

Your Success is Our Success: An Exploration of Black Ph.D. Students' Educational Journeys and  
Experiences With Mentorship

By

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Dr. Stephanie Jefferson. As a parent who worked full-time while also earning her Ph.D., you sacrificed a lot to ensure I became successful. I remember growing up and questioning why it was taking you so long to complete your degree – and now I know why. While it did not occur to me how much you sacrificed, as a student-parent until becoming one myself, I want you to know that you're my shero. Hopefully, I can instill the same values in my son that you instilled in me. I love you.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Dedication.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Summary of Methodology.....	8
Summary of Findings and Significance of the Study.....	9
<b>Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Accessing Graduate Education.....	12
Undergraduate Research.....	13
Financial Support.....	15
Marginalization.....	17
Summary of Accessing Graduate Education.....	18
Graduate Student Socialization.....	19
Defining Socialization.....	19
Graduate Socialization at Undergraduate Level.....	20
Graduate Socialization at the Graduate Level.....	21
Summary of Graduate Student Socialization.....	23
Mentorship and Students of Color.....	23
Defining Mentorship.....	24
Undergraduate Mentorship.....	25
Graduate Mentorship.....	26
Summary of Mentorship and Students of Color.....	31
Theoretical Framework.....	32
Structural Intersectionality.....	34
Political Intersectionality.....	35
Representational Intersectionality.....	36
<b>Chapter 3 – Methods.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Participants and Recruitment.....	41
Figure 3.1 – Student Demographics.....	44
Research Location.....	45
Data Collection.....	46
Demographics Questionnaire.....	46
Document Analysis.....	48
Individual Interviews.....	49

Data Analysis .....	52
Low-Level Coding .....	53
Meaning Fields.....	54
Reconstructive Horizon Analysis.....	55
Figure 3.2: Critical Data Analysis Example .....	58
Figure 3.3 – Example of Codes and Sub-Codes .....	60
Data Validation and Trustworthiness.....	61
Multiple Forms of Data.....	61
Data Saturation.....	61
Member Checks.....	62
Peer Reviewing/Peer Debriefing.....	63
Multiple Forms of Analysis.....	63
Limitations .....	64
Positionality .....	64
Race.....	65
Gender.....	65
Class .....	66
Intersecting Identities .....	68
Mentorship .....	69
<b>Chapter 4 – Mentoring Characteristics, Styles and Experiences.....</b>	<b>70</b>
Mentoring Characteristics.....	71
Power Dynamic: “There’s always a power differential” .....	72
Empathy: “Even if he disagreed with me...he told me do it the best I could” .....	74
Accountability: “Learning together and challenging one another” .....	77
Wholeness: “Provide...academic and emotional support” .....	78
Three Styles of Mentoring: Business-Oriented, Relationship-Oriented, and Egalitarian.....	82
Figure 4.1 – Table of Mentoring Characteristics and Styles .....	84
Business-Oriented Mentoring Examples.....	84
Relationship-Oriented Mentoring Examples.....	89
Egalitarian Mentoring Examples.....	96
<b>Chapter 5 – Career Readiness.....</b>	<b>105</b>
Practitioner Career Paths.....	105
Faculty Career Paths .....	111
Hybrid Career Paths (Research/Practice).....	117
Summary of Mentoring Styles and Career Goals .....	126
Figure 5.1 – Students’ Career Aspirations and Preparedness .....	127

**Chapter 6 – Discussion..... 129**

    Black Ph.D. Students are not a Monolith..... 132

    Mentorship is Defined by the Unique Interactions of its Participants ..... 133

    Mentorship can Contribute to Lasting Joy and/or Lasting Pain ..... 135

    Relating Intersectionality to the Findings ..... 136

    Mentoring and Career Preparation..... 137

    Implications..... 137

        Practice Implications ..... 138

        Research Implications ..... 140

    Contributions of Study ..... 142

    Positioning my Future Mentoring ..... 142

    Conclusion ..... 143

**References..... 146**

**Appendix A – Example of Interview Questions..... 161**

## Abstract

This study explored the educational journeys of 17 Black Ph.D. students who attended a large, public Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education in the Midwestern United States. At the time of data collection, each participant was enrolled in one of five different Ph.D. academic programs in the university's Education College (EU). The specific focus of this research was to explore the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students and how these experiences, if at all, contributed to their success. Success was defined as graduating and/or achieving their career goals. Two research questions were used to explore this specific focus. These research questions were: What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend a PWI? And, how do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic and professional success of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI?

Utilizing an adapted hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Van Manen, 2014) and theory of intersectionality (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989), three semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each participant for a total of 51 interviews. An online demographics questionnaire and document analysis were also used to gather specific details about students' identities and degree program requirements. A series of key characteristics (power dynamic, empathy, accountability, and wholeness), present across participant descriptions of mentorship, emerged from an in-depth analysis of interview data. These characteristics contributed to the development of three styles of mentoring (business-oriented, relationship-oriented, and egalitarian) and are represented within all three styles. Findings of this study indicate: (1) Black Ph.D. students are not a monolithic group; (2) The mentorship experience is defined by the unique interactions of its participants; and (3) Mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain. This study concludes with research and practice implications for higher education faculty/administrators who seek to improve the persistence as well as holistic success of Black Ph.D. students at PWIs.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Higher education institutions mirrored racial segregation in education nationally in the United States. It is unsurprising that Black students might experience marginalization on many campuses even in contemporary times. Before 1954, majority of Black students (both at the k – 12 and higher education levels) attended predominantly Black institutions of education due to racial segregation (Smith, 2016). At the collegiate level, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were the primary, and typically only, way Black students gained higher education. HBCUs have a long history in the United States. These institutions were the first and primary way Black collegians received their higher education between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Higher Education Act of 1965 described an HBCU as an institution of higher education, established prior to 1964, whose primary goal was and/or is to educate Black Americans (U.S. Department of Education, n.d). The first recognized HBCU was The Institute for Colored Youth founded in 1837 in Cheyney, Pennsylvania (LeMelle, 2002). Although many of the first HBCUs were founded privately by White Christian denomination groups during the Reconstruction era<sup>1</sup> (Cantey et al., 2013), states began to create public HBCUs after Abraham Lincoln passed the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890<sup>2</sup>. HBCUs were considered a great accomplishment and sense of pride for Black people because of the U.S.’s long history of preventing Black persons from seeking/receiving formal education. The content that was taught

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<sup>1</sup> Reconstruction was the period immediately following the American Civil War (1866 – 1977) where the U.S. Congress attempted to reorganize the southern states, that had previously broken away from the Union, by providing them a way to be readmitted into the Union which called for Blacks and Whites to live side by side in a non-slave society (Library of Congress, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> The Morrill Act of 1862 was named after a U.S. Congressman from Vermont (Justin Morrill) who sought to create the land grant universities for every state in the country. Congress passed a second Morrill Act in 1890 to specifically address southern states that would not allow Black people to attend their land grant universities. The Morrill Act of 1890 enforced states to prove race was not a criterion for admission within their land grant universities or create separate universities for Black people. Many southern states chose to create separate universities for Black people (Lee and Keys, 2013).

and learned at these institutions, however, was closely monitored by the White people (Christian groups and state governing boards) who created them to ensure the curriculum reinforced Jim Crow<sup>3</sup> policies (LeMelle, 2002).

On May 17, 1954, the landscape of U.S. education changed forever. During the *Brown v. Board of Education* court ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court denounced the “separate but equal” doctrine upheld by *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>4</sup>; opening the doors for Black people (and other persons of color) to attend -predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of education (Harvey et al., 2004;). Since 1954, the enrollment of students of color at PWIs of higher education has consistently increased. More college students of color (including graduate students of color) attend PWIs than any other type of higher education institution in this country (Harvey et al., 2004). In 2001, for example, roughly 13 percent of Black undergraduate college students attended HBCUs (Provasnik & Shafer, 2008) while the remaining 87 percent attended PWIs (McClain & Perry, 2017). Although PWIs have the largest representation of Black college students, HBCUs graduate Black college students at a higher rate. In 2001, HBCUs accounted for 22 percent of Black college graduates even though they only accounted for 13 percent of the Black college-goers in the U.S. During this same period, conversely, PWIs (which enrolled 87 percent of Black college students) only produced 78% of our nation’s total Black college graduates (Provasnik & Shafer, 2008). Given these trends of undergraduate education, it is no wonder then that at PWIs, Black students continue to be underrepresented in many graduate programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Crow Laws were a formal set of policies used throughout the southern states to re-enforce racial segregation after the American Civil War. These laws, which used signs such as “Whites Only” and “Colored”, were applied to parks, restaurants, water fountains, buses, and other aspects of everyday life. (PBS-Wisconsin, n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> The Plessy V. Ferguson court case was used to provide legal justification for racial segregation in public spaces. This ruling was used to segregate institutions, such as schools, until the Brown V. Board of Education decision in 1954. (Library of Congress, 2018)

Multiple factors have been cited as negatively influencing the persistence and graduation rates of college students of color who attend PWIs (McClain & Perry, 2017; McCoy et al., 2015; Twale et al., 2016). At the graduate level, these factors include students being marginalized on campus (e.g., being tokenized in class, having negative social interactions with White peers, etc.), not seeing themselves reflected in campus administration/faculty, and lack of mentoring opportunities (Gay, 2004; Johnson-Bailey et. Al., 2009; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). These issues have led to the creation of federally/state funded initiatives to increase the readiness and academic success of graduate students of color (Hathaway et al., 2002; McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

One such initiative is the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program which was created in 1989 as one of eight federally funded TRIO programs<sup>5</sup>. Named after the late Ronald E. McNair<sup>6</sup>, this competitive grant program was established to prepare eligible students for doctoral degree programs via participation in research and other scholarly events (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The activities offered by this program differ amongst universities, but usually include summer internships/seminars, undergraduate academic advising, and/or research mentorship opportunities with faculty members. Eligible participants include undergraduate students (at eligible institutions) who identify as low-income, first-generation college students, and/or members of underrepresented populations in graduate education. The primary goal of the Ronald E. McNair program is to increase the graduation rate of doctoral

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<sup>5</sup> The TRIO Programs are a set of 8 federally funded initiatives designed to advance outreach and student services for people from marginalized backgrounds. These initiatives include programs for students at the k – 12 and post-secondary education levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ronald Erwin McNair was one of the first Black astronauts to travel into space upon the U.S. Challenger spacecraft in 1984. Upon his second trip on the Challenger in 1986, the spacecraft exploded killing all 7 astronauts aboard (including what would have been the first schoolteacher in space). In honor of Dr. McNair and his accomplishments, Congress provided funding to establish the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. (NASA, 2004; UC Berkeley, 2020)

degree students from marginalized backgrounds in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

These types of initiatives are also available at the regional level. For example, the Big Ten Academic Alliance (formerly known as the Committee on Institutional Cooperation) was created to establish an academic partnership between the members of the Big Ten athletic conference in 1958 (Big Ten Academic Alliance, n.d.). The first of their programs, geared toward the academic success of college students, was called the Traveling Scholar Program. The Traveling Scholar Program, established in 1963, allowed a graduate student from any of the Big Ten institutions to study at another Big Ten university for one semester without having to pay special fees or meet residential requirements of the university they visited (Wells, 1967).

Although this program did not specifically support students of color, it paved the way for other Big Ten Academic Alliance initiatives such as the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP). Like the Ronald E. McNair Program, SROP was designed to increase the number of underrepresented students in graduate school – more specially, Big Ten graduate schools (Big Ten Academic Alliance, n.d.)

In addition to academic programs designed to increase the graduate school readiness of students, a host of colleges/universities have adopted graduate fellowship awards for certain underrepresented populations. Lack of funding can be a major barrier impeding the academic success of collegians of color (Long & Riley, 2007; Twale et al., 2016). Money, in the form of grants, is used by graduate schools to recruit and retain underrepresented students of color via funding their academic journey (Griffin et al., 2016). An example of this is the Minority Graduate Fellowship at Murray State University. The fellowship was specifically created for recently admitted Black and Hispanic graduate students who were admitted to the university

unconditionally. If the fellow is enrolled full-time, maintains a 3.0 graduate GPA, and works 20 hours a week within the Office of Multicultural Student Initiatives, they receive \$3,750 per semester for four semesters (Murray State University, 2016).

Even with the support of such initiatives, the enrollment rate of Black and Latinx graduate students continues to outpace their completion rate. Between the years 2000 and 2018, Black and Latinx students saw their representation within the total enrollment of graduate students rise from 15% to 25% (a difference of 10 percentage points) (NCES, 2020). During this same period, however, their graduation rates only increased from 13% to just over 20% (a difference of 7 percentage points) (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2020, table 323.20; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2020, table 324.20). This gap has motivated scholars to further examine factors that influence the completion rates of graduate students of color. One such factor involves the social support these students receive from the people around them (Ellis, 2001). While this encouragement has been cited as coming from various stakeholders, graduate students of color have identified faculty and students (especially those who look like them) as their main sources of support (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). This support has also been referred to, within the literature, as mentorship. Much of what we know about graduate student mentorship involves faculty (Griffin et al., 2010; Young & Books, 2008). What is less known, however, is how peer mentoring might contribute to success for graduate students of color. Given prior evidence of lacking faculty mentoring for many students of color in graduate education (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008), it is particularly important to understand the role that peers might play for students of color in graduate programs (Patton, 2009). At the root of this study are the following questions: *What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend a PWI?* And, *How do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic*

*and professional success of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI?* Particularly, I am interested in learning about the diverse styles of mentorship that influence the success of these scholars. Broadening knowledge on mentorship can lead to new and innovative ways of retaining, persisting, and graduating Black Ph.D. students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are three major gaps within the literature on graduate mentorship. The first, focuses on defining mentorship. There is no one definition of mentorship in the context of higher education (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). The definitions that do exist are frequently defined by higher education faculty and/or practitioners (Brown II et al., 1999). Not having a definition of mentorship from graduate students who participate in graduate mentorship is troubling because we do not know how students of color perceive mentorship. Students' descriptions of the phrase may differ, greatly, from the definitions provided by previous literature. Failure to understand the ways in which graduate students of color define mentorship, will pose even greater challenges for practitioners who seek to develop effective mentoring strategies for people (especially faculty and other graduate students) who mentor this population.

The second area of mentorship literature that must be expanded is knowledge regarding graduate peer mentorship from the perspective of mentees. It is likely that in the absence of proper faculty support, people rely on their peers (Williams et al., 2018). Although most literature written on graduate peer mentorship focuses on mentoring from the standpoint of protégés, this research is extremely limited (Patton, 2009). This is a problem because researchers have a limited understanding of peer mentoring characteristics that are most beneficial to mentees, as reported by Black Ph.D. students who are mentees. Additionally, researchers do not know why certain essential aspects of peer mentoring are essential in the first place. They also do

not know why, nor how, these factors are more effective than others. Without this information, it will be difficult for practitioners to replicate the types of mentoring that contribute to these students' academic and career success.

The third area of graduate peer mentorship that must be broadened is literature on the experiences of, and techniques employed by, graduate student mentors. In general, there is less information on peer mentors than protégés. Without increased research on graduate peer mentors, researchers do not have a well-rounded understanding of what effective peer mentoring encompasses, nor do they know how this practice impacts the lives of the peer mentor. That is, it might be the case that serving in a peer mentoring role might be beneficial to the peer mentor's success in their own program as well as a way for them to give back by paying it forward.

Another reason why our lack of knowledge on peer mentors is an issue, is because researchers have very limited information about the effective strategies used by these mentors to support fellow students. Although we understand what techniques may work from a faculty mentor's perspective, the most successful techniques used by student mentors may look very different from those of faculty.

Mentorship is essential to the development and overall success of college students. This is especially true for underrepresented students who enroll in the Nation's predominantly White universities. What is less known, however, is the definition of mentorship and peer mentorship's impact on the experiences of doctoral students of color at predominantly White universities. Increasing knowledge on the mentorship of doctoral students of color can assist key stakeholders (i.e., college administrators, faculty, etc.) in developing practices that contribute to higher persistence and graduation rates for these scholars.

This study qualitatively explored the role of mentorship on the academic and professional success of Black doctoral students who attend one Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, I sought to answer the following research questions: *What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend a PWI? And, how do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic and professional success of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI?*

### **Summary of Methodology**

This study took place at Midwestern University (MU). MU is a large, predominantly White research university located in the Midwest. The campus sponsors multiple fellowship programs designed to recruit, retain, and graduate doctoral students from underrepresented backgrounds. I explored the ways in which doctoral fellows of color engage in mentoring opportunities and how these experiences contribute to, if at all, their academic and professional success. I did this by conducting 51 semi-structured individual interviews with 17 Black identifying doctoral students in the Education College who actively engaged in mentoring relationships. Each participant was interviewed three times and asked to complete a demographics questionnaire regarding their social identities. I also completed an analysis of publicly available documents pertaining to their academic program via the Education College's website. This qualitative, phenomenological study was theoretically guided by intersectionality to examine the mentoring relationships of Black doctoral students.

After conducting the semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis, I used a three-stage technique to analyze my data. First, I reviewed each transcription and created low-level codes (3 – 8 words long). These codes were used to objectively summarize participant quotes, and eventually develop larger themes for my code book. Second, I developed meaning

fields by finding quotes most essential to the focus of my study and interpreting the possible meanings of these quotes using “and,” “or,” and “and/or” phrasing to reconstruct the sentences. Unlike low-level codes, meaning fields are subjective and based on the perspective of actors who were not interviewed in the study (e.g., the interviewer). Finally, I created a reconstructive horizon analysis by using the meaning fields to form explicit meaning of inferential foregrounded and backgrounded material from the data (Carspecken, 1996).

### **Summary of Findings and Significance of the Study**

A series of key characteristics (power dynamic, empathy, accountability, and wholeness), present across participant descriptions of mentorship, emerged from an in-depth analysis of 51 interviews with Black Ph.D. students. These characteristics contributed to the development of three styles of mentoring (business-oriented, relationship-oriented, and egalitarian) and are represented within all three styles. Findings of this study indicate: (1) Black Ph.D. students are not a monolithic group; (2) The mentorship experience is defined by the unique interactions of its participants; and (3) Mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain. Although faculty members were identified by participants as mentors, “faculty advisor” was not synonymous with “mentor”. Some students considered their faculty advisors mentors while others did not. At the conclusion of this dissertation are research and practice implications for higher education administrators/faculty who seek to improve the persistence as well as holistic success of Black Ph.D. students.

Exploring the mentorship practices of black doctoral students was significant for various reasons. First, race matters – especially in the context of mentorship (McCoy et al., 2015; Twale et al., 2016). At PWIs, where students of color greatly outnumber faculty of color, finding a same-race faculty mentor can be a daunting task for graduate students of color (Davidson &

Foster-Johnson, 2001). An alternative to having a same-race faculty mentor was having a same-race peer mentor. In fact, research has found that some graduate students of color receive the most social support from peers who look like them (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). Second, further exploring this topic helped researchers better understand how doctoral fellows perceive and define mentorship. Having a more robust definition will improve the strategies used to increase student satisfaction and degree completion. For academic programs that emphasize diversity, improved mentoring will also be a way to successfully recruit and persist Black faculty.

Feedback, provided by students, can be used to reimagine what these relationships look like and provide structure for formal or informal mentoring experiences. Third, this study provided readers an opportunity to learn about peer mentorship from the perspective of peer mentees and peer mentors. While the former has been explored by previous literature, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, a literature review, there is very little to no information on the latter. Having feedback from mentees as well as mentors will allow researchers to have a more adequate understanding of what effective peer mentoring encompasses. Additionally, this information can be used to develop spaces that nurture organic peer mentorship via the process of working with peer mentors to create these communities. Learning successful mentoring techniques will also help universities train faculty and graduate mentors on the most effective mentoring strategies to employ with Black Ph.D. students.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black doctoral students enrolled in academic departments of MU's Education College. Specifically, I sought to better understand the influence of mentoring relationships on their academic and professional success. Within this chapter, I share and discuss what is known about doctoral students of color based on recent literature. This chapter has been divided into three parts. The first section focuses on the process of accessing graduate education for students of color. The second part highlights the socialization these students experience while transitioning into and/or throughout their doctoral studies. The final passage provides details regarding what we know about graduate mentorship and its significance on the lives of graduate students of color.

All of the literature in this study stems from peer-reviewed articles and state/national organizations that were found via academic search engines such as Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic, and The University of Wisconsin – Madison online library catalog system. No specific search terms were excluded from my search. I did, however, use a combination of the following phrases; “Graduate students of color”, “mentoring”, “social support”, “graduate socialization”, “peer support”, and “Predominantly White Institutions of higher education” to identify articles that focused on the three broader sections of this literature review. Since there is a large amount of literature on graduate student experiences, in general, I found it important to use the above terminology to emphasize the unique experiences and socialization of Black graduate students as well as other graduate students of color. Although I did not necessarily exclude terms from my literature search, most of the peer-reviewed articles incorporated within this review focused exclusively on college students of color, Black college students, graduate students of color, Black graduate students. Some publications, which focused more broadly on

graduate student socialization (despite race) were also included to highlight the strategies that have been used to better understand the socialization of graduate students over time. I also used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative articles within this literature review. While this dissertation research was qualitative, I found it important to include both research types within my literature review. Doing so provided a more robust description of students of color and their diverse experiences accessing/persisting through graduate degree programs.

### **Accessing Graduate Education**

Much of what is known about college students of color is based on their experiences at the undergraduate level (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). This is more than likely due to the fact that majority of students of color in higher education are in associate or bachelor's degree granting programs. Of the total college degrees conferred to Black students in 2017, 75% of these degrees were received at the undergraduate level (associate/bachelor's programs) (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2020). For Hispanic students, 85% of the total degrees conferred in the 2017-18 academic year were received by students in associate or bachelor's degree programs (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2020, table 321.20; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2020, table 322.20). The research that does focus on graduate students of color suggests there are various factors influencing their enrollment in and persistence through graduate degree programs. These factors, all of which are reviewed below, include:

1. participation in undergraduate research (Gasman et al., 2009; McCoy et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2010),
2. cost of graduate school (Griffin et al., 2016, Poock & Love, 2001,)
3. and, feeling marginalized on campus (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Robinson, 2013).

### ***Undergraduate Research***

Undergraduate experiences, particularly within the scope of research, can influence students and their decision to pursue graduate education (Bauer & Bennett, 2003; Eagan Jr. et al., 2013; Gasman et al., 2009; Harper, 2010; Hathaway et al., 2002; McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015; Palmer et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2010). Eagan Jr. et al. (2013) used a quantitative study to examine the link between participation in undergraduate research programs and graduate school aspirations for undergraduate students majoring in STEM fields. Using a longitudinal sample of more than 4,000 diverse participants, the team learned that STEM students who participated in undergraduate research were significantly more likely to express interest in pursuing a STEM graduate degree program than their peers who had not participated in any undergraduate research experiences. Bauer and Bennett (2003) took their study one step further. The authors, who also conducted quantitative research, used a mail-in survey to better understand the benefits of undergraduate research from the perception of alumni at the University of Delaware. With a sample size of 900 academically diverse alumni, Bauer and Bennett (2013) learned that students with undergraduate research experience were significantly more likely to attend doctoral degree programs than peers who did not participate in undergraduate research at all.

A rapid increase of government funding for academic research, starting in the 1960s, opened the door to undergraduate research experiences (Bauer & Bennett, 2003). There are multiple types of undergraduate research programs for students of color. For example, the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program was established as one of eight federally funded initiatives to support the academic advancements of participants from underrepresented backgrounds. Named after the late astronaut, Ronald E. McNair, the McNair Scholars Program specifically aims to prepare college students from underrepresented

backgrounds for doctoral degree programs by engaging them within undergraduate research and other academic activities (U.S. Department of Education, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, 2020). Similar programs, such as the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, have been designed by individual states to increase student retention via the collaboration of faculty and students on research projects (Hathaway et al., 2002). One broader focus of these programs is on the retention and persistence for students of color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) related fields (Gasman et al., 2009; Hathaway et al., 2002). Although students of color are generally less likely to attend graduate school than their White peers, this is especially true within STEM (Harper, 2010; Palmer et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2010). Some of this literature has been critiqued as focusing too much on the failure of these students, and not enough on their success (Harper, 2010). More recent literature, however, has sought to view these students from an asset-based lens and focus on factors that help them persist through their undergraduate studies and into graduate school (Gasman et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2010).

Strayhorn (2010) and Gasman et al. (2009) sought to understand how universities can increase the number of undergraduate students of color who major in STEM graduate degree programs. Strayhorn found that undergraduate students who conducted undergraduate research held higher aspirations for graduate study than their peers who only wrote literature reviews or did not participate in undergraduate research experiences at all. These results are consistent with those of earlier quantitative research that found a positive correlation between students of color engaged in undergraduate research and the pursuit of graduate education (Hathaway et al., 2002). Additionally, Gasman et al. (2009) used a comprehensive literature review to emphasize the

importance of providing integrated support systems/programs designed by faculty/administrators who understand STEM course content and other STEM related activities at the graduate level.

