Mentoring at Minority Serving Institutions

THEORY, DESIGN, PRACTICE, AND IMPACT

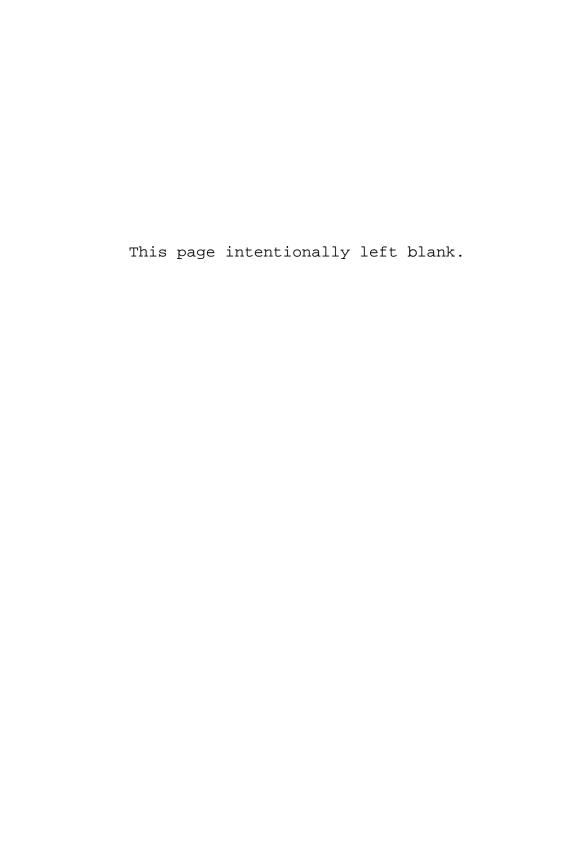*edited by*

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Theory, Design, Practice, and Impact

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INTRODUCTION

Mentoring at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs): Theory, Design, Practice, and Impact has been a project of great importance to us since its inception. In an era during which the direction of higher education is changing rapidly and the very existence of minority serving institutions (MSIs) is called into question, a concerted effort to bring together some of the best ideas about conceptual and practical mentorship frameworks at such institutions is highly critical. Indeed, the better we can foster the flourishing of our students and faculty alike, the better able we are to support our campuses, impact our communities, and demonstrate the need for MSIs at national as well as local levels. As products of—as well as pedagogues and practitioners at—MSIs, we editors feel that constructing a volume such as this is a personal as well as professional duty and honor.

STRUCTURE: CHAPTER SECTIONS

Though the overarching intent of the volume is to provide a collection of works on theory, design, and practice of mentorship programs, the structure of the volume is focused on specific demographic elements or target populations.

Section I (Gender-Focused Mentoring Programs) focuses on programmatic support of women and men, respectively. Themes and programmatic elements include social justice, peer and virtual mentorship, and commonalities found between Black and Latino male students.

Section II (Graduate Students Mentoring Programs) involves the retention and success of those considering or already attending graduate studies in master's and doctoral programs. Programs such as those highlighted here deal with strategies for properly preparing individuals who are at this crucial point in the pipeline for their future professional roles.

Section III (STEM Mentoring Programs) highlights several programs at MSIs that have been designed to enhance rigor, retention, and recruitment of students into STEM studies and professions. It is no secret that as a result of a number of initiatives on national as well as local scales, programs to boost STEM success have received a great deal of attention.

Section IV (Frameworks in Mentoring Programs) provides a general summary of programmatic elements of effective mentorship programs at MSIs. Though their specific target population and its particular needs may vary, a common theme among these chapters is their nature as case studies that illustrate basic frameworks and principles of mentorship programs.

Section V (Student-Focused Mentoring Programs) focuses on various subsets of undergraduate populations and means by which they may be supported. Particular emphasis is on first-generation students and student athletes. These chapters highlight efforts to better support them and identify their specific needs. Due to the characteristics of these populations, they may be met with specific hurdles while having particular proclivities which can be built upon.

Lastly, Section VI (Teacher Education and School Administration Mentoring Programs) contains a selection of chapters which outline mentoring structures that support the development of students who will be working as staff and faculty within the K–12 educational system. This section deals with students who are involved in or considering K–12 administration or pre-service teacher programs. These writings provide reflections on organizational structure as well as pitfalls and promises of such programs.

