# Locating Themselves: Black Womxn's Geographies of Professional Socialization

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**How to cite**
alexander, e. (2022). Locating Themselves: Black Womxn's Geographies of Professional Socialization. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 4(2), 80-98.
https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.8

**ABSTRACT**
This paper presents findings from a larger study that explored the relationship among Black graduate womxn's (BGW) geospatial and social locations in their academic organizations, their professional socialization processes, and their abilities to access their desired career pipelines upon program completion. More specifically, it is concerned with manners in which Black womxn (co-)construct geographies for their professional growth that (a) retain Black womxnhood at their centers – and in doing so, (b) challenge academia's dominant discourses about students' socialization processes and outcomes. The study took place in a highly ranked college of education ("the College"), at a highly regarded predominately-white public research institution in the American Midwest ("Midwest"). I conducted the study using a bricolage approach. Black Critical Race Theory, postcolonialism, and ideas about everyday resistance informed the paper's methodology. The findings illustrate a theorizing of Black womxn's created geographies as sites of resistance, and their liberatory imaginations, against anti-Black and colonial violence in the education academy. They also offer implications for how academia must evolve its understandings, structures, locations, and practices of graduate studies to be more responsive to the evolving needs of a diversifying population of learners and professionals.
**KEYWORDS**
Professionalization; critical geography; critical theory; resistance; Black women; graduate students.

## INTRODUCTION

Professional socialization is the process whereby individuals learn a profession's roles, values, functions (Merton et al., 1957), knowledge, and skills necessary to enter it at an advanced level (Weidman et al., 2001). Scholarship discusses student socialization through four overlapping processes: mentorship, skills and knowledge acquisition, professional development, and networking – all of which ideally mature into career access and success. It also presumes that socialization comes through students leveraging their professors' expertise, to support their growth and advancement (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2015; Weidman et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2016).

Studies about BGW's socialization most often explore it as simultaneously psychosocial, emotional, and academic (e.g., finding belonging, sensemaking, and imposter syndrome; e.g., Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey, 2004) in service to retention and persistence. Hence, it captures personal and professional support, identity development, and growth as interconnected. However sparse, studies about BGW's networking, professional development, and skills and knowledge acquisition is also usually combined with discussions about mentorship. Extant literature highlights mentorship as necessary in Black graduate students' professionalization where it is merely encouraged for graduate students more broadly. These students do not receive adequate (or at times, any) guidance in navigating institutional dynamics, or developing skills and knowledge in their fields. Resulting, Black graduate students are at risk of completing their programs without knowing how to be successful in either faculty or industry careers (e.g., Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Jones, 2017; Shorter, 2016).

The disparities in professionalization guidance, in relation to career preparedness, are also intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) in ways that contribute to BGW's neglect. Curtin et al. (2016) found that doctoral students who are of Color or femme receive less mentorship from advisors in research and professional development than do those who are either white or masculine. They also found that femme Students of Color receive significantly less mentorship than do both masculine students of Color and white femme students. BGW are also consistently excluded from peer collaborations and events, targeted by faculty because of misunderstandings and minor issues in their courses, and have more contentious relationships with their advisors than do non-BGW students (e.g., Bailey-Iddrisu, 2010; Bhat et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2016).

In response to having neither faculty mentorship nor camaraderie among program peers, BGW co-construct their own networks to encourage each other's professional development and self-empowerment (e.g., Bailey-Iddrisu, 2010; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Jordan, 2017). Participants in Jordan's study (2017) formed said networks after being excluded from non-BGW groups in their programs. Bailey-Iddrisu's (2010) application of Ellis' (1997) Three Stages for Graduate Development in a study of BGW yielded similar findings: participants were ostracized by non-BGW peers, found each other, and guided each other through completion of their coursework, candidacy, and dissertations. BGW also incorporate family, friends, faith communities, civic

organizations, scholarly associations, work colleagues, and sororities into their networks as sources of professional and holistic mentorship (Bailey-Iddrisu, 2010; Fries-Britt & Turner Kelly, 2005; Patton & Harper, 2003). These communities provide BGW with group-specific guidance, as alternatives to their programs (Fries-Britt & Turner Kelly, 2005; Shorter, 2016).

## GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

Extant literature about BGW's professionalization highlights a need for them to create their own support systems to fully engage in the process. This paper theorizes those systems as geographies of resistance to anti-Black and colonialist exercises of power in BGW's learning environments. Postcolonialism and Black Critical Race Theory (BlackCrit), alongside ideas from critical geography and everyday resistance, informed the analysis and findings theorization for this paper. Here, I explain the frameworks and how they came together to support the paper's aim. The tables below detail tenets of postcolonialism and BlackCrit that supported the study; I italicize concepts from critical geography and everyday resistance that also supported the study.

**Postcolonialism and Black Critical Race Theory**
Postcolonialism is a school of thought that deconstructs the global hegemony of western life as the world's "mainstream" regime of being. It highlights tensions between westerners (i.e., white people) and non-westerners (i.e., non-white people) that exist because of continuing colonial power dynamics via western-centric sociocultural norms, and governmental and economic systems (i.e., neocolonialism) – despite proclamations of decolonization and/or denials of colonization (e.g., in the American Territories; Prasad, 2003). BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) borrows from postcolonialism to explore structural, cultural, and psychological forms of anti-Blackness in society. In doing so, the framework asserts that epistemic rules used to define humanness associate normalcy and social acceptability with whiteness, and undesirability and incorrectness with Blackness in need of western intervention to "correct" it (i.e., Dumas, 2015; alexander, 2022).

**Table 1.** Postcolonialism (alexander, 2022)

| Supporting Tenets |
|---|
| **Subalternity and "othering":** western entities discursively name and tell the stories of peoples they have colonized – as "others" or subaltern – instead of allowing them to tell their own stories. These stories and positioning of the colonized as "others" maintains westerners at the center of humanity (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). |
| **Orient and occident:** in stories they tell, westerners represent non-westerners in ways that do not reflect their actual lives, histories, or customs (Said, 1978). Westerners also conceptualize the East in ways that present it as inferior to the west – characterizing Eastern religions and cultures as exotic, mysterious, and dangerous. By contrast: westerners characterize themselves as the knowledgeable, civilized Occident (Bhabha, 1983, as cited in Prasad, 2003; Spivak, 1988). |
| **Epistemic violence:** western hegemonic intellectual discourse essentializes the peoples they colonize, in part to erase non-westerners' epistemic diversity and practices. Doing so gives westerners self-justification for excluding colonized peoples from knowledge creation in favor of western rational thought (Spivak, 1988). |
| **Colonial subjection:** through subalternity and orientalism, westerners make non-westerners subjects/objects of their knowledge systems. Subjectivity manifests through epistemic violence and othering that is reinforced through governance, imbalanced exchanges, and economics (Bhabha, 1983, as cited in Prasad, 2003; Fanon, 1967; Spivak, 1988). |
| **Psychological resistance:** colonization of the non-western mind by western culture and ideology has been more impactful than has been colonization through military and economic domination. Therefore, (formerly) colonized peoples must work to continue living in their traditions, while navigating western presence as part of daily life (Nandy, 1983; Prasad, 2003). |

**Table 2.** Black Critical Race Theory (alexander, 2022)

| Supporting Tenet |
|---|
| **Anti-Blackness** is endemic and central in the global schema of social, economic, historical, and cultural human life. It refers to the broader antagonistic relationship between Blackness and (the possibility of) humanity as conceptualized through western thought (Dumas & ross, 2016). |
| Anti-Blackness serves to **reinforce ideological and material "infrastructure" of educational inequity** – including maldistribution of resources (Dumas & ross, 2016). |
| Blackness exists in **tension with neoliberal multiculturalism**, where: (a) neoliberalism presumes that racism is no longer a barrier to opportunity; and (b) multiculturalism dismisses poor material conditions of Black people through narratives on inclusion (Dumas & ross, 2016). |
| **Whiteness as property**: white people feel that their whiteness entitles them to opportunities, privileged spaces, and structural advantages (Dumas, 2015; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009). |
| Creating space for **Black liberatory fantasy** includes acknowledging white historical dominance (Leonardo, 2004) and violence against Black people and their bodies (Bell, 1987). |
| Decolonization occurs through a **disruption of colonial social order** (Fanon, 1963). |

## Geographies of Resistance

Critical geography is a framework that examines physical spaces as social constructions wherein realities are de/re/constructed, negotiated, and performed (Ko & Hong, 2019; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996, 2010). It is often used to explore (a) *how social groups are permitted in or excluded from said spaces*. In the context of everyday resistance – or challenging power through one's daily routines – Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) cite Soja, postcolonialists, and others to speak about the inclusion and exclusion of people as an exercise of power that (b) *polices how bodies are presented and performed* in certain spaces. The (c) *spatialization of resistance*, in response, is opposition to (d) *activities, social relationships*, and *identities* that are (e) *organized in place-specific ways* through which power can be exercised. Johansson and Vinthagen also identify (f) *third spaces* (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) as those of resistance that marginalized people create to facilitate their inclusion in response to being excluded from established spaces.

