that inspired your peer support network.

How did the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial unrest inform how you and your peers supported one another? What have you and your peers learned? What lessons have created these spaces and communities taught you and your peers?

Discuss the significance of this work to your lives and careers personally and to the field. Why are spaces and conversations like these so important?

(20 minutes) Facilitated Discussion- The Way Forward: What is the Homework for Institutions? The moderator will frame a conversation of peer mentoring networks through the lens of the "homework" institutions must complete to better support Black women's doctoral success. Panelists will provide examples of what institutions can do to ensure the success of Black women doctoral students.

(20 minutes) Audience discussion: Attendees will have an opportunity to speak with other authors within the book as a deep dive into the experiences of Black women doctoral students, discuss their personal experiences with peer support networks, and how they can build their capacity in understanding and advocating for better support of Black women doctoral students. Below are reflection and discussion points:

Current Doctoral Students: Do they have a peer support network? If they do, how was it formed? How do they build their peer support network if they do not have one?

Faculty Members: How do you best support Black women doctoral students? What institutional structures challenge your ability to support Black women doctoral students? How can you build your mentoring capacity?

Administrators/Institutional Leaders: What resources currently exist in the institution that can better support faculty members who mentor? Black women who mentor each other, what resources exist to mitigate some of the challenges Black women doctoral students endure?

Significance

Women students mentoring women students, especially in minoritized communities, is an

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important aspect and dimension of mentoring that is often overlooked. Exploring the meaning of peer mentoring in doctoral programs is needed to support minoritized students and advance equity in the academy. Being a Black doctoral student brings its unique challenges. Doctoral programs, acting as microcosms of the social context, are rampant with institutionalized gendered racism that operates through the programs' internal climate, policies, and procedures (Nagbe, 2019). Thus, this interactive symposium will examine women student mentors who help other women students navigate unwelcome campus environments laden with identity politics because of their low representation, racism, sexism, and other structural barriers. This session will address what Black women doctoral students have done to mentor each other and provide avenues for institutions to support and foster their success. This conversation is needed since COVID-19 and the racial unrest in 2020 have exacerbated inequities among Black Women graduate students.

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