MENTORSHIP: REFLECTIONS ON DEFINITIONS

Before we can illustrate some of the various ways that MSI mentorship has been implemented, it is useful to reflect on what "mentorship" may be defined in the first place. As Wanberg, Welsh, and Hezlett (2003) state, there is a great deal of variance in definitions of the term. Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011) were able to identify 40 different definitions of mentoring and slight variations thereof. Some definitions of mentoring focus on the nature of the relationship between two or more individuals, whereas other definitions of mentoring begin by defining the "who" in the mentoring relationship (e.g., mentor and protégé). Scandura and Williams (2004)

noted that "mentoring is described as a one to one relationship between a more experienced and senior person and a new entrant or less experienced person (his/her protégé) in the organization setup" (p. 455). However, one definition of mentoring offered by Dreher and Chargois (1998) states, "A mentor is defined as an individual who holds a position senior to yours who takes an active interest in developing your career" (p. 406).

Forret and de Janasz (2005) proposed a mentor is "an influential individual in your work environment (typically a more senior member of your organization or profession) who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to the enhancement and support of your career" (p. 484). This definition of mentoring is very similar to the one cited above by Dreher and Chargois (1998). However, Kirchmeyer (1995) noted that a mentor is a "senior manager who provides emotional support, guidance, and sponsorship to a less experienced person" (p. 72); whereas, Seibert (1999) stated that a mentor is "someone, other than your manager . . . who provides you with technical or career advice, coaching, or information on an informal basis" (pp. 493–494).

Other attempts to define mentoring have provided less hierarchical conceptualizations of mentorship. Stoddard (2003), for example, expands on mentoring as a process done alongside or with—and not to—someone else that requires "patience, persistence, and perseverance" (p. 24). Those on the receiving end of the mentoring relationship are termed "partners" in the process (p. 25), adding more organicity to the above definitions.

Clearly, these definitions of mentorship are rather varied in their scope and focus. However, whatever one's theoretical orientation toward mentorship—be it relational or more process-focused, horizontal, vertical, or a mix thereof—it is the enhanced retention, sense of belonging, effort, engagement, and performance that are so often the fruits of what we would deem to be the successes of mentorship. This volume is an effort to craft a useful collection of some of the means by which such partnerships and platforms have been developed within MSIs.

MSIs: OUR TARGET AUDIENCE

The primary thrust of the proposed volume is an effort to speak to higher education minority-serving institutions (MSIs) and the individuals as well as organizational units within them as they seek to promote recruitment, retention, and success of students and faculty of color. MSIs are generally defined as educational enterprises that can fit into one of the following categories: (a) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), (b) Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), (c) Asian American and Native

American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), and (d) Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) (John & Stage, 2014). Targets include undergraduate students, graduate students, junior faculty, senior faculty, and administrators. Secondarily, the volume may speak to third-party organizations and units that interface with MSIs.

CONCLUSION

In all, our aim is for this present volume to provide some sense of the hurdles and the hopes contained in the programs and relationships that have been built in the support and service undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty at MSIs. From theory to design to practice, each of these practices has been an intentional effort to positively impact the professional lives and academic successes of the individuals who participate in them. MSIs represent a substantial portion of our best and brightest, and ensuring that they have the best physical as well as human resources at their disposal is essential to developing opportunities that are both practical as well as promising for them. We hope that you will find this work to be of use in your own endeavors to cultivate fruitful futures within your campus communities.

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SECTION I

GENDER FOCUSED MENTORING PROGRAMS

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FACULTY WOMEN OF COLOR

Peer Mentoring in a
Virtual Community of Practice

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In recent years, institutions of higher education in the United States have emphasized and actualized diversification of their student population and academic faculty. The Higher Education Act (1965) recognized and responded to the need for improving and increasing minority students' access and opportunities to participate in higher education. The Act permitted colleges and universities that serve high percentages of racial and ethnic student populations, to be designated as minority serving institutions (MSIs). While minority student enrollment in MSIs has increased, the recruitment and retention of faculty of color has become paramount in MSIs.