## Integrating the Frameworks

Together, these frameworks helped me to theorize exercises of power by BGW and their College colleagues as place-based challenges to, and practices of, colonial and anti-Black violence – respectively. Because academia is western and Midwest is predominately white, BGW's colleagues might feel entitled to engage College spaces as properties wherein they presume occidental norms. This could lead them to police peers through requiring occidental sensibilities for inclusion in College activities, relationships, and identities. These same powerholders might also orientalize non-white peers by othering them, being epistemically violent towards them, and/or objectifying them. Said violence could reinforce ideological and/or material infrastructures of inequity in the College – causing non-white collegians to feel as though they will never find inclusion, support, or belonging in their programs. When directed at BGW, this violence would be anti-Black. In response, non-white collegians like BGW might exercise psychological resistance through (a) spatializations of resistance in the College, and (b) creating third spaces for themselves wherein they feel liberated. Doing so would disrupt the College's anti-Black and colonialist social orders that maintain it as a white/western property.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper explores ways that Black graduate womxn (co-)constructed geographies for their professional growth during matriculation at Midwest that (a) retained Black womxnhood at their centers and (b) challenged academia's dominant discourses about socialization processes and outcomes. For data collection, I asked participants to discuss locations – in the College, at Midwest, and beyond Midwest – that supported their professionalization. I carried out the study as a bricolage, "a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 11; alexander, 2022). The bricolage method is multidisciplinary and meant to help capture complexities of phenomena and environments in which they occur (Kincheloe et al., 2011). This bricolage borrowed from constructivist case study

(Merriam; 1998; Stake, 1995, 2000), grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990/1998), and narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016; alexander, 2022). The study's frameworks supported analysis, as presented in the Findings section.

**Data Collection and Analysis, and Participant Profile**

I recruited participants via a Qualtrics interest survey that was sent out over email using criterion (Jones et al. 2014), snowball (Creswell, 2013) and purposive (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) sampling (alexander, 2022); the email was circulated through direct contact with BGW and alumni in my network, and administrators in the College. Participant criteria included identifying as a Black womxn who was earning post-baccalaureate credentials from the College, or who had done so within five years of data collection. The timeframe was intended to support understanding BGW's ideas of professionalization within the College's contemporary organizational culture – including diversification of leadership in that time (alexander, 2022).

My data collection included two two-hour focus groups (n = 11, plus me), and individual semi-structured interviews (n = 6) that lasted 60-90 minutes. I collected data via Zoom summer 2020 – through which I also audio-recorded and transcribed discussions. I facilitated focus groups as sister circles, through which participants co-constructed ideas about professional socialization by providing insights about each other's experiences (alexander, 2022; Bosco & Herman, 2018; Butler-Kisber, 2008; Watt, 2003; Wilson & Flicker, 2014). The first group explored BGW's locations of professionalization in general terms while talking through five prepared questions; the second explored locations in the College and at Midwest while talking through 10 prepared questions. In interviews, I asked where BGW experienced professionalization in the College, at Midwest, and beyond both while talking through 14 prepared questions; I used responses to lead us into more nuanced discussion about BGW's experiences across their constructed geographies.

I analyzed data late summer 2020 through early winter 2021, foregrounding narrative inquiry approaches. My analysis process included: 1) open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) transcript data after cleaning them; 2) re-reading and re-coding each transcript twice with the new coding frames; 3) identifying major areas of findings in the study; 4) creating composite narratives for each area of findings (Labov, as quoted by Mishler, 1995); and 5) conducting analytical processes of *broadening, burrowing,* and *restorying* (alexander, 2022). Broadening is looking for wider contexts for stories than the stories themselves; burrowing is looking into specific details of narrative data; restorying is recreating a story from data within the contexts of findings, after broadening and burrowing (alexander, 2022; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). I broadened and restoried data through the paper's frameworks.