Although this research sheds a light on the positive relationship between undergraduate research and graduate school access, much of it was quantitative (Hathaway et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2010) and focused primarily on STEM fields (Harper, 2010; Palmer et al., 2011). Outside of STEM, there is much to learn about the impact of undergraduate research experiences on students of color and their matriculation into, and persistence through, graduate school (McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015; Perna et al., 2009). Other than honing one's academic and professional development, undergraduate research programs help students address another factor influencing graduate school access – financial support. One direct way these programs help students financially is by paying for miscellaneous expenses that can quickly add up. The McNair Scholars program, for example, is known to provide graduate application fee waivers and graduate fellowship awards to its undergraduate participants (Wayne State University, n.d.; University of Colorado – Boulder, n.d.). One indirect way undergraduate research helps students fund graduate school is by connecting them with campus faculty and administrators who serve as references for future Graduate Assistantships. Hathaway et al. (2002) found that student participants of the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) at the University of Michigan were significantly more likely to utilize faculty mentors for job recommendations than University of Michigan students not involved in undergraduate research.

### ***Financial Support***

Higher education, at all levels, has increasingly become more expensive (Long & Riley, 2007), and serves as another barrier to graduate school for students of color (Brown II et al., 1999; Poock & Love, 2001; Young & Brooks, 2008). Some states have replaced need-based aid

with merit-based aid (McLendon et al., 2014), negatively impacting certain populations more than others. Between 2003 – 2004, Black students paid for school with loans more than any other racial group (Long & Riley, 2007). During that same period, Black students also held the highest average loan amount of their peers. While initiatives such as the McNair Scholars program provides some financial support, not all undergraduate research programs are supported by the federal government. Additionally, not all students of color have the ability to join such programs at the undergraduate level.

The significance of funding for graduate students of color has been voiced by multiple stakeholders including faculty members (Young & Brooks, 2008), administrators (Griffin et al., 2016; Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999), and graduate students of color themselves (Poock & Love, 2001). Poock & Love (2001) used a questionnaire and focus groups with more than 300 doctoral students in Higher Education Administration programs at multiple universities, to better understand why these students chose to attend their specific academic program. While the authors suggest participants, in general, sought programs that were “friendly and welcoming” (p. 213), the decision of non-White students to attend their programs was more influenced by factors such as internship opportunities and access to other funding resources. Too often, however, funding for graduate students of color is hard to come by. Griffin et al. (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 Graduate Diversity Officers (GDOs), across 11 universities, about the role of GDOs in retaining graduate students of color. Although some GDOs highlighted their success in obtaining national grant funding, majority of the respondents expressed frustration with their campus’s lack of effort in providing adequate financial resources to improve the success of graduate students of color. Other administrators have also voiced their concerns regarding limited funding and its negative influence on their ability to recruit and retain graduate

students of color. Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton (1999) used a mailed-in survey to learn what factors impacted the recruitment efforts of Graduate Admissions Directors for doctoral programs in Clinical Psychology. Of the 55 Admissions Directors who highlighted factors hindering their recruitment efforts, 19 specifically identified inadequate funding for graduate students of color. In addition to funding, faculty members have expressed the importance of intervening on behalf of students with campus services such as the financial aid office (Young & Brooks, 2008). Financial support is not the only type of support that influences students of color and their access to graduate education. Social support, or the lack thereof, has significantly affected these students and their ability to successfully transition into graduate school. Even if a student is well funded, the student may encounter various forms of marginalization along the way (by peers, faculty, etc.) which has discouraged many from continuing their studies. More specifically, graduate students of color have used terminology such as “social isolation” and “discrimination” (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009, p. 188) to describe their negative experiences on campus.

### ***Marginalization***

A wealth of higher education literature has been dedicated to highlighting the social encounters that negatively and/or positively influence the persistence of students of color – especially those who attend predominantly white universities (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; McCoy et al., 2015; Robinson, 2013). Gay (2004) discussed three forms of marginalization that contribute to the negative experiences of students of color in graduate school. The first form, isolation, highlights the exclusion people of color experience due to “being the only one” (p. 267) in their program and/or lack of representation of their culture in course materials and other campus artifacts. Isolation was also cited by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2009) who interviewed Black graduate alumni, at one predominantly White research university

in the American south, and learned alumni felt “alienated” (p. 192) in spaces where they were the only people of color. Factors like isolation, often lead to graduate students of color negotiating when and when not to address micro-aggressions and other racist behavior in these spaces (Gildersleeve et al., 2011).

The second form, benign neglect, involves professors/academic advisors passing students along without providing them the type of critical feedback needed to maximize their academic writing/research skills (Gay, 2004). Like many experiences of students of color, benign neglect could start at the undergraduate level. McCoy et. al (2015) interviewed White faculty who mentored undergraduate students of color in STEM fields and learned these faculty sought to treat students of color the same as White students, but openly acknowledged relaxing certain criteria for their lab assistants of color. These moments are often disguised as creating opportunities for students of color who are commonly referred to as “not top students” (p. 233).

Problematic popularity, the third marginalization type, is described as a form of “tokenism” (Gay, 2004, p. 284) where people of color are invited to participate in various activities (i.e., committees, assistantships, classroom dialogues, etc.) but have very limited influence on the course and direction of these activities. Although tokenism affords some students of color the opportunity to invoke institutional change, these students must challenge the status quo in a way that is considered less threatening to the dominant racial group or risk being silenced (Robinson, 2013).

### **Summary of Accessing Graduate Education**

There is much to be learned about students of color and their access to graduate education. Although the literature above is useful, most of it is quantitative, more than five years old, and paints a grim (yet accurate) image of what life as a potential graduate student of color is

like – especially for those who choose to attend PWIs. Additionally, there is a lack of emphasis on why students of color select the graduate programs they attend (particularly if they did not attend that institution for their undergraduate studies) and how students learn about these programs in the first place. The role of important stakeholders, other than faculty and admissions officers, (e.g., family members, Graduate Coordinators, peers, etc.) on these processes is seldom discussed as well. These gaps in the literature limit knowledge on how students of color ultimately determine the importance of graduate school access and who helps them in achieving this milestone. Without this information, campus stakeholders will continue to struggle in their attempts to successfully recruit and increase the number of graduate students of color on campus. In addition to factors impacting these scholars and their access to graduate education, a significant amount of literature has been dedicated to the graduate socialization process of students of color.

### **Graduate Student Socialization**

Within the next section of this literature review, I discuss what we know about graduate socialization for students of color. First, I highlight how socialization (in the context of higher education) has been defined. Second, I briefly write about the type of graduate socialization that can occur at the undergraduate level. Third, I share what is known about the socialization process of students of color while in graduate school.

#### ***Defining Socialization***

Socialization is essential to the academic and professional progress of graduate students, especially graduate students of color (Ellis, 2001; McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The socialization process is described as one in which novices become members of a community (Golde, 1998). In the context of higher education, the *novice* is a student and the *community* they

are joining is an academic department or program. More specifically, Weidman et al. (2001) defined graduate socialization as the process in which a person gains the necessary skills which allow them to enter a professional career requiring an enhanced level of specific skills. Golde (1998) noted four tasks of the socialization process for students transitioning into and beyond graduate school. These tasks include honing one's intellectual competence, learning the truth about graduate life, educating themselves about their intended profession, and then integrating themselves into that profession. Although students may experience similar socialization processes, no two students or academic programs are the same (Austin, 2002; Weidman et al., 2001). This was especially highlighted within the differing experiences of students based on race/gender (Gardner, 2008), institution type (Barnes & Randall, 2012), and academic program (Mendoza, 2007). For example, Gardner (2008) found non-traditional students (e.g., women, students of color, part-time students, etc.) generally believed their academic programs did not appreciate their diverse backgrounds which negatively impacted the student's satisfaction with their graduate program.

### ***Graduate Socialization at Undergraduate Level***

Although less frequently explored, studies do note the graduate/professional socialization process as beginning at the undergraduate level (McCoy et al., 2015; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). This stage of the process is known as anticipatory socialization. Weidman et al. (2001) described anticipatory socialization as the stage in which novices initially learn about the behaviors and attitudes associated with graduate/professional education. At this level, many of the novice's behaviors/attitudes about their intended career are preconceived or stereotypical. Since they are not as familiar with graduate school, the students acquire much of their information about graduate school from sources such as the media (e.g., news articles, internet,

etc.) and current graduate students or professors who advise graduate students (Weidman, et al., 2001). As the student enters graduate/professional school, however, their knowledge becomes more empirical.

McCoy & Winkle-Wagner (2015) used data from a multisite case study to better understand how 16 undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds engaged in anticipatory socialization via summer bridge programs before entering graduate school. Participating in such programs assisted students in developing confidence as a scholar and cultivating a passion for scholarship. Winkle-Wagner & McCoy (2016) used a critical qualitative case study to examine how graduate school preparation programs contribute to the socialization of 15 underrepresented students of color in the English discipline, who were transitioning into graduate school. Among their findings, the authors note the impact of such programs on students' socialization into disciplinary norms and ability to create change within their discipline by bringing their social/cultural backgrounds with them to the graduate level.

The experiences of undergraduate students, highlighted in both articles, shows the importance of graduate preparation programs for aspiring graduate students of color. Although these programs are credited with, sometimes beginning the graduate socialization process, most literature on graduate socialization focuses primarily on graduate students after they enroll in graduate programs.

### ***Graduate Socialization at the Graduate Level***

As previously mentioned, graduate socialization can enhance students' ability to obtain the necessary skills required for success within their academic profession. For many graduate students, who were unable to attend graduate preparation programs at the undergraduate level, socialization is acquired during graduate school (Weidman et al., 2001). Literature highlights the

significant impact of ones' socialization, or lack thereof, on their experiences in graduate school (Golde, 1998, Austin, 2002). This is especially true for doctoral students (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Weidman & Stein, 2003) and even more true for doctoral students of color (Gardner, 2008; Ellis, 2001; Gay 2004; Johnson-Baily et al., 2009).

Gardner (2008) used interviews with 40 chemistry and history Ph.D. students to examine the socialization and influence of "fitting the mold" (p. 126) on participants' graduate experiences. Within their findings, the author noted the less than satisfactory experience of non-traditional students (i.e., non-White males) who described their academic departments as not taking into consideration the diverse backgrounds and experiences of an ever-changing student body. Gardner's (2008) findings are supported by Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) who have encouraged practitioners to provide opportunities for underrepresented students to see themselves reflected within their research and academic career field. Doing so can assist graduate programs in not only retaining students but ensuring they have a more positive graduate experience.

Gay (2004) also highlighted the types of marginalization experienced by graduate students but focused specifically on students of color. Based on the accounts of her participants, Gay (2004) identified these categories as isolation, benign neglect, and problematic popularity. Johnson-Baily et al. (2009) examined the social experiences of Black graduate alumni at one predominantly White research university in the southern United States and noted similar forms of marginalization previously discussed by Gay. Johnson-Baily et al. (2009) identified discrimination, isolation, and loneliness as normal feelings that frequently led participants to view their graduate experience through a deficit lens and ultimately describe it as something they "endured and survived" (p. 192). Additionally, Ellis (2001) found that when race and gender are

considered, Black male doctoral students reported higher levels of satisfaction with their graduate experiences than Black female doctoral students. The author noted this could be related to the differences in how students are treated on-campus as well as male students being less interested in making friends and building social connections within their academic program.

### **Summary of Graduate Student Socialization**

Like their graduate admissions process, literature on the graduate socialization of students of color leaves many unanswered questions. While some students attend graduate preparation programs at the undergraduate level, this is not true for everyone. One such question that must be answered, is: what motivates students, who did not participate in graduate preparation programs, to attend graduate school? Additionally, much of what is known about graduate students of color focuses specifically on their race (and gender, sometimes). Other identities such as sexuality, class, or religious identities, however, are rarely discussed. As a result, a question arises: what are the graduate socialization experiences of students of color who share other marginalized identities (e.g., students who are also parents, students with physical or intellectual disabilities, etc.)? Another area rarely discussed in previous literature is the career trajectory of these students. Although many doctoral students visualize themselves as tenured-faculty, these positions are continuing to diminish – especially as cuts to higher education funding continue (Finder, 2007). As a result, students may be forced to explore other career paths to pay for basic needs and gain additional skills to acquire a tenure-track faculty position.

### **Mentorship and Students of Color**

One factor that can directly influence graduate socialization for students of color is social support in the form of mentorship. The final section of this literature review will discuss the phenomenon of mentorship and what is known about it at the undergraduate and graduate school

levels. Before sharing what previous literature says about mentorship, I first identify how it is defined.

### *Defining Mentorship*

In the broader context of education, mentoring has been identified as disorganized and rarely guided by theory (Jacobi, 1991; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In their analysis of college mentorship, Jacobi found that the guidelines for mentoring varied across the field of higher education. Factors such as required meeting times, role of mentor/mentee, and duration of mentoring relationship looked different depending on the university and department where the initiative was employed. Additionally, Crisp & Cruz (2009) found 30 different definitions of college mentorship in their critical review of literature on the practice between 1990 and 2007. These issues have encouraged Nora & Crisp (2007) to develop a conceptual framework that sought to categorize the multiple dimensions of college mentoring. Based on the findings of previous literature, these categories consist of:

1. Psychological and emotional support
2. Support for setting goals and choosing a career path
3. Academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field
4. Specification of a role model

The authors then compared these categories to the findings of their quantitative survey of 200 community college students. In the end, Nora and Crisp (2007) found that all but one category (academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field) were identified by survey participants as significantly contributing to their mentoring experience.

### *Undergraduate Mentorship*

Although broad and sometimes difficult to define, mentoring has been linked to the success of students at four-year colleges, particularly Students of Color (Barker, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011; Pounds, 1987). This is notably true for scholars engaged in undergraduate research with faculty members (Ishiyama, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; McCoy et al., 2015). In his qualitative examination of mentoring relationships within the Ronald E. McNair Program, Ishiyama (2007) found Black undergraduate students were more likely to value the personal connection with faculty mentors than their White peers.

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) found something different relative to the availability of mentoring, however. Using results from the CSEQ, the authors note Black collegians identified research-focused relationships, rather than personal relationships, with faculty mentors as positively correlating with their college success. Not all interactions within faculty-to-student mentorships are positive. McCoy et al. (2015) qualitatively explored the relationship between White faculty members and their student mentees of color with help from Bonilla-Silva's Colorblind Racism Frames. The authors found that White faculty described their students of color as not being top scholars and challenged these students less vigorously than White student mentees.

Peer mentorship has also positively influenced the undergraduate experiences of Students of Color (Harper, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016) and those mentoring relationships might influence students to attend graduate programs. Using a phenomenological study of high achieving Black male collegians at PWIs, Harper (2007) identified social support from same race peers as having a significantly positive impact on the college successes of high achieving Black male collegians. Palmer et al. (2011) noted similar

results. The team sought to identify factors contributing to the retention and persistence for undergraduate Students of Color in STEM disciplines via in-dept face-to-face interviews. Amongst their major findings was the positive influence of peer-group support between Students of Color in STEM disciplines. Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016) used a critical qualitative case study, framed within the concept of Social Reproduction Theory, to explore the influence of graduate school preparation programs on the socialization of underrepresented students in the English discipline. Within their findings, the authors linked peer-mentorship to students' motivation to excel academically.

### ***Graduate Mentorship***

Unlike their undergraduate counterparts, less has been written about the mentorship experiences of graduate students of color – especially good mentoring (Brunsmas et al., 2017). The literature answered three basic questions, including: Who do graduate students of color rely on for social support? What are the misconceptions associated with mentoring graduate students of color? And how can mentors improve the way they mentor graduate students of color? I use the sub-sections, below, to answer these three questions.

**Socially Supporting Graduate Students of Color.** Relationships with faculty and peers can significantly influence students of color and their graduate experiences (Brown II et al., 1999; Ellis, 2001; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2016).

For example, Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) used CRT and a 72-item mailed questionnaire to explore the support experiences of more than 500 Black graduate and professional students who graduated from a predominantly White southern research university. Although the participants discussed five different sources of support, they specifically identified Black students and Black professors as greatly contributing to their positive graduate experiences.

While effective mentorship does not require mentors and mentees to identify as the same, racially (Brown II et al., 1999), race and other identities can greatly influence this relationship (Williams et al., 2016). Williams et al. (2016) used CRT and interview data from a larger research program to examine the socialization experiences of Black doctoral students who attended one of 13 public research universities and sought faculty careers. Consistent with Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008), race was identified as an important factor contributing to positive advisor-student mentorship experiences. Other important factors, such as gender background, shared experiences, and mutual understanding also influenced the trust these participants had in their advisors. When students had difficulty connecting with their advisors, they sought mentorship from other colleagues.

Ellis (2001) conducted individual interviews and focus groups with 42 Black and White students to better understand their doctoral experiences. Like the findings of Williams et al. (2016), the author noted that students worked “unofficially with outsiders” (Ellis, 2001, p. 36) when they had difficulty finding faculty within their department to work with. This was especially true for the non-White participants, such as one Black male who discussed working with a professional in his field that lived multiple hours away from campus. These studies not only emphasize the importance of social support, but also the determination of Black graduate students to seek-out mentoring that is conducive to their needs.

**Misconceptions of Graduate Mentorship.** In addition to discussing the importance of social support, literature has also highlighted various misconceptions and issues associated with mentoring graduate students of color (Brown II et al., 1999; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Reddick & Young, 2012; Young & Brooks, 2008). In their study, which explored the requirements of mentoring graduate students of color, Brown II et al. (1999) identified five

myths associated with mentoring graduate students of color based on previous literature and interviews they conducted with faculty colleagues/graduate students. The five myths associated with mentoring graduate students of color include:

1. *Any senior person can mentor a junior person* – this is considered false because many senior persons need, but do not have, a basic understanding of mentorship or how and why it is beneficial for student mentees. Some faculty exhibit personality flaws, such as prejudice and criticality, which have been identified by students as bad mentor traits (Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986).
2. *Engaging with graduate students of color during class and seminars is sufficient mentoring* – the authors noted this as untrue because mentors must engage their mentees outside the classroom to foster rapport with students. In fact, mentees who apart of more informal mentorship experiences report higher satisfaction with their mentor (Johnson, 2002).
3. *Mentoring is only extra advising* – Successful mentorship should not be based on the top-down structure of advising but should embrace co-learning experiences where students feel comfortable expressing their innovative ideas and are not scared to ask questions. Mentoring is a two-way street. The most successful graduate mentorships are those in which the mentor and mentee have common expectations of their relationship (Johnson, 2002).
4. *Students of color can only be mentored by faculty of color* – In addition to this myth being unsubstantiated, having the opportunity to work with faculty of color is challenging for these students because faculty of color are significantly out-numbered by students of color (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

5. *Faculty should mentor only those students with whom there are strong similarities (i.e., research interests, philosophical positionality, etc.)* – Although it is important for mentors and mentees to have some similarities, faculty mentors choosing to only work with students who share their strong similarities would disadvantage graduate students (especially those of color) who attend PWIs and have difficulty finding faculty with whom they share strong similarities. Students of color, like their white peers, need effective and influential guidance no matter the race of their mentor (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001).

**Suggestions for Mentoring Graduate Students of Color.** Factors, such as the misconceptions above, have inspired researchers to study and identify ways to effectively support the mentorship of graduate students of color (Bonilla et al., 1994; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Reddick & Young, 2012). Some of these recommendations have been created by faculty, for faculty. Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001), for example, identify two steps that faculty (involved in cross race mentoring) can take to improve the mentoring experience of their protégé. The first of these steps is to use a series of questions to broaden their cultural knowledge of themselves, their protégés, and their work environment (e.g., academic department). These questions include:

1. How do you feel about mentoring someone who is of a different race or culture?
2. What views does your protégé hold with regard to assimilation versus cultural pluralism?
3. What is the diversity maturity of your organization? Does your organization possess attributes of self-awareness, clarity of values, openness, adaptability and egalitarianism with regard to non-majority graduate students?

Step two is to create a more inclusive and supporting environment that fosters the growth of graduate students of color. The authors describe a four-stage plan to invoke organizational change at the college or department level. This plan involves “identifying and adopting the appropriate college or departmental model for cultural identity”, “developing a mentoring program for the college or department”, “focusing on the diversity culture and climate of the department or college”, and “planning formal departmental events to provide continued introspection, examination, discussion, and remediation of diversity issues” (p. 566).

Current and former student researchers have also contributed to the literature that highlights recommendations for successful mentoring relationships with graduate students of color. While some of these publications focus on faculty-to-student mentoring (Grant & Simmons, 2008), others discuss recommendations for peer-to-peer mentoring (Bonilla et al., 1994).

Grant and Simmons (2008) conducted a case study where they used CRT to explore the mentoring experiences of a doctoral student and faculty member who both identify as Black women. After sharing the types of mentorship that assisted them in navigating PWIs, the authors call for academic departments (at PWIs) to create formal mentoring experiences that involve race and gender-sensitive activities. Additionally, the team challenges departments to provide their Black women graduate students with professional development opportunities that include research incentive grants, teaching assistant positions, the ability to mentor undergraduate Black women, and post-doctoral experiences. Another distinguishing feature of this study is that Grant and Simmons believe “this process must begin on the master’s level...” (p. 512) for students.

Like Grant and Simmons (2008), Bonilla et al. (1994) discussed the mentoring practices that assisted them in navigating their doctoral programs. Different from Grant and Simmons,

however, these authors identify as men (two are Black and one is Puerto Rican), graduated from the same academic department/university, and speak on their experiences with peer mentorship. The men focus specifically on peer mentorship because, unlike faculty-to-student mentorship, it is based upon equality and allows participants to be “free to interact and communicate without any need to defer to each other” (p. 112). At the conclusion of their book chapter, the trio provides a list of the peer mentoring practices that most contributed to their success. This list includes the men regularly meeting with each other, giving honest feedback to one another regarding each other’s research, providing space/time to vent their feelings, and continuing this support until all three scholars graduated with their Ph.D.

### **Summary of Mentorship and Students of Color**

Although there is a wealth of literature on students of color and their social experiences with advisors/mentors, much of this literature is outdated (Bonilla et al., 1994; Brown et al., 1999), dominantly caters to undergraduate students (Barker, 2007; Ishiyama, 2007; Palmer et al., 2011), and/or focuses specifically on faculty-to-student mentoring (Griffin et al., 2010; McCoy et al., 2015).

The understanding of mentorship for graduate students of color, especially Black Ph.D. students, must improve. First, it is imperative to have a working definition of graduate mentorship that is defined by graduate students themselves. This can allow faculty researchers to explore if and how current students’ definition of mentorship differs from text-book definitions of the term. Using definitions that were created by faculty or administrators, without the input of students, fails to fully acknowledge the experiences of the very population that faculty/administrators seek to assist. Second, more attention should be dedicated to peer mentorship for Black graduate students. As previously mentioned, most of what is known about

graduate mentoring focuses on faculty-to-student relationships as opposed to student-to-student relationships. It is important to focus on peer mentorship because students greatly contribute to the persistence of other students (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008; Bonilla et al., 1994). This could be especially evident on campuses, particularly PWIs, where faculty advising is limited because of various factors. Additionally, there could be methods of mentorship, used by students to help other students, that faculty/administrators are unaware of and/or cannot replicate – such as a relationship based on being equal (Bonilla et al., 1994).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory I used to support my research is intersectionality. Intersectionality spans multiple disciplines (Mattsson, 2014; McCall 2005), has several definitions (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Strayhorn, 2013), and has been considered a complex theory (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008) used in various ways to support previous research (Harris & Patton, 2019). For the purpose of this study, intersectionality will be defined as a principle that “investigate[s] how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life” (Collins & Bilge, 2020). This theory can, and should, be used to explore overlapping social identities (e.g., race, sex, class, age, etc.) and better understand how these characteristics contribute to the intricacies of human experiences via social structures/stratification (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Specifically, I used intersectionality to explore the impact of these interconnecting identities on Black doctoral students and their various experiences (i.e., class, work, home, etc.) at a PWi.

Before discussing why and how I used intersectionality, it is imperative for me to acknowledge its early beginnings. Intersectionality is hardly a new concept (Collins 1971/2001; Cooper, 1892/1995). The term was first coined in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw – a leading

scholar in Legal Studies. Although Crenshaw is recognized as coining intersectionality, the principle is rooted in Black Feminism (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2020; Harris & Patton, 2019). Its connection to Black Feminism is best depicted by Collins (1986) who referenced the notion of intersectionality within her description of Black Feminist Thought (BFT).

BFT was designed to empower Black women by providing a platform for them to produce work that articulates, and clarifies, the experiences of Black women for Black women (Collins, 1986). Collins noted three themes that characterize BFT, including:

1. *the meaning of self-definition and self-valuation*: The act of challenging the externally produced stereotypical images of Black womanhood via the creation of self-defined authentic Black female images,
2. *the interlocking nature of oppression*: Describes how various types of oppression (e.g., racial oppression, gender oppression, etc.) conjoin to further marginalize the experiences of Black women, and
3. *the importance of Afro-American Women's Culture*: Emphasizes the importance of Black women redefining and explaining the importance of Black women's culture.