Initiatives and specific efforts to diversify academe have supported changes in the makeup of some institutions' historically White male-dominated faculty (Frazier, 2011). Given the academy's history of exclusivity, vestiges of sexism and racism have necessitated the implementation of strategies to recruit and retain faculty women of color (FWOC). In addition to

navigating the complexities and nuances of academia, FWOC often contend with the double bind of racial and gender biases, discrimination, and oppression, as they may simultaneously experience racism and sexism in academe (Turner, 2002).

Mentoring outside the home institution with faculty that is familiar with the challenges faced by FWOC, sharing kinship among professional colleagues, and validating culturally focused research are also recommended as coping mechanisms (Salazar, 2009). Indeed, FWOC make up less than 10% of postsecondary full-time faculty (NCES, 2016a), despite the fact that, by race and gender, approximately 40% of women of color are enrolled in college, representing the largest percentage of any other group (NCES, 2016b). MSI faculty lead the country in supporting students of color, preparing more than half of the undergraduate students of color in widely diverse areas of medicine; education; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008).

We propose in our chapter, that subsumed within the identities (Trower & Chait, 2002) and equity pedagogy (Nunez, Murakami Ramalho & Cuero, 2010) of FWOC are salient supporting aspects contributing to the success of some MSI students of color. These initial supports are the impetus for FWOC's informal mentoring, knowledge sharing, and the development of other supporting networks (Thompson, 2008). Salazar (2009) suggests specific coping strategies for faculty of color, that include: creating distance from negative experiences, understanding the rules to succeed in achieving tenure and promotion, and locating a sense of community outside the home university.

Prior studies have considered the formal and informal mentoring relationships for faculty of color in predominantly White institutions (Stanley, 2006; Tillman, 2001; Yoshinaga-Itano, 2006). Additionally, some researchers have conceptualized and enacted peer mentoring in Hispanic serving institutions (Murakami & Núñez, 2014; Núñez, Murakami, & Gonzales, 2015). However, few studies, if any have explored MSI faculty peer mentoring programs (if, in fact, such programs formally exist) or the peer mentoring practices of MSI faculty or MSI FWOC .

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to describe a qualitative study, employing the method of autoethnography, to explore the peer-mentoring experiences and practices of two junior female faculty of color in two MSIs. The two FWOC who came together in a virtual community of practice (VCoP) to re-humanize academe by supporting one another's scholarship, teaching, and service through life–work integration (Edawrds, 2016). Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), conceptual frameworks explained in a forthcoming section undergird this study. These dual frameworks were used to shape our individual and collaborative autoethnographic accounts (self-reporting of experiences or introspections), as we tell the story of how we conceptualized and developed

a peer mentoring community of practice (PMCoP). From a redefined academic space, we put forth a description of three bidirectional mentoring practices that afforded us the opportunity to reframe, validate, affirm, and further one another's experiences in our attempt to support, develop, and retain one another in academe.

As MSIs transition from expectations that focus predominantly on teaching and service to requirements that value academe's metrics of scholarship production, it is now more paramount than ever before, that mentoring designs and programs which appropriately address the needs of racially and culturally diverse faculty, be established and sustained. The support and appropriate facilitation of such authentic higher education mentoring relationships are imperative to further recruit, develop, and retain other FWOC in the academy.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND GROUP PROCESS

Our group includes two FWOC scholar-practitioners who transitioned from P–12 careers to tenure-track assistant professorships. Scholar-practitioners assist higher education programs to bridge the university–school divide by using their P–20 experience to inform the preparation of the next generation of K–12 educators. With the increasing challenges of recruiting and developing teachers and leaders of color, the preparation and development of aspiring educators are best supported by scholar-practitioners who seamlessly blend theory with practice.

While scholar–practitioners' intersectional identities as both a scholar and practitioner are considered significant value-additions for schools/colleges/ departments, few structural supports are offered to guide and assist with their transition into higher education. Moreover, little guidance is provided to help them understand how to integrate their scholarship, which is often practice-based empirical work, with their teaching and service. For scholar-practitioners who are also FWOC, their challenges in the work environment are often exasperated by academe's patriarchal dismissal of the resources they need to develop work–life integration (Edwards, 2016), a career that has porous boundaries of place, time, or endpoint products (Park, 1996).