The sample included 18 BGW: three master's and 15 doctoral students, including me. More than half identified as either being from the state in which Midwest is located, or living and working in that state prior to beginning their programs; at least one third identified as having longer-term connections with Midwest. At least one third spoke about being more

mature than their peers, or having families, as influencing their professionalization. Half of the sample spoke about working in education prior to matriculation, and one third continued working full time while enrolled in their programs. Of the remaining two-thirds: half intended to (re)apply for clinical, practitioner, or industry positions following graduation; the remaining participants were flexible in their career trajectories, with only four expressing interests in joining faculty. More than half of the BGW spoke about having scholarly interests in, and/or working in offices and programs that address, issues of diversity or racial justice in education.

## Study Limitations

The study had several limitations. Foremost, 65% of the College's BGW population matriculated through one division of the College at the time of study (Midwest, date) – which was also my division of affiliation. Most BGW were aware of each other by name or reference prior to the study, given that the College's Black womxn student population was small. These factors resulted in the study having a sample that disproportionately represented my division. One division in the College was also not represented at all, despite my multiple attempts to communicate with BGW therein who completed the interest survey. The study sample also almost entirely represented doctoral students; however, my analysis revealed that master-level students held the same ideas and concerns about socialization as did doctoral students (alexander, 2022). Last, I chose not to use software for analysis. It might have helped me to locate codes, patterns, and themes in data – but it would not have helped me with discerning or constructing narrative meanings from them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Kim, 2016).

## FINDINGS

Study participants framed locations of their socialization in terms of social relationships, but also assigned geospatial locations to those relationships. Their doing so created a dichotomy of outsider/insider status in relation to College/non-College sites of development. They also named their Black womxnhood as supporting their placemaking beyond the College as much as it informed their exclusion within it. Analysis yielded three areas of findings: BGW's displacement as outsiders in education; them creating learning geographies for themselves; and their perceived relationships between geography and power. Because this paper prioritizes their placemaking, I only brief the first area of findings below as context for the other two. I present findings as restoried through the paper's frameworks, with sample data from participants; italicized words reference the frameworks' tenets or concepts, unless otherwise stated.

Overall, participants' narratives supported literature about BGW as they discussed being excluded from geographies of influence and growth opportunities in their College programs. Foremost, they identified having interests and goals that differed from those of white colleagues.

Them not wanting to collaborate with you on different things, for me, has been a lot of: none of our interests align…. My interests very much center Black womxn. Everyone else's interests don't center…not even people of Color! I think that has drawn a rift.

They also highlighted the prevalence of locations in their classmates' socialization that centered activities in which they had no interest – specifically those of alcohol consumption.

A lot of classmates' socialization or socializing happens at the bar: every Thursday night, they want to go do XYZ at some bar or something. Even faculty has gone out for happy hours! And if you don't participate continuously in those type of things, you tend to get left out of the conversation when it comes back to the academics. I'm a mom, I'm married, I can't go out after class and go to the bar.

BGW's experiences of being treated as outsiders in their programs illustrated how cultural *anti-Blackness* in the academy contributes to *ideological and material infrastructures of inequity* such that locations of influence, belonging, intellectual affinity, and faculty relationships became *white properties* of the College. BGW's sensibilities and interests also became "*othered*" in comparison to those of non-BGW colleagues; they were positioned as *oriental* in comparison to their peers, whose *occidental* norms never decentered or critiqued bonding in manners that did not accommodate BGW. Such situations placed BGW outside the bounds of their programs' social and academic geographies. They also possibly illustrated BGW's *tensions with neoliberal multiculturalism*: non-BGW in the College could argue that BGW excluded themselves from community-building through their personal preferences, rather than being *excluded* because of their Blackness or Black womxnhood. Thus, BGW's College peers acted as powerholders: they *policed* each other and College spaces through standardizing certain *activities* and *relational* interactions as criteria for *inclusion* in socialization, and penalized BGW for not aligning with those standards. Faculty were also complicit in failing to dismantle the College's *social order*, resulting in whiteness becoming propertied therein. Despite BGW's outsider status in the College, they succeeded greatly in locating professionalization in settings that better suited them.

## Creating Geographies of Learning

BGW found all aspects of professional socialization, as discussed in extant literature, through 1) personal networks, 2) work, and 3) associations, organizations, and institutes.