Within her second theme, *the interlocking nature of oppression*, Collins noted Black women can see oppression more clearly than Black men and White women because of the “multiple structures of domination” (p. 519) they experience. Since Black men and White women share a common identity with the dominate group in our society (White men), their view of oppression is limited in scope. For example, Black men can identify with the struggles of racism, but may not be able to personally identify with the struggles of sexism from their own lived experiences. Conversely, White women can identify with the struggles of sexism, but cannot personally identify with the struggles of racism from their own lived experiences. As a result, the continued

domination of Black women is directly linked to their marginalized status in multiple either/or dualities (e.g., race and sex/gender). These multiple either/or dualities highlight the importance of studying both interlocking identities and interlocking oppressions when using intersectionality.

Along these lines, Crenshaw (1989) used intersectionality to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (Crenshaw, p. 1244). She later broadened the term to address the ways in which race and gender merge to influence aspects of violence against women of color (Crenshaw, 1990). Crenshaw further described these aspects as structural, political, and representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990).

### ***Structural Intersectionality***

Structural intersectionality emphasizes how women of color are often harmed by the very structures (i.e., policies) that were designed to protect them. Additionally, race and gender intersect to make the domestic violence experience of women of color uniquely different from the domestic violence experience of White women. The same policies that are designed to address issues for both groups often explicitly cater to the needs of White women, while neglecting their non-White peers (Crenshaw, 1990). One example, provided by Crenshaw, involved a revision made in 1990 to the Immigration and Nationality Act. The revision involved protecting immigrant women abused by their spouses (who were U.S. citizens or permanent residents). Due to the act’s marriage fraud provisions, these women had to remain “properly” married for at least two years before applying for permanent resident status (Crenshaw, 1990). The amendment, made in 1990, provided “marriage fraud” waivers to immigrant women who could prove hardship caused by domestic violence. To prove hardship, women had to submit

evidence which involved written reports from police, medical staff, and/or other social service agencies. The challenge, congress failed to recognize however, was that cultural and language barriers prevented many immigrant women of color from reporting their spouse and receiving the help they needed (Crenshaw, 1990).

In my study, structural intersectionality helped explain how some Black students are hurt by the same policies designed to help them. For example, many research universities have established fellowship programs designed to attract and retain Black students via funding (e.g., tuition waivers and stipends). However, many of these same programs require people to be full-time students (earning very low wages) and attend mandatory professional development workshops/events. While these requirements seem reasonable for most students, they negatively impact those who can only attend school part-time. These rules can also hurt full-time students who do not have the time/availability to attend required activities because of prior familial obligations/commitments. The inability to access tuition waivers can make a student's educational journey more financially costly. Limited access to professional development workshops/events could result in the student being less prepared for their desired career field.

### ***Political Intersectionality***

Crenshaw uses this form of intersectionality to address the fact that women of color often belong to multiple subordinated groups whose political agendas (e.g., antiracism, feminism) conflict (Crenshaw, 1990). An example of political intersectionality, at work, involves how the political views of conflicting groups negatively impact women of color who experience domestic violence. Crenshaw (1990) discussed her attempt to retrieve domestic violence records from LAPD and having that request denied. She was told feminist groups did not want the statistics released because they feared the numbers could be misinterpreted by law enforcement. Feminists

were concerned the statistics would show domestic violence as only an issue in communities of color – resulting in (White) politicians not taking the matter seriously. By concealing the records, feminists hoped policy makers would interpret domestic violence as a White problem and take the issue more seriously.

Political intersectionality helped me understand the trickle-down effect of federal policy on the experiences of Black doctoral students. In recent years, the U.S. has shifted from prioritizing need-based aid for low-income college students to subsidizing the cost of higher education for middle- and upper-income families (Long & Riley, 2007). This has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx students (Long & Riley, 2007). As universities have less money specifically designated for underrepresented students, they may choose to fund scholars who are considered most qualified based on traditional measures of success. These measures might include standardized exam scores, undergraduate/graduate GPA, and formal research experience. Students who did not possess these traditional standards but have displayed resiliency and academic determination in other ways, may have received less or no funding at all. Examples of non-traditional measures of academic success could include students whose undergraduate GPAs improved from freshman to senior year and/or students whose GPAs (and other traditional measures of success) were negatively impacted by their need to work fulltime while in school.

### ***Representational Intersectionality***

This type of intersectionality specifically addressed how the misrepresentation of women of color, by popular culture, can perpetuate negative stereotypes and lead to the disempowerment of these women. Crenshaw (1990) used the obscenity prosecution of a rap group, 2 Live Crew, to show how representational intersectionality impacts women of color. In her example, Crenshaw

notes how White men are usually given a pass for obscene or very sexual material (e.g., music, comedy, etc.) while other populations do not fare as well. In fact, the obscene or very sexual material of certain men (i.e., men of color) is often viewed as a threat to society (Crenshaw, 1990). This perceived threat helped to explain why 2 Live Crew (a group of Black male rappers) was prosecuted while White individuals/groups (producing similar content) were not (Crenshaw). She further suggested that obscene material produced by men of color, involving women of color, is not seen as a threat to women of color but rather to White society. This ultimately left women of color unprotected from the very same content that perpetuate dangerous stereotypes of women of color.

This type of intersectionality helped me better understand the ways in which representation (or lack thereof) of students, faculty/policy makers, from diverse backgrounds matters to the field of higher education. Although campus services such as Financial Aid Offices are considered readily accessible, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has been critiqued as “culturally biased and is not language sensitive or relatable to all students” (Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 76). For example, the application requires students to use their birth name, which may pose a challenge for trans students whose birth names align with a gender identity they do not identify with. Additionally, the application assumes a student’s family can provide an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and has a bank account (Eichelberger et al., 2017). This is relevant to underrepresented doctoral students of color because even if some of these students receive fellowship awards, they may still rely on federal financial aid to support themselves and/or their families. More diversity amongst policy makers, as well as the students who seek to become policy makers, could greatly increase the cultural awareness/sensitivity of important services such as federal financial aid.

The work completed by Black feminists such as Crenshaw and Collins has greatly shaped the exploration of how race and gender merge to create the oppression experienced by women of color for being women of color. Black feminists have also challenged us to directly address these interlocking natures of oppression via social justice research (Crenshaw, 1990; Harris & Patton, 2019). Having a better understanding of intersectionality's roots assisted me in my own work as I sought to create socially just research that explores the experiences of Black doctoral students who attend a PWI.

There are a few reasons why I chose intersectionality as a theory to support my research. First, intersectionality not only served as a reminder to acknowledge the intersecting social identities of my participants, but to also recognize the ways in which these intersecting identities interlock and shape the multiple forms of oppression experienced by Black students as they navigate doctoral programs at PWIs. For example, Black students who identify as second-generation doctoral students may have types of familial support that their first-generation peers do not have access to because of possible class differences. If this was true, I sought to further explore how these identities interlock and contribute to the oppression experienced by first generation students. Second, intersectionality produces transformative knowledge (Bilge, 2013) especially within the context of higher education (Garcia & Ortiz, 2013; Harris & Patton, 2013). Transformative knowledge can be used to transform college campuses into socially just environments via the process of directly identifying and addressing the systems of oppression experienced by Black doctoral students. The reasons why I selected intersectionality greatly influence how I used the theory within my study.

Although intersectionality has been used in a myriad of ways to support research (Harris & Patton, 2019), I used the theory as an analytic tool and resource to inform my research

questions. The use of intersectionality as an analytic tool is common within literature (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Mattsson, 2014). For example, Mattsson (2014) shared how intersectionality can be combined with the practice of critical reflection to assist social workers in reflecting on how race, gender, class, and sex interconnect to shape the lived experiences of their clients. Mattsson also discussed a three-step process for using intersectionality and critical reflection to analyze specific incidents within the social work practice. These steps included identifying a critical incident to write down on paper, critically reflecting on the incident (using intersectionality to think about the influence of race, gender, class, and sex within the incident), and then reconstructing strategies for theory and practice.

Because intersectionality was originally applied to women of color (more specifically, Black women), I grappled with how I can use this theory to adequately capture the interlocking identities and oppressions of Black doctoral students at a PWI who may not identify as women. In the context of higher education, intersectionality can be used as an analytic tool to create solutions for increasing equity on campus (Collins & Bilge, 2020). This effort is especially important as the nation's colleges/universities become more diverse (in terms of race, gender identity, class, age, and citizen status) and members of these institutions identify across multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality as an analytic tool is important because it challenges universities to think outside the box and address the issues experienced by students with overlapping marginalized identities (e.g., Black women students, low-income student parents, first-generation undocumented students, etc.). As I spoke with doctoral students about their experiences with mentorship, I sought to understand their intersecting identities and how these identities have shaped their lives. Additionally, as a practitioner, I aimed to develop strategies for

providing these students with the resources/support they need to thrive throughout and beyond their academic programs.

### Chapter 3 – Methods

The research questions for this study are: *What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend a PWI? And, how do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic and professional success of Black doctoral students at a PWI?*

To answer these questions, I used a phenomenological methodology adapted to include analysis of similar, as well as unique, experiences of Black Ph.D. students. Phenomenology is dedicated to describing a common phenomenon shared by participants (e.g., being a doctoral fellow of color at a PWI) (Creswell, 2007). Unlike other qualitative methodologies, phenomenology is more of a means for questioning than answering (Van Manen, 2014). Van Manen describes phenomenologists as being enthused by asking reflective questions and “obsessed with sources and meaning of lived meaning” (p. 27). Although several forms of phenomenology exist (Van Manen, 2014), I selected hermeneutic phenomenology for my research. Hermeneutic phenomenology greatly emphasizes the exploration of the interpretive structures within a person’s lived experiences. As a scholar who takes great pride in conducting research with the people, as opposed to on the people (Mobley, 2015), I sought to use this specific methodology to learn as much as possible about Black doctoral students at PWIs, from Black doctoral students at PWIs.

#### **Participants and Recruitment**

I conducted three individual interviews with 17 Black doctoral students (51 interviews total) in which more than 35 mentors were discussed. Six participants identified as men while 11 identified as women. These students attended the same predominantly White research university and shared some of the same mentors associated with the campus. Participants who shared mentors did not always have the same experience with that mentor. For example, one student had

an overwhelmingly positive experience with a particular faculty mentor while another student shared mixed-feelings about how that mentor addressed conflicts between mentees.

Regarding recruitment, I sought participants who racially identified as Black. These students were recruited because they are significantly underrepresented within the American higher education system, especially at PWIs. Additionally, several PWIs have developed initiatives (e.g., fellowship programs) to recruit/retain graduate these students, but their attrition rates remain high. Although I did not compare groups of participants (based on social identities), I did highlight any differences (such as cultural upbringing) that emerged within participant data.

Participants had to be active Ph.D. students. For this study, active was defined as currently working toward the completion of a doctoral program within MU's Education College. I required participants to be active students because active students are more likely to have remained engaged with the College, whether on-campus or off-campus, because they were still working toward the completion of their Ph.D.

Additionally, I sought to further diversify the type of students in my study by actively recruiting scholars who were at different stages of Ph.D. completion. Typically, there are three stages of the doctoral process. The first involves the completion of course work. Once students have fulfilled the course requirement, they must complete a qualifying paper and dissertation proposal. After the student's qualifying paper and dissertation proposal have been approved, they enter dissertator status. As a dissertator, the student conducts Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved research and writes/presents a dissertation paper. I chose a mixture of students, across these three levels, to provide a more robust exploration of the doctoral process. Each level is unique and requires different amounts of support. Newer doctoral students are more likely to receive guidance and structure because of taking classes. These students usually have a set

routine provided by professors. They see the same teachers and peers each week and follow a structured syllabus that provides deadlines for each course assignment. By the time students reach dissertator status, however, they have typically lost this form of support. Many dissertators are finished with coursework and struggle to maintain the same level of structure provided by course enrollment. Therefore, the type of social, academic, and professional support needed by these students varies by Ph.D. level.

I successfully recruited four to six participants from each of these stages in the Ph.D. process (17 students total). There were no participant limitations regarding gender, sex and/or Socio-Economic Status. I chose not to have limitations regarding these identities because I sought to recruit and work with as many participants as possible.

I lived near the research site and was able to easily access the area because of my physical proximity to campus. I was also familiar with the targeted fellowship programs and knew program staff and student fellows. These campus members helped me identify and connect with prospective participants via email. My specific recruitment plan involved the snowball, or chain referral, sampling technique. This strategy is used to recruit participants via “referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest.” (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). I also asked for assistance from a gatekeeper. I first contacted students that were identified by my colleagues (e.g., gatekeepers) who work and/or attend school in the Education College. Second, I sent these students an email with details about the study and asked them to respond if they were interested. Once the student expressed interest, I sent a follow-up email with additional details about the study/interview process, a letter of consent, and a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) link for a demographics questionnaire. Within the email, I asked interested participants to return a completed copy of the

letter of consent (by email) and submit their demographics questionnaire (via a web-based survey platform) within two weeks of receiving my follow-up email. The demographics questionnaire assisted me in understanding what level of the Ph.D. process the student was at and their social identities. As the initial students signed up to participate, I asked these participants to help me identify and recruit other Black Ph.D. students who might be interested in the study. This cycle continued until I successfully recruited 17 participants. Figure 3.1 displays the pseudonym of each participant along with their gender identity, and progress toward Ph.D. completion. The figure also provides a general overview of the salient identities discussed by participants within their demographics questionnaire and/or interviews.

**Figure 3.1 – Student Demographics**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ph.D. Progress</b>	<b>Identities (across participants)</b>
Gina	Woman	Beginning / Mid-point	Bi-lingual
Chelsea	Woman	Beginning / Mid-point	Bi-racial
Charles	Man	Mid-point / End	Caretaker
James	Man	Mid-point / End	First-gen. American
Kenny	Man	Beginning	First-gen. Student
Blair	Man	Mid-point	Full-time student
Chanel	Woman	Beginning/Mid-point	Heterosexual
Lupita	Woman	End	Multi-cultural
Fred	Man	Mid-point	Partner
Mali	Woman	Mid-point	Parent
Gabriella	Woman	Mid-point/End	Part-time student

Keisha	Woman	Beginning/Mid-point	Queer
Savannah	Woman	Beginning/Mid-point	Second gen. Student
Nicole	Woman	Mid-Point	Suburbanite
Pat	Woman	Beginning	Upper middle-class
Kimberly	Woman	Mid-point	Urbanite
Buddy	Man	Mid-point	Working-class

### Research Location

My study was conducted at Midwestern University (MU). MU is a large public research I university located in a state capital within the upper midwestern United States. In addition to its research, I status, MU is the state's flagship university and largest PWI. According to the school's Registrar Office, students who identify as African American made up just 2.7% of MU's total student population in the fall of 2019 Conversely, White students represented 65% of the campus during that same period. I chose MU as the site of my study for multiple reasons. First, the school is a public university. More Black students attend public universities than private universities (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, table 24.3, 2010). Second, I chose MU for its demographics. As a public university, MU has one of the largest Black student populations, by number, in the state (7,829 students). Third, MU's campus was relatively easy for me to access. Because I lived near the MU campus, I was able to more conveniently recruit and interview fellowship participants.

My study narrowly focused on Black doctoral students within the Education College at MU. The Education College has more than 10 Ph.D. academic programs of which five were

represented within this study. These programs included Higher Education, K-12 education, Psychology, School Psychology, Policy Education, and Education Curriculum.

Another interesting note about participants is that 15 of the 17 students were apart of at least one fellowship program. Although being engaged in a fellowship program was not a requirement for participation in this study, many of the students were recruited to the university via campus-based fellowship initiatives. These programs sought to increase the number of doctoral students from underrepresented backgrounds at MU by offering student tuition waivers, student fee waivers, stipends, and professional development opportunities. The professional development opportunities ranged from social mixers to presentations about financial planning and maximizing one's professional experience at academic conferences.

### **Data Collection**

Within the current study I used multiple data collection techniques over the course of one year to better understand the experiences of doctoral fellows of color at a PWI. These techniques included demographics questionnaires, individual interviews, and an analysis of documents related to the academic programs' participants were enrolled in.

#### ***Demographics Questionnaire***

First, I gathered basic participant information via demographics questionnaires. As noted by previous authors, questionnaires can assist researchers in better understanding the backgrounds of their participants (Crawford et al., 2001), especially participants who identify as Black students (Strayhorn, 2014; Cuyjet, 1997). In addition to providing basic information about ones' background, the questionnaire allowed me to pre-screen students who were interested in participating in my study and select a diverse group of participants. Specifically, I sought to

interview Black doctoral students, in the field of education, who were at varying levels of the Ph.D. completion process.

Details collected within my demographics questionnaire included participants' race/ethnicity, age, hometown, gender identity, academic program/department, and academic year. I also asked questions regarding their current stage in the Ph.D. process (i.e., coursework, comprehensive exams/proposal, or dissertation) and how they define or describe mentorship. As previously mentioned, the only required demographics qualifications of my participants was that they identified as a Black Ph.D. student enrolling in MU's Education College at the time of our interviews.

The type of questionnaire I used to collect these details is web-based and generated by a Survey Hosting Site (SHS) via the university's Technology Department. I chose to use a web-based questionnaire because it has been proven to be just as affective, if not more, than questionnaires that must be completed via paper and pencil (Crawford et al., 2001; Strayhorn, 2014). In fact, Crawford et al. (2001) noted online surveys generate a higher response rate than other types of surveys such as those that are mailed in. Crawford et al. (2001) also highlighted web-based surveys as popular amongst college students. For the purpose of this study, the SHS will be called Data-Bank. According to the school's website, Data-Bank is an "easy to use" online survey generator available to university students, staff, and faculty. The SHS provides users with the ability to use pre-made survey templates or create their own survey template. Data-Bank also has three types of questions that users can insert within their survey. These categories include "Standard Questions", "Specialty Questions", and "Advanced Questions". To keep the survey as user friendly as possible, this study only used the "Standard Questions" category which entails multiple-choice, text entry, and matrix table questions. In addition to its

ease of use, I used Data-Bank because it is the official web-based survey tool of MU. My participants were also more likely to be familiar with this SHS than other web-based surveys not associated with MU's campus. Although there are multiple benefits to using online surveys, a persistent challenge with these systems is the nonresponse and/or incomplete response rate of participants (Crawford et al., 2001). This concern is especially prominent amongst passive web surveys, like Data-Bank. Passive web surveys are described as surveys in which participants must complete the entire survey to have their response recorded by the online system (Crawford et al., 2001). To address this issue, I sent follow-up emails to potential participants encouraging them to complete the web-based demographics questionnaire if they had not already done so. For anyone who met with me for an interview, if they had not completed the demographics questionnaire, I provided them time to complete it during the interview.

### ***Document Analysis***

An analysis of relevant documents further assisted me in data triangulation. As noted by Yin (2014), documents assist the researcher in validating information gathered from other types of sources. Specifically, I used documents to validate details from my individual interviews with Black doctoral students regarding their degree programs and participation in campus-based or national fellowship initiatives. These documents included, but were not limited to, graduation requirements, mission statements, and program/fellowship handbooks.

The student program/fellowship handbooks included important information about degree/fellowship requirements, deadlines, and contact information for various campus resources (e.g., the university health office, office of financial aid, etc.). These documents were frequently handed out at the beginning of the school year and discussed in greater detail at Welcome events for new/returning students. In addition to passing out handbooks, programs also used their

Welcome events to collect data on the types of social and professional activities fellows wanted to engage in. Documents like these assisted me in understanding the support participants needed and expected from different support systems.

In total, I used seven different documents and/or weblinks to support this study. These documents were obtained through programs' public webpages. When documents and interviews contradicted each other, I further examined each of the sources and sought to identify why and how these sources contained conflicting details. Although documents are useful for most qualitative methodologies, the document analysis technique has been highlighted as one of the best ways to conduct different types of qualitative research (Yin, 2014; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016).

### ***Individual Interviews***

The third, and primary, technique I used to collect data from participants was semi-structured individual interviews (51 total interviews). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were held virtually via Zoom video communication software. Each interview was scheduled for 90-120 minutes, and interviewees shortened or extended the interview session(s) as needed. Since participants are current students, at various stages in their Ph.D. programs, I sought to be as flexible and accommodating as possible. The individual interviews helped me learn about the educational experiences of participants and how mentoring, if at all, has influenced these experiences. Having multiple interviews allowed me to review data and ask follow-up questions in person (and/or virtually). I selected individual interviews as a data collection technique for multiple reasons. First, individual interviews allowed participants to share more intimate details of their experiences with only the interviewer, as opposed to several individuals at once (common with focus groups). For example, there could have been students who have difficulty sharing aspects of their identity (e.g., sexuality) with multiple people who

they do not know. Second, individual interviews allowed participants who wanted (or needed) time to reflect and process questions, the ability to do so without social pressure to respond instantly. Additionally, individual interviews could have minimized the likelihood that participants felt pressured to answer questions a certain way (e.g., conform to social norms). Cohesive in-groups, like focus groups, could lead to groupthink (Janis, 2008).

I interviewed each participant a total of three times over a period of three months. Seidman's (2019) three-interview series was used to guide these conversations. The three-interview series is a strategy which "allows both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning." (Seidman, 2019, p. 21). I used the first interview with participants to establish context by learning as much as possible about their life history within the context of education and mentorship (from as early as they could remember until they entered their doctoral program). This included, but was not limited to, educational experiences within and outside the classroom. It also encompassed the relationships that participants forged with family, friends, and other important stakeholders (e.g., instructors, coaches, etc.). Examples of the questions I asked throughout each interview are detailed in Appendix A of this dissertation.

Within the second interview, I focused more specifically on the participants' present lived experiences in relation to their role as a doctoral fellow of color who engages in mentorship while attending a PWI. Seidman describes lived experiences as the "thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and actions..." (Seidman, 2019, p. 22) we experience every day, but commonly take for granted and do not think about because these moments happen so frequently and casually. An example of a lived experience would be the emotions a student of color may feel as they walk through the halls of an academic building and only see White faces on the wall.

The focus of interview three was to encourage participants to reflect and make meaning of the experiences they previously shared with me (Seidman, 2019). I used questions to help interviewees step outside the hustle-and-bustle of their daily lives, pause for a moment, and think about what their various experiences mean to them. The success of this interview was contingent upon the foundation I established in the first two interviews because it required participants to process how their life history and present lived experiences intertwined to shape their current life. For example, I frequently asked participants to describe how their perceptions of mentorship have evolved overtime because of their childhood experiences and where they see themselves, career-wise, in the future.

In addition to providing a structure for participants to explore their experiences, I chose to use the three-interview series for a few reasons. First, it complimented my use of phenomenology because of the technique's emphasis on students' experiences and the meaning of these experiences within their life. Second, it provided a level of context and trust that could be very difficult to achieve with just one 90-minute interview session. Only meeting with the student once could have hindered my ability to establish a stronger rapport because the student may not have felt comfortable sharing certain aspects of their life with someone who they considered a stranger (Seidman, 2019). As the participant became more comfortable with me, they may have divulged details in our second or third interview that they actively withheld from the first interview. Third, multiple meetings with participants allowed me to review data between interviews and identify questions to ask in our follow-up discussion(s). This also helped me process our conversations and identify aspects from the previous interview that I could discuss more deeply with the participant. Additionally, multiple meetings assisted interviewees with their thought process because they were able to follow-up with me and expand on information

they forgot to mention in a previous interview. Allowing both parties (participants and I) to process details between interviews helped me paint a more adequate picture of Black doctoral students and their experiences with mentorship.

Each of my individual interviews were semi-structured. I define semi-structured as having a short, formal list of open-ended questions and prompts that provided flexibility for me to adjust questions and prompts as needed throughout the duration of our interviews (Leech, 2002). Leech (2002) notes that semi-structured interviews are one of the best ways to establish rapport with participants because this style provides participants an opportunity to serve as the expert and inform research. There are a few reasons why I used semi-structured interviews. First, this style allowed me to modify my list of questions before, during and after interviews. Situations in which I considered modifying questions after an interview included moments where participants discussed an interesting topic/experience in their previous interview that I did not previously ask about. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to edit my questions for the second interview and expand on new discoveries. Second, semi-structured interviews allowed me to have a more free-flowing and natural conversation with the interviewees which could have provided a more relaxed and comfortable environment for the participant. This awareness hopefully helped the interviewee feel more comfortable and open to discussing topics they would not have felt comfortable discussing in other environments.

### **Data Analysis**

For the current study, I used three layers of data analysis; low-level coding, meaning fields, and a modified reconstructive horizon analysis (Carspecken, 1996). Carspecken (1996) notes how these three layers contribute to the initial reconstructive analysis because of how they support each other. The reconstructive analysis begins with meaning reconstruction.

Meaning reconstruction is a cyclical process in which a person's understanding of meaning moves from tacit (implied without words) to explicit (clearly stated with words) and then back to holistic. It is difficult to develop a meaning reconstruction without at least taking mental note of recurring patterns and unusual events. Researchers may have trouble taking notes of recurring patterns if they do not know the basic functions of low-level coding. Low-level coding will not be beneficial to the researcher if they are unfamiliar with meaning reconstruction (Carspecken, 1996). For this section of the paper, I will describe each layer of the technique. Once I have described the layer, I will share any modifications I have made to the layer and finally connect it to my research.