Our similar identities as P–20 scholar-practitioners and FWOC led to the inception and development of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) implemented in an online space, also known as a virtual environment, yielding our VCoP. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice include processes of social learning that occurs among a common interest between subjects or collaboratively over a period of time through sharing ideas and strategies. Our VCoP afforded opportunities in which we, as junior faculty and assistant professors, participated in activities

to learn the language, acumen, skills, and necessary actions for scholarship development and retention.

Throughout our VCoP, we engaged in synchronous meetings and asynchronous communications, including email communications and text messages. We often used collaborative and flexible content-based technologies (e.g., Dropbox, Google suites) to support one another with scholarly tasks and co-construct projects. Although our VCoP was initially formed to facilitate our discourse and reflection, which contributed to both our learning and completion of scholarly tasks. The transformative nature of our interaction became more instrumental to our personal and professional well-being (Christ, 2013), as we shared values, beliefs, and aspirations around work–life integration. Thus, the inception of our PMCoP where a bidirectional (as opposed to hierarchical) mentorship positioned both of us as mentors and mentees, in an authentic relationship that became integral to our redefined academic space.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers have employed a variety of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in studies of female faculty of color in higher education/academe. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks for these qualitative studies have included feminist theories (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014), Black feminist theories (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1991; Collins, 2009), critical race theories (Harris et al., 2012), and other variations of standpoint theories. The use of these theories to ground qualitative studies have supported the production of discourse that examined and explored the experiences of FWOC. Because we know being a woman influences experiences of being a woman of color, and being a woman of color influences experiences as a woman, in this study, both Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) are used to center and interpret our bidirectional peer mentoring practices as FWOC in MSIs.

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

As a critical social theory, a key utility of Black feminist thought is its inclusion of distinct "bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices" (Collins, 2002, p. 31) that problematize and engage inquiry central to the struggles experienced by Black women in the United States. While Black feminist thought supports centering the experiences of Black women specifically, the theory also serves as an ontological paradigm for all other women of color. According to Collins (2009), "Such theory recognizes that

U.S. Black women constitute one group among many that are differently placed with situations of injustice. What makes critical social theory "critical" is its commitment to justice for one's group and other groups" (p. 35). As such, Black feminist thought re-humanizes and validates the racial and gender experiences and expressions of Black women and any other group of women of color who have been marginalized and oppressed.

Knowledge is a salient component in the social relations of domination, oppression, and resistance (Collins, 2009). However, Collins (2009) warned, "knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough" (p. 35). Accordingly, Black feminist thought must be used to align our lived experiences and work with the goal to improve and enhance those experiences in some manner. Thus, the principles of Black feminist thought are inclusive of knowledge derived from both experiences and articulated practices that challenge and change conditions rooted in mechanisms of social control. The tenets of Black feminist thought are

- lived experiences as a criterion of meaning,
- the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims,
- an emphasis on the ethic of caring,
- an emphasis on the ethic of personal accountability,
- an emphasis on positionality as an agent of knowledge, and
- the recognition of "truth" and the complexity of the pathway toward the truth (Beard, 2012, p. 62).

According to Collins (2009), situations such as the suppression of Black women's ideas within traditional scholarship and the struggles within the critiques of that established knowledge are inherently unstable (p. 11). Collins acknowledged that Black women/women of color, as socially oppressed groups, have produced social thought that was designed to oppose oppression by creating counter-narratives of White men's discourse. The purpose of Black women's collective thought is distinctly different, as Collins (2009) has asserted, "Social theories emerging from and/or on behalf of U.S. Black women and other historically oppressed groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic justice" (p. 11). Thus women of color from oppressed groups worldwide find utility in liberatory social theories such as Black feminist thought to understand new ways of resistance.