### *Personal Networks and Workplaces*

As previous studies highlight: perhaps the most dynamic geographies of BGW's professionalization were among members of their personal communities. Family and friends supported BGW's knowledge and skills acquisition, and encouraged them to develop their professional portfolios and identities based on who they were as people beyond Midwest.

One of my best friends is in a PhD program right now. I could say we mentor each other in a way. We learned a lot from each other because we started applying to PhDs together. So we've done literally every step alongside each other.

My cousin – she's not a practitioner or anything, but she has a nonprofit where she does practitioner-type things. She works with inner-city students. I talk to her, and sometimes she invites me to Zoom meetings when I'm allowed. So she's a person who I talked to just to get ideas of like, "how are you getting [clients] to open up to you?"

Receiving this type of support from loved ones may have helped BGW to feel more empowered while matriculating. It also validated the legitimacy of their Black womxnhood as part of their professional selves, through affirmation from trusted content experts in their lives who had no connections to their programs. BGW similarly discussed receiving more candid (and thus more trustworthy) insights from Midwest's Black faculty in community settings away from campus.

Being able to be in the salon, having conversations with folks as I was learning things in class – you know, bouncing things off faculty members… I would sometimes be in the shop while they were there. They'd say to me: "how are you? What's going on?" And I'd say something and they'd be like, "Girl, yes! No, that is a very real thing," like that kind of thing. Or, "oh my gosh, I didn't know that. Oh, that makes so much more sense now!" You know, so just being able to be in conversation with them and hearing many of the stories that they would tell – being able to learn from other people, right?

While BGW's professionalization was the most diverse through their personal networks, it occurred most organically through their workplaces: current and former employers, as full-time and Graduate Assistant employees, on and off campus, directly and passively, and across levels of their organizations. At least one-third of BGW asserted that their professionalization was strongest at work. In fact, several expressed feeling "behind" classmates in certain aspects of socialization after being excluded from their programs' social geographies – but then "catching up" to these peers while excelling at work. Related, some also discussed coming into their programs having had socialization through(out) their careers such that the College provided no additional meaningful support in that regard.

Where I've gotten my socialization really has been from work. All the publications that I have came through my job. I happen to be blessed to have a Black female supervisor who is phenomenal – who takes an approach of, "let me teach you, but let me learn from you. But also, let me just kind of walk you through this." It's like, "Hey sis, let's do this."

I've been working since I was 14. And I've worked in a lot of different places, I've had a lot of different jobs…. I have been a professional in a couple of different fields. I learned about being a professional prior to coming to Midwest. I don't know if Midwest has been a value-add when it comes to setting goals, creating benchmarks, meeting deadlines, communicating with supervisors, asking for help. I learned that prior to Midwest.

BGW engaged their personal networks and work settings as *third spaces* through which they could resist *activities*, *relationships*, and *identities* of socialization as defined by College colleagues. Of note is that their third spaces did not steer away from metrics of placemaking as discussed by Johansson and Vinthagen (2016). Yet these spaces steered away from *occidental* norms as requisite for professional placemaking, allowing BGW to construct geographies of growth with and for fellow Black womxn. These locations welcomed BGW and encouraged growth through their authenticity and *daily routines* (e.g., collaborating with each other at work).

> I think I've learned more about socialization of the field when I'm with other Black womxn, or a Black person who has made it through and is sharing the tricks of the trade with me.

### Associations, Organizations, and Institutes

Participants' additional involvements with professional associations and Black organizations also suggested that both locations provide opportunities for BGW to grow. A caveat is the outstanding need for BGW to receive more information about the value and function of these locations as vital in their professionalization, as discussed in extant literature.

One-third of study participants found growth opportunities through their fields' professional associations. However: because these locations were beyond their programs, some viewed them as subpar alternatives to the College or did not identify them as sites of professionalization at all. One participant shared, "my socialization that has come from being at Midwest, *which I was getting also in my previous institution*, was networking. Putting myself out there at conferences, talking to people, talking to students... *that's* where I got that from" [verbal emphasis by the speaker]. Another BGW belonged to associations and attended conferences, and talk about ways that her participation supported her professional identity development.