### ***Low-Level Coding***

Carspecken (1996) described low-level coding as “coding that falls close to the primary record and requires little abstraction” (p. 146). These codes entail using a few words (3 – 5) to highlight what was stated in a sentence and/or paragraph (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Most low-level codes are objective in nature and involve using direct quotes from the transcription. It is important to note, however, not all low-level codes are objective; there are some that involve the researchers' interpretations of the data (Carspecken, 1996). The significance of low-level coding is that it allowed me to produce more accurate findings by encouraging me to stay as true, as possible, to the words of participants.

Most of my analysis process involved grouping low-level codes by similarity and developing a shorter list of descriptive codes. After defining these descriptive codes, I created a codebook. The codebook was then uploaded to a qualitative analysis software, called MAXQDA, and used to code all 51 transcripts. After the transcripts were coded, I reviewed the coded segments (quotes), identified the most relevant to Black Ph.D. students' mentorship

experiences and extracted these segments to a Word document. I then further discussed the quotes with my faculty advisor and developed a series of larger themes regarding Black Ph.D. students' mentorship experiences. Finally, these themes and quotes were used as the basis of my findings. Although majority of my analysis process involved creating low-level codes and descriptive codes, I also used meaning fields and a reconstructive horizon analysis to better interpret the possible meanings of specific quotes. See figure 3.2 for examples of the study's codes and sub-codes.

### *Meaning Fields*

Once low-level codes are created, Carspecken (1996) encourages researchers to use segments from these low-level codes to develop a meaning field. The meaning field contains "possible meanings...that other people in the setting might infer, either overtly or tacitly." (Carspecken, 1996, p. 95). These possible meanings are used to reconstruct the sentences and are separated by "and", "or", and "and/or" phrasing. This type of phrasing allows researchers to show the range of possible meanings for the actors involved (Carspecken). The only adjustment I made to the meaning field analysis for my study is adding "because" to the list of "and", "or", and "and/or" phrases. This idea stemmed from Gray, McKay, & Toombs (2016) who used additional phrases to turn the meaning fields into complete sentences. I preferred for my meaning field to read as a short story and used these phrases to assist in that process because it flowed more naturally.

Researchers and participants develop their impressions of meanings the same way (Carspecken, 1996). Both are aware of the likely intended meanings of a particular act and the range of potential interpretations others may have of that act. Although researchers and participants develop meanings in the same way, this does not guarantee their meanings will

be the exact same because of individual differences (e.g., life experiences, and how we interpret data).

Carspecken (1996) notes researchers should always think about, and be able to articulate, the possible meanings of their data. The creation of meaning fields helped me with this process. Since it is impossible to completely validate reconstructed meaning fields (Carspecken), this technique encouraged me to consider how I will ensure my articulations most accurately reflect the participants. One way I did this is via the use of member checks. Member checks allow participants to view the researcher's possible meanings and provide feedback on whether their depiction is correct or not. Another way I ensured accuracy is by familiarizing myself with the participants' daily life (Carspecken). This was done by using a demographics questionnaire to better understand how participants socially identify. I then used these details to ask follow-up questions during our individual interviews about how their identities impact the ways in which they navigate life and relationships with others – especially as a doctoral student of color at a PWI.

### ***Reconstructive Horizon Analysis***

Before I describe this form of analysis, it is important for me to discuss its roots in Jurgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action (Carspecken, 1996; Gray et al., 2016; Habermas, 1984). In his theory, Habermas (1984) proclaimed that all communicative acts are divided into three formal worlds. Each world is described as a type of validity claim (Gray et al., 2016). As described by Carspecken (1996), validity claims, claim “that the data or field records produced are true to what occurred [and] claims that the analysis performed on the data was conducted correctly” (p. 57).

The three types of validity claims, all communicative acts are divided amongst, are

objective, subjective, and normative-evaluative (Gray et al., 2016). Objective claims are described as standards of truth that are mutually agreed upon and are concerned with “the” world as we know it. One example of an objective claim from the data was “Chanel did not handle the situation, with her student, well”. Since Chanel told me she “did not do a good job” with how she responded to the student’s actions, this is an objective claim because it is a matter of fact. Subjective claims are claims that outside observers contain limited access to and are concerned with “my” world. An example of such was “I regret hounding the student for her actions.” Since Chanel did not explicitly state she “regretted” her decision, I implied this notion. Normative claims focus on what is proper and appropriately conventional (Carspecken, 1996). Unlike objective or subjective, normative claims are concerned with “our” world. An example of a normative claim in our society is that “adult figures need to be strict with children for the child’s protection”. Parental strictness, especially between parents and children of color, has been positively associated with feeling loved and cared for (Mason et al., 2004).

Habermas (1984) would assert that all three claims are inferred in every statement, even if one of the claims seems most salient. In addition to these three, a fourth claim (identity) can also be used to capture something that is implicitly claimed as a part of someone’s identity (Gray et al., 2016). In Chanel’s experience, her most prevalent identities involved being a Black woman who works with Black girls. An example of an identity claim for Chanel was “I am a Black woman who used the same disciplinary technique on a Black girl that was used with me in my youth, as a protective measure, by Black women. Although I am deeply invested in her safety, I regret scolding the girl and have made strides towards improving the way I respond to similar incidents in the future. My actions, from

that incident, haunt me to this day.”

The reconstructive horizon analysis involves reconstructing inferred implications of a given meaning. To do this, validity claims are created (within the four categories previously discussed) and placed on a continuum from highly foregrounded to highly backgrounded (Gray, McKay, & Toombs, 2016). Highly foregrounded data consists of explicit details that are emphasized by the participant. Highly backgrounded information involves more “assumed” and “taken for granted” information regarding the participant (Carspecken, 1996).

Instead of using the traditional reconstructive horizon analysis, I decided to modify this technique to include my theory, intersectionality. My rendition of this model is entitled the Intersectional Reconstructive Horizon Analysis (IRHA). The difference between my analysis and the original, is that IRHA incorporated intersectionality within every validity claim. Doing this allowed me to better understand; 1) which identities are most salient to the participant; and 2) how a participant’s intersecting identities contribute to the intersecting oppressions they experience. I also modified the role of identity claims in my analysis. In the original technique, identity claims are embedded on the continuum in each category (i.e., highly foregrounded, foregrounded, backgrounded, and highly backgrounded). Since I applied intersectionality to all my claims, I decided to create one identity claim, at the end of my analysis. This identity claim served as form of high-level coding where a high inference code was placed next to the low-level code. Carspecken (1996) described high-level codes as codes that are dependent upon “greater amounts of abstractions” (p. 148). Placing my identity claim at the end allowed me to recognize the various intersecting identities/oppressions captured (throughout the entire analysis process) in one statement. It also assisted me in better understanding how these intersections appear in their day-to-day lives. See figure 3.1 for an

example of the entire IRHA process.

### **Figure 3.2: Critical Data Analysis Example**

#### **Quote**

In reference to her own response to one of her Black girl students bringing marijuana to school, Chanel stated:

I think about that a lot. I really did not do a good job there because by the time I had gotten back, she had already been suspended, didn't come back to school, right? And so, there was no need for me to hound on her, and I did. And I recognize that's all I knew how to do. That's all I know. That's the only way I knew how to hold people accountable, was to do what my mother did, right? Which was lecture, lecture, blah, blah, blah. And that just wasn't what the situation needed. But I think about that a lot.

#### **Low-Level Codes:**

- I really did not do a good job there
- She had already been suspended
- No need for me to hound on her
- That's all I know
- Hold people accountable
- Do what my mother did
- Lecture, lecture, blah, blah, blah
- Wasn't what the situation needed
- I think about that a lot

#### **Meaning Field:**

- “That situation is constantly on my mind” AND “I know I messed up” AND
- “I shouldn’t have hounded her” BECAUSE “she had already been held accountable for her actions” AND/OR “removed from school” AND
- “I treated her the way I was treated” AND “That’s not what she needed”

### **Reconstructive Horizon Analysis:**

#### ***Highly Foregrounded (More Obvious)***

- Objective: “Chanel did not handle the situation, with her student, well”
- Subjective: “I did not handle the situation well”
- Normative: “Children must be held accountable for their actions”

#### ***Foregrounded***

- Objective: “Chanel regrets scolding her student”
- Subjective: “I regret hounding the student for the student’s actions”
- Normative: “Expressing empathy is good, but expressing too much empathy is bad”

#### ***Backgrounded (less obvious, higher inference)***

- Objective: “Chanel is remorseful for how she responded to the student”
- Subjective: “I feel bad for responding to the student the way I did”
- Normative: “Adult figures need to be strict with children for the child’s protection”

#### ***Highly Backgrounded***

- Objective: “Chanel is angry with herself for how she responded to the student because Chanel’s actions were not productive”

- Subjective: “I am bothered by the way I handled the situation because it did not resolve the ordeal in a productive manner”
- Normative: “Being strict with students, especially students of color, is one of the best ways to protect them from injustices within society”

### ***Identity***

- *“I am a Black woman who used the same disciplinary technique on a Black girl that was used with me in my youth, as a protective measure, by Black women. Although I am deeply invested in her safety, I regret scolding the girl and have made strides towards improving the way I respond to similar incidents in the future. My actions, from that incident, haunt me to this day.*

**Figure 3.3 – Example of Codes and Sub-Codes**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Sub-codes</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Communication		References to any type of communication between the participant and people they consider a part of their social support system.
Career Development		References to participants career development throughout life
	Ph.D. preparation	References to Ph.D. preparation
	Career Hopping (Major to Major, Job-to-Job)	References to Career Hopping (Major to Major, Job-to-Job)
Hindsight 20/20		Reference to advice participants wish they would have received earlier in life.
	Regrets	References to any regrets discussed by participants
Gimme the loot (money)		References to the impact of having or not having financial resources for various experiences
Rejection		References to participants being and/or feeling rejected
Grow your own talent (paying it forward)		References to paying it forward by giving back to others and/or the community
Have a plan		References to planning for the future
High expectations		References to the participants high expectations of others. References to high expectations of participants by others.
	Institutions	References to participants expectations of Institutions / references to institution’s expectations of participants

	Family	References to participant's expectations of Family / references to family's expectations of participant
	Mentees	References to participant's expectations of mentees / references to mentee's expectations of participants
	Mentors	References to participant's expectations of mentors / references to mentor's expectations of participant
Impact of unforeseen circumstances		References to unforeseen experiences that impacted participants lives
	Family	References to Family
	COVID-19	References to COVID-19
U.N.I.T.Y. (community)		General references to community
	Establishing community	References to Establishing community
	Maintaining community	References to Maintaining community
Fall through the cracks		References to ways in which different systems have failed participants
	Administratively	References to Administratively
	Programmatically	References to Programmatically

### **Data Validation and Trustworthiness**

Multiple validation techniques were employed to ensure the trust and confidence of research participants. These techniques involved: multiple forms of data, data saturation, member checks, peer review/debriefing, and multiple forms of analysis.

#### ***Multiple Forms of Data***

One technique I used to establish trustworthiness with participants involves the use of multiple data collection methods. Previous research has identified this technique as a way for authors to diversify the type of research they gather and check for inconsistencies (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Harris III et al., 2011). The multiple types of data collection I used in this study are semi-structured individual interviews, document analysis, and a demographics questionnaire.

#### ***Data Saturation***

The second technique I employed to ensure trust amongst participants was data saturation. Data saturation is described as the process of interviewing and gathering information

on participants to the point “of diminishing returns, when nothing new is being added” (Bowen, 2008, p. 140). This practice has been considered challenging, at best, because saturation varies by study and no particular number of participants ensures the process is complete (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010). Additionally, Previous researchers, who have sought to fulfil data saturation, have failed to explain how they fulfilled it in their study (Bowen). I sought to reach data saturation by using multiple forms of data and knew I had reached the point of saturation when I began to see detail replication – especially across the three data collection techniques employed in this study (semi-structured individual interviews, document analysis, and demographics questionnaires).

### ***Member Checks***

The third technique I utilized was member checking. This process is described as sharing researcher notes with participants (Carspecken, 1996), and asking for feedback regarding my interpretation of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After each data collection session (e.g., individual interviews, observations, etc.), I provided participants a transcript of their interview or notes from my observation. I then asked the participants to review the information and provide additional details or omit certain words/sentences from the transcript. Interviewees were asked to return feedback, regarding the data, within one month after receiving the document(s). If interviewees did not submit changes to the document(s), within one month of receiving the document(s), I proceeded with using the original data in my dissertation. This technique helped me foster rapport amongst interviewees and provided transparency by giving them the ability to confirm if my perceptions of the reality “ring[ed] true” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 246). If my perceptions did not “ring true”, participants were allowed to change details so I could more accurately reflect their perspectives.

### ***Peer Reviewing/Peer Debriefing***

In addition to sharing notes/transcripts with participants, I also sought feedback from my dissertation chair and colleagues. This technique, known as peer reviewing/debriefing, is used by researchers to assess credibility and broaden one's perspective of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I engaged in peer review with colleagues by sharing my data and discussing the research themes that have emerged. I then solicited their advice regarding potential meanings of the data that I had not originally considered, potentially, because of my biases (Carspecken, 1996). As noted by Carspecken (1996), these biases can include giving certain participants "too much attention" while minimizing or "ignoring" others (p. 89). Sharing my research with others helped limit these concerns while allowing me to verbally process my findings.

### ***Multiple Forms of Analysis***

The final technique I used to establish and foster trustworthiness within my study involved the use of multiple methods of data analysis. Utilizing different analyses challenged me to review and understand my data from differing perspectives. I used Carspecken's (1996) three-layered design to analyze my data. These layers involve identifying low-level codes, developing meaning fields, and creating a reconstructive horizon analysis. Since the meaning fields and reconstructive horizon analysis were only conducted on specific quotes, much of my analysis involved identifying in-vevo codes, creating descriptive codes, and documenting quoted segments within Microsoft Word as well as MAXQDA. An example of my low-level codes can be found in Figure 3.2. With the incorporation of multiple forms of analysis, I sought to stay as true as possible to my participants and their experiences as doctoral fellows of color who engage in mentorship.

## **Limitations**

There were a few limitations of this study. The first is that I only conducted interviews with the 17 participants and not the people they discussed having mentoring relationships with. Speaking with other people, involved within the mentorship, could provide a better understanding of the relationship from multiple perspectives. Another limitation of this study was that I used a snowball sampling (or chain referral) technique to recruit participants. Although this technique was convenient, because of limited availability, it influenced the participant pool by restricting my access to only students who associated with the people that assisted me in recruiting participants. In addition to using a snowball sampling technique, I only focused on Black Ph.D. students who were enrolled in MU's Education College. This further restricted my ability to recruit Black Ph.D. students who could have had vastly different academic experiences (e.g., Black students in STEM-related fields) than those in education-based Ph.D. programs.

## **Positionality**

My research interests include critically exploring the experiences of collegians of color who attend PWIs and understanding what factors contribute to their academic/professional success. Prior to being a Ph.D. student, I worked several years in Residence Life and Academic/Career Advising. As an academic, there are multiple social identities that represent who I am and how I portray myself to the world. These identities include (but are not limited to): race, gender, and class. I possess several other identities, but these three intersect in ways that have most significantly influenced my lived experiences. While two of these identities were salient to me at an early age, the other did not resonate with me until I entered high school. There are three goals for this section of my dissertation. The first, is to provide context by sharing how

I learned about each of my three most salient identities. The second, is to discuss how these identities intersected, with one another, to shape my educational experiences. The third, and final, purpose is to share how my identities assisted me in personally connecting with my participants.

### ***Race***

Racially, I identify as Black/African American. There were two distinct ways I learned about blackness as a child. The first was through formal education, at school, where blackness was often viewed through a deficit lens. I remember elementary teachers giving vague details of Black slaves who seemed to magically appear, alongside White settlers, in the Americas. These instructors, who were usually White themselves, rarely discussed the accomplishments of Black people before and after slavery. They also failed to mention the role of White people during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The second way I learned about Black culture was through family and social media. In addition to telling me stories about my heritage, my mom frequently rented “Eyes on the Prize” videos and would give me pop-quizzes on the knowledge. She also paid for me to visit various museums like the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago. I also learned about Blackness through television shows (e.g., Martin, Fresh Prince of Bel Air) and music (e.g., Hip Hop, R&B). Today, I continue to broaden my knowledge on the diversity of blackness. Most recently, I have sought to learn more about Afro-Latinx culture – especially since my wife is Latina and we recently had our son.

### ***Gender***

Another identity I learned early in life was gender. As a child, I solely identified as a boy. But as I aged, I began to understand the different forms of masculinity. I am a cis-male because I identify with the gender assigned to my sex at birth. Like race; school, home, and social media

were how I learned “to be a man”. Based on interactions with other boys from school and television, being a man seemed simple. Heterosexual cis men wanted two things; women and respect. For men to earn both, they had to express themselves in a certain way (e.g., physically dominant, emotionless/stoic, and independent). If you did not abide by the “man code”, you were considered less of a man or not a man at all. This toxic manhood, however, was directly challenged by men in my family who exhibited healthier forms of masculinity. My father, maternal grandfather, and uncle taught me the importance of saying “I love you”, not being afraid to cry, and using words to avoid/de-escalate physical altercations. Now that I have my own son, I seek to show him the same love my father, maternal grandfather, and uncle showed me.

### *Class*

Unlike race and gender, social class is a form of identity I learned much later in life. I consider the household I grew up in to be lower middle-class. My mother and father split before I was born, making my mom a single parent<sup>7</sup>. In addition to her being a single parent, my mother was in graduate school most of my childhood and we lived a financially modest lifestyle. Although she could not afford to buy me everything I wanted, my mother provided me with everything I needed to be successful (i.e., food, clothes, participation in athletic activities, and academic support). Since I grew up around kids who came from families like my own, I rarely noticed class differences. This changed, however, when we moved to a western suburb of Chicago during my sophomore year of high school.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: Although my parents ended their relationship before I was born, my father is (and has always been) a positive factor in my life. I have a strong relationship with him, and he has always assisted my mother in taking care of me (financially and emotionally).

At my new high school, there was a clear distinction between the “haves” and the “have nots”. Students who came from working- and lower middle-class families were often shuffled into very different academic tracks than our upper middle- and upper-class peers. The only time I can remember socializing with students who were in a different social class than myself was when I joined the cross-country team. While my family lived in a three-bedroom condominium, many of my teammates and their families were living in gated sub-divisions with swimming pools and manicured lawns. To fit-in, I began dressing like many of my teammates. This involved saving my Christmas and birthday money to buy fitted-Ralph Lauren polo shirts and slim gap jeans.

As someone who grew up in a working-class Chicago household, my mother is adamant about the importance of education and saw it as the key to social mobility. She was the first person in her immediate family to earn undergraduate/graduate degrees and held these same expectations of her only son. From an early age, my mom enrolled me in pre-college programs that aimed to prepare me academically and socially for higher education. Many of these programs contained residential components in which participants lived on college campuses for multiple weeks during the summer. Between the ages of 12 and 17, I participated in three different residential pre-college programs at two large research I universities. These programs helped me learn how to physically navigate college campuses and become more self-sufficient (via doing my own laundry and waking myself up and walking to/from classes). They also encouraged me to identify and utilize similar resources (e.g., fellowship programs) at the collegiate level to hone my graduate preparation and socialization. As a fourth-year doctoral student, I continue to rely on a fellowship program for financial and social support.

### *Intersecting Identities*

There are multiple definitions of intersectionality, but the term was first coined by renowned Law Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1989) used the term to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (Crenshaw, p. 1244)<sup>8</sup>. Higher education scholars such as Strayhorn (2013) broadened the term by describing it as a way to “...improve society by understanding and explaining the lives of and experiences of marginalized people and by examining the constraints and demands of the many social structures that influence their options and opportunities” (p. 9).

Within the context of education, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between my marginalized and privileged identities. Visibly, I am a Black man. This dual identity subjects me to ridicule because of my perceived physical threat to the larger society (i.e., campus). It also, however, allows me to hide behind a veil of silence during classroom discussions about gender inequity (in general) and racial/gender discrimination against women of color (in particular). In addition to being a Black male, I identify as heterosexual and cisgender. Each of these identities could have been in stark contrast to those of my participants, contributing to them feeling less comfortable revealing certain aspects of their life because I could not relate.

Although these intersecting identities could have negatively impacted my connection with participants, they could have also helped me establish a greater level of rapport with interviewees. Black doctoral students are not one and the same, but we share unique similarities related to navigating an environment not created for us while seeking systems that will support

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<sup>8</sup> Note: As someone who is not a Black woman, I believe it is important for me to acknowledge the original purpose of Crenshaw’s definition of the term before using a similar definition to describe my experiences with intersectionality.

us in the ways we want/need to be supported. This could have encouraged participants to feel more comfortable sharing their stories with me (a fellow student) because there is more equitable power within our relationship. This power dynamic is different, however, when faculty are involved because faculty have a more direct influence over the career trajectory of students. Additionally, being knowledgeable of the outsider within status of participants (especially Black women) further encouraged me to trust the personal/cultural experiences of Black Ph.D. students because these experiences are valid sources of information (Collins, 1986). The validity techniques, mentioned in the previous section, assisted me in accurately capturing the experiences of participants and sharing their stories the way they wanted their stories shared.

### ***Mentorship***

Overall, my personal experience with mentoring has been positive. As an undergraduate student, older peers served as big brothers and big sisters who assisted me in learning how to study and where to locate financial resources on/off campus – preparing me for graduate success. In graduate school, same-aged peers and faculty mentors introduced me to writing groups and allowed me to shadow them at professional conferences – enhancing my development as an education researcher/practitioner. Each of these groups, in their own way, made mentorship feel natural and sincere. They were also instrumental in boosting my confidence and shaping how I seek to guide/mentor others. While my experience with mentorship has been overwhelmingly positive, I knew this may not have been the case for each of the students I spoke with. My awareness of this fact encouraged me to push-back on notions that mentorship is always positive and that it looks the exact same for everyone who engages in it.

## Chapter 4 – Mentoring Characteristics, Styles and Experiences

Within this chapter, I discuss the findings of my research study which explored the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attended a PWI in the Midwest. I chose to explore this topic because of my own personal connection to receiving and providing mentorship – especially within educational settings. This study was guided by two research questions: *What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend a PWI? And, how do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic and professional success of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI?*

In the first section I highlight three key claims from the overall study. Then, I describe four major themes of participants descriptions of mentorship. The third section identifies a set of three mentorship styles derived from participants’ mentorship descriptions and use these styles to categorize the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI. The final section will re-emphasize the key takeaways and how these findings further assist us in understanding the mentorship experiences of Black Ph.D. students and how these experiences have contributed to their success. Three claims emerged from the data. These claims, which I demonstrate in my presentation of data below included:

- i. **Black Ph.D. students are not a monolithic group:** No two students’ educational journeys were the same. Each student brought different experiences, talents, and skills which influenced the types of support they individually needed to thrive or survive such journeys. While I do highlight mentoring styles below, the way participants experienced these styles was unique.
- ii. **The mentorship experience is defined by the unique interactions of its participants:** Because no two students are the same, there is no one definition (e.g.,

mentor/mentee) or service (e.g., mentorship initiative) that comprehensively addresses all needs for all students, always. Rather, mentorship is a practice that reflects constant relationship building between participants. It's also fluid and can evolve or morph over time. Although there were two mentoring styles that encapsulated most of the students' experiences, the mentoring relationship is still a relationship between multiple people that will not necessarily be the same in every instance.

- iii. **Mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain:** While participants may have forgotten what some mentors (or perceived mentors) said and/or did, they did not forget how that person's actions made them feel. This has not only influenced how the scholar perceives themselves, but also how they have perceived and received others in the future.

Next, I summarize how students framed the various mentoring approaches as a way to demonstrate possible reasons for the differing experiences that participants had with their mentors.

### **Mentoring Characteristics**

When asked to define mentorship, no two participants' descriptions were the same. Phrases used to describe mentorship ranged from "organic" to "tasking responsibility". Although they varied, participant definitions revealed four key components of Black Ph.D. students' mentoring relationships. These components (power dynamic, empathy, accountability, and wholeness) were present across multiple styles of mentoring.

Power dynamic refers to the level of influence mentors had over the behavior of mentees. In some instances, the power dynamic between participants was described as balanced. In other

relationships, there was a clear power differential in which mentors almost always possessed a higher level of professional power, or influence, than the mentee. Empathy refers to mentoring participants' ability to be mindful and understanding of one's emotions and/or experiences even if those emotions/experiences were not explicitly stated. The level of empathy in each relationship varied upon participants. Some experiences consisted of higher levels of empathy between participants, while others reportedly involved lower levels of empathy or none at all. Accountability refers to a participant's ability to be dependable, particularly in situations where another member of that mentorship needed advice, guidance, and/or other actions completed. Like empathy, the level of accountability ranged between experiences. Wholeness encapsulates students' references to mentors as people who provide holistic, or all-encompassing, guidance. Commonly, this guidance revolved around various aspects of one's life (e.g., personal, professional, emotional, mental, psychological, etc.). Wholeness also highlights the various roles assumed by participants within a given relationship. For example, some participants discussed sharing mentor/mentee responsibilities with others in a mentorship. Although wholeness was a popular characteristic shared by participants, not all mentorships were described as all-encompassing. Some relationships were described solely as focusing on professional development.