As a standpoint theory, Black feminist thought creates a space to articulate the interlocking forms of oppression and gives voice to Black women's fight for justice (Collins, 2009). Collins (2009) suggested Black women are exposed to "a distinctive set of social practices that accompany our particular history within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions" (p. 26). Yet while women of color's multiple identities

placed them at the nexus of multivariant forms of oppression, their unique position also "stimulates a distinctive consciousness concerning these experiences and society overall" (p. 27). Thus, a distinct consciousness of women of color is informed by both their race and gender.

According to Collins (2009) understanding the contours of heterogeneity and specifically how Black women and subgroups of women can be best prepared to resist negative treatment and controlling images is a significantly important task for Black feminist thought. Collins (2009) purported that the political purpose is found within the struggle for, and the continuation of efforts to define, validate, and value the self. Historically, Black women have struggled "to form positive self-definitions in the face of derogated images of Black womanhood" (Collins, 2009, p. 102). Black feminist thought affirms practices of self-defining, self-validation, and determining self-worth.

Collins (2009) portrayed African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals who confront race, gender, and class oppression. Afrocentric feminist thought articulates the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. The knowledge validation process encompasses the ethic of caring (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000), which considers personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy. Collins (2009) advocated for the merging of experience and consciousness to produce Black women's collective wisdom as foundational, for naming their experience as a criterion of meaning and as a legacy of struggle, resistance, and activism.

In Black feminist thought, Black women's collective wisdom is inclusive of Black motherhood. As an institution, Black motherhood "consisted of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African American community and with self" (Collins, 2009, p. 190). Collins asserts that motherhood can be evoked as a symbol of power for Black women whether blood mother, other mother, or community other mother.

The traditions which characterize other mothering and community other mothering in Black women's community work have taken different forms. Collins (2009) contended that Black women as community other mothers for all Black children, often allowed Black women to treat children who were biologically unrelated as their own. Thus the cooperative nature of child care exemplified how Black women become political and social community leaders, while simultaneously serving as a mechanism for Black women's self-expression as they learn the power of self-definition.

The study of Black feminist thought (Collins 1991, 1996, & 2009) is an application of intersectionality because it firmly places Black women and women of color at the center of analysis to study their experiences, actions, and epistemologies. According to Collins (2009), the multiple aspects of identity mutually construct each other. For Black women and women of color, being

female influences their experiences as Black/of color and being Black/of color influences their experiences as women. Therefore, the importance for understanding the intersection of multiple identities (Collins, 2009, Crenshaw, 1989; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) is critical for interpreting and positioning Black women's thoughts, experiences, and actions.

Intersectionality

The interpretive paradigm of intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991) is the secondary conceptual frame that undergirds this inductive, qualitative study. Intersectionality is based on the premise that variables related to one's identities work in groups. Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality rejects the idea of a "single axis framework" and seeks to demonstrate the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape and define the multiple aspects of Black women's experiences (p. 1244). As Black feminist Pearl Cleage (1993) contended, "we (Black females) have to see clearly that we are a unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex with a unique set of challenges" (p. 5). According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), women of color must fight against the myth of inferiority. Therefore, the focus is on the formation of social identities.

Although intersectionality has been applied to other identities such as class or sexual identity (Crenshaw, 1991), for this study, the theory was used to explore intersecting oppressions and identities (Collins, 2009) related to the professional experiences of two FWOC scholar-practitioners serving in minority serving institutions (MSIs). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) asserted that identity is formed through social interactions with others. They explained that in the workplace, informal and formal interactions with co-workers and managers, over time, shape identity and reveal the perceptions and expectations of others. According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), "the formation of self-identity, social-identity and gender, and other differences are components of a social process, that may be particularly important." (p. 175). Thus, as our conceptual framework, intersectionality grounded our examination of how our racial and gendered identities not only informed our professional experiences in higher education but also propelled our bidirectional mentoring practices to support one another's experiences as FWOC in two MSIs.

METHODOLOGY

Since the purpose of our study was to describe and systematically analyze our experiences and development within our PMCoP, we determined

individual and collaborative autoethnographic methods would help us gain both an individual and collective understanding of our various interactions (Ellis, 1999; Grenier, 2015; Hernandez, Ngunjiri, & Chang, 2015; Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Autoethnography is a method used to understand one's self in deeper ways through a first-person account of events and relationships (Ellis, 1999). As a qualitative research approach, Patton (2009) contended autoethnography is the self-reporting of one's own experiences and introspections as a primary data source (p. 86).