> I went to this convention and everybody that's practicing in the country was there. I saw so many Black womxn in one room – studying the same thing. I was definitely inspired by them. To hear the things that they've done – things that they've practiced, has really pushed me to keep going. And now [topic] is always at the forefront of my discussions and what I try to advocate for when I enter those professional networking kind of things.

Yet when I asked her about staying connected to Black femme faculty she met once conferences ended, she said she did not know how to express her interests with those willing to mentor her; she subsequently lost contact with them beyond the bounds of those conferences. Another BGW discussed her advisor recruiting her to collaborate on a conference presentation; she did not think of the conference, her attendance, the presentation, or collaborating with her advisor as sites of socialization that she could re/construct to support any of her professional goals.

These findings troubled me. Study participants' placemaking behaviors aligned with literature about BGW's professionalization, which illustrates both creating *third spaces* and the *spatialization of resistance*. BGW were engaging socialization beyond their programs after being *excluded* from them, and were being presented with opportunities to create additional third spaces for themselves. However, they were not realizing the necessity or benefits of doing so – practically or theoretically – and were therefore not maximizing their involvements therein. It is possible that BGW received messaging from College powerholders that it should be their central site of socialization – despite the exclusion they experienced therein for not being *occidental*.

Another one-third of participants gained professionalization by participating in Midwest's Black organizations or diversity-focused centers. Of note was that Black professionals who were willing to mentor them therein were most often either administrators or non-College faculty who they met informally, and who knew that BGW were systematically neglected.

> I've sought out campus professionals versus people in the program. There has been value in the connections that I've made with those sometimes-overlooked and -forgotten Black womxn who have been willing to pour in and answer questions as best as they can. They also got the pulls because they've been working at the university for forever, so many people owe them favors, so they tell other Midwest colleagues, "you gon' sit down with her!" And thank God they are willing to do it! They understand [my need for guidance].

Midwest's organizations for Black scholars served as additional *third spaces* wherein study participants exchanged advice with other Black students across the university about navigating graduate school. These spaces, and professionals who made themselves available through them, also supported BGW in developing skills related to conducting and producing scholarship. Moreover, they socialized BGW in manners that centered culturally Black *activities*, *relationships*, and *identities*. Said locations were unique from BGW's networks, work, and associations in that they competed against the College in constituting a geography for BGW whenever they were on campus. In this way, BGW arguably and unwittingly engaged in a *spatialization of resistance* against the College by finding inclusion at Midwest elsewhere.

BGW's placemaking for socialization beyond the College, despite them being excluded from its social spaces, demonstrates how they disrupted academia's *orders of ideological and material inequity*. BGW resisted narratives that positioned them as *subjects* whose academic existence was undermined by their locations at the periphery of their programs, and created third spaces for learning *beyond the imaginations* of their non-BGW College colleagues. Non-BGW sought to maintain BGW as *subaltern* by making professionalization a *white property* to which BGW had no access because they did not participate in the College's *occidental relationships*, *activities*, or *identity*-building processes. In return, BGW circumvented those *place-based* restrictions for *inclusion* by divesting from their programs' social spaces altogether. Their doing so suggests that BGW can find *liberation*, at least to some degree, during their matriculation.

**Understanding Geographies and/of Power**

During the study, BGW also related their geographies of learning to understanding how power exists and is exercised in education. Additionally, they thought about power as *place-based* with regards to (a) feasibility of resistance and (b) leveraging their locations for *liberation*.

### *Is Resistance Realistic?*

Evidenced by their divestment from geographies of the College, BGW spoke candidly about their willingness to leave geographies of professionalization, including those in education, if they felt that their Black womxnhood was not respected therein. They were also ready to locate to or create *third spaces* beyond the traditional p-20+ system in which Blackness was centered.

> I try to find the spaces that actually accept [my Black womxnhood]. Like, my practicum: they saw me for what I was, evaluating me doing what I do, interacting with Black k-12 learners how I interact. I did present very authentic in what I did, and they appreciated it – for that appreciation, they're one of my top places to go back and work for. If they had not met me with all that appreciation – because I had a previous placement that did not – that just meant that obviously wasn't the place for me.

Despite their openness to finding and creating locations for themselves, BGW acknowledged challenges in leaving those of education's "establishment." They struggled in finding a balance among: (a) *disrupting social orders* of the field that compelled them to both assimilate into white/*occidental* social norms, and remain in its "established" geography for professional legitimacy; and (b) enduring the field's *anti-Blackness*, which positions them as *other* through a raced (and often gendered) *orient*/occident dichotomy that leads to their *exclusion*. Four questions captured BGW's constantly-felt tension during data collection.