***Power Dynamic: "There's always a power differential"***

Power is one theme that emerged from the participants descriptions of mentorship. For some, a power dynamic was important and necessary to provide structure for mentors and mentees. Chanel, a full-time, Policy Education student described mentorship as a trusting relationship in which someone helps you make career decisions by asking tough questions and

providing resources to navigate the decision-making process. She further described these relationships as needing a power dynamic for them to be considered mentorship.

I think, within mentorship, there's always a power differential. When I think about mentorship, I automatically think about there being some sort of power differential. And so I just, I wouldn't see it. So peer mentorship would still have to have a power differential because I just see all of my friendships as we're always pouring resources into one another. I wouldn't call it mentorship. You know what I'm saying? Even though it essentially is kind of the same thing, I just feel like that title feels weird.

Chanel acknowledged the important role peers served within her social support system but did not necessarily see them as mentors because peers were typically at the same place in life as she was. While she believed mentorship can involve friendship, she described mentorship as “a little more distant than what friendship would be” because friends pour resources into each other. Chanel wasn't the only student to reference power when asked to describe mentorship.

James, a part-time candidate, indirectly discussed the importance of power when he described a mentor as someone who will stand-up and defend you – especially at your most vulnerable moments.

Mentorship is the ability for someone to make sacrifices for you that you cannot necessarily make for yourself. That's my definition of what mentorship is. It is not slanted towards any race, color, whatever, sexual preferences, or anything like that. It is a person's ability to make sacrifices for you that you cannot necessarily make for yourself, himself.

In this situation, James held a positive view of power. His quote highlight's the important role mentors, especially those in positions of influence, have within the lives of students. Like James,

mentees may view their mentors as people who can address barriers (e.g., administrative technicalities, faculty concerns, etc.) that the mentee cannot address themselves without a greater risk of being ignored or retaliated against.

For other participants, power differential was a trait that negatively impacted the relationship between mentors and mentees. Fred, a full-time student considers many mentoring relationships to be “wrapped up in capitalism, anti-blackness, and homophobia.” He also expressed frustration with mentors that force views or opinions upon mentees – especially views/opinions regarding how one should or should not behave in society. Fred stated, “When it comes to Black boys, there's a lot of problematic mentorships like, ‘Pull up your pants,’ and ‘we need to learn how to tie this tie and speak this way.’ And I'm like, ‘Not that.’” What Fred labels as “problematic mentorship” is closely associated with the controversial notion that the success of students of color is closely associated with a student’s ability to assimilate into the dominate culture (Carter, 2006). Rather than force their perceptions on others, Fred believes mentors should express higher levels of empathy toward mentees and their unique views of the world. Empathy was a characteristic shared by multiple participants.

***Empathy: “Even if he disagreed with me...he told me do it the best I could”***

Although Fred had difficulty defining mentorship, he did articulate various desirable qualities of the people who mentored him. One such quality included a mentor’s ability to guide mentees while centering the mentee’s goals/aspirations and allowing the mentee to carve their own path.

I had a mentor that I really enjoyed because even if he disagreed with me, even if anything else, he told me do it the best I could. It might not be the best idea to go in a police station and throw all the papers off the board, but if you must do it, here you go.

You know what I'm saying? So something like that, you know what I mean, where it's a deep love, it's a deep care. It's not patronizing, it's not paternalistic where you're making somebody...Trying to impose a cookie-cutter image of whatever

The words that stand out most within Fred's last statement are "even if he disagreed with me...he told me do it the best I could". This quote highlights the positive influence Fred's mentor had on him by empathizing with Fred's wants and needs. Instead of wielding his power by telling Fred what to do, and possibly damaging their relationship in the process, the mentor provided Fred constructive advice that was just advice.

In addition to Fred, multiple other students discussed mentorship as something that involves a personal connection between participants which influences the mentor's ability to be understanding of the mentees needs as well as supportive of their goals. Nicole, a full-time student, described a mentor as someone who invests time and effort into guiding others toward success, but in a way that allows the mentee to steer their own path. When asked to explain, she stated, "I feel there's a lot of generosity there. There's generosity of one's time and guidance, but not pushing. More just exposure to things that you might not be aware of and supporting you as you process through what could be next without dictating the process."

Nicole also noted that mentorship can involve the emotional support provided to people who exist in spaces where they do not feel "super validated or represented". Even if the mentor cannot relate to the mentee's experience of feeling invalid or underrepresented, their ability to be empathetic to the mentee's feelings is an important trait for a good mentor to have.

In addition to not being "pushy", Blair, a part-time student, believes mentors help you plan for your goals while actively engaging you throughout the process of achieving those goals.

I define mentorship as a really intentional engagement in a way that's linked in helping you get to whatever your stated goal is. It's someone who's in your life who is helping to understand what pathway you're trying to go on, and they're willing to be engaged with you in that journey, and whatever that means.

Blair went on to distinguish mentorship from another form of social support closely aligned with it – coaching. While he saw mentorship as providing broader guidance to help someone fulfill their goal, coaching was described as giving specific instructions on how to accomplish a certain task. Blair's remarks underscore the importance of mentors empathizing with the goals of their mentees and supporting those goals however they need to be supported.

Blair's description aligns with another student's belief that good mentorship needs to be organic. Gabriella, a full-time Ph.D. candidate notes that while mentors/mentees shouldn't be required to have a deeply personal connection, there needs to be vulnerability on both sides. Vulnerability can contribute to a more natural relationship. The exact opposite happened, however, for Gabriella when she participated in a college transition program that attempted to provide first-year students of color with a mentor. Although Gabriella generally enjoyed the program, she did not enjoy its mentorship component. "I feel like one of the things the bridge program had failed in is that it was like too contrived and prescribed", she stated, "and they wanted to mentor or guide along or advise or coach just the same and I feel like a mentorship is organic."

Gabriella had difficulty being vulnerable with this mentor because their relationship did not have an organic connection. The absence of an organic connection led to a lack of empathy between the two. Her comments highlight the nuances of highly structured/standardized

mentorship programs and validate the finding that mentorship is defined by the unique interactions of its participants.

Mali, a full-time Ph.D. student also identified mentorship as an emotional investment into someone's success within a specific task or generally throughout life. Mali additionally highlighted the importance of the mentee feeling their mentor has their best interest at heart which, in her experience, has been validated via Mali sharing commonalities with her mentors (e.g., race, sex/gender, etc.) – specifically her faculty advisor. Mentors who expressed empathy were also more likely to positively reinforce other traits, like accountability, within the relationship.

***Accountability: “Learning together and challenging one another”***

Accountability is another characteristic that emerged from participants' descriptions of mentorship. Although the word “accountability” was seldom used, students frequently described mentoring experiences as those in which mentors and mentees “worked together” or “challenged one another” to accomplish a set of goals. This trait was most prevalent in descriptions of mentorship between peers.

Despite being at the same place professionally, Charles, a full-time candidate believed peers served as some of the best mentors. He supported this argument by stating, “I don't think mentorship necessarily has to be a novice expertise relationship. You know? I think that it can also be people who arguably have the same expertise as you, where you're just learning together and challenging one another.”

Charles not only considered friends and colleagues to be mentors but also viewed the mentor role as bi-directional. Bi-directional mentorship was a common theme amongst various students. Savannah, a full-time student, for example, considered mentorship to be a reciprocal

process for peers and non-peers. She distinguished peer mentorship from non-peer mentorship, however, by describing the former as a relationship in which the members move through their experiences at the same time.

I think peer mentorship is similar [to non-peer mentorship], but I think in terms of like life knowledge, you're kind of going at it together, but also different, different sense of world making, right, like different ways of knowing how to navigate so I think peer mentorship is more like we are kind of doing this together.

Savannah's quote shows that while students value the guidance of people who have already been where they currently are, they also recognize the importance of having responsible peers who can help them navigate life as an equal.

Like Savannah, Chelsea, a full-time Ph.D. student, identified mentorship as a reciprocal relationship in which someone can "help me get where you're going". More specifically, she viewed peer mentors as people who held her more accountable for accomplishing different tasks/responsibilities than helping her professionally get to where they are because both were usually at the same place in their lives.

***Wholeness: "Provide...academic and emotional support"***

One's understanding of power, empathy, and accountability within mentorship contributed to the final theme - wholeness. Numerous students, like Gina – a full-time Ph.D. student, considered mentorship an action that should be holistic in nature. Gina noted mentors as people who "provide you with academic and emotional support." Other participants used words such as "all-encompassing" to describe key characteristics of their own mentorship experiences. Like Gina, Buddy, a part-time student, shared how he considered mentors to be people who support you in more ways than one.

You can inspire people and perhaps serve as a mentor to them without even knowing the impact you're having on them. When I think about mentorship, I don't think it's necessarily just about like how we support people. But I think it's also like, the inspirational piece to it as well. Because you're looking to that person for guidance. Even if you're not, even if you're only watching their actions, or watching their behavior, or watching what they do.

Buddy went on to identify his former undergraduate Resident Assistant as a mentor who inspired him to also become a Resident Assistant (RA). Even though Buddy never officially told the RA he considered him a mentor, this example validates the notion that actions can speak louder than words – especially in reference to mentorship. It also shows the various roles mentors can have within the lives of mentees.

Like Buddy, Lupita viewed mentors as people who not only provided feedback/guidance but consistently checked-in with the mentee to ensure they're successful.

So I think a good mentor will ask a lot of questions. Provide a lot of advice. But also, with providing that advice, ask a lot of like, follow up questions as far as like, does this seem reasonable? Like, does this seem doable? Like Will this work for you?

She said probing the mentee with questions like these could help them develop the critical thinking skills needed to troubleshoot various problems without the mentor resolving the issues for them. Her quote also emphasizes the holistic role mentors serve as advisers who provide suggestions while also positively challenging the person to consider various perspectives of a situation.

Pat, a full-time Ph.D. student, also highlighted the diverse support provided by mentors who have a genuine interest in the success of others.

They have passion for the people they're working with. And it's a tasking responsibility. The passion and the love that you have for helping those you are helping is what continues to motivate you to wake up every morning and call your mentee, or find resources for them, or just be there to talk to them and help them progress along their journey, and figure things out in life.

It is “passion”, that Pat believes is the root of one’s willingness to go above and beyond to provide the mentee with whatever that mentee needs for their success. Passion can also lead to, what Gabriella formerly described as, an “organic” relationship in which mentees feel all or most of their needs are being met. This relates to the experience of Kenny, a full-time Ph.D. student who shared how his life-mentors have provided him academic, professional, and personal wisdom. He went on to provide more clarification as to how he defines mentorship.

Specifically, I'm thinking of, you have a mentor who's somewhere farther along in terms of his life, and at a place where you could see yourself, or would like to see yourself... who can offer sometimes advice, but sometimes it's support a lot of times, so you can be a listening ear. Or hold you accountable.

Kenny’s quote emphasizing mentorship as something that is multifaceted. In addition to being a “listening ear”, Kenny’s mentors provide him advice and hold him accountable via encouraging words and/or reminders for Kenny to pursue his passion.

In addition to holistic mentorship traits, participants discussed the wholeness of actual mentors. While many participants initially saw mentorship as an action between two people, their understanding of who could serve as a mentor and the number of people who might be included within a particular mentoring relationship developed over time. Keisha, a full-time

student shared that prior to graduate school, she saw mentorship as something that would only come from a particular person (e.g., teacher). As a Ph.D. student, she now sees it differently.

So maybe I have those type of people who have known you and seen you grow, but now I'm realizing, oh it could be multiple people. A mentorship can be one person in the center, and then they're sort of surrounded by different people. So now I'm realizing it can be more of a group or a circle.

Although Keisha sees group mentoring as a viable option for others, she noted being unsure what that type of relationship would look like for her. Keisha tended to be more involved in one-on-one mentoring experiences than those involving groups. Her quote re-enforces the murkiness of how mentorship is perceived and defined. It also begins to highlight the different roles served by different mentors within the mentee's life.

Kimberly, a full-time Ph.D. candidate, discussed the various mentors (i.e., professional mentors, peer mentors, and elders) within her life who shared important similarities as well as critical differences. Although majority of her mentors, in general, identified as Black women, Kimberly emphasized the importance of having Black women serve as her professional mentors since they could assist Kimberly in navigating careers as a Black woman. Peer mentors specifically assisted Kimberly by providing her guidance/suggestions regarding different aspects of her life (i.e., personal, academic, etc.). Her elder members differed from peer and professional mentors in the sense that they served more as listeners/well-wishers than advice givers. The important takeaway from Kimberly's description is that she relied on three types of mentors, simultaneously and holistically, to traverse various obstacles within her life as a Black woman.

Although participants' descriptions of mentorship varied, each definition can be summarized using the characteristics from above (i.e., power, empathy, accountability, and

wholeness). These characteristics contributed to the development of, and were present across, three mentoring styles that will be discussed in the next section.

### **Three Styles of Mentoring: Business-Oriented, Relationship-Oriented, and Egalitarian**

Three mentoring styles (business-oriented mentoring, relationship-oriented mentoring, and egalitarian mentoring) emerged from an in-depth analysis of the data. The above characteristics contributed to the development of these styles and existed, in some form, across each style. Two of these styles, business-oriented and relationship-oriented mentoring, capture the way students described experiences in which there was a clear power differential between mentors and mentees. The third style, egalitarian mentoring, expressed participants' views of mentorship between peers or people exhibiting equal or similar levels of power.

The first style is business-oriented mentoring. This type of mentoring is typically top-down and involves a clear power differential, between participants, relied upon for structure/professional accountability. Additionally, these relationships are more professional in nature than they are personal. Because the relationship is more formal, mentors may choose not to share personal details of their life with mentees – possibly leading to less apparent empathy and holism. Another trait of business-oriented mentoring is that it is often one directional. The person with the higher level of power/influence is solely the mentor and the person with less power/influence is solely the mentee. Some participant experiences involving faculty/administrators were categorized as business-oriented mentoring.

The second style is relationship-oriented mentoring. Like the previous style, this mentoring typically began as formal interactions between participants and involved a clear power differential. Unlike the previous style however, relationship-oriented mentors invested, professionally and personally, in their mentees – contributing to more empathy. As demonstrated

in the findings, many relationship-oriented mentors shared vulnerable details of their own academic journey and personal life with mentees to not only bond with the mentee but better prepare them for future success. These mentors expressed their accountability by being attentive to, and flexible in addressing, the mentee's diverse needs (e.g., professionally, psychologically, emotionally, etc.). Mentoring described as relationship-oriented commonly involved faculty, administrators, employees, and younger students who worked directly/consistently with participants.

The third style is called egalitarian "equal" mentoring. Unlike the previous styles, egalitarian mentoring involves relationships in which participants see each other as equal powers and are usually at the same place in their lives personally, academically, and/or professionally. These experiences often started as friendships/acquaintanceships that evolved into a more all-encompassing relationship. As the relationship blossomed, participants exchanged multiple forms of guidance/support (e.g., personal, professional, emotional, etc.) between each other. This multi-faceted aspect of the relationship contributed to more academic accountability and empathy between participants. It also helped the mentorship feel more holistic in nature. Another key trait of egalitarian mentoring is its bi-directional nature. Participants within these relationships can serve as both a mentor and/or mentee to other participants. Students' experiences involving friends/peers and some family members were categorized as egalitarian mentoring. Figure 4.1 displays a table aligning each style with the type of mentor it was commonly associated with and the characteristics previously discussed.

**Figure 4.1 – Table of Mentoring Characteristics and Styles**

		<b>Styles of Mentoring</b>		
		<b>Business-oriented</b>	<b>Relationship-oriented</b>	<b>Egalitarian</b>
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Mentor</b>	Non-peer	Non-peer	Peer
	<b>Power</b>	More apparent	Apparent	Less apparent
	<b>Empathy</b>	Less apparent	More apparent	More apparent
	<b>Accountability</b>	More professional	More balanced	More academic
	<b>Wholeness</b>	Less apparent	Apparent	Apparent

The next section will categorize and highlight specific quotes from participant conversations that support the styles of business-oriented mentoring, relationship-oriented mentoring, and egalitarian mentoring.

#### ***Business-Oriented Mentoring Examples***

Some participants discussed negative experiences with people initially considered mentors and how these experiences influenced their general perception of mentorship. James, a part-time candidate shared that a negative encounter with a former administrator in his high school caused him to carefully screen future mentors. According to James, the administrator, who also identifies as a Black man, used his role as a “mentor” to make himself look good and advance his own agenda. This relationship caused James to think more carefully about who he considered a mentor in the future. He stated, “In College, I was much more guarded, if I thought that it was something that wasn't authentic, then I didn't vibe with you at all. And at that point, I didn't have to.”

Like James, another part-time student (pseudonym withheld for anonymity), shared a traumatic encounter they experienced with a former supervisor during their time on campus.

I left [campus early], for a couple of reasons. After I was done with my coursework, I had discovered that the person who was my boss, and [my office] had written an article I submitted an article that I had wrote a significant portion of, in fact, [an entire section]. And [they] submitted it to...a national conference, without my name, and I mentioned it to my [mentor], and in hopes that [the mentor] would have reconciled it. [My boss] eventually talked to me. And I brought it to [their] attention. And [they] basically lied to my face and said, [they] didn't realize I was on the paper. And I just thought that was odd, because [that person] was over all of the research in the [office]. And so that then made me feel like I could not trust [that person] with any more of my writing, which meant, my time in the [office] would be cut short, because I, I didn't feel like I could report to [them] anymore. And that was sort of like the last straw because there was also other instances where [that person], I felt was I felt like [they] were just perhaps, targeting me for whatever reason.

Although the student discussed this experience with a mentor, who also knows the former boss, the student did not feel their mentor helped them address the situation. This interaction warped the student's trust in not only the supervisor but also their mentor. Furthermore, it influenced the participant to relocate and continue school as a part-time student.

The most alarming aspect of James and the other student's experiences' is that these situations involved people who they share multiple social identities with. Both instances represent examples of business-oriented mentorship because of the clear power differential in

each relationship as well as the lack of personal connection between the participants and their mentor (or perceived mentor).

It is important to note that not all students, who experienced business-oriented mentorship, had negative encounters. Blair, a part-time Ph.D. student discussed the role his faculty advisor served within his professional development. As a nontraditional student who works full-time and has more than a decade of administrative experience, Blair taps his faculty advisor for guidance he considers different from that provided to more traditionally aged Ph.D. students.

[My advisor] became a really important person for me to consult because it wasn't just about my degree. It was about, how does it fit it into my strategy? Which is different than... sometimes people come right out of undergraduate or have a little bit of work experience coming out of a PhD program. Where I was in my life, all these pieces had to come together to fit right because of where I was in my career.

In addition to considering his advisor “strategic”, Blair credits the professor with challenging him to think more long term about the direction of higher education and owning his intellectual capital. Although Blair wasn’t particularly close to his advisor, personally, the mentor provided Blair a form of mentorship that was just as effective if not more than mentors who use a relationship-oriented style of mentorship. Blair’s experience validates the finding that Black students are not a monolithic group and possess unique differences that require unique guidance.

James, the candidate from earlier, also discussed a more positive relationship he formed with another Black male professor while completing his undergraduate degree. He met the professor at a formal event hosted by a non-profit organization board James was a member of.

James considers the man a mentor but shared that the mentor label was never officially discussed.

I think we just somehow clicked, he had a genuine respect for me as a person, passionate, he was passionate about what he was doing. I was very intrigued by some of the different fellowships that he had received in his career and journey into higher ed. And so just based off of just mutually being in places at the same time we just cultivate a relationship. And so I use mentor loosely because he's much older than me, many, many more years of experience. But he never really said, "Okay, we're in a mentor relationship" But if you boil it down, that's pretty much what it was.

The key difference between James's experiences is that he described the latter mentor as having a "genuine respect" for him, whereas the former mentor was considered non-authentic because of the mentor's interest in helping himself more than James. After their initial meeting, James and the latter mentor continued to have conversations about general life topics and future aspirations. As a former administrator, the mentor provided James wisdom regarding the structure and politics of university systems. They remain in contact to this day. Although this experience may fit within the business-oriented mentorship style now, it seems to be evolving into more relationship-oriented mentoring as James and the senior administrator become more acquainted and develop a personal relationship. James' two experiences validate the finding that mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain.

Another form of mentorship less frequently discussed by participants was the mentoring provided to people they directly supervised. Blair, for example, was a senior manager who supervised a team of full-time mid- and entry-level professionals. As such, he found it important

to guide his employees the same way he was guided by his former supervisors who sought to prepare him for upward mobility within his career path.

If you were my staff, I was doing what [my mentor/supervisor] did for me...I'm taking you to national meetings. I'm taking you to where we're going to talk about [national equity programs] with legislature, so that you can understand what it means to move it into a policy. All those things that were set up for me, I was trying to replicate...It's been in my strategy along the way.

In addition to Blair's desire to see his team thrive, he shared that one of his mentors (who he remains in contact with) holds Blair accountable for paying it forward by consistently asking him "who else did you mentor?" These moments encourage Blair to remember the importance of paying homage to the people he acquired information/guidance from by gifting this knowledge to others as they move throughout their careers. Based on Blair's description of the guidance he provides his staff, this mentorship is more business-oriented but could one day develop into relationship-oriented mentorship. I describe it as business-oriented because the relationship is significantly more professional than it is personal. Like James's latter experience, Blair's relationship with his team could, if it hasn't already, evolve into more relationship-oriented mentoring if/as their personal bond grows.

The experiences of Blair, James, and the other participant uniquely qualify as business-oriented mentorship for various reasons. First, each relationship involved a clear power differential in which unidirectional guidance was transferred from the mentor to the mentee. In negative experiences, power served as a way to control situations such as the manipulation or complicity used by perceived mentors to advance their careers or the careers of others at the sake of the mentee's. In positive experiences, power was used to ensure mentees had the opportunities

needed to thrive. Secondly, there was a greater emphasis on the mentee's professional success than their whole development. This is different from relationship-oriented and egalitarian mentorship because the latter two revolve around the mentor's ability to provide a more holistic experience for mentees.

### ***Relationship-Oriented Mentoring Examples***

James and Blair were not the only participants to discuss relationships that straddled the lines of business-oriented and relationship-oriented mentorship. Pat, a full-time student shared that the support she received from her advisor involved more professional guidance than personal guidance – which Pat was okay with.

It's comforting to know that I one day want to be in the position that he's in to be a faculty member. And sometimes when I'm going through this, I feel alone. And I feel like, oh, I'm not going to be good enough to be able to make it because I'm feeling like this. And then he just shares his experience and it's just reassuring and it feels good

The advisor also encouraged Pat to seek out other professionals who can offer her different types of mentorship.

One thing I talked to [my advisor] about, or he talked to me about was that not one person is going to provide you all of the spaces that you need. So maybe he'll be able to provide me that academic support, but maybe he won't be able to be there for the emotional part.

With his advice, Pat reconnected with a faculty mentor from her undergraduate experience who has been very instrumental in providing Pat “words of motivation” as well as care packages with supportive quotes and books. Although Pat's faculty advisor/mentor was not always there for her, emotionally, he was able to establish a personal connection with Pat via his ability to relate

with and validate her experiences as a Black scholar who at times feels they're "not going to be good enough." This is slightly different than the experiences of James and Blair who recounted having less of a personal bond, at the time of our conversations, with their mentors/mentees.

One participant who had a more emotional bond with their faculty advisor was Gabriella. Both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gabriella's mentor helped her navigate family life while balancing school and personal wellbeing.

It's just been so much, um, so much there has happened so much a loss. And so I feel like she's guiding me through that loss. And still how to be like, Okay, this is how you can also still exist in, ooh I'm getting sad \*laughs\*, emotional, and still exist in academia. So I really thank her for that it's like how to incorporate all this other stuff that's happening in your life, because it was just like, at one period, it was just like loss after loss after loss.

Gabriella shared that her mentor's identity (as a fellow Black woman) and willingness to discuss their own personal life with her, contributed to Gabriella feeling comfortable confiding in this mentor. Her experience highlights the various roles mentors serve within the lives of mentees.

Like Gabriella, Mali, a full-time student, described her advisor as a mentor who has provided emotional support to advisees (especially Black women advisees) via deliberate conversations about race and gender.

I remember her sharing this article in the beginning of one of those smaller group sessions where it was just her female, black advisees that was about being able to separate yourself from the experiences that you have on the job which are harsh or racist. Right? Then, after that article, there was some time for people to open up about how they felt about that, so their experiences about reading that article, and they could relate to it.

Having an advisor whose racial and gender identities matched Mali's was important for Mali. She went on to state that she couldn't imagine having that same conversation, about racism on the job, with someone who did not identify the way she did – such as White men. Savannah, another full-time Ph.D. student, also discussed receiving similar advice from her faculty mentor about navigating challenging times.

This semester has just been hard on everyone. We've talked a lot about what do you do when you know your students are hurt by what's happening in the world, and that we're also in the midst of a pandemic, and that we are also tired. Right?

Savannah noted that conversations like these have shaped her understanding of what it means to advise students as a faculty member. Savannah plans to adopt similar techniques, used by her advisor, to support her own future academic advisees.

Unlike Gabriella, Mali, and Savannah; Nicole, another full-time Ph.D. student, did not racially identify with her faculty advisor. She did, however, praise her advisor for providing important insight regarding careers in academia as well as the practice of their professional field.