Similarly, collaborative autoethnography is a group version of autoethnography, where individuals share their stories in their effort to collectively make sense of their experiences before they co-construct their collaborative narrative (Hernandez et al., 2015; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Our critical methods are suitable for revealing our identities as FWOC navigating academia's vestiges of racism and sexism in MSIs, while also authenticating our voices and indigenous ways of knowing regarding experiences with our PMCoP. As such, (collaborative) autoethnographic accounts are written in first-person voice ("I" voice to represent the individual autoethnographies, and "we" to represent our collective voice) and appear in various forms to feature action, dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness.

We conducted four phases of data collection and analysis. First, we reflected individually and collaboratively on the trajectory of our PMCoP from its inception to its current state. Next, we wrote reflexive individual autoethnographic accounts of our experiences within our (MSIs). We then engaged in challenging and reconciling one another's recollections, opinions, and perspectives of our PMCoP, by iteratively probing one another. Finally, we co-constructed our collaborative autoethnography. With the intention to critically disrupt and transform the historical identities, exclusiveness, and othering in academe, interpretation of our (collaborative) autoethnographical accounts provided the heuristics outcomes of this study—suggested peer mentoring practices that can support, develop, and retain FWOC in academe.

In the following sections, our individual and collaborative narratives will illustrate our experiences as two FWOC, scholar-practitioners on the pathway towards tenure and promotion at two minority-serving institutions: one historically Black college and university and one Hispanic serving institution. The first individual, Dr. Edwards, is an African American female, first-year professor who has experience in K–12 teaching, school principalship, and executive level school district leadership. The second individual, Dr. Khalil, is a female fourth-year Muslim-Palestinian American professor who has experience in K–12 teaching. While we personally identify differently by race and ethnicity, we share similar and aligned professional goals and aspirations as FWOC and P–20 scholar-practitioners in academe.

OUR AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STORIES

Our story begins by situating our introduction and conversation at a professional conference for education leaders and policymakers. We found kinship in our identities as women faculty of color, familiarity in our current assignments as assistant professors at different MSIs, and excitement and enthusiasm about how our pathways to the academy bore from our experience as PK–12 practitioners. And yet, here we reflect on how we reconciled, reframed, and repositioned the dissonance we felt upon transitioning from PK–12 to academe.

Dr. Edwards

Entering my 26th year of experience in education and educational leadership, also marked my entry into academe as a first year, tenure-track assistant professor. I had arrived, a scholar-practitioner, eager, willing, and capable of using my experience as a practitioner and a scholar to blend theory and practice to work, teach, and lead at the nexus of praxis. As I perused my professional resume and vitae, I routinely focused more on the experiences in my years, rather than my years of experience. I considered the quality of my contributions as paramount to the quantity of my educational and professional experiences.

I had spent a considerable portion of my career navigating the landscape of PK–12, serving in various capacities of school leadership and school district executive leadership positions, while simultaneously researching, writing, presenting, and publishing in academe. As an aspiring scholar in the academy, I was a beneficiary of social justice practices demonstrated by mentors, professors, educators, and colleagues. I determined my status of scholar-practitioner, was safe and non-revealing.

However, in the academy, my years of experience and achievements in PK–12 seemed to yield animosity and exclusion rather than credibility and acceptance. The value systems of academe and PK–12 contexts appeared to be at odds. My identity and credibility in PK–12 provided access to academe; however, my limited academic-exclusive accomplishments had the effect of wide, white space on my vitae. While I perceived my value to be high in my previous contexts; I determined my value was diminished in academe. In the academy, my apparent depreciated credibility and value lead to feelings of inadequacy. I internalized my devaluing emotions as suspension and rejection; I am an imposter in academia. How did I become an imposter in the academy?

Dr. Khalil

After 3 years as an assistant professor, I was just recovering from the culture shock I had felt as I transitioned from my PK–12 frame of reference to that of an academic. The contrast between academia hierarchical value system and PK–12's pragmatic axiology had me wanting to disassociate myself from any scholarship productivity. I felt I needed to mask any so-called accomplishments, as I felt there was much more I needed to achieve to fulfill my vision of a true P–20 scholar-practitioner. My need for a "cover" was indicative of my own internal challenges with imposter syndrome and my covert efforts to divert any attention around my achievements. I was still mulling over various ways of naming my emotions and reflecting on how my intersecting ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic identities had different connections to PK–12 and higher education spaces when I met Dr. Edwards at a professional education conference. Within minutes of our meeting, I attempted to reflexively answer her question, "How did I become an imposter in the academy?"

My immediate response was, Academe was NEVER meant for us, so your imposter syndrome has less to do with who you are, and more to do with who the system intended to support; certainly not females, but males; certainly not pragmatic practitioners but ivory tower theorists; and most certainly not for the masses or for people of color but for White elites. Academia's systemic post-humanist language has stripped it of any semblance to what we, as women scholars of color, identify, recognize, understand, and value. Academia's outcomes are deliberately tied to ways of valuing individualism and not communalism, one's own good rather than the greater good, and in its prioritization of establishing "knowledge" overdeveloping "people."

The dissonance experienced by PK–12 educators is more acute because we believed serving as tenure-track education faculty was just an extension of teaching and leading in PK–12 schools, where we had the responsibility of raising the next generation of community builders. So of course, we felt we didn't belong in academia. In reality, we didn't create academe's contextual conditions—they created academe for White males; we don't belong to or in an academic space normed around individualistic values of functionalists' meritocracy. What we need to do is build our own higher education space normed around our own indigenous values of communalism.

I remember watching Dr. Edwards' facial expressions shift as I reflexively attempted to capture in words what I had just begun to realize. Observing how my words helped Dr. Edwards realize it wasn't her but in fact the structure of academia; I realized the indigenous feminist strategy of reframing and repositioning our conscious meaning making around our lived experiences could very well be an empowering tool for FWOC. Thus

our initial meeting marked the beginning of many reframing opportunities as we sought to peer mentor one another through our academic journey.

* * *

Our story continues. As Dr. Edwards continued to ponder and process Dr. Khalil's insights, perspectives & conceptualization of academe's intended purpose and perceived practices of exclusion and marginalization, she was captivated, intrigued, and determined to learn more about this new reframing of academe. Within minutes of Dr. Khalil's revelations, Dr. Edwards asked Dr. Khalil, "Who's writing about these ideas? Are you writing about these concepts? And Dr. Khalil responded, "I didn't, but you can." Desiring to both a.) reciprocate the earlier affirmation Dr. Khalil's perspective had given her, and b.) affirm the value of Dr. Khalil's conceptualization, Dr. Edwards emphatically stated, "You SHOULD be writing about this [academe's exclusivity]! Your perspective is unique and unwritten."

Dr. Khalil

My entrance into postgraduate education could be described as an unintended positive consequence, in that it was a highly improbable occurrence. I was the first person in my family to graduate from high school and the first female in my community to attain an undergraduate degree. I never imagined a sequel to these sagas of firsts. When I was invited to take doctoral classes because of my experiences as a mathematics teacher, I accepted the offer. The following premise and goal were the foundation of my decision: I wanted to understand the various nested structural and systemic levels of inequities that affected my minoritized students' opportunities to access a quality mathematics education—to "fix" it and ensure increased opportunities and outcomes for P–12 students. My idealistic views, hope, and commitment to ameliorating the inequities and injustices prompted me to "matriculate" full time to a doctoral program, with the ultimate intent of returning to PK–12 to actualize sustainable change. Thus, the goal of my journey through a joint doctoral program and fellowship, that afforded me courses designed across six university campuses was a pragmatic one.

Upon graduation, my rationale for applying for a higher education position was similar to my reason for applying for positions in PK–12: to join the cadre of colleagues at MSIs in disrupting the systematic marginalization of minoritized communities and classrooms, while advocating for institutionalized, sustainable educational change. Such a space helped me continue my professional development and served to inform the work I currently do with aspiring STEM educators. However, I never really imagined my contribution to society in general and the academic community specifically, could be

more. I did the "work," contributing to the educational discourse related to issues of access and equity in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). I led the critical design of PK–20 STEM learning ecologies, and imagined with aspiring educators how we could be "creatively insubordinate" in the way we disrupt and transform PK–12 spaces for our children. And yet, throughout this work, our work or my work, I felt the need to mask any scholarship or accomplishments that bore from these efforts.