- (How) can I fully stand in my Black womxnhood, and stay in the education field?
- What are the personal and professional consequences for either divesting from or continuing to invest in spaces of the education establishment as a Black womxn?
- Can I stay in and transform the establishment before it destroys my Black womxnhood?
- Where can I do Black education work if I decide to leave the establishment?

> I wanted to be sure that I was being socialized only to the extent that it was relevant to my professional career, not my identity. You can get caught up in trying to play the game. And I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to be too far away from the people that I do this for. Like I got into my subfield to help my community, to help Black students.

BGW also expressed feeling that completely leaving the established geography of education would undermine combatting anti-Blackness therein – which was very important to them, because majority of Black learners matriculated through it (e.g., public schools). This dilemma created a tension between fighting against Black learners' *subjection* from within the establishment, and divesting from its geographies as exercises of *Black liberation* and *psychological resistance*. BGW understood that they could not truly be epistemically free until all Black learners were. They therefore felt compelled to remain in the establishment and try to transform it into a space wherein Black *identities*, *relationships*, and *activities* could thrive. Still, they grew tired of fighting to protect their Black womxnhood while doing this work.

> I thought academia would be my [space] to really stick it and say my piece and do all these things that I want to do…. But then…. I'm still going to be a part of that system…. it's like, "do I want to play this game, to try to get into that place? How much of myself can I sacrifice to get to the place to be able to make that impact for those students?"

### Leveraging Their Locations

Despite their inner conflicts, BGW stood firm on the importance of using their access to geographies of power, through education, on behalf of Black learners whenever they could.

> The whole point of pursuing a PhD is to be able to do more higher-level stuff. I'm like, "decision makers are at the table and there are decisions that need to be made." It was, "I just wanted to be in a room to make decisions." I think that most people, especially Black womxn in education: you just know you want to make it better for the people behind you. I want to make things better for the Black womxn who come behind me and all the People of Color who come behind me.

Reflective of their commitment to Black learners, participants told stories about devising strategies to access locations of power at Midwest – all of which were beyond the College. As was the case in placemaking for learning, BGW were successful in these endeavors despite being *excluded* from their programs' geographies. Their success again illustrates the reality of Midwest competing against the College for BGW's investment in professionalization placemaking.

> I think Midwest is a great training ground for education professionals: if you take advantage of the resources or put yourself in the appropriate spaces, you'll get exposed. The bigger lessons were about politics: the opportunity to sit with institutional leaders. Whatever relationships you build, let people know that you are interested in exploring.

When they had authority, BGW also took opportunities to bring their Black womxnhood into spaces of education's establishment that challenged assimilating into the field's status quos of *occidental identities* and *interactions* – effectively reconstituting the field's socialization spaces as temporary *third spaces* to serve their needs. BGW did so through culturally Black speech and self-presentations. They also discussed "doing" their Black womxnhood therein as (a) sometimes an intentional *spatialization of resistance* practice, and (b) always foundational

to their professional identities. In this way, they used their power to challenge *place-specific body policing* that habitually excludes them for not conforming to education's occidentalism.

> I think about myself and how I teach classes filled with primarily white womxn from middle class backgrounds. I make intentional choices to wear my big hoops and my really long nails: those are things that I love and are part of my gender expression and an expression of myself. But I also am very conscious that I'm doing that as an act of resistance against what is viewed as professionalism, to bring myself into that space.

> Something I'm both famous and infamous for is that I don't code switch, right? Everyone thinks it's absolutely hilarious because I will use "loquacious" and "ain't" in the same sentence. Like, I'm well-versed in Standard American English and AAVE and I will use them at all times, right? But I never thought of it as an act of resistance. I just thought it was like, "this is who I am and I'm not changing it for work."

BGW's unapologetic politics in their Black-centered professional goals and identities – in relation to their willingness to challenge education's social conventions – demonstrates their *psychological resistance* to the field's cultural norms. Their approaches in accessing geographies of power beyond the College, while refusing to sacrifice their Blackness in the process, *disrupted cultural orders* of graduate-level training that seek to mark Blackness and Black womxnhood as *otherness* that would prevent BGW from being successful in their careers. That study participants had successes while being themselves suggested a possibility for *Black liberation* in education, which encouraged them to remain in the field's establishment should they choose to.