[My advisor's] done a lot of practice and came to her faculty role later after being in the field for a while. So, she has a lot of wisdom to share about different aspects of the job and what life can look like in different career trajectories. So, she's been a really important person to talk to about that, generally gives really great thoughtful feedback on writing and other work that I do. And is just generally supportive of my whole person and self in this program.

Nicole also credits her advisor with being very intentional about acknowledging the differences (namely race) between herself and Nicole. Nicole identifies as a mixed-race Black woman and her advisor is a White woman. The advisor also admitted she would not always understand

Nicole's experiences as a bi-racial Black woman but would aim to learn and grow during their relationship – which Nicole described as “powerful” and something she had not necessarily experienced with other White women mentors in her life.

Other than faculty advisors, participants discussed mentoring experiences with professors from departments outside of their own. Kenny shared how a departmental professor connected him with a faculty member who belonged to a different academic college on campus. The faculty member, who also identified as a Black man, had graduated from the same undergraduate institution as Kenny. As the two learned more about each other, the faculty person became one of Kenny's mentors; helping Kenny connect with other Black men off-campus and troubleshoot issues Kenny was having with his then supervisor.

[Dr. Scott] who I'm in his research lab. He's in the school of human ecology and he has, since we met, he's definitely somebody who sends me information about black things happening around town, if you will. It's pretty cool. He's put me in touch with black men around here who go biking. I'm probably not going to do none of the running with them. My knees, I ain't really for that running on cement no more. So, he's pretty helpful. I can talk to him, literally. He's always willing. He's also one of the people I shared, I was having some challenges with my clinical supervisors. He's one of the people, he's like, in me trying to role play and talk through the conversation. He's like, "Now, if you need me there I'm with you. If you need me to advocate or talk on your behalf I can do that too." I was like, wow, okay, cool. That's good to know. So, he's definitely...We even talked about the difference between a mentor and advisor and advocate. He talked about them different, in a sense. So, he's definitely a mentor for me, an advocate.

Advocation was a topic frequently discussed by different students. Like, Kenny, Gabriella, also shared an experience in which a faculty mentor stepped up for her during a time of need. When protests regarding multiple police-involved killings of unarmed Black people occurred on-campus, Gabriella sought to become involved in every protest but her faculty mentor pulled her aside one day for a conversation.

[She said] Let me do this, you need to graduate. And I just remember tussling with this because I was like, oh my god am I less of a black person, if I ain't out here at every protest? if I ain't doing this...and I just had to realize, like that ain't my lane all the time, and that's quite alright, you know, I could be a disruptor in other ways, and no, it doesn't take away from my blackness or who I am.

Although the advocacy of Gabriella's advisor looked slightly different from that of Kenny's advisor, their comments support James's earlier assertion that mentors can be people who "make sacrifices for you that you can not necessarily make for yourself."

In addition to experiencing relationship-oriented mentorship as a mentee, there were a few participants who experienced this style as a mentor. These relationships involved the participants serving as mentors to younger students they formally supervised or advised. Gabriella spoke about her experience mentoring undergraduate Black women and high school Black girls in topics ranging from professional development to personal hygiene. In particular, she discussed an upcoming conversation she was planning to have with one of her undergraduate employees/mentees who is very involved in student activism. The mentee had recently graduated and was looking for an entry-level position that would help her acquire the skills needed to advance in her desired career field. Gabriella discussed wanting to help the student package her

application materials in a way that would express the student's passion for activism while not alarming potential employers who may hold different beliefs than the student.

Don't nobody want a radical Secretary, sis! \*Gabriella laughs\* So it's like how can I help... sometimes in this space, like, again, trying to help her navigate that. Not to say that you can't bring that identity into the workforce. But like your whole resume, you know, just be saying like leadership experience...her's be like activism, leadership, social justice experience, and I'm like, 'Oh sis, this is not... just say it straight'. You can talk about it a little bit... [but] like you have to be careful.

Although Gabriella used humor to provide context for this situation, the topic of code switching frequently came up during our interviews – especially in reference to the way she moves in and through professional settings as a visibly Black woman. Her statement for the student to be “careful” highlights one of many barriers' Black students, especially Black women, must navigate as they seek to elevate within their careers. One slip (e.g., being perceived as angry or difficult to work with) could severely damage their reputation and ability to advance professionally. It could also, unfairly and unjustly, perpetuate negative perceptions of Black women as a collective.

In some cases, the fear of being negatively perceived or affirming harmful stereotypes can encourage one to *police* the actions of others who share their same identities – leading to regrettable moments. Chanel discussed not responding well to a certain situation involving one of her high school advisees/mentees she was personally close with. The mentee, who is a black girl, had been suspended for bringing marijuana into the school. Although Chanel did not witness the incident, she was made aware of the issue by others and decided to “hound” the student the next time she saw her. Once she calmed down, Chanel realized she had made a mistake.

I think about that a lot. I really did not do a good job there because by the time I had gotten back, she had already been suspended, didn't come back to school, right? And so, there was no need for me to hound on her, and I did. And I recognize that's all I knew how to do. That's all I know. That's the only way I knew how to hold people accountable, was to do what my mother did, right? Which was lecture, lecture, blah, blah, blah. And that just wasn't what the situation needed. But I think about that a lot.

Even though Chanel remained close with the girl after this incident and doesn't believe the mentee holds the "hounding" against Chanel, Chanel still feels guilty. She stated, "I don't think that they... that's something that they center, but it is something that's always on my brain. In that moment I really did fail."

As previously noted, Chanel was the student who described mentorship as needing a power difference between participants. Her own experiences as a daughter and mentee could have shaped how Chanel first perceived her role as a mentor with the girls. In hindsight, Chanel wishes she would have held a private conversation with the student to better understand why the student believed she needed marijuana, and help the girl critically think about the long-term consequences of bringing weed to school. Both are objectives Chanel believes she could have accomplished without further shaming the student for her actions. Even though Chanel's general experience with the student can be described as more relationship-oriented mentoring, this specific instance reveals how easy it is for trust to be diminished. As a result, the mentorship could become more business-oriented – especially when there's a power difference (e.g., age, employment status, etc.) between mentor and mentee.

Each mentorship example in this section connects to relationship-oriented mentoring. Although there was a clear power difference, the mentors sought to provide more holistic

guidance to their mentees. The holistic guidance provided to mentees included academic, professional, social, and psychological support. While most of this guidance came from mentors who shared multiple identities with the mentees, there were a few pairs with differing social identities who were just as successful.

### *Egalitarian Mentoring Examples*

Egalitarian mentoring was described as the bi-directional guidance exchanged between two people, with equal or similar status, at the same place in their lives. This type of relationship occurred most between friends and colleagues within the same academic school (who eventually became friends) but also happened with family members.

Gina, a full-time student first learned of her Ph.D. advisor via friends and mentors at her undergraduate institution. Although the advisor was well respected in academia, Gina initially expressed hesitation in working with the advisor when she learned the advisor was not Black. Gina decided to put her concerns aside after having an affirming conversation with one of the advisor's student advisees who identified as a Black woman and eventually became a mentor to Gina.

I was just I was just talking to her like, you know, how's your experience there like, you know, how was Dr. Cole, as an advisor to you and Shanice was like, 'I think she's a really good advisor like very supportive and everything. Um, and I kind of was like tiptoeing around because I was like, you know I hope she doesn't go all Rachel Dolezal, and she was like 'Nah, she ain't' and I was like, Okay, I didn't ask those questions directly, but I was kind of like tiptoeing around it, I was still kind of skeptical. Um, but then I ended up after I talked to Shanice, I ended up emailing Dr. Cole.

Gina's statement highlights the significant role that mentors, especially those who the mentee identifies closely with, can serve within a student's decision-making process. Even in situations where the students are not engaged in a mentoring relationship, students may be more likely to listen to the advice of people they share commonalities with rather than those they do not.

Like Gina, Charles, a full-time Ph.D. student, recounted his experiences with informal peer-mentorship. More specifically, Charles discussed meeting peers near the beginning of his Ph.D. process who became his friends as well as writing buddies.

We would have these study groups that were very helpful to me, we have writing groups that were very helpful that I engaged in that they introduced me to. We did writing retreats. We've actually been on writing retreats outside the university together which was really helpful. They're actually still my writing group now that write with and meet with frequently throughout the program. I feel without that mechanism I wouldn't have made it this far. Without them, without them supporting and helping me throughout this process particularly with the writing group that we have and the feedback sessions for another. Those have been particularly very helpful. That's the type of support, mentorship that they give me. They've read my papers and given me feedback...those types of things.

In addition to giving Charles important academic feedback regarding his research and other projects, the writing group supported Charles in identifying graduate assistantships and with other student life matters such as locating housing.

Chelsea, a full-time Ph.D. student, also described peer mentorship as a form of support that was pertinent for her journey to and through the Ph.D. She discussed having older peers, while she was completing her master's degree, prepare her for doctoral success.

I think peer mentorship has been the most vital in my Ph.D. process, and getting in. Just because, I mean, those people walked me through stuff and continue to walk me through stuff, give me updates give me submissions, you know what I mean? Like submit to this, apply to this...

She considered advice from peer mentors to be more direct, whereas advice from non-peer mentors (e.g., faculty members) was more suggestive. This could have been influenced by Chelsea having stronger personal relationships with peers/friends, than faculty/administrators, who felt more comfortable telling her what explicit career moves to make.

Formal peer-mentorship experiences were also shared by participants. These relationships often involved the student being assigned a mentor by their academic department or having the option to initiate a mentorship with a fellow graduate student and formalize the relationship, so mentors were compensated.

Before applying to her program, Pat, a first-year full-time Ph.D. student, met a fellow student (in her program) at an academic fair on-campus. After the fair, Pat remained in contact with the student who provided her with guidance regarding the Ph.D. application process. When Pat was accepted into the program, she was assigned a peer mentor by the department. Pat eventually learned that the student she met at the academic fair had a direct connection to her new peer-mentor.

It turns out that the mentor that I was assigned to, her mentor was the girl that I had met before coming into the program. And so I consider them my mentor and my grand mentor. And it's really great because now they mentor me and also we're becoming friends and it's a great relationship that we have.

All three have frequent dinners where the mentor and grand-mentor answer Pat's general questions about school and other aspects of the Ph.D. life. Kenny, another first-year full-time Ph.D. student, discussed a peer he formalized a mentorship with via his academic fellowship program.

As apart of the program, you can choose an advanced graduate mentor...So, one of the TAs in the clinic, who I had grown to, I just started chatting with her in person, because we're in person. We had to wear a mask. I just started chatting with her. So, naturally when I was rereading requirements or rereading [my fellowship information] I was like, oh I can select a mentor. I chose her, I asked her and she was like, "Yeah.

Kenny went on to share how he worked with his fellowship coordinator to formalize the mentorship and ensure the woman was compensated for her time/commitment. He also wished the fellowship program had explicitly informed him of this opportunity at the beginning of the academic year so he could have formalized the relationship sooner.

Most participants discussed peers, faculty members, and administrators as mentors. A few, however, also identified family members as having a considerable role within their success. Fred, for example shared how his wife has assisted him in remembering to center his work around the community.

I look at my wife as a mentor in terms of the community work that she does and what it means to put self second and community first, because putting community first, putting yourself first. She teaches how not to get too caught up in the world of academia. How to stay committed to community and our people.

Although Fred was not the only student to reference the support of significant others, he was the only participant to identify his wife as a mentor. Kenny also described his wife as helping him

pursue his career goals, by connecting him with different resources learned from her job but did not refer to her as a mentor.

So, I definitely want to go [back to school] and my wife, in her fashion, came again and she's like... She's a hairstylist so she talks to other people. She's like, "Oh my God, I heard about this great opportunity." And I was like, "Go ahead, shoot. Tell me. What is it?" \*Kenny smiles\* She told me about this institute for recruitment of teaching program that pretty much has this structured process of helping minorities apply to graduate school.

After doing some research, Kenny learned that the program his wife was referring to was a national institute designed to address the shortage of teachers from racially underrepresented communities. The program funded various aspects of its participants educational experiences including, but not limited to, graduate school seminars and graduate school applications. Even though she wasn't labeled a mentor, Kenny's wife connected him to a resource that helped him successfully matriculate into a well-respected Ph.D. program in his field.

Significant others were not the only family members referenced in conversations. Parents also greatly influenced the success of students. For example, Gabriella noted the imperative role her mother held within Gabriella's decision to not quite school after a series of personal experiences that negatively impacted her life.

It's really hard. Like I had a breakdown like two months ago. My mom had to like pull me out of... It's like 'I quit like I quit'. I don't like this. I just don't like the games of grad school the... I don't even know if I will call it hazing so much as it's the culture of grad school. Um, and it's too much, it's too much. And so I almost quit. And I was like, I don't

really care, like, but she, you know, my mom said, “No, you've come so far” which is true, I have come so far.

Although parents are typically not referred to as equals, in this situation Gabriella’s mother realized the sincere duress Gabriella was experiencing with school. As a result, she assumed more of an equal role in allowing Gabriella to vent using colorful language usually not approved by elders.

In addition to being the recipients of mentorship, participants discussed their experiences with serving as mentors to others. These experiences mostly revolved around relationships with same-age peers, younger peers, or people the students supervised.

Although Nicole, a full-time Ph.D. student, entered her program with a cohort she described as more racially diverse; the Black women who entered her program in the cohort after Nicole’s were not as fortunate. This encouraged Nicole to take the women under her wing as mentees. She found herself particularly close to one of the women who also identifies as a Black bi-racial woman from the same metropolitan area as Nicole.

We just share a wild number of common experiences, she's also from southwest suburbs of [large upper Midwest city] and has a lot of other same things going on that I did kind of coming in. But they both came in directly from undergrad, which was a difference for sure, compared to me. I definitely made an effort early on, to make sure that I was available, just generally as a person who just went through what they're about to go through and making sure that I was an open ear.

In being available and offering an open ear, Nicole wanted to provide the women the type of support/guidance she knew they would need especially in a department where majority of the students and faculty identified as White. She also recruited the women to join a task force

designed to address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion as an opportunity for them to have their voices/experiences acknowledged by the department.

Like Nicole, Lupita, a part-time Ph.D. candidate, discussed the importance of assisting new students in acclimating to the Ph.D. life. She went on to highlight the type of mentorship exchanged between herself and two other peers who share the same faculty advisor.

We have actually, it's interesting, because we have a peer who has graduated, but she was a year, maybe year and a half ahead of me. And I am a year, maybe year and a half of our other peer. And so I learned a ton from her in terms of expectations that were specific to our advisor around the proposal process, the data analysis process, etc, etc. And so learning that from her, I was able to incorporate it into my work. And now our third peer who is coming behind us is also learning from both of our experiences.

Lupita also identified these two peers as friends and has remained in contact with them even though they live in different regions of the country. Mentorship between peers advised by the same faculty person were common experiences for participants.

Like Lupita, Keisha, a full-time Ph.D. student discussed providing mentorship in the form of professional guidance and emotional support to co-advisees of her faculty advisor. Although Keisha is used to serving as the mentor who checks-in with mentees, she recounted an experience where the roles were reversed. During a project meeting between the faculty advisor and advisees, Keisha became overwhelmed when reporting on the status of tasks previously assigned to her by the advisor.

I didn't check everything off on the list. And I was pretty honest about that. And so my advisor was like, "Okay." I could tell she was a little disappointed in me. So then I just started bawling in the Zoom room. So I was like, "All right." And they were like, "Are

you okay, Keisha?" And I was like, "It's just too much!" But then the mentee reached out to me, and was like, "Hey, I was going to check in on you. I can't believe how much you're actually doing. I didn't realize how hard you've been working to make this all work." I don't always think people want to see that or need to see that. But then, somehow, people... I don't know, it humanizes me in a way that people are like, "Oh. Yeah. You're just a mom out here trying to do this in a pandemic. A grad student with self doubt, just like everybody else."

Keisha's example captures the complex life of a Ph.D. student – especially for women of color. In addition to being a full-time student and Teaching Assistant in a research group, Keisha is also a caretaker whose family's success critically depends on her own. Her example also supports the idea that mentoring experiences can be reciprocal relationships between multiple people sharing mentor/mentee responsibilities.

The examples of equal mentorship highlight the significant impact peers have on students. More specifically, it shows how students work together, both within and outside structured spaces, to support one another via professional and moral advice. The difference between egalitarian and relationship-oriented mentorship is the balanced power dynamic. Students like Charles and Chelsea felt most comfortable with, and better supported by, fellow students rather than faculty/administrators.

This chapter specifically discussed characteristics, styles, and key takeaways associated with Black Ph.D. students' experiences with mentorship. Mentorship was broadly described as a trusting relationship between two or more people that is holistic in nature. Multiple fluid mentoring styles exist, but majority of the experiences shared by participants in this study revolved around egalitarian mentoring. These findings further highlighted that Black Ph.D.

students are not a monolithic group, mentorship is shaped by unique participant interactions, and mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain. The next chapter will detail the professional goals of participants and the influence of mentorship on their career readiness.

## **Chapter 5 – Career Readiness**

This section will discuss the current Ph.D. status, career goals, and career preparedness of 17 Black doctoral students across five academic departments in the Education College at Midwestern University. Contrary to the way that the students were primarily being trained by their graduate school mentors, the majority of the students within this study envisioned themselves in practitioner (5) or hybrid (8) positions – conjoining practice with research. Only four of the students identified tenure-track faculty positions as their sole/main career interest. This statistic is relevant to the current job market because the number of faculty of color has continued to decrease at an alarming rate since the great recession (Kim et al., 2021). Despite this trend, participants discussed being trained, by their academic programs for faculty positions – not administrative positions. For those interested in administrative, or other non-faculty, positions they often sought guidance from people outside their academic department if they did not receive that guidance in-department.

The first part of this section will focus on students who are most interested in serving as practitioners in education. The second part will highlight participants more interested in faculty related positions. The final part will share the career goals and preparedness of students who are more open to pursuing hybrid full-time positions within research and practice. I opted to create short narratives for each participant to demonstrate the complexity of their aspirations as they relate to the way in which they were mentored.

### **Practitioner Career Paths**

Five participants discussed seeking practitioner-based careers only. The types of positions students noted being most interested in included opening private and/or non-profit practices revolving around educational topics and serving as higher education administrators.

**Nicole.** At the time of our interview, Nicole was completing the third year of her Ph.D. program. Third-year students in her field spend a full year in practicum placement. According to the program website, the practicum involves “applied experience” working with children (individually and in groups) within general or special education settings. Ph.D. students usually work in-person at the schools, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced Nicole to mostly work with her students virtually. Unlike majority of the participants in this study, Nicole does not visualize herself working in academia as faculty. Her career goals involve opening her own private practice clinic and serving as a practitioner within school districts. Although she loves the idea of working directly with a school district, she noted the consequence of not being physically located within a school for her practicum due to the pandemic:

It's just been kind of weird because this year, I just haven't gotten a good sense of what it's like to work in a school and this was supposed to be my year to get a sense of what it's like to work in schools. I'm hoping that I can get an internship placement that is kind of a consortium model and will allow me to rotate through a couple different things so I can get a sense of what working in different places would be like, more on a four or five days a week schedule.

Despite her inability to work physically within a school setting, Nicole does feel equipped to enter her career path. When asked if she felt prepared for her career, Nicole responded with the following:

Yeah. Yes. I mean, technically I could enter the workforce now because I have a master's and I would just need to pass an exam and I could work in schools as a [practitioner in student wellness] I don't feel like my practice has been entirely balanced, but I do feel like I have a lot of strong skills. I was literally in a meeting yesterday with my supervisor

talking about this. I just feel like I need to be able to put it together within a system and understand how that system impacts my work instead of doing these one-off cases or one-off projects with school staff. That's the part that I just feel like I don't quite get.

Even though she feels prepared for the future, Nicole believes an additional full year of in-person training regarding key processes of her aspired position (e.g., developing/facilitating Individualized Education Programs) would be beneficial. Nicole's faculty advisor/mentor is very encouraging of Nicole's career goals. For instance, Nicole previously shared how the advisor has supported her "whole self" by serving as someone that gives academic and life advice. The advisor's relationship-oriented mentoring, as well as prior practitioner experience, has also helped Nicole further explore opening her own private practice.

**Mali.** Mali was in the process of completing her dissertation proposal when we met to discuss where she pictured herself in the future. Like Nicole, Mali is not interested in pursuing tenure-track faculty positions. She would rather establish her own Youth-led Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR) company for black, brown, and indigenous youth. Although Mali has had reservations about funding this type of work, she recently applied for and received a grant to establish a Y-PAR program for a local organization which made her feel "very encouraged." Other than the recent grant she was awarded, Mali believed she was only "somewhat" ready to open her own Y-PAR company. When asked if she felt prepared for her career goal, Mali had this to say:

I read a lot about it because I studied community based educational spaces. I had some training, some experience just volunteering through my church, the churches I've gone to, and other volunteer programs. So I've definitely had some experience in that. But not through school, just on my kind of own personal accord because that's what I was

interested in. I don't have any experience or training in starting a business. So I didn't get any prep work for that.

Unlike Nicole, Mali did not have an advisor with experience as a business owner.

Although Mali considered her advisor's relationship-oriented guidance to be supportive, Mali had to learn a lot of information about Y-PARs on her own. The advisor's ability to help Mali navigate her professional life as a woman of color, however, seemed most important to Mali. Mali was not the only Ph.D. student who discussed feeling somewhat prepared or not prepared at all for their career goals. Most of the participants in this study shared that they did not feel ready to achieve their career goals, at this moment, but believed their Ph.D. training along with other experiences would give them the tools needed for long-term success.

**Kenny.** Kenny, a first-year Ph.D. student, expressed an interest in wanting to teach while also opening his own private family practice with an emphasis on community partnerships. He also stressed the importance of hiring interns within his practice because Kenny, himself, greatly benefited from serving as a college intern at his mentor's private practice. When asked if he felt prepared or was currently receiving the preparation needed for his career goals, Kenny said, "No. No. Not at all. I mean, I don't know if I would receive it through my graduate education, honestly. I'm going to try to look for classes that do work in that area."

Although Kenny does not believe he is currently receiving the training needed for his professional aspirations, Kenny's career goals are the reason he decided to work with his Ph.D. faculty advisor. In addition to the professor's writing ability, Kenny described his faculty advisor as someone who was "doing more work in the community than some of the other professors." While Kenny did not refer to his advisor as a mentor, the type of guidance the advisor has given Kenny fits within the business-oriented model. As their relationship develops, Kenny hopes he

will learn skills needed to foster community partnerships with families in underserved communities. In the meantime, Kenny has continued to lean on other professionals (like the Black male professor he was first connected with on campus) for relationship-oriented guidance regarding life as a Black man in academia.

**Buddy.** Buddy, a part-time Ph.D. student, had recently completed his qualifying paper and was writing his dissertation proposal at the time of our educational journey conversations. Like a few other participants, Buddy possessed multiple years of full-time experience as an educator before entering his Ph.D. program. Although he was initially open to considering tenure-track faculty positions, this aspiration faded after Buddy became more familiar with the tenure-track process.

The PhD is already an academic haze, the emotional roller coaster that you go through in PhD programs, the financial, you know, sacrifices you make. It's an... I say this, almost to everybody who applies to a PhD program, not to scare them off, but to be very real. It's the biggest mindfuck of my life \*buddy and interviewer laugh\*. And so to go through this. And then to go through another five to seven years on a tenure track, to get tenure, just doesn't sit well with me, while still making not a lot of money. Seeing faculty members on a tenure track, you know, go on vacation, but still talking about how they're taking their laptop with them to the beach, taking their laptop with them to write during like family vacations, seeing the stress and the grind that they had to go through. It didn't seem worth it to me.

These factors, along with Buddy's full-time administrative experience, have led Buddy to focus more on maintaining a career in administration after finishing his Ph.D. Although he doesn't see himself within the tenure-track process, Buddy did note that he "wants to be a part of students

learning in the classroom” as a clinical professor. When asked if he feels prepared for his career goal of advancing within administration, once he’s finished with school, Buddy said yes. He went on to share how the university, and more specifically his Ph.D. program and faculty advisor/mentor, provided him with the “breadcrumbs” (e.g., serving as Teaching Assistant, advising/mentoring younger Ph.D. students, serving on national committees, etc.) needed to be generally successful in higher education Buddy also praised friends and colleagues who provided him with egalitarian guidance as he navigated turbulent experiences in his Ph.D. journey. In relation to Buddy’s earlier description of mentorship, these friends/colleagues assisted him in “more ways than one” by supporting him professionally, socially, and psychologically.

**Blair.** Blair, a part-time Ph.D. student was in the process of completing his qualifying paper when we met to discuss his educational journey. Like a few other participants, Blair was currently working full-time as a senior-level administrator. Although he did not discuss pursuing a career in faculty, Blair highlighted the significant role his faculty advisor’s business-oriented guidance served in Blair understanding the significance of owning your intellectual capital. The advisor also encouraged Blair to think of ways to use his intellectual capital to establish multiple streams of income – something he noted “we don’t often talk about in our Ph.D. programs.” His experience in administration, as well as keen advice from mentors, more than likely inspired Blair’s following response to my question about his career goals:

I could see myself toggling between a senior leadership role but also having a consultancy arm to what I'm doing. The best model would be being able to find a position where I could have a senior leadership and have my own research institute. Have my own lab.

As previously mentioned, Blair’s advisor has continued to challenge him to think “how does [the Ph.D. degree] fit into my gameplan?” He went on to note that he feels prepared to enter a hybrid role which includes senior leadership and consultancy because his current work “encourages that type of structure”. In addition to the support he’s received from mentors, Blair had already accumulated more than a decade of full-time experience in his career field and was presently serving as a senior education administrator. His experiences are quite different from majority of the participants who mostly identified as full-time students who had fewer than five years of full-time work experience prior to entering their Ph.D. program.

### **Faculty Career Paths**

As previously mentioned, only four of the 17 participants in this study noted faculty member as their preferred career path. All four participants self-identified as women and discussed seeing themselves as professors at larger Research I universities.

**Chanel.** Chanel was a second-year Ph.D. student that had recently entered her second to last semester of coursework at the time of our conversations. Different from Nicole, Chanel stated that the ongoing pandemic did not negatively influence her academic progress because she was still able to fully participate in classes – virtually. Once Chanel is finished with her Ph.D. she intends to move back to her native hometown and become a tenure-track faculty member. Although she didn’t discuss working at a specific university, Chanel identified education, Black studies, and Women studies as academic areas she hopes to specialize in. When asked if she felt prepared to enter the workforce as a professor, Chanel had the following to say:

What is the workforce? And be a professor? These jobs are scant. Am I a really good scholar? Yes. My ideas are really amazing and I had people... I think about the professors here who are pushing me and pushing my thought and listening to my ideas and also my

peers and other graduate students. And I'm like, "Yo, I know that I'm being trained really, really well." So yes, I am going to be an amazing scholar. Now, is there going to be a job for me? That's not up to me. That's not a question that I could answer, but I know that I'm going to be amazing.

Although Chanel is confident in her abilities as a scholar and future professor, she noted feeling more prepared to navigate course work and prelims than the job market at this time. Once she is finished with her Ph.D. program, however, Chanel believes she'll have the social connections (e.g., friends, faculty advisor, other faculty members, etc.) needed to land a professor position. This confidence stems from the structured relationship-oriented mentoring Chanel received from Black women professors. Although she previously discussed not seeing peers as mentors because of the power dynamic, Chanel also acknowledged fellow Black women Ph.D. students as people who supported her personally and academically via practices like writing groups.

**Gina.** Like several other participants, Gina, a fourth-year Ph.D. student, was almost finished with course work and drafting her qualifying paper at the time of our interviews. Students within Gina's program become "candidates" once they complete their dissertation proposal and present the proposal to their dissertation committee. During one of our conversations, Gina discussed wanting to be a professor but wasn't sure what type of institution she wanted to teach at. Something that was for sure, however, was that Gina did not see herself as an administrator. When asked why, she provided a few reasons:

I think, I think two things. Working for [pre-graduate school preparation program] but also seeing black women in administrative roles. Like, I'm thinking about [Upper administrator], head of [large campus division], when I first came into [pre-graduate school preparation program] I was working directly with her because there wasn't a

Director, and to me, seeing her in that role, I feel like she does a lot, and I think that a lot of black women that I see in administrative roles they take on a lot and it doesn't look like something I would want to do, I don't want to work, you know, over 40 hours a week, really, you know? Staying there, fixing the problems of the university when they don't give a fuck about me

Gina went on to share that these factors, along with completing administrative tasks like budgeting for an entire program/department, seemed stressful and something she wasn't interested in doing. When asked if she felt prepared for her career goal of serving as a professor, Gina said:

Ooh, yes and no. Um, yes in ways...I think I can definitely teach and do all that, and the only thing I feel like I'm not prepare with is like I still feel like I'm growing into my confidence of like 'oh, I am a scholar, oh I do know this, I could actually teach this, right?

Another factor influencing Gina's confidence involves her published work. Gina doesn't believe she has published enough peer-reviewed journal articles. Oftentimes, the frequency of one's ability to publish is used by higher education institutions (especially research I universities) to determine the potential success of a faculty member. Publishing is something Gina is currently working on with the egalitarian guidance of Ph.D. peers/friends (like the older Black woman student who became her mentor early in the program) and relationship-oriented support from her advisor and Black women faculty members. Similar to Chanel, Gina believes she'll be better prepared to enter a tenure-track position once she finishes school.

**Lupita.** At the time of our conversations, Lupita, a Ph.D. candidate, had finished writing her dissertation and was preparing to complete her final oral exam while searching for full-time

employment. Like other participants, Lupita worked as an education practitioner between her undergraduate and Ph.D. programs. Unlike other students with full-time administrative experience, however, Lupita sought to be a tenure-track professor as opposed to a senior administrator at the conclusion of her Ph.D. At the time of our third interview, Lupita had applied for “a ton” of tenure track positions and was feeling “jaded” because she had mostly received rejection letters or no response at all from universities. When asked if she felt prepared for the job market once finished with school, Lupita said:

I feel prepared to do my job, like once I get there. And I think part of that is because, like I've mentioned before, I have a long professional history. And I think having that professional history, like attuned my senses in a different way, like once I got to doctor school in terms of paying attention to what my faculty members were doing, not just in teaching classes, but what else were they spending their time on? And how are they feeling about that? How are they engaging each other around those sorts of different components of their job. So I feel prepared to actually do that job once, once I get it. Um, I did not feel prepared to actually get a job. And some days, I still feel inadequately prepared to actually get a job.

Although her prior full-time experience contributed to Lupita believing she was prepared to land a practitioner position, “not understanding academic politics” led to Lupita feeling “very unsure and hesitant about the operations” of acquiring a tenure-track role. She also shared that even though she was aware of the processes for becoming a faculty member, there are other factors negatively impacting her ultimate career goal.

I feel like those processes are not as successful given the body that I come in, and the politics that I represent. To be more specific, what we have been told, you know, from

peers and from faculty, mentors, etc. One you have like, a great CV, that means presentations, publications, like all that stuff. And so, I feel like I'm doing all of that. Then there's like the working your networks and making connections and all of that. And to some degree, I've done that as well. But I also know that when I look at faculty across the country, that the likelihood of me being the only black person on faculty and or the only person of color period on faculty and or the only dark-skinned person on faculty could be really, really possible. Which to me also says that even as people do all those, like, even as people check all those boxes of getting the great resume and CV and like, publishing and all those things, that those things don't necessarily propel you to a position. And again, you know, the work that I do is like, very race forward, very analytical of like structural, anti-blackness, etc, etc. I think that some of those things are just not as welcome in academia, period. And then on top of that, the body that I come in, makes people uncomfortable. If there's nothing else I learned from, you know, just being in social spaces, like the bus \*Lupita laughs\* at my doctoral institution is just the body that I come in, it makes people uncomfortable. For many of those people on the bus, like I might be their peer, like their faculty member peer. And if I make you uncomfortable on a bus, not talking to you, like, how much more uncomfortable would you be like sitting in the same room and like, having to engage me?

As someone who was actively searching for a tenure-track position within the job market at the time of our interviews, Lupita's quotes are in stark contrast to other participant's responses regarding career preparedness. Unlike Lupita, many of the students I spoke with were still in the process of completing their Ph.D. and not seeking full-time employment just yet. One cannot help but imagine how their responses to the question about career preparedness would have been

different if they, too, were at the point of applying for full-time positions within their preferred career path and were met with similar challenges to Lupita's. It's also important to note how Lupita felt unprepared to find a faculty position even though she was well qualified and had adhered to relationship-oriented/egalitarian advice from colleagues as well as advisors who were already faculty members.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly, a third-year Ph.D. student had recently finished coursework and was preparing to complete her program's preliminary exam when we held our conversations. Unlike most participants in this study, Kimberly shared that she "definitely wanted to be a professor" after completing her Ph.D. work. The connections she made with faculty members, during school, and her interest in fast-paced environments motivated Kimberly to specifically pursue faculty positions at research I universities along the western U.S. coast. When asked if she felt prepared for her career goal, Kimberly replied:

Absolutely. I think I find myself in enough spaces with senior, junior faculty, where I see role models. I feel funny calling them role models, because in a lot of senses, they're just people who are open to giving you whatever advice you need. They recognize the need for scholars of color to be in the spaces that I'm in. They recognize that I have good ideas ... in their opinion

As previously mentioned, Kimberly has had various Black women professionals invest in her via business-oriented and relationship-oriented mentoring. These experiences have contributed to Kimberly feeling not only confident in securing a faculty position, but a faculty position within a research I university in a region of the U.S. she prefers to live in – the west coast.

### **Hybrid Career Paths (Research/Practice)**

The remaining eight students visualized themselves as both researchers and practitioners. Five of these participants identified as women while three identified as men. Their career interests ranged from being a professor/community activist, to faculty member who holds dual teaching/administrative responsibilities.

**Fred.** At the time of our conversations, Fred, a third-year Ph.D. student, had recently completed his qualifying paper and was writing his dissertation proposal. He was also in the process of applying for IRB approval for his dissertation research. Similar to other full-time students, Fred discussed having opportunities to teach and influence the curriculum used within undergraduate/graduate courses. Although Fred shared that being a faculty member was on his “radar” as a result of the academy “training us to go back into the professoriate”, being a professor was not his only aspiration. Fred also envisioned himself using his academic training and community organizing efforts to help lead the day-to-day activities/curriculum of a community school supporting underserved areas. When asked if he felt prepared to serve as a professor and/or practitioner (within a community school), Fred responded:

Yes and no. I guess the adult people, my advisors, people I trust, and who I met in the academy, really propelled my thinking and pushed me in a lot of ways. But also the academy is designed to limit me. Once I surpass their understanding of critical, I am now problematic. I'm critiqued for my politics, not even the body of work that I'm producing.

Fred provided context by discussing a course he recently developed for his institution. While he enjoyed creating the class, Fred also described it as a “weird complex skin-tight black space” that he had to maneuver carefully as an activist who was still a student. He further stated:

That's why I say yes and no, because at a certain point I had to break away from what they were trying to confine me to in order to do that community work. But it also has led me to where I am now politically and theoretically, and that has definitely prepared me. Fred acknowledged the relationship-oriented and egalitarian guidance he previously discussed receiving from advisors, peers/family, and community leaders who supported his vision and refrained from forcing their personal opinions on him. Their continued support assisted Fred in remembering to always put the community first. Fred was not the only participant who described how their experiences within the academy have prepared them for career success in more ways than one.

**Savannah.** At the time of our conversations, Savannah was a student completing her second year of course work while also finishing a pilot research study similar to that of a master's thesis project. Once the study is complete, Savannah will have a master's degree in education but plans to continue school until her Ph.D. is completed. Like many of her colleagues, Savannah was in the exploration phase of her career goals. Although she wasn't sure of the exact position she wanted to hold after finishing the Ph.D., Savannah knew general details such as the type of people she wanted to work with. Savannah described these people as "change oriented like I am" and went on to state:

I think having a job that would allow me to engage with undergraduates and graduate students is a dream because then I feel I'm like, "Oh, well then the graduate students can be also mentors and undergraduates bring..." It's this kind of level of knowledge that I want in my spaces so.

The space briefly described by Savannah, above, resembles the space her Ph.D. faculty advisor established for women of color to learn how to navigate and engage within community-based

research. In fact, Savannah identified her advisor as someone who has helped her “build relationships with the community” via introducing Savannah to different community members as well as updating her on community research opportunities that have come available. When asked if she felt prepared for her career goals, Savannah said:

I do think that I am in a really great space where I'm watching modeling of how I want to navigate, especially community work and how research aligns with that, how it doesn't.

And having those conversations, I feel I have support here that is helping me understand how to navigate those relationships.

Savannah went on to note that she has people who support her in learning the skills needed to adequately conduct community work. Savannah is also confident she'll leave her Ph.D. program with the ability to provide a similar learning environment for undergraduate/graduate students that was provided to her. Like Chanel, however, she clarified that she does not have the confidence at this moment to “go and walk in and be like ‘let's go’.” Savannah's description of her advisor's support resembles relationship-oriented mentorship. Although she doesn't feel prepared for her career goals yet, Savannah is receiving all of the necessary training (e.g., how to establish/maintain community, group advising/role playing, etc.) to be a relationship-oriented mentor in whichever career she pursues.

**Keisha.** Keisha, a full-time Ph.D. student, was in the process of completing coursework and writing her qualifying paper at the time of our interviews. She was also finishing a pilot study she planned to use for her dissertation research. Unlike some students who enrolled in their Ph.D. programs immediately after completing undergraduate or master's degree programs, Keisha worked full-time in education administration for nearly a decade before returning for her Ph.D. As a previous administrator now within a Ph.D. program, that greatly emphasizes the

production of faculty, Keisha discussed grappling with the idea of which profession would allow her to have the greatest influence on student success.

When I came in, after working for ten years in admissions and student affairs, the goal was to get the PhD and jump right back into administration. So, [upper administrative position #1], [upper administrative position #2], sort of in that level, and with the ultimate goal of being a college president, at probably a [smaller college]...Now that I have learned more about what presidents do, I don't know... But initially, when I tell people I want to be a chancellor or a president, they're like, "Oh, that sounds terrible. Why would you want to do that?" And then I'm always like, "Well, why not be?" I feel like we need lots of different people at the table...But being here in [this state], being at a research I institution, I'm definitely being socialized to really strongly consider faculty life, in a way that I hadn't done previously, before starting the PhD...So I'm definitely more open to it, because I think about, "Where can I make the most change?"

Keisha elaborated on her “making the most change” remark by highlighting the racial disparities between faculty members and administrators. She noted there’s “no shortage of black student affairs folks” whereas black faculty members, as a whole, represent a much smaller proportion of tenure-track university professors. When asked if she felt prepared to enter a tenure-track faculty position or senior administrator role, Keisha stated:

So for the faculty? Hands down. My advisor, I think she's incredibly knowledgeable and prolific. And in terms of, "Here's what you want to do. Here's how you write these publications." So I feel in that way, I'm getting a lot...It was the administrators' side that I thought my program was going to be a little bit more friendly towards people who are interested in going into [education administration]

She continued by sharing that her Ph.D. program highlighted more practical elements of education training on its website but didn't clarify that this training was more specific to Ph.D. students interested in K-12 education administration, not administration in other areas of education. The program's lack of practitioner-based education for Ph.D. students has encouraged Keisha to find administrative mentors who can provide her business-oriented career development advice through the lens of a practitioner. More specifically, she identified a senior administrator at the university who motivated her to remain connected to the practitioner side of education (via assistantships) if Keisha remained interested in serving as an administrator. Although Keisha's faculty advisor would like her to pursue faculty positions, the advisor has been supportive of Keisha's diverse career interests via relationship-oriented guidance/advice.

**Chelsea.** Chelsea was a Ph.D. student finishing her last semester of coursework and preparing to write a Ph.D. qualifying paper when we met to discuss her educational journey. Since completing her first college degree, Chelsea knew she wanted to be a teacher but wasn't sure if she wanted to pursue tenure-track faculty positions until the end of her undergraduate degree program. At that point, she met a series of mentors (e.g., Ph.D. students and faculty/administrators with a Ph.D.) who encouraged her to consider the Ph.D. route for better job security and more respect within the academy. Although she initially "didn't know what tenure meant", she eventually learned about the process from various mentors along her journey to and through the Ph.D. Her involvement in student leadership activities and discussions with clinical professors encouraged Chelsea to consider hybrid positions which merge research with practice. When asked if she felt prepared for a career as a higher education practitioner/professor, Chelsea responded, "Yes and no. So I think my [previous university's] work prepared me for the

practitioner side. And [my current university] is preparing me for the professor side, And I think here. It's very much a bifurcation between practitioners and professors, black and non-black.”

Chelsea went on to explain that at her master’s institution, she saw a greater number of administrators who also taught undergraduate and graduate courses. That experience differs from her experience at MU because there appears to be fewer professors who also have practitioner responsibilities and vice versa. As demonstrated above, much of the wisdom Chelsea received throughout her educational journey came from relationship-oriented experiences with faculty/administrators and egalitarian mentoring from friends/colleagues who are also enrolled in Ph.D. programs or already have their doctorate.

**Pat.** At the time of our interviews, Pat, a first-year student, was wrapping up her first semester of coursework as a new graduate student. Pat was one of two participants who matriculated into their Ph.D. program directly after completing a bachelor’s degree. She was also one of a few students who graduated from an undergraduate degree program at MU prior to pursuing the Ph.D. Although Pat considered her career goals to be “all over the place right now”, she identified professor, mental health practitioner, and philanthropist as positions of most interest to her. When asked if she was receiving the preparation need for a successful transition into these positions, Pat stated her involvement with volunteer organizations was preparing her to be a philanthropist. She also discussed a first-year education course that helped her understand the licensing exam needed to become a licensed practitioner in her desired career. In regard to her training as a teacher, Pat said:

I don't think I'm being like directly prepared for it. I think it's more like, as of now, seeing what my professors do, what the faculty do and how they do it and how they engage in their work and with students, is helping me prepare myself, like, "Is this the path that I

actually want to go towards? This is what I want to do. And then if it is, how do I get there?"

Pat also stated that, as she becomes more aware of what she wants in a career, it will be important for her to inform professors and advisors of these goals so Pat can receive the preparation needed to achieve them. Although she didn't feel as prepared for her career goals yet, Pat's experiences with mentorship resemble all three styles. While she received business-oriented and relationship-oriented mentoring from different faculty members, she has also found egalitarian support from a variety of Ph.D. students (such as her mentor and grand-mentor) within education.

**James.** James, a Ph.D. candidate, was almost finished with school when we met to discuss his educational journey. Unlike most participants who were still completing coursework or writing qualifying papers, James had completed his dissertation research and was writing the last two chapters of his final paper. He also identified as a part-time student that worked full-time at another university. James's career goals included serving as both an administrator and tenure-track professor. Becoming a practitioner and professor were important goals for James because both would help him more holistically serve "students that look like me that are coming through the pipeline." When asked if he felt prepared to accomplish his career goals, James exclaimed:

Yeah, I feel like I have. The practitioner training is more intensified than the academic training, but at the same time, with anything you don't learn much until you're kind of doing it, you're doing it every day and you're experiencing it. But, in the baseline, in terms of my preparation and my PhD work in terms of doing an independent study, and I've written with co-authors on different pieces while in grad school, I'm familiar with the process.

Although James believed he was prepared to enter the tenure-track process, he noted being more confident in his ability to serve as an administrator since he was currently a full-time administrator. James also shared that he didn't feel as confident in being a professor, as he did an administrator, because most of his research training occurred while he was a student and not as a full-time professor. Another factor that could have influenced James feeling more confident in his administrative abilities is that most of his business-oriented mentors appeared to be current or former administrators themselves.

**Gabriella.** Gabriella, a Ph.D. candidate, was near the final stage of her program and collecting dissertation data at the time of our conversations. She was also preparing to enter the job market. When asked about her career goals, Gabriella wasn't exactly sure if she wanted to pursue tenure-track faculty or administrative positions and shared that she would "probably apply for everything because my mom didn't raise no fool." Although she was still weighing her career options, Gabriella was adamant that she did not see herself at an institution like MU. Gabriella elaborated by noting she enjoyed the campus as a student, but believed faculty were not adequately compensated for all that was required of them by the university. Rather, she believed working at a well-endowed private university would give Gabriella more professional "flexibility" while allowing her to better support family – financially. When asked if she felt prepared for the next step in her career after school, Gabriella said:

Sometimes I feel prepared. And then sometimes I'm like, Oh, God, I feel like I have to start grad school all over like, day one, class one and I think It's like feeling overwhelmed. imposter syndrome. Like I'm not good enough and stuff. But there are moments where, especially as I got to this candidate stage where I've been in writing

groups and people are talking about stuff, I'm like, I follow you! Okay, I understand, you know, so there are moments like that I'm like, Oh, yes.

Gabriella went on to share that in moments where she doubts herself, her “community of support” (e.g., faculty advisors, family, friends, mentors, etc.) have been there to reassure Gabriella that “you’re ready for this, like, you could do this.” These relationship-oriented and egalitarian experiences have not only helped Gabriella overcome imposter syndrome but have also contributed to her feeling prepared for life after school.

**Charles.** Charles, another Ph.D. candidate, was writing the last two chapters of his dissertation at the time of our conversations. Like a few other students, Charles worked as a full-time educator between his master’s and Ph.D. programs. His experiences as both an administrator and student have motivated Charles to pursue hybrid positions which merge research with practice. More specifically, he envisioned himself serving in a role that supports the continued learning and professional development of school administrators. When asked if he was prepared to enter a hybrid research/practice career, Charles said:

Yes. Just because maybe I'm unique in... I don't know. I feel... actually just because I've always felt that way about the workforce and job market. I actually feel more confident in the job market and my ability to work in the sector area that I want to, then I do to complete my actual dissertation.

Charles explained that he was confident in his ability to find the right position because he’s a planner who knows the importance of preparing for the future. Although he didn’t specify why he was less confident about completing his dissertation, Charles did note majority of his support came from other students rather than professors.

I found faculty, but to be honest most of the mentoring that has helped me along the way has come from my peers...I feel without that mechanism I wouldn't have made it this far. Without them supporting and helping me throughout this process particularly with the writing group that we have and the feedback sessions for another. Those have been particularly very helpful.

Unlike other participants in this study, Charles' mentoring experiences mostly revolved around the egalitarian relationships he formed with fellow Ph.D. students. Even though the writing groups were important for Charles academically, they also served as spaces for him to seek professional advice from older Ph.D. students regarding career preparation and development. These groups provided him with opportunities to learn firsthand from the experiences of friends who had already entered, or were preparing to enter, the job market.

### **Summary of Mentoring Styles and Career Goals**

This chapter highlighted the career goals of each participant, whether they felt prepared for that career goal, and the ways in which their mentoring experiences contributed to their preparedness. Although most programs within the Education College, at MU, emphasize faculty careers, most of the students in this study were either torn between faculty and non-faculty positions or not interested in faculty roles at all. Another interesting note about the participants' experiences is that their mentoring relationships varied between the different mentoring styles described in chapter four. Most interviewees experienced more than one type of mentorship simultaneously and/or consecutively.

Mentorship mattered to the career goals of the Black Ph.D. students in this study because it provided them the knowledge and confidence to navigate various challenges within academia. These challenges included systemic barriers (e.g., administrative/programmatic requirements that

disproportionately impacted part-time students), personal barriers (e.g., being a caretaker and full-time student), and relational barriers (e.g., mis-matched mentoring opportunities leading to negative experiences). While not every mentoring experience was considered exactly what the student wanted/needed, especially for students most interested in non-faculty positions, these experiences contributed to their career preparedness one way or another. Figure 5.1 displays the styles of mentoring most discussed by participants, their academic progress, career aspirations, and whether they felt prepared for that career or not.

**Figure 5.1 – Students’ Career Aspirations and Preparedness**

Name	Style of Mentoring	Ph.D. Progress	Career aspirations	Prepared/Being Prepared?
Gina	Egal. / Rel.	Beginning / Mid.	Faculty	Yes
Chelsea	Egal. / Rel.	Beginning / Mid.	Hybrid	Yes
Charles	Egal.	Mid. / End	Hybrid	Yes
James	Bus. / Rel.	Mid-point / End	Hybrid	Yes
Kenny	Bus. / Rel.	Beginning	Practitioner	Yes
Blair	Bus. / Rel.	Mid. Point	Practitioner	Yes
Chanel	Bus./ Rel.	Beginning/Mid.	Faculty	Yes
Lupita	Egal. / Rel.	End	Faculty	Yes/No
Fred	Egal. / Rel.	Mid-point	Hybrid	Yes
Mali	Rel.	Mid-point	Practitioner	No
Gabriella	Rel. / Egal.	Mid-point/End	Hybrid	Yes
Keisha	Rel. / Egal.	Beginning/Mid.	Hybrid	Yes
Savannah	Rel. / Egal.	Beginning/Mid.	Hybrid	Yes
Nicole	Rel. / Egal.	Mid. Point	Practitioner	Yes
Pat	Rel. / Egal.	Beginning	Hybrid	Yes
Kimberly	Rel.	Mid. Point	Faculty	Yes
Buddy	Egal. / Rel.	Mid. Point	Practitioner	Yes

The next, and final, chapter of this dissertation will further align these findings with the study's three key takeaways before concluding with future implications regarding the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend PWIs.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion

There were two purposes of this study. The first purpose was to identify how Black Ph.D. students defined mentorship. Consistent with prior literature, I found that mentorship in education has several definitions, looks different from one person to another, and requires more organization/framing (Jacobi, 1991; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Minnett et al. 2019). The second purpose of this study was to highlight the mentorship experiences of Black Ph.D. students and note the influence of such experiences on their success (e.g., graduation, meeting career goals, etc.). I conducted 51 semi-structured individual interviews with 17 Black Ph.D. students (three interviews each) and used the following questions to guide my study: How do Black Ph.D. students define mentorship? *What are the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI? And, how do mentoring relationships, if at all, contribute to the academic and professional success of Black Ph.D. students at a PWI?*

A series of characteristics (power dynamic, empathy, accountability, and wholeness), present across participant descriptions of mentorship, emerged from an in-depth analysis of the data. These characteristics contributed to the development of three styles of mentoring (and were reflected within each style):

1. Business-oriented mentoring
2. Relationship-oriented mentoring
3. Egalitarian mentoring

Power was evident across the three styles in that non-peer mentors (business-oriented and relationship-oriented) almost always possessed more power/influence over their mentees than peer mentors (egalitarian) with their mentees. Consistent with previous research, power was considered nuanced and contributed to both positive as well as negative mentoring experiences –

particularly informal mentoring experiences (Hansman, 2002). Egalitarian mentors held their mentees more academically accountable, while business-oriented mentors encouraged their mentees to be more professionally responsible, and relationship-oriented mentors were cited as providing more of a balance between academic/professional accountability. Like prior studies, empathy and holism were identified as positive mentoring characteristics (Young & Brooks, 2008; Ludeke et al., 2019). Mentors who engaged in relationship-oriented or egalitarian mentoring expressed more empathy than business-oriented mentors. Participants described their experiences with relationship-oriented and egalitarian mentoring as more holistic than their experiences with business-oriented mentoring.

The mentoring styles were not discrete categories. Rather, they were fluid and could change over time. Although not always explicitly stated, the race and gender of mentors was important for many participants (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). In the absence of faculty guidance, some participants sought and received mentorship from peers or colleagues they shared identities with (Williams et al., 2016).

Peer mentoring almost always started as a social relationship that evolved into an exchange of social, academic, and emotional support between participants. Some faculty/administrators began the relationship as predominantly business-oriented mentors and remained that way throughout the relationship. Other faculty/administrators began the relationship with a more business-oriented approach but evolved into relationship-oriented mentors. Lastly, one participant discussed having a more holistic relationship with their mentor, from the beginning, because both attended the same historically Black college for their undergraduate studies. This allowed the mentor and mentee to possibly bond quicker than other pairs who did not have the same connection at the onset of their relationship. While each of the

styles positively shaped students' educational and career trajectories, even if the actual mentorship experience was negative, they each seemed to have different influences on participants. Relationship-oriented mentorship appeared to be the style that most contributed to participants feeling holistically validated by senior academics and/or the participant feeling they holistically validated the experiences of younger students. Business-oriented mentorship, whether positive or negative, seemed to contribute most to participants feeling prepared for their specific career goals/interests. Egalitarian mentorship appeared to contribute most to students' ability to successfully navigate academic hurdles (e.g., courses to enroll in, funding opportunities to apply for, writing feedback, negative experiences with faculty/administrators, etc.) of a Ph.D. program. In the end, each of these styles positively influenced the career readiness of participants in their distinct ways.

Three key claims emerged from this study, each of which I summarize below:

- I. **Black Ph.D. students are not a monolithic group:** No two students' educational journeys were the same. Each brought different experiences, talents, and skills which influenced the types of support they individually needed to thrive or survive such journeys.
- II. **The mentorship experience is defined by the unique interactions of its participants:** Because no two students' are the same, there is no one definition (e.g., mentor/mentee) or service (e.g., mentorship initiative) that comprehensively addresses all needs for all students, always. Rather, mentorship is a practice that reflects constant relationship building between participants. It's also fluid and can evolve or morph over time.
- III. **Mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain:** While participants may have forgotten what some mentors (or perceived mentors) said and/or did, they did not

forget how that person's actions made them feel. This has not only influenced how the scholar perceives themselves, but also how they have perceived and received others in the future.

### **Black Ph.D. Students are not a Monolith**

Like the mentoring styles above, no two students' experiences were the exact same. Although they shared a common identity, as Black Education Ph.D. students who attended the same university, participants had various unique qualities that distinguished them from their peers. These unique qualities included differences in students' geographic hometown/region, racial/cultural identities, student status, parental status, career goals, and work experience prior to enrolling in a Ph.D. program. For example, Blair's role as a full-time college administrator allowed him to better understand how to identify and navigate student resources on campus because of his professional connection to many of the offices that provided such resources. If Blair had questions, he often knew exactly who to contact and how best to contact them. This position granted Blair a level of access that many full-time students, who are not as familiar or connected to campus resources, did not have. At the same time, however, Blair experienced challenges in accessing certain professional development resources (e.g., workshops, lectures, etc.) geared toward Ph.D. students because these events, heavily marketed toward traditional students, were held during times in which Blair was either at work or in class.

Even participants who were enrolled as full-time Ph.D. students encountered distinct barriers for various reasons. One participant, for example, was a mother who grappled with the idea of how best to support their family while pursuing their Ph.D. Either they could work full-time and attend school part-time, which would extend the length of their program, or attend school full-time and work part-time which would negatively influence the participant's ability to

support their family in the short term – financially. With guidance from their faculty advisor, The participant chose the latter option in hopes of completing the Ph.D. sooner and gaining access to higher earning potential in the process. Previous literature has helped us understand that Black students/professors greatly contribute to the positive experiences of other Black graduate students (Johnson-Baily et al., 2008) and identify popular misconceptions of graduate mentorship (Brown et al., 1999). These studies have also shaped our perception of how stakeholders (e.g., faculty/administrators) can improve the mentoring experiences of Black graduate students via inclusive/supporting environments (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001) and formal mentorship involving race/gender-sensitive activities (Grant & Simmons, 2008).

These findings contribute to research that argues for further study of within-group differences among Black students (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). In conclusion, as the findings demonstrated, there are major differences for Black part- and full-time students such as access to programmatic funding opportunities and availability to attend professional development activities sponsored by the college. Additionally, there were differences between traditional and non-traditional aged students. These differences included varied levels of full-time professional experience and diverse family roles/responsibilities. Additional research is warranted to better understand the complexity of Black Ph.D. students' identities as well as how universities can develop more inclusive solutions to address their needs.

### **Mentorship is Defined by the Unique Interactions of its Participants**

Participants unique differences contributed to their unique wants/needs of mentoring. As evidenced in this study, mentoring relationships could, and did, change over time. Some relationships were exclusively professional all the time. Blair's experience with his faculty advisor fits this style because Blair did not discuss having a personal relationship with his

advisor the way he did with mentors from his high school or undergraduate experiences. Other mentorships grew from strictly business relationships to business relationships that also included a personal bond between participants. An example of this was Gabriella's experience with her faculty advisor which evolved from a business-only relationship, to a relationship in which the two bonded over similar life/family situations. Egalitarian relationships also evolved into relationship-oriented mentoring. For example, Kimberly first met one of her mentors while they were both students at the same university. Over time, their relationship blossomed from egalitarian mentorship to relationship-oriented mentorship as the person became a faculty member and guided Kimberly in her Ph.D. process. Lastly, some relationships started as more relationship-oriented mentoring that became more holistic over time. An example of this included Kenny's experience with a current faculty mentor who attended the same Historically Black College as Kenny (but at a different time). Although there's a clear power differential between Kenny and his mentor, and the two didn't know each other prior to meeting at MU, they had more personal commonalities than other mentor/mentee pairs.

While previous literature notes the important role students of color have within the lives of other students of color (Dortch, 2016; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; Bonilla et al., 1994) much of what we know about these students' mentorship experiences involves their relationship(s) with faculty/administrators (McCoy et al., 2015). While there is a limited sub-set of research discussing the influence of peer support for graduate students of color (Williams et al., 2016), this area must be expanded. Furthermore, research is needed to better understand the ways in which these students use the advice/guidance received from mentors to positively influence the lives of mentees. These details can help divisions/schools as well as academic programs better

understand as well as properly address the multi-faceted and ever-changing needs of their student body.

### **Mentorship can Contribute to Lasting Joy and/or Lasting Pain**

Another reason why administrators must better understand the diverse needs of their students is because, like other experiences, mentorship can contribute to lasting joy and/or lasting pain for many individuals. Prior studies on mentoring have explored the lasting effects of the mentoring relationship (Bonilla et al., 1994; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008) but there has been less emphasis on the emotional impact of these relationships and how that impact can persist over a students' educational journey. When adequately facilitated, mentorship initiatives can have positive lasting implications for the people engaged in the relationship as well as others who may in-directly benefit from that mentorship. For example, Gabriella discussed having a mentor who encouraged her to focus on school while the mentor used their privilege as a faculty member to address racial injustice on/off campus. Although Gabriella was concerned that not participating in various protests for racial justice "would make her less of a black person", Gabriella also realized she could disrupt injustice in ways that were just as influential as protests but less negatively impactful to her academic and professional journey. As time went on, Gabriella received an opportunity to provide the same wisdom she received from her mentor to one of her mentees. This opportunity involved Gabriella helping the mentee in navigating how to describe the mentee's student activism experiences in a way that would not be labeled "radical" and unattractive to future employers.

When poorly facilitated, however, mentorship initiatives can have negative lasting implications for those directly or indirectly involved in that relationship (McCoy et al., 2015). For example, James discussed how a negative mentorship experience with an administrator from

his school encouraged James to become more “guarded” and carefully screen others who sought a mentoring relationship with him. For another participant (whose pseudonym was withheld to protect the participant), a bad mentoring and working relationship led to that person changing their student status to part-time, leaving the campus before finishing their degree, and continuing their academic journey from another region of the country. Although previous literature has identified ways to improve the mentorship experiences of graduate students, much of this literature pertains broadly to students of color and/or focuses on solutions for faculty/administrators as mentors (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Grant & Simmons, 2008). It is important for future literature to examine the factors contributing to positive/negative mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students to ensure these scholars have the support they need to thrive within and beyond their academic program. It is also necessary to explore the emotional impact of mentoring, for Black Ph.D. students, because this study shows how negative experiences can encourage students to leave campus before finishing their program.

### **Relating Intersectionality to the Findings**

As previously stated, I chose intersectionality as a theory because it helped me explore the intersecting social identities of Black Ph.D. students and how these intersecting identities interlock/shape multiple forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Mattsson, 2014). For example, students’ inability to attend school full-time, and/or participate in certain activities (because of prior familial commitments), negatively influenced their access to critical resources such as funding and professional development. Intersectionality can also be used to better understand why people mentor others the way they do. One’s mentorship style could be influenced by the person’s awareness of their own marginalized identities and how these interlocking identities can contribute to their vulnerability within society. For example, one participant discussed a Black

woman faculty mentor who was very guarded around new advisees because of a negative interaction with a previous student that could have harmed her professor role in ways it would not have if she were White and/or a man. Once trust has been established, however, the professor is known to share more personal details of her life with advisees. This example highlights the way race and gender interact to form systems of oppression that can influence a mentor's decision to engage in business-oriented mentoring rather than relationship-oriented mentoring with students. In return, this can influence the way students view their role as future mentors and encourage cycles of non-holistic mentorship.

### **Mentoring and Career Preparation**

While the Education College at MU is known to emphasize faculty careers over practitioner careers, majority of the students either considered hybrid faculty/practitioner roles (8) or did not see themselves as faculty members at all (5). Only four students were fully committed to becoming faculty members after finishing their program even though many students' academic programs and mentors were primarily training them for faculty related careers. Even if students' career goals did not necessarily match what their mentors wanted for the student, mentors still supported mentees' ambitions. Mentors expressed their support in ways which included, but were not limited to, asking mentees reflective questions about their interests, sharing their own professional journey with mentees, and finding other people who could better support certain aspects of the mentee's goals/aspirations.

### **Implications**

During the interviews, I also asked participants to identify factors that might contribute to better mentoring experiences for Black doctoral students. I summarize the participants ideas, as well as my own opinions, within the practice and research implications below.

### *Practice Implications*

Suggestions for practice implications, regarding the success of Black Ph.D. students at PWIs, included:

1. **Un-surveilled spaces on campus for Black Ph.D. students to casually interact (i.e., socially, academically, and professionally) with each other as well as Black faculty members.** Some students discussed working with other Black Ph.D. students to develop safe spaces (e.g., writing groups, etc.) on campus to interact with one another. The physical location of these spaces included offices reserved for Ph.D. students and study rooms in various academic buildings. Although many participants were able to establish a sense of belonging with other Black students, few discussed having strong relationships with Black faculty/staff across the college. Most interactions between Black students and Black faculty/academic staff occurred within individual/small group advising sessions or formal spaces such as classrooms and university-wide events. One suggestion for increasing the sense of belonging for Black Ph.D. students is for university officials (e.g., deans, academic program directors/coordinators, and professors) to design casual opportunities for students to interact with one another as well as faculty who resemble them. These spaces could include “Welcome Back” activities and events in which Black professors advise Black students within a variety of topics such as navigating the tenure-track job market after completing school. Professors can assist students, who are aspiring administrators, by providing general professional guidance and connecting the student to different colleagues who work within administration.
2. **Improved comprehensive funding packages for students.** Funding was one of the most discussed topics by participants. Although most full-time students received some

type of funding package, participants shared that funding (e.g., fellowships and assistantships) could be inconsistent year-to-year. This resulted in students having to continuously seek and find additional opportunities to finance their education.

Recognizing financial aid as an issue, the academic college decided to adopt a new policy providing all incoming students with four-years of guaranteed funding (via a combination of fellowships and assistantships) – but what about existing students? Other general concerns of funding packages involve the limited monthly stipend, inadequate health benefits, and policies requiring participants to remain full-time students (which discouraged full-time employment). While having a full-time student requirement could encourage recipients to focus on their academic responsibilities and increase their ability to graduate on-time, it could also negatively influence their ability to pay for non-academic needs such as housing and transportation. This is especially problematic for non-traditional students who must support others (e.g., children, parents, and other relatives) physically and/or financially. One suggestion for resolving this matter is for administrators and professors to review students' needs case-by-case as opposed to collectively, and work with other campus stakeholders (e.g., career services representatives, professors, academic directors/coordinators, etc.) to find adequate resources that fit the needs of each student.

3. **Individual academic and career planning for students throughout their Ph.D.**

**program.** In addition to more adequate funding, students discussed wanting structured academic and career guidance at the programmatic level. The academic and career guidance they received, typically came from faculty advisors and/or program coordinators. While greatly appreciated, much of this guidance was decentralized and

varied from advisor to advisor – resulting in some students receiving more academic and career development than others. In some cases, students received formal advising from fellowship programs they were members of, but not all students were members of a fellowship program because these programs usually required participants to be full-time students. Nearly a quarter of the students within this study identified as part-time students. A suggestion for addressing this concern, is for academic programs to invest in recruiting and retaining multiple academic coordinators. These academic coordinators can work with students, as well as their faculty advisors, to develop and track academic/career plans based on each student’s aspirations and individual needs. If hiring additional academic coordinators is not possible, another suggestion could be to provide faculty advisors with adequate (and routine) training for how to guide students academically and professionally, year-to-year.

### ***Research Implications***

Implications regarding future research on Black Ph.D. students included:

1. **Better understanding the mentoring experiences of Black Ph.D. students who attend schools different from Midwestern University.** This study was conducted at a large, public, Research I institution that serves as the flagship university of its state. While Black Ph.D. students may have various similarities, they also have unique differences that could be influenced by the type of university they attend. One suggestion is to broaden this study to include Black Ph.D. students who attend smaller comprehensive universities throughout the Midwest. Broadening this study to campuses different from MU could give practitioners a more holistic understanding of students’ experiences with mentorship. Additionally, more research in historically Black college and universities or

other types of institutions where demographics are different would be useful. Mentorship may look different and contribute to more positive experiences for students at these institutions. Learning about these experiences could assist institutions like MU with continuing to improve the services and opportunities available to Black Ph.D. students on their campus.

2. **Interview program administrators regarding their perception of the resources**

**provided to students and contrast these perceptions with student experiences.** This study explicitly focused on student experiences from the perspective of students. Future research should also explore program administrators' understanding of student experiences as well as how administrators are addressing students' needs. A study involving students and administrators could assist universities in more accurately determining the success of efforts designed to improve student success.

researchers could speak with program administrators regarding their understanding of the successes and challenges encountered by Ph.D. students – as well as how they are addressing students' needs.

3. **Interview mentors/mentees of participants to better understand multiple**

**perspectives of mentoring relationships.** Only one perspective of the participants' mentoring experiences were collected within this study. Mentors/mentees who were not interviewed however, may describe these relationships differently than those who were. Future studies can address this gap by conducting individual interviews or focus groups with multiple people involved in the same mentoring relationship. More specifically, researchers should explore how mentors developed their mentorship style and why they

mentor people the way they do. This research can be used to further validate and/or add nuance to our understanding of mentorship involving Black Ph.D. students.

### **Contributions of Study**

There are two primary contributions of this study to the field of education. The first contribution is that the study further complicates our understanding of mentorship because these relationships can look very different from person to person. For example, power differential was considered a positive trait by some students, but not by all. One student even described elements of power, such as mentors forcing mentees to subscribe to societal norms, as “problematic mentorship”. Additionally, while some students viewed mentorship as a one directional experience (in which the mentor was solely the advice-giver, despite power dynamics) others considered mentorship a bi-directional experience in which participants worked together to guide one another through life. The second contribution of this study is that it highlights the need for academic programs to diversify the career training accessible to Ph.D. students. While there are plenty of students who are interested in faculty roles, there is also a growing body of Ph.D. students who, for one reason or another, are seeking hybrid or practitioner career paths. Programs must broaden their support for students interested in hybrid or practitioner pathways or risk pushing these students to seek career guidance elsewhere outside the academic department and perhaps the university. Diversifying the professional development available to Ph.D. students could increase their satisfaction with the academic program and enhance their marketability within the ever-changing job market.

### **Positioning my Future Mentoring**

Discussing mentorship with 17 Black Ph.D. students encouraged me to reflect upon my own mentoring experiences as a fellow Black Ph.D. student attending a PWI. More specifically,

it made me examine how my role as a mentee has impacted my role as a mentor. Listening to students discuss the importance of investing in the whole mentee made me question whether I was effectively doing the same for my mentees, or solely investing in certain aspects of their life (e.g., academic/career goals) while neglecting other aspects of their life (e.g., the influence of family dynamics on said academic/career goals). These conversations also motivated me to consider how I can improve my roles as a relationship-oriented mentor and mentee. Mentoring strategies I have committed to, since conducting this study, include asking mentees more questions about the type of support they want/need, and more openly discussing lessons I've learned within my own personal life outside academia. As for improving my role as a mentee, I plan to ask my mentors questions and provide comments/feedback that indicate my sincere interest in their wellbeing as someone I care about. For example, my questions may include inquiries about topics I know they care most about. My comments/feedback could involve transparent discussions about the impact of their guidance within my life. Each of these strategies are aspects that, according to participants, are not communicated enough within mentoring relationships.

## **Conclusion**

To better understand college students of color and their educational journeys; this study explored the mentoring experiences of 17 Black Ph.D. students who attended a PWI. Through multiple semi-structured interviews, I learned how Black Ph.D. students define mentorship, what these mentorship experiences look like, and the impact of said mentorship on students' career readiness.

While mentorship was fluid and could evolve over time, there were a few mentoring practices that seemed most successful according to participants. One practice involved writing

groups. Students, who participated in egalitarian mentoring, often cited writing groups (with other students) as providing multiple forms of support. Although the general idea of a writing group was for students to support each other academically by writing together, these groups also served as ways for students to provide/receive advice about personal matters and career development. Another successful practice involved students engaging in mentoring sessions during extracurricular activities. The most popular extracurricular activities discussed by participants included mentors/mentees eating meals together and/or playing team sports (e.g., basketball) together. These activities occurred across mentoring styles but more frequently within egalitarian and relationship-oriented experiences. Food/sports could have served as a way for people to bond with one another and develop a more personal relationship outside of more formal settings. The last successful practice revolved around mentors developing creative ways to introduce and discuss complex issues with mentees. This practice commonly occurred within relationship-oriented experiences between Ph.D. students (as mentees) and faculty members (as mentors), or high school/undergraduate students (as mentees) and Ph.D. students (as mentors). The creative ways of introducing complex issues ranged from showing/discussing feminine hygiene products to/with high school girls, to hosting Ph.D. advising group sessions regarding work-life balance as women of color in the academy. Like bonding over food/sports, creative ways to discuss complex issues allowed mentors to reveal more personal details about themselves and strengthen their relationship with mentees.

In conclusion, this study adds breadth to existing literature on Black Ph.D. students by broadening our knowledge of how mentoring contributes to lasting joy and/or lasting pain for participants. Lasting joy seems to be associated with fostering organic relationships, providing holistic guidance, and allowing mentees to chart their own path. Lasting pain seems to be

associated with manipulative behavior, violating one's confidentiality, and encouraging distrust via complicity. As a higher education practitioner, I have taken note of these experiences and will use them to further enhance my own understanding of effective mentorship especially as a future mentor of Black Ph.D. students.

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## Appendix A – Example of Interview Questions

### **Interview I – Life History Interview:**

1. Tell me about your early beginnings:
  - a. Where are you from? Where do you call home?
    - i. Describe your neighborhood.
    - ii. Describe your high school.
  - b. Who were the members of your household as you grew up?
    - i. Describe your immediate family members.
2. Where did your pursuit of higher education begin?
  - a. When did you first think to yourself “I want to go to college/I see myself in college”?
  - b. What types of college preparation did you receive (before going to college)? Were you apart of any pre-college programs?
  - c. Who, specifically, played a role in your college preparation?
3. How do you define mentorship?
  - a. Does this definition also apply to peer mentorship?
  - b. Describe qualities of a good mentoring?
  - c. Describe qualities of bad mentoring?
4. Before entering college, was there anyone in your life you considered a mentor? If so, what is your earliest memory of having a mentor?
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal? Peer or non-peer?
  - b. Who was the person?
  - c. What type of mentorship did they provide?
5. Before entering college, was there anyone in your life you considered a mentee? If so, what is your earliest memory of having a mentee?
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal?
  - b. Who was the person?
  - c. What type of mentorship did you provide them?
6. Tell me about your undergraduate experiences:
  - a. Generally, how would you describe your undergraduate university to others?
  - b. Why did you choose this institution?
  - c. What was your major?
  - d. Were you apart of any scholarship and/or pre-graduate programs? If so, how did these programs influence your experience on campus? If not, were you aware of any scholarship and/or pre-graduate programs?
  - e. Which of your social identities were you most aware of (walking around campus)? Why?
  - f. Where did you feel most safe on campus?
  - g. Where did you feel least safe on campus?
7. During undergrad., were there people you considered mentors? If not, why? If so...
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal? Peer or non-peer?
  - b. Who was the person?

- c. What type of mentorship did they provide?
8. During undergrad., were there people you considered mentees? If not, why? If so...
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal? Peer or non-peer?
  - b. Who was the person?
  - c. Why type of mentorship did you provide them?
9. From high school to college, how did your understanding of mentorship evolve?

### **Interview II – Present Lived Experiences Interview**

1. Did you go directly from undergrad. to your PhD program? If not, how did you fill the space in between?
2. Since we last met, is there anything else you would like to share about the mentoring relationships you experienced in undergrad. or before then?
3. Where did your pursuit of a Ph.D. begin?
  - a. When did you first think to yourself “I see myself in graduate school, I want to get my Ph.D.”?
  - b. What type of graduate school preparation did you receive? And, from where?
  - c. What types of graduate programs did you apply to? Why? Who influenced your decision to apply to these schools?
  - d. Is there anyone who played a significant role in you choosing this institution/program for your Ph.D.? Who? Why?
  - e. How did you meet your faculty advisor? Why did you choose to work with them?
4. What is It like to be a Ph.D. student on your campus?
  - a. Are you apart of a fellowship program? If so, what are its requirements/benefits?
  - b. What interactions have you had with the fellowship staff?
  - c. What interactions have you had with other fellows in the program?
  - d. Describe the people you mostly hang-out with on campus? Off campus?
  - e. Where are you currently within your Ph.D. program? How has COVID-19 impacted your progress?
5. As a Ph.D. student, are there social identities you think of now, that you didn’t think of during undergrad. (or thought about less frequently)?
  - a. If no – how frequently do you think about the social identities, you identified from before (undergrad.)? Why?
6. As a Ph.D. student, are there people you consider a mentor? If not, why? If so,...
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal? Peer or non-peer?
  - b. Who was the person?
  - c. What type of mentorship did they provide?
7. As a Ph.D. student, are there people you consider a mentee? If not, why? If so...
  - a. Was the relationship formal/informal? Peer or non-peer?
  - b. Who was the person?
  - c. What type of mentorship do you provide them?

### **Interview III – Meaning of Experiences Interview**

1. In reflecting upon your different experiences, is there anything you would have done differently? If so, what? If not, why?

- a. Mentee
  - b. Mentor
2. What are your career goals after finishing your PhD? Why?
  - a. Do you feel prepared to enter the work force? Why or why not?
  - b. What has most contributed to your career preparedness?
    - i. What has prepared you the most for what you want to do?
  - c. How have your mentorship experiences prepared you for your career?
    - i. Follow-up: Were any of the peers, you just mentioned, mentors? Is there any particular advice you can remember being given?
3. What will having those three letters (Ph.D.) behind your name mean to you once you're done with the program?
4. If you could go back in time, what advice would you provide yourself (knowing what you know, now):
  - a. As a high school student
  - b. As an undergraduate student
  - c. As a master's student / and a full-time worker
  - d. As a Ph.D.
5. What would have made your transition into this Ph.D. program smoother?
6. What factors and/or identities, within your life, make your experiences unique from other Black students?
7. Imagine creating a soundtrack that represents your Ph.D. experiences thus far. What songs would be on that soundtrack?