My need to divert attention from perceptions of my work as scholarly was a manifestation of my imposter syndrome, in which I masked my internal challenges to obscure them from the external critiques of academe. I thought my identity as a Palestinian-Muslim *fellaha* (female peasant; Khalil & Rodriguez, 2017) would be too great of contrast with my identities as a theorizing and conceptualizing scholar-practitioner and a thought leader. And, I believed that if other scholars of color presented or published a thought, construct or conceptualization first, their words and truths were more credible. The critical mass of well-read, well-written, and widely cited scholars explicate their experiences or validate their truths. However, my imposter syndrome caused me to perseverate on the same question, Why would I think my "voice" or "experiences" mattered or had any meaning?

Dr. Edwards

I believe my recruitment and transition to the professoriate in a minority serving institution (MSI) are related to both my academic credentials, including a doctorate (PhD) in school improvement and educational leadership and my PK–12 practitioner credentials, which are steeped in evidence-based practices and outcomes. In essence, I understood my scholar-practitioner experience serving demographically diverse and underserved populations and my published scholarship based on my practice in PK–12 contexts, had utility for both aspiring and practicing leaders enrolled in leadership preparation and degree programs. I am keenly aware of how each of my identities and/or the intersectionality of my identities; female, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latina, practitioner, and scholar, have served as motivators or inhibitors in educational and professional contexts. Indeed, in my educational and professional environments, I was led to believe I was "breaking the glass ceiling," but I often remained the "first," "only," and "one of a few," othered and remanded to the margins. In these racial- and gender-stratified contexts, I found myself working harder and striving to be more productive than my White male, male and White female counterparts.

In PK–12, we often lamented, "you measure what you treasure," and thus, what gets measured gets done. These statements refer to the treasured, measures of student performance and data within the PK–12 assessment and

accountability systems. Higher education appraises and measures faculty performance by research/scholarship productivity and impact, teaching effectiveness and service. In many institutions of higher education, these performance components are rank ordered with research production and publication of scholarship ranked as the top priority. Although cognizant of my experiences and proven results in racially and culturally diverse PK–12 contexts, these outcomes appeared to be of lesser value in the academy.

However, I knew the pragmatic value of my experiences and performance in these contexts. With the desire to affirm Dr. Khalil's pragmatic value and dispell her thoughts of minimal credibility, I understood the importance of being empathetic to our mirroring propensity to become overwhelmed by our imposter syndrome. I was deliberate in reciprocating validation, and affirmation regarding the importance of Dr. Khalil's positionality and contribution to the academy.

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The story of our introduction ends where our journey continues. Dr. Khalil's riposte to Dr. Edwards' suggestion, "No, WE should be writing about this." epitomizes our combined valuation of collective, collaborative, communalistic practices. Thus our first meeting set the tone for our relationship. After we reframed our positioning in higher education, reciprocated validation and ensured affirmation of our positionality as change agents, we ended our first meeting with an understanding that "WE" can and should write about our feelings, interests, and experiences as early career scholar-practitioners.

Dr. Khalil and Dr. Edwards

Having worked with many teachers, school and district leaders, and other education providers with varying levels of expertise on a continuum of instructional and leadership experience, we were often perplexed by practitioners' and scholars' disassociation of theories and practices. It is said, that what gets measured is indicative of what is treasured.

Our interest in bridging theory with practice, in conjunction with our social identities, helped us develop an instant kinship and community of practice. Thus our journey of developing our own academic space, and shaping our scholarship through communalistic worldviews of trust and acceptance. Our research interests and intellectual quests led to a common path of co- constructing abstracts for conferences, special issues, or just general topics we felt best reflected our intersectional scholar-practitioner identities (Lee, Cummings, & Welton, 2016) and our conscious need to dismantle academe's oppressiveness. We felt our co-construction was restoring our sense of self, our humanity, and embodied our collective sensemaking