## DISCUSSION

This paper explores how Black graduate womxn (co-)construct geographies for their professionalization that (a) retain Black womxnhood at their centers and (b) challenge dominant discourses about the process. It contributes to extant research by highlighting BGW's disparate relationships with their presumed socialization environments, in relation to their career goals. The paper also highlights an urgency to better understand how BGW exert efforts to construct geographies for themselves, where non-BGW may not have to because they are not subjected to the same exclusions. In closing, I present major takeaways and recommendations for future projects. Informed by the takeaways: I suggest that said projects engage participatory research approaches that create opportunities for BGW to offer their experiential expertise on topical conceptualizations, data collection and analyses, and findings interpretations and dissemination.

### Making Professionalization Boundless

Contrary to seminal literature, BGW's professionalization can and often does occur beyond bounds – physical, sociocultural, and intellectual – of their academic programs. Viewed through the paper's guiding frameworks: this finding reflects that neither academic programs, nor

literature that presumes programs as the centers of graduate student development, has developed over time to accommodate or account for Black womxn therein. Perhaps partially resulting from this neglect, BGW go on to find meaningful experiences away from the very people who literature suggests should be their touchstones during matriculation. A positive outcome of this reality is that BGW's constructed geographies transcend specific spaces. They find guidance and mentorship in environments that most non-BGW might not think about with regards to professionalization. In doing so, BGW cross paths with people who are invested in their holistic development, but with whom they may have never interacted had they continued to prioritize the learning geographies of their programs. These findings critique extant literature's conceptualizations about when, where, and with whom professional socialization can occur – for students of any background theoretically, and for BGW practically and specifically.

Future studies must focus on how BGW understand geographies of their institutions and fields of study, and how they go about moving through those spaces to best support their growth. While doing so, researchers should consider prioritizing co-curricular environments rather than graduate programs to illuminate BGW's typical activities and relationships in relation to their desired professional identities and growth outcomes. Part of these inquiries should assess areas of socialization that BGW gain and miss as they engage spaces in their constructed geographies. Related: studies might explore relationships between BGW's valuations of potential learning spaces and levels of socialization they gain through said spaces. Doing so would allow scholars to consider additional characteristics that might influence BGW's placemaking valuations – including their professional histories, aspiring careers, and relationships with their institutions of matriculation. For example: aspiring instructors and aspiring administrators will likely have different professionalization goals, and thus seek to construct different learning geographies. Similarly, BGW who matriculated through the institution from which they earned undergraduate degrees will likely have different placemaking experiences than those who did not.

**Exploring BGW's "Everyday" of Resistance**

Future research should also explore how BGW's usual approaches to professionalization, which they may speak about as routine, are actually enactments of resistance. Study participants received messaging throughout their matriculation that they would never completely fit into the education field as professionals; they also characterized education's establishment ill-fitting for them. Still, they championed their goals by (a) creating third spaces and (b) leveraging their influence in education's establishment whenever they held the power to do so. Most did not view their actions as resistance to their exclusion from the College, but as part of Black womxn's typical approaches to survival and advancement in the face of anti-Blackness in society. Moreover, BGW who saw their actions as resistance named said resistance as part of Black womxn's daily lives. Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) offer other manifestations of everyday

resistance through which scholars might examine BGW's strategies for making professional gains in the education field.

Related: understanding BGW's broader perceptions of professionalization may illuminate how its locations place them in situations to enact everyday resistance. In another piece from this paper's source study (alexander, 2022), I examine how BGW conceptualized professionalization based on their experiences in the College and Midwest, and beyond both. The findings partially informed a need to identify locations of BGW's professionalization in relation to their ideas about the process, yielding this piece. Future studies should go further to interrogate how professional socialization's presumed locations, activities, relationships, and identities reinforce and are reinforced by geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Said work should include how BGW create geographies of learning as emotional and psychological refuge away from forms of violence in their programs or the academy more broadly. It should also examine how powerholders make decisions – consciously or unconsciously – about professionalization norms, locations, criteria, and intended outcomes that inform BGW's inclusion in and exclusion from the process. My piece, and existing literature about BGW's holistic socialization, offer insights that might serve as starting points in designing more professionalization-focused projects.